



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Mrs. William H.
Welch, 1965 January 2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Mrs. William Welch on January 2, 1965. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I'll probably evade the answers. He's relatively silent, isn't he? You hear the overtones of my grandchild who was not in Connecticut at that time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: We need ----- anyway.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Oh, we do eh?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I think perhaps a ----- way to get started, and put us back in to Connecticut at this time, is to find out from you, what it was that you were doing in Connecticut in, let's say, '33,'34,'35?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, I was living in Connecticut. I had just left an advertising job in New York. I had been with Beutar and Bawbis, and I had gone into Connecticut to look after my children, they were relatively young, and to do a little freelance writing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You are a writer?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, after a fashion. I had written a good deal for magazines and I've had newspaper training and newspaper jobs, and that one advertising job. I've had quite a lot of newspaper experience.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Were you trained in journalism in school?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Partly trained and self-trained.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You did go to school?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I went to school, but that's all in the past. I refuse to talk about school.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Fine, except that is...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Everybody's bored with school anyway.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's a point of departure. What you make out of it depends on chance and so many other factors over which you don't really have any control. And only know about them after the fact when you can take advantage of snobishness that comes with hindsight.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I think at the age of 19, I got my first newspaper job on the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Marvelous!

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I chiefly, at that time, I was chiefly Picture Editor which I felt to be a way in, but the job, of course, not at all suited to my capacities. But I had the good fortune to be able to cover the movies. Because the movie editor's father died, and she was gone. And being still in the way of writing essays, I did it, I should think quite -----, but they all liked it, so from then on I was put on the regular staff. I worked on the Democrat and then I worked on the New York Journal American.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Were you centered here in New York in those days? Were your contacts in New York?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, I'm a born New Yorker, but I've lived in other parts of the country. I feel more like Connecticut than anywhere else. I've lived there quite a lot and I feel more at home in Connecticut strangely enough. I've lived in Princeton, but Connecticut's always seemed home to me. From the moment I smelled Connecticut air, I belonged there. I love Connecticut.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There were a series of attempts, FERA...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes. Federal Emergency Relief Administration. CWA which was an offshoot of FERA to give professional people, writers, musicians, artists, a kind of standing apart from just rough, rude work, which

was scuttled quite quickly partly because the sharecroppers in the South. They wrote into the law a minimum wage, and the sharecroppers in the South began leaving the cotton fields and going into town to get more work at better rates there. So Southern Senators, rather curiously anti-relief, turned against CWA. Then there was sort of a pull back on the part of government to turn things over to Ickes, in public work, partly because we didn't want to compete with invested interest. We wanted to find something safe, which would also, somehow, turn into a conduit and pour funds, what is it.. prime the pump and create buying power for people.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Create buying power--that's a very interesting phrase, you know? What really creates buying power?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Out of this came the WPA. It was an immediate effort to get funds into pockets by Thanksgiving of 1935. Put them on the roll somehow, worry about what they were doing subsequently.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I don't know how this emerged in Connecticut at all, or how you were brought into it?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It's very interesting. Of course, I was interested in a general way in economics. I happened to be one of those who never got caught in the tide of Communism, you know, when so many of the people you knew felt that was the only way out because, perhaps, I just knew too many of them and saw that they didn't live up to their theories. But I was concerned about a way out, and in a way having known, perhaps as a newspaperwoman, people of all levels of society, and living in a community because for a while I lived in Westport, Connecticut and Western, where people were quite well off, I was very shocked to see the terror on the part of people who should have known better when the Depression, I suppose, was at its height. There was a good deal of desperation in the town. Now in the town of Westport Proper, we looked after all the poor families, those of use who knew them. There were a number of us who took care of 3 or 4 families. We saw that they got groceries, and so on, that the children were looked after and all that, but when the whole situation grew worse and I suppose people came from parts of Saugatuck, and other parts of Connecticut, for jobs, when people'd come around and ask if they could do some work in the garden, or mow the lawn, I don't know how many people called me and remarked to me that they thought I was being naive, that I was allowing these future Communists to work there. These were perfectly good, honest, decent people without jobs. I was so shocked by both the stupidity, the fear, and the heartlessness of that, that I began to wonder very much what on earth was going to be done to deal with this situation. It happens that I was in London, I think, you know, when Roosevelt was elected but had not yet actually taken the position officially, shortly after he did, there was this famous monetary crisis, the day that he stopped the banks ---

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The London Economic Conference.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, I was in London, and I did get into a great many of the meetings that it was possible to get into, but I was very struck by the difference between the attitude over there. In a way, they were both very curious as to what we were going to do, looking towards us, as though, you know, maybe the Yankees will have a bright idea. And among people of the same level as the ones in Westport, the same social class, or whatever you would call it, there was considerably less fear. There was much more concern. You know, how are you going to solve this problem? So of course I was interested. Then when WPA actually did begin, when I heard that Harry Hopkins about whom I had heard, and various people I had known in one way or another, were getting involved in it, I was very interested to see what could happen. I even had the dream, of course I was young enough to dream, that it might be possible to do this thing through politics non-politically. I thought that Hopkins was an idealist, and also had a lot of practical experience in dealing directly with situations of extreme poverty. He wasn't one to say "It's their fault". It seemed to me it was happening on such a scale that I didn't see how people could be so stupid as to blame individuals. Then, I remember, I came in from Westport, to New York, every so often, because at that time, my children were pretty young, and I was still very close to them, watching them, and I saw of course, bread lines. Oh, you know, not the size of the Catholic Worker but, very long, and I thought if people don't wake up to the reality behind this and do something we're finished, we will have one of your famous revolutions. I knew a number of people and when Larry Morris went down, of course the Morris's are old friends of mine, I kept very much in touch with what was going on. But, of course I suppose, the other side was my own preoccupation with my growing family and all that. I lived in Westport, I came into New York and took an advertising job. I went back into the country because I felt that I needed to be with the children more, and started to do freelance writing, but I didn't at once, find markets. I found occasional ones but, you know, a Sunday piece for the New York Times once in 6 months doesn't pay very much. I didn't think in terms of WPA at all until, I think, it was Larry coming up through once, told me that he had been talking to what was called the Professional and Service Division which was also included all the arts projects.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: They said that they didn't have a very good press in Connecticut. They had talked with him about it, and they had said how they wished they had somebody who could go around to the newspapers and say something in their behalf. I think, shortly after that, I said, "Well it would interest me, if it didn't take an

enormous amount of time." Larry thought, well, it wouldn't hurt to have a talk with the head of the Professional and Service Division, who was a real, most, most unusual, most remarkable woman, Mary Huergert.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Mary Huergert.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Huergert, Polly Huergert, who was herself a Republican, but again not at all too concerned about politics. I think she probably got that job because every state made some sort of concession to the Republican party, so here I found myself, of course, a Democrat, working with Polly Huergert. I went to see her and she asked me whether I thought that a good job could be done, whether we could get the people, the newspapers in Connecticut to do stories. And I said that in my experience the newspapers will use material if its relatively accurate, and if you do the writing for them, and if you get them the pictures that they want, that I didn't think it was anymore complicated than that. Well, I think maybe, 2 or 3 months after that, she asked me if I would undertake it. That's how it began.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you know, one launched...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Does that give you anything you want to know?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Once launched, what did you find structurally about the, I'm thinking -----...good and bad.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, the Federal Art Projects were unique, initially, because the quotas were fixed in Washington.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: The State Administrator worked largely through appropriations direct and quotas direct from Washington, and they were kept out of exercising any discretion as to what would or would not be done within the Federal Art Projects, which I think were 6 in number, writers, artists, musicians, and theatre.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Theatre.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: But by the time I got there, the theatre, I don't know as the theatre had ever been very strong in Connecticut, the theatre was out, but the other three were present. The music project was, I think, quite wonderful in Connecticut.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was it?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Just really good. They gave concerts in Bridgeport and various places, but you felt as though these musicians out of work were just an unusual lot. They produced some beautiful music. I thought they were extraordinary. And I think the same was true for the, what did we call it? The painting, you know. A great deal of painting was done. As you know, that's a little harder to tell, but I remember I was, for a long time, in the same building that housed the arts project. A great many paintings were made that were put in various public halls of one sort or another, schools throughout the state. I thought what it did, I don't know how one can ever calculate that, but I thought that it gave the artists a chance to really try to produce something without being so terribly concerned at any moment as to whether they were going to be able to eat for the rest of the week. You know, and I think the effect on them was perhaps not at all what was expected. I thought that they both tried to produce the kind of thing that would be suitable, for instance, as well as simply, your famous artistic self-expression. Which, unless you have a real artist, of course nine-tenths of the time is expression, but not communication. I thought the arts projects, art and music in Connecticut, were particularly interesting, both what they produced and the way in which it worked. Now the writer's project which I later went into from this, after I had got every newspaper in Connecticut to do a story, and they did. They were wonderfully cooperative. They were interested and I, myself, was interested because I saw something that I hadn't believed--I don't know if this is the sort of material you want, but its what interested me. It isn't art, but its very close to it. We had some very good people in the crafts, in weaving, and in the hooking of rugs. I helped from time to time in hiring. Now I remember very well the sulky expressions on the faces of the women who went into a project like the hooking of rugs, their feeling of wasting of time and what are they doing, women that had raised families and doing this kind of nonsense, that absolute rejection of it until they began to work, and then they worked on such beautiful patterns and produced such little works of art, their whole attitude changed. I said to my husband, "Its the new form of occupations therapy. If we're not doing anything else, we're giving some people something worth living for.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: And you know, when I finally took the writer's project over, with which I had my troubles, I'll tell you about them if you want to know. One of the things that struck me there also was exactly the same thing that people were desperately anxious to be at work on something that they could respect and have a little

respect for themselves. Yes, I think it was quite novel certainly so far as arts were concerned to have artists doing what artists enjoy doing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And do well.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: And doing well, and receiving a wage with continuity. Of course, there were advantages taken, I can't remember the man's name, so it's probably safe to speak about it, but when I took over the writer's project, I was sent to Stamford, first place I'd met the man who'd been head of the project who was under the impression I had put him out. Of course I had nothing to do with it. I was just given the job there. He was very surly and when he left, one of the women at the Stamford project who was more or less in charge of it, at that point but you know on the WPA basis, said "Am I expected to continue to falsify the payroll?" I said, "Well, what do you mean?" "Well, that's what we've been doing. We've been putting down the names of these people who never came and so on." I said "Well, if you falsify the payroll, you will land in the penitentiary and you'll take me with you, so let's stop that at once!" When I got to know them better, I saw that there was a great deal of discontent of that sort. People that were decent found themselves in situations where they had to play the game. I think something was going on, there's no question about it. When I got to know the people individually there, they were very good people. There was one woman who had been on the local newspaper, the old Stamford Advocate, but she'd been fired apparently because of the conditions. There was a man who had been head of one of the factories, I think the factory was no longer in existence and who had started to do a history of Connecticut. It was a wonderful history of Connecticut and of Stamford particularly. It was a very good job. But these people were even lying about it. They weren't telling anybody they were on WPA. I remember one night when the Stamford Historical Society invited me to read to them, or to tell them something about this history of Stamford, and I went. It wasn't my work. It was the work of these people, but I did do a certain amount of editing and that's all, but they had done a very good job. They all applauded, they all told me how good it was and when it was over, I said "You know what I don't understand, is why we're having trouble with Stamford. Why, we're always having difficulty getting you to do your share of the backing of any of the WPA projects because you all admit that this is good." One of the men told me this story. He said that he came from an old Stamford family, and he said, that when he went into the streets of Stamford and saw for the first time the bread line, he was so upset that he called a meeting of the manufacturers and the people who owned department stores, and so on, in Stamford, and he made this proposition to them -- he said, he couldn't do this alone, but if they would agree with him, he would be perfectly willing to keep all his employees on. He might have to reduce the salaries. They probably all would, but he would like not to let anybody who was an old Stamford employee lose his job, his way of earning a living. He said first that it was a question of getting something like 20 others then 10 other, and he said in the end he couldn't get one other person to do this with.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's frightening.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That's really quite frightening. It was this sort of thing that made me feel, well, there's no way out but the WPA. The thing to do now is to do as good a job as possible and make these people see what sort of people they were being indifferent to. I had so much of that. I remember one man who came to me at the Writers Project, asking for a job -- he had put himself in, you had to put yourself on relief, you had to make statements to the fact that you were, what?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A kind of a pauper's-----

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: A pauper -- and this man came to me and said he wanted a job on the Writer's Project if he could get on. As I talked to him, I said, you know, you just make me feel ashamed. You're the sort of person who should be my City Editor. This is not at all right, what is your story? He said that he was married and had 3 children, that they had a little house that he was trying to keep from being taken altogether. There was no place he could live. He said he'd gone to everyplace in Connecticut. He couldn't afford to go to New York to look for a job, and anyway there weren't any jobs. I remember he made a very big impression on me. I said something to him about wouldn't he still try a few more papers? I went to the Hartford Current which was one of the papers that was interested in this whole experiment, and I blew up at the Managing Editor about this. I said I thought it was disgraceful. I think it was about a week later, this man called me and said that he didn't need the job after all, he'd got a job on the Hartford Current. I was terribly pleased. But it was people of that character who were out of jobs. In part then, the initial task was a sales job within Connecticut, in a way. I had to let the people in Connecticut know that at least in the arts projects, or what we call Professional & Service, something was going on that was worthwhile.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Of course I became convinced myself, which is what helped it, in spite of all you know, there was much going on underneath, that I would have changed. For instance, this connection with the Federal Government. I don't know if my friend Larry would like this or not, but you got so much literature from Washington that I just stopped reading it. I had a reputation. Polly Huerger told me that I was someone who got

things done, and the reason I got things done is I never read the literature because if there was anything important, someone was bound to tell you about it. You know you'd go down the street and somebody would say "Have you read circular 692381?" I'd say, "What do you think about it?" That was it, it was the only way. There was an awful lot of that kind of waste, but whether there was more of it in the advertising business, I don't think so, no.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you have the sense that with the WPA Professional Service Group there was much in the way of directions from Washington?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: There was a lot of direction, but how much that direction was listened to -- you know Connecticut Yankees. There was a lot of direction, I think we used our own judgement within it. They certainly didn't direct very efficiently in certain ways, or very efficaciously. It's a little difficult when you face the firing line to accept the direction of someone who has no notion of what the detail is. This is the thing, this is the thing that we met time and again because oh, such things, as everybody had to sign, everybody had to be accounted for in the morning and had to go to a certain place and be on time. Well, when I had Miss Elizabeth Beard, who used to be the Editor of the ----- and her sister, no, Patten Beard she was, and Elizabeth Beard who had taught French at Vassar, they were both on relief. Now, you know, I wasn't going to humiliate those women, I didn't think it made sense, and when we were told that two members of the same family theoretically they were of the same family, though I would think they would even be too old for relief rolls, they were both old, and you know, if they were to live together they would probably end by mutual murder, or something. But living separately and being on somewhat different project, they could get along. In that kind of thing we had to use our judgement.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right, it was just impossible, ----- kind of situation.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Absolutely, and I respected these women because at the time that Landon, is that who it was? Who ran against President Roosevelt?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: "36" yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Maybe it was later, it was later, when Wilkie. They wanted to show me they weren't going to be influenced by the fact that they were on WPA and they carried around pencils that said "Wilkie" on it and they wore Wilkie buttons. They looked at me very defiantly, and they thought I would scold them for it, or take them off the rolls. Well, you know, you wouldn't want something like that to be destroyed.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: And when I came to see them to find out how their work was getting along, they always offered me tea as if it were a social visit. And who were they? They were the daughters of a very distinguished Norwalk minister and Norwalk couldn't take care of them. I think it was a disgrace, I really do. This is my Connecticut reactions arising. No, I think that we had to use our own judgement on a great many things. If, for instance, an agency wanted a book out, a social work agency, for a particular event, they would ask us to prepare that book for let's say, November 10th. We would write Washington about its permission and how it should be done, where photographs should be used, we would do it absolutely correctly, and by the time we got the reply from Washington, it would be December 15th. So, you see, we couldn't pay any attention. We had to go ahead and use our own judgement. There was a lot of this kind of thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: This indicates to me that there was some cooperation between art and writing where something like this, a service booklet was concerned.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Oh yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You had this kind of liaison.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: To a degree, to a degree. It was something we looked forward to, then we always hoped would work out. We did for instance, when it came to the photographing of some of these old houses. We had a certain help from them. That was a wonderful project because I think a great many of those old houses are gone, and the details of them would forever be forgotten except for our photographs and descriptions.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, well now the inception of an idea like that, was it again a local discussion? Did you come up with ideas which you could float yourself, if you had the personnel?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, yes we did. We did a book on the canal that we ourselves suggested. Of course, the original idea of the guide books came from Washington. Came from - what's his name?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Henry Alsborg.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Henry Alsborg, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you meet him?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I knew Henry, yes, he's one of those I had known. Well this was one area in which it was a national design.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That was a national design.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, he had certain preconceptions as to what it is he wanted out of the guide books. And as I understand it, the copy was researched, written up, shipped to Washington for final approval and if found wanting, shipped back for greater detail or whatever.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's right - so that he exercised far greater control, that's not the right word I want, but, sense of direction --

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Direction, maybe. Direction without losing control. But you know, the one that Laura Saxson did in, New Orleans, was so much better than some of the others because you had some good writers.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: This kind of thing did happen locally. When you had people that had a certain flair for description, you have a better piece of literature. For instance, I think that History of Stamford that never was published is a well written piece of work somewhere in the archives of WPA. Now that certainly was locally inspired, and then we suggested several books of photographs. With certain descriptions of the things in Connecticut, you know, not only old houses, but, the various rivers and ---

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The New England calendar published today has marvelous things.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: There you are. Well, there we got into difficulties with Washington because they kept having other ideas. Our ideas came from, we thought, our knowledge of Connecticut. They would keep changing it, so they exercised enough direction there to make it impossible to get the book out, as far as I can see. At other times their comments on things were very useful.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But the idea for the ...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I think most of the good things with the exception of the guide books, which were not state inspired, were nonetheless better if they had the inspirational material of the people who knew the state. And there were really big differences there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What intrigues me you know, this balance between the central government and its sense of direction, or its self-sense of importance perhaps and the local people, is that the very nature of the task. You had people on you own local rolls and you had to tailor make your program to suit or fit those people that you had.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, that's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: So you'd have to, in a sense, come up with ideas or come up with a program or a project which was suitable to what you knew to be in existence. I'm sure in a way, although I don't know the details, that the old houses came about, not that there wasn't interest in old houses generally, but how to go about doing it? What do we have?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: But in Connecticut of course, everybody's interested in old houses.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Of course

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: You begin with something that touches everybody there, and I think there's a good deal in that. For instance, one reason why we did so well on the famous toy mending projects. You know, we took old toys and repaired them and really made them much more beautiful than they had been originally. Then they were loaned out. There were libraries. But the reason they were particularly beautiful in Connecticut is because there was an awful lot of watch-makers out of work. What are you going to do with these men who were all of 35 or 38 years old and they were too old by the standards of that moment, to get jobs in factories. They knew how to do very fine work. They were skilled men. They were craftsmen really. Well, you give a man like that a piece of wood and you know, he is able to do something with it lovingly and beautifully. Some of those toys were just beautiful.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Marvelous.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Extraordinarily beautifully done and in the man's feeling of it. You felt as if a human

being had been at work on this. And of course, he had something to do that he could love instead of watching his 18 year old boy go over and do his job less well because believe me, when you talk to the watch- people, the old watch-factory people, they told you that the new ones were fast, but maybe it didn't matter if you did things well anymore. It was that sort of change it was coming into.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's comparable to the discovery in New Jersey of a, a nest of glass-blowers.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Wherein the glass factory had been closed since 1919 and glass blowers were on the rolls. "Lets constitute the glass blowing project."

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But it went on beautifully partly because you had at long last men after years and years doing the thing they loved and knew best.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: And knew how to do -- Until the old notion of completing with invested interests and a glass manufacture caused it to be closed, as callous as that. This glass that was blown was sent around to hospitals, schools, even put on in display. But hand blown things, you know? Like the tapestries that were made in San Francisco where there was a small group of Armenians who had been at this business for years and knew this craft, but there had not been any market for it. But this was a way to get artists to make designs, turn the design over to the tapestry maker and have him make these perfectly gorgeous things, you know, and create joy. Otherwise you simply lose it, you create a joy and you create something that will continue.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Continue to give joy. There were some rugs made in Connecticut that I certainly would be very proud to own, really some beautiful ones. You had 2 or 3 people that were awfully clever at that. That produced both things that were sort of traditional in pattern, but also with a great deal of originality. There were some lovely ones.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you find that you had to tour the state to keep in touch?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes I did. That's what I had to do. I had to go over the entire state, or I think Stamford, ---- - maybe, although we didn't have a project there. Stamford was the last. And on the other end, the entire state. I just went everywhere. Hartford of course, about once a week. We had a weaving project there that was very interesting.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Again, we had 2 or 3 good, first rate, wonderful weavers. And of course they taught a lot of other people how to do it. This was another thing, there was a phone call in the state of Washington from the sewing room "I need to put more looms to work, but I don't have enough machines, what can you do for me?" The person with who he was communicating was the head of the Art Department. What can you do? What can you come up with?"

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well the head of the art project knew how to hook rugs. He took one woman and taught her how to hook rugs. She in turn, taught 15 others. He got the artists to design the rugs. He got the surplus scrap from the sewing room. He had people cut it to proper lengths, so on.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And so you have something.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, in short, they created work because it was necessary, you know to have people gainfully occupied, or occupied in something that was fruitful and productive which gave an added burst to an instinct for workmanship. You know, there's something which is behind what you're saying that interests me. Again I don't know whether it goes away from this, but you know how much has been said today, about our affluent society, I'm not an economist, I've read a good deal, but it seems to be that one doesn't have to be an expert to realize that certainly in our country and maybe in Europe as well, we are today in a situation where what really hampers us and what hampered us at that moment was the inability to make an effective demand that's all. You know, there are rugs to be made. There are people to make them, today when factories do everything, relatively alike and relatively badly, the luxurious article is the one that someone does lovingly by hand. It will be our next way of what was the expression that ----- used? _____ display, something like that, you know? This is the way you have to even show that you have more money than somebody else, or something like that. Now the fact that we are so unorganized, I suppose, or so unintelligently unorganized that we're not

able to make an effective demand in those very areas that will bring more joy, more knowledge, more intelligence is really our obstacle, our hinderance. It isn't a state to encourage. Now I saw it so clearly at that moment because I saw that all you needed was a little distribution of purchasing power, that's all, of a certain kind. People were willing to work when they could work at beautiful things, or things that they liked to do. Nobody wants to be idle really. Its the biggest bore in the world not to be interestingly occupied. That's true on every level. I mean, the reason people do all the foolish things they do is because they don't have something better or they haven't been touched in an area of something productive. I think that one of the good things that WPA actually made evident was what we laughingly called "occupational therapy." You see? Then there was much to be done, but it is never done on a basis of who makes a profit by it. It can only be done on a basis of it needing to be done, or its bringing a special quality to our life which heaven knows is more and more necessary. Now, I think that if it proved anything, it proved that his was possible in spite of politics, in spite of having to have one Democrat and one Republican, in spite of all this stuff. Unfortunately I'm unpolitical so it always seems nonsense to me. I don't know. I realize its necessary to be governed, but is it necessary to manipulate so much in order to do it well? I don't know. But it did show that this kind of relationship between the source of supply and the people was possible. And that it brought something good. That's it, you see? What I saw happen to the Stamford project as soon as they began to work at something they respected, as soon as they were no longer being treated as people who were just, you know, trying to get something out of this situation because after all, they were people who needed the jobs.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: No matter how they talked, that was a fact. They were out of jobs. They had families to support. They were willing to work. They had so much more pleasure in working at something they could do well, they could respect, they could hope that somebody else would have some connection with, and I think until this problem is solved I don't know what's going to happen to this country. I don't mean solved. We don't solve problems, but until this is better recognized, cause I see the same thing in New York, I see, for instance, that we talk about unemployment and yet we have the dirtiest streets in the world probably. Now maybe there are some people who could take the same satisfaction in cleaning the streets that I take in cleaning my house. You know, if there were some way of making it worth their while, at least not punishing them for it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think the latter, because rather than the result, its the process through which they went that enlisted their XXXXXXXX. It was the daily details through which they went that became a source of satisfaction.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I think there's something in that. Of course, this is one of the big troubles of modern life, that we're always thinking in terms of what does this get for me and not in terms of enjoying the process. You're quite right. I mean, those two women, the Beard sisters, enjoyed what they were doing and produced some good material.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, its an old buzz saw, that action is a function of interest.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, and it's quite correct that the WPA I think, began a non- competitive --- in those areas which we often overlook and take for granted.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: --- may all be aware that there are such things as landmarks, such as old buildings. As long as we continue to see them, the warm and familiar things, but we don't seem to project ahead the preservation or conservation of the very beauty we enjoy.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's true.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: But with a camera, you know, particularly with photographers who have no source of employment, you utilize that and capture atmospherically the thing which is elusive and eternal and will vanish unless we do something about it. Then to have the result here as a kind of catalogue of the period. You know, or after these plans are drawn, a subsequent age can make way for super highways but, there is still some touch tone to the past. We take down the Ritz in this city, beautiful old ----- I mean, we don't allow buildings to stay up until we get a chance to love them anymore. They're up and down. Its a strange thing we do. But here this was an opportunity... It is, we have an outrageous need to tear things up and change them for the sake of somebody's temporary profit. I don't understand it. But what people will say to me but everybody's interested in what he can get, and I think probably that's true, I don't know. Maybe that's why its necessary to have, let's say, an architectural commission that refuses to allow certain buildings to go up and certain buildings to go down. But I don't believe it. You know I think that its a question of the temporary or more permanent time. Maybe most people, I don't know, are shallow, and the temporary good is all that matters. But when people think in terms of their families their children, or their grandchildren, the lives of their friends, they're willing to give way the temporary. Over and over again, I mean this is the history of civilization. That the temporary has given way to something with a hope of more permanence.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Don't you agree? I think there is something ----- misunderstood there. I think we're allowing the thugs and yokels and so on of our civilization to have the last word on all this. I feel there's something very wrong there. In part, I suspect, it has to do with the absence of communication. And the blindness which we have at seeing what we may think of in terms of permanence. It's the shallowness that we bring, suddenly something happens to rip this form apart, and there is relatively little one can do except be a bystander.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Its too late, yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: And gaze through those windows, you know, and the doors that show man's work destroying something which is marvelous.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's true.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Now the short gain, the short-sighted gain, the temporary thing, I suspect, is part of the American character. I think so. We're an emotional people, aren't we. Yes, it's ----- ----- I'll get something out of that, what does it matter if you destroy Washington Square, we'll put up...

DR. WELCH: Second time we meet. I told him I was going to come and break it up.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: We still have time...

DR. WELCH: I warned him.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I think he should have a liquor candy.

DR. WELCH: Well, he was very decent because he was waiting downstairs until the time arrived. My God, are we being recorded?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

DR. WELCH: How 'bout that!

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Be careful, this isn't the FBI.

DR. WELCH: Oh dear.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I have no truck with them myself.

DR. WELCH: They're bastards.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you know, even in terms of ideas, --- ----- has to be recreated because it was the popular ----- days.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It was popular front but there were people with a larger concern than this temporary profit, there really were. I will hand it to Harry Hopkins. He had his faults, but he was really thinking on a much bigger scale. he was thinking of the good of the American people. Maybe he was very lucky to be able to think that way but he was.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well he did have background. He was head of the Tuberculosis Association.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I know, but that's just a job.

DR. WELCH: No, not with him. You forget that I have an association with him.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And he also in the state of New York had been I think, head for a while of the New York State Relief Administration. He was sent down to Washington to be a kind of coordinator. He only backed into the WPA because ----- couldn't solve the problem of drafting a contract that would keep politicians hands out the of cards.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I remember. What did they have before that? Something else.

DR. WELCH: They didn't keep their hands out of it anyway, the Senate got into it up to their eyes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That's what I was saying.....With all its faults, however, there was something good about

the basic idea. Something of the original power remained in WPA. Because even though in Connecticut, in the end you know, there was a big blow up and the head of WPA. you know, landed in jail. Somebody else told on him, but the Professional & Service Division and all the arts projects were as white as snow. They couldn't get anything on us because we were so very careful and so innocent. We really were. We wouldn't have anything to do with anything dirty, and this was another thing for Polly Huerkert, you know? She wouldn't touch anything dirty.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the fact is, and I believe that in the early days, the Federal Art Project was something quite apart from WPA's hold.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes originally, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And only I think in '39...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: No it was before that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was it? That they erased the distinction between local option in terms of the state...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: ..institutions that had this in charge.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It was earlier than that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It was earlier?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, I don't know exactly, but it was earlier than that. It was '37, '38. Because I remember the point at which...

DR. WELCH: You know her secret don't you? Did she tell you?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: What?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Her secret?

DR. WELCH: She never read any of the circulars they sent.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I told him about that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, I wondered, you don't know...

DR. WELCH: It depends, you get a reputation of being a friend of Mrs. R-- ----- . You never met her, but it doesn't make any difference.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Oh, we did meet her but years afterwards.

DR. WELCH: Oh yeah, that's right.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Certainly we met her at ah...

DR. WELCH: That's right, years later.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You must have found this period exciting.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I found it very exciting. I found dealing with the human situation exciting. For instance, a man coming to the project who was a playwright and had produced a number of successful Broadway plays, and he was broke and had a heart condition. For instance, you would talk about this using your judgement, my manipulation not to let him know because he had exceeded a certain date that he was off the WPA roles. So that he should think he was on them, you know? And he died while he was with us. The whole business of trying to keep the situation human...

DR. WELCH: Who were those wonderful old girls of yours who had the Wilkie buttons?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: The Beards, yes, I told him about them.

DR. WELCH: They were the greatest.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Marvelous.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: You know that for years later, when I talked to an old friend of mine in Princeton who had gone to, what's the name of that school everybody goes to in Princeton? The girls school?

DR. WELCH: Miss Fines.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Miss Fines! She had taught French at Miss Fines and she had taught one of my oldest friends and here she was on WPA you know.

DR. WELCH: That old newspaper man I always liked.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, yes I told him about him too, I think that I was interested in the fact that it was doing something not only for individuals, but it was giving people a change to work at something self-respecting and worth doing. And worth doing.

DR. WELCH: I think the scale in Connecticut was very good too.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It was a wonderful scale yes.

DR. WELCH: You know it was something one could encompass, it wasn't like New York City, you know which was impossible, I'm sure.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That maybe another element, I wonder about it when you speak of Federal. You see, we're a small state, Connecticut, and you knew anybody that had anything to do with this. Well, to the extent that the projects have been judged by what transpired at New York City. New York City is not a window on America and never was. It is as narrow and particularistic in its way as Patchpants, Iowa, I suppose.

DR. WELCH: What are you doing, a book about this?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, we're merely collecting material for the Archives of American Art under a Ford Foundation Grant.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: They're interested in the American Art, and I'm speaking of everything else, crafts and music and that's art also.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: My interest immediately is in the ephemeral thing that -----, the excitement, the atmosphere in which you have to function and work and which is why I brought Washington into play because largely in many ways, you have to exercise your own discretion. And you ignore Washington. You didn't read the circulars. Well, bless your soul!

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, I didn't. I couldn't have done anything if I had. It took too long. You see, this is the period which you look back on and say all eyes were focused on Washington to answer our problems. But by the time '33 came, I think after a period which ----- people wanted something done. They took rude hands and put them on the institutions to see what made them tick. It was an exciting creative period in a lot of ways. Washington was filled with what we would now look upon as crackpots with ideas galore. You know, and every backyard on Sunday was like the old tea shops in New York on the East side where people would tear society down the first part of the night and build it up the rest of the night. It was this kind of excitement that was in the air. Surely we were high centered economically, oh, terribly how to get back on the track? So possibly there's some relationship between the touching of leather in our wallets and our----- for creative idea. So that when they are - and - it is no longer a matter of -. It's tragic. Well I don't know that this is right. It may be right. There's certainly some connection. Just what the connection is, I don't know. because I'm sure --- been societies in which that isn't the generating impulse, or whatever. I am aware of the fact that what I'm suggesting is that in order to achieve the ----- of civilization, we may need a little stinking human manure. I don't want to think we do either, but this period which we got ----- about people ----- you mentioned Westport's general attitude on the part of people who should have known better.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's right, absolutely.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: They didn't know better, and it was only after this desperate attempt to feed them that -- - we heard about mortgage riots in Iowa, or force sales with the farmer standing around with loaded guns buying mortgaged property for a dollar because the sheriff didn't dare do other than sell it. But here in New York City, chain stores are being invaded by longshoremen. Well, I mean, we understand -----

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Certainly.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: In those terms the function of the chainstore is to produce it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No question about it.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: And there wasn't anyone who wanted to quarrel with the longshoremen, but as long as this continued it threatened what - peace, security or orderly procedures. Something had to be done. It was desperate. It really was desperate. It was a national problem and at least they came up with an idea which gave opportunity.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And an opportunity to function not only in one area.

DR. WELCH: You read "The Great Hunger?"

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes.

DR. WELCH: Quite a difference.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

DR. WELCH: A lot of difference, you know, in what happened to laissez-faire in a hundred years.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, I find however, laissez-faire as an idea is coming back with increasing frequency.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: You have to have a certain amount of it, there's no question about it.

DR. WELCH: I think it's somewhere in between. You can go terribly off the beam with well, I don't mean to give you a lecture on what I think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But I think you're correct though, it's probably where you draw the line and where you draw the line in 1964, will differ from where you draw the line in '65. But this assumes that there are people sufficiently knowledgeable to ascertain the spirit of a given period. As to be, let's say, more precise in drawing that line than they would be without being in tune with the spirit of a society.

DR. WELCH: But certainly, the humanitarian ideas so deeply established at this moment are such that laissez-faire is given far more lip service than anything else. Certainly the young generation has no interest in laissez-faire. They've got an interest in the pension.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: This is what they say, I don't know.

DR. WELCH: Yes, but I tell you I see them all the time. God I know them by the thousands.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But this may be no more than a steam-heated approach to living.

DR. WELCH: Sure it is.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I mean we're use to radiators.

DR. WELCH: You'd bet it is.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And in that sense, its something less bold, less adventuresome.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Oh yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: We were adventuresome I believe, in granting to localities as we did certainly under the WPA, discretion to create projects tailor made to fit the people we had on the roles, and that was bold.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It was intelligent.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, but it was bold. It went the reverse of what we've heard ever since the '30s, mainly that -- is becoming a unitary government and not allowing any discretion to local communities.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That's right. Well, here you had discretion --- what they did in New Jersey and what they did in Georgia, and what they did in Wisconsin. It gave opportunity for exciting, imaginative discretion on a local level. And depending upon the ----- of people that the times threw to the sacrifice, the job was rather well done, or it could be well done. The writing project varied, well you know, that is something we can judge. And the theatre project was, did you see them do, what was it we saw?

DR. WELCH: Murder in the Cathedral?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Murder in the Cathedral! They did it awfully well. I've never seen it done better. Hatty Flanagan, I guess that was Hally Flanagan.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: She had fire in her belfry, an idea, and while I think she didn't perhaps play, you know, politics correctly there's a limitation on quoting senator's correctly about housing. She didn't pull that punch. She believed in an idea. Good! The theatre project had to walk the plank.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It was a great pity too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Of course, because it was quite exciting.

[Telephone call]

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Ask him if I can speak to him later, find where he is will you please?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But you know, all these things vary. Congress got into it, even with Mr Alsburg.

DR. WELCH: Did you know Henry?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, I did not. But they discovered, I think among other things it shows you, what a man will write, in the middle of the night a letter he wrote, I believe, to the nation, in which he argued for Democracy in the American prison systems. That the American prisoner ought to be allowed a certain sense of discretion as to their own management. But its the sort of idea you can get reading late at night.

DR. WELCH: Henry was never in prison.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That's what I should have said --

DR. WELCH: Henry should have known ...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: He's a born idealist.

DR. WELCH: --that all prisons are run by the prisoners. They always have been. they always will be. How silly.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There was someone ---

DR. WELCH: Naive.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes, I think that ---

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Henry was naive

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But, but wonderfully so. It was a generous idea.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Of course, of course.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And its the sort of impulse you can get --

DR. WELCH: But it's the sort of thing you can settle very quickly by visiting one prison. Either as an inmate, or talk to the boss.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Henry had nothing whatever to do with life as it is lived. There's no question about it, or very little.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And besides I think when you're dealing in the realm of creative ideas it's permissible to be inconsistent.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Absolutely.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Otherwise, you know...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: You've made the point. you see, that's the difficulty with this rigid kind of people. They just simply don't make room for that. They have no resiliency.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They don't allow for untidiness, if you have a mind to.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Absolutely, they have no resiliency.

DR. WELCH: Were you, ah, appraised of all this business that was going on at the time? Were you?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, I've come to it subsequently by reading both in the newspapers and in the Senate hearings and in the House hearings.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Dr. Phillips is a Connecticut Yankee from Vermont.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Saint Albans.

DR. WELCH: Saint Albans, Vermont.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Lovely spot.

DR. WELCH: Good part of the world.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, indeed.

DR. WELCH: I have a college roommate from Bennington, so I have been touched by the green mountains too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But you know, in reading over the papers --- ---plus the hearings, one gets a completely different picture of this whole business as far as the Federal Arts projects are concerned from the people who now remember it as something important in their lives. Well, in almost everything that goes on really that touches humans, I suspect that Congress gets in it with an somewhere along the line. For purposes which are never clearly identified. Self aggrandizement, or whatever it may be. I doubt if we'd ever know. Take Mrs. Woodward. Ellen Woodward. I don't suppose anything ever happened in the state of Mississippi that prepared her for ----Hally Flanagan, Henry Alsburg. You know, these were her children and when she went to testify, she had that kind of courage; in effect, she was saying I don't understand them, but they're mine. Just Marvelous!

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, yes, she was a nice woman. Did you know her?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, I did not. But she...

DR. WELCH: Is she not alive?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, she is in Washington.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, I don't know, she probably is alive. It's been so many years since I thought about her.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I've talked to her on the phone.

DR. WELCH: What's she doing? She in government still?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. No. But I think she came through the political wars.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That's the big thing what you've just said about her. It's my impression of her, I remember when she was appointed. She was great and maternal. Nothing of the artist in her. You know, I suppose she's never thought an original thought in a certain way.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: There was something, something wonderfully loyal, the Great Mother.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right, she had this.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: She had tranquility.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I mean, I can't conceive of her having background enough to handle as desparate a group as writers, the artists. So ----. It must have been something out of deep center field for her completely.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That's true.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And yet in the testimony which she was called upon to give before the House Committee, she went right down the line for her kids.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: My children may be odd, but they're my children, eh?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, and when Hally Flanagan had to walk the plank in the theatre, you know.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That was really awful.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Ellen Woodward was battling right to the bitter end.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Many tears were shed, I can tell you. We all thought it was a damn shame.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Because something good was coming up and noncommercial. It was a great pity stopping that thing. I think it was one of ---even worse than stopping the art project would have been, because there's something about the theatre that addresses so many people more directly. You know, where else would you hear at that time T.S. Elliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*? Where else!

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's right.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Some dump on Cherry Lane that wasn't well done.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think Congress in this period perhaps had a ...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: They were a bunch of barbarians.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, they had a job--

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: You'd better cut that out.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They had a ----- toward the whole thing. I suspect they collected some scar tissue from what was going on in New York City. This was the first period in which artists, as cussed, as independent, as creative artists can be, banded together in unions. The Artist Union, the Artist Congress, this sort of thing. Well, this was the period of the popular front. The first sit-in as far as I can see, was in Colonel Somer---'s office here in New York City. Well, this is marvelous. You would expect artists who are alleged to be the growing points of society to somehow or other, come up with a reaction to someone who was dealing with people as though he were dealing with fungible goods. Peas in a pod like Somer--- was. Playing a statistical game, we're going to cut off the payroll 30% next week. Well now, 30% is easy for him to say but when you count yourself among thirty, you know, like the bananas, you stick to the bunch or you get skinned.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, this is what transpired, and they had organization, unionization pressure, and this is one area in which Congress could take out its axe as it could not do within the automobile industry where there was a ----- . So the picture was complicated, I suspect, in Congress's mind, you know, so that they had to take after something which was safe, but would not really alter the basic economic sense of the country.

DR. WELCH: I wonder if David Rockefeller wasn't working for LaGuardia at that time?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Was he? Maybe.

DR. WELCH: He went to work for LaGuardia, you know, when studying for his PH.D. It just occurred to me, because Ham Sheilds was working for Victor ----- you know.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Oh, that's right. I remember now. Well, I think there's quite an involved story about the employment of David Rockefeller. I'll ----- . The original impulse of his was to feed people, create work and opportunity, but once our ears were in tune with the ---- voices abroad, the discussion and struggle took place in this country between the America First Group and the Committee to Aid America by Aiding the Allies, which made us forget momentarily about feeding stomachs so that the WPA and both Congress' mind and I think in the nation's mind became something of a backwash. Nationally there are statistics that show the people were going out of WPA into industry. To be sure this industry was what --to fill the air with planes. I've seen contract talks going on in the Department of Justice, papers related to Navy contracts going on as early as '38. So that means the whole sense of what we were ----- doing, was being overloaded with this new preparedness. It had its effect of WPA.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It certainly did.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, this is what I wanted to --

DR. WELCH DR. WELCH: It faded in and faded out.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, was there ever any efforts in Connecticut, for example to continue WPA and make it a useful agency for preparedness?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: There was a lot of talk about whether or not it was useful as it was. Of course the people who felt that we were on the verge of some sort of showdown were very much concerned. When you're speaking from the point of view of the people working for WPA, I would say that a great many of them were relieved at the idea of finding a job which wasn't on the poverty status. I think this was the worse thing about WPA, the personal humiliation.

DR. WELCH: That had to be certified.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That people had to be certified as poor enough to do this. I think its something that they would do anything to, especially in Connecticut you know, to get rid of. But there was a lot of talk as to whether or not these very useful projects couldn't be continued. In some ways that would be accepted, in some legitimate way. I remember it was one of the times that they changed the title. Remember it was "Works Progress Administration" and then it became "Work Projects Association."

DR. WELCH: Before that it was the PWA.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: No, that's a different thing. PWA is Public Works.

DR. WELCH: Yeah, that's how it started. It started Public Works before WPA.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, but there's a difference. PWA was not the same as WPA.

DR. WELCH: I know it wasn't, but I'm...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I think PWA was the Ickes thing.

DR. WELCH: That's right. That was the first thing.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That's what started out.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But Ickes never came to bat, you see, and Roosevelt had called Hopkins down to be an overall coordinator. He suddenly got the whole job thrown at him. Initially, I think 400 million dollars was taken out of Ickes appropriation just to put people to work, getting them to do something.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Build schoolhouses, and that kind of thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Anything, even though they were without tools you see.

DR. WELCH: But weren't the highways that were planned and that kind of thing that were planned, weren't those all planned by the Defense Department?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think there was an overall coordinating committee within the federal government as to the priority of projects where engineering consultants and so on were used. This wasn't true of Post Offices. That was underneath the Treasury Department which had its own mural-decoration and so on, the Section of Fine Arts.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: You know, there was a certain change in attitude, atmosphere, I didn't know what, you see, at first, people in WPA had jobs and then there was of course all those that were on the .. What was it called? We had a title. On the, anyway, the staff of those who were not on relief.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, there was a percentage of supervisors -

DR. WELCH: Well, people who were the supervisors were not on relief.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, but there was one of those sort of classy names. I've forgotten.

DR. WELCH: You might just as well have been, but you weren't.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I remember that there were 2 young men who were working on some sort of sociological study, both young PH.D.s in Yale. I remember at one point, how things were much more open and suddenly, there was a question of whether or not people were really American, and people had to sign various things to the effect that they were not members of the Communist Party, or were not interested in overthrowing the government. Somehow this threw something because with this Connecticut group it really wasn't a group of revolutionaries. They were mostly people who were just awfully nice people out of jobs, and it brought a sort of element of suspicion and dislike.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: This was part of the preparedness.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: This part, as I say, came just at that time. I just thought of it now because I remember these two young sociologists who suddenly were being questioned because either one of them or both of them, -----, and one of them I remember saying, "I will sign this only on the condition I will say I am not a Communist nor a Fascist. Why is it always Communism and Fascism? You know, the superrational?"

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There came out of the, I guess it was the Attorney General's committee on preparedness an act, an Alien Registration Act.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: That was Alien Registration

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In order to have some idea before shooting presumably started, you know, so that they were registered. This also had to do I believe with the early thinking on when young men had to sign up for the Army. Which is in peace time, the peace time Army. Well, there had been background thinking for at least 2 years in the Department of Justice as what we would do with conscientious objectors. Suppose they were aliens, you know, what did we require as a minimum from them to defend the Constitution, you know, the Military Oath. This is part of it so that, Hoover, wanted, I suppose, some means to aggrandize his department and part of it was this Alien Registration Act. The questions for certification came through underneath as to whether one was a Trotsky Communist, or whatever.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Whatever. I remember one young man who was an artist in the Arts Project. I think he was either now how could he have been on that and still have been at Yale, or just out of Yale? I'm trying to think of his name because suddenly he was called and had to go into the Army. I remember he was stationed in Florida.

DR. WELCH: The draft started in about 1940 didn't it?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: This was then I suppose. This was about 1940 because I remember he came back after having been there for, I don't know, 4 months or 3. He was a boy who had been a young intellectual, very artistic. I'm trying to think. He was a violinist. Was he an artist? He was on one of the art projects. His saying that he had ceased to be able to think. He said, "You just didn't know what the Army is". --- just had suddenly been hypnotized in some strange way. I remember having chills about just the general impression he made. He was no longer this sensitive boy. I suppose men would think it was alright.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you remember the criticism of the WPA was, in general, that if we continued the crazy waste of public funds, we'd bankrupt the nation. Well, a point of fact by 1940, '41, we were spending per day, really what we had spent per year on WPA. And we were spending it on, oh, expendable goods by which there was no accountability. We were ----- patterns of behavior which were illogical in a ----- society. We'd gone complete circle from an effort to conserve and preserve and to feed, to destroy, you know, and almost, well, Roosevelt was placed in a position of doing two things, you know, in contradiction. Build a fireproof house and take out fire insurance...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, that's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: As a leader you have to do this, but the net effect on thinking and atmosphere pushed this humanitarian concern largely into the background. So that there was WPA, what to do with it. There were efforts made in various parts of the country. For example, a sewing room in Los Angeles made uniforms. A sewing room in Brooklyn was taken over to make uniforms for the Navy. An art project in Washington was turned into a camouflage unit for the Navy.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I'm sure that kind of thing happened, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Posters for Selective Service. Silk-screen geniuses working on posters for Selective Service turning them out by the bucket. So that there was this effort in various parts of the country to turn WPA people into new opportunities to suit the new design and new spirit abroad in the land. Which was difficult to fathom in '40, '41 because Lindberg and his crowd and William Allen White and his crowd, were at loggerheads and we were discussing it out in the open. The two ocean Navy deal, leaflets, Wilkie, you know, the works, and it was touch and go.

DR. WELCH: Remember, what Charles Lindberg said? He said that people were saying over their fireplaces...

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Yes, I remember.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He's a strange creature.

DR. WELCH: He said, "There're three people who want war". I heard this on the radio. "Three people who want war, the New Deal, the English and the Jews." The world came down on his head. You know, and plenty of people

could have said it without heat. Because this is perhaps, fair enough you know?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: It may have had its own truth.

DR. WELCH: Yes, it may have had its truth. It's not important in a sense, and yet this poor guy was foolish enough to think you can talk this way and not be misunderstood.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: And how clear was he actually in this?

DR. WELCH: He wasn't at all.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Remember that wave of the future that his wife came out with?

DR. WELCH: Sure, it was Fascism.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Wave of the future, thank heaven that wave is submerged.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Quite a long distance from Dwight Morrow.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Quite a distance, yes. Well you know, I'm beginning to remember, you know, the atmosphere, the change that I think the emphasis went just as you were saying. It's perfectly natural. As I say I think that the chief thing was that people themselves were glad to be done with it in a certain way. Now I think those who were serious about the arts, you always have those relatively few people and you always have those who wanted to continue. I don't think we ever finished our place name study for instance. We got to a certain point with it, but I don't think we ever finished that. and I don't know how many things of that sort, you know, just disappeared.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What happened to the records that were kept?

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: Well, I think they were supposed to go into the National Archives. Now that's what I've wondered about myself. I wondered what happened to those as well as some of the books that I paid a lot of the government's money for. They disappeared They don't exist anymore. Where are they? Do you know what happened to all these things? I think probably Yale. Yale of course, has everything Yale ordered. They do have that study on old houses, and they may have a ---- name study, what there is of it, because we got to some distance. But what happened to the others, I simply don't know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, then it ceased to be a major concern that's for sure.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: There's no question, it ceased to be a major concern for a number of reasons; change in the atmosphere and the fact that a great many people were really happy to be what is called legitimately employed.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: I think its a great pity.

DR. WELCH: If you remember, people suddenly began talking about the fact that tires were going to be in short supply, couldn't get gasoline, food rationing and every time you picked up Time magazine you saw, "This is the beginning of a new", you knew something that wasn't apparent, but everybody was talking about it.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: When did Chet Boles reappear? Boles suddenly left American First and became a New Dealer. Yes, suddenly he became a Democrat having been in America first the day before yesterday. And I happen to know him well because I worked for him.

DR. WELCH: Then he went up to Connecticut and worked there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, well Kneed--- appeared on the scene. And Kneed--- in terms of the 3 he 30s, in terms of whatever the new Deal was, was certainly an alien, but suddenly he appeared on the scene in a kind of dual headed role with someone else whose name escapes me, as a National Defense something or other.

DR. WELCH: With Engine Charley or somebody.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Some weird combination where no one really had ----- authority on things, and of course the thing became ---- because there wasn't this ----- authority.

DR. WELCH: But this was the thing that Roosevelt did all the time. You know, he gave three people the same identical responsibility and persuaded them he was behind them 100%, and then he'd find somebody else.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, it was true, I think, that in his own judgement he could not fight a war which he suspected was coming by using the old agencies. He had to somehow, someway, but time before he could create new agencies. And it was the new agencies that were set up almost parallel with the old agencies, but with the discretion to operate in the war, whether it was ----, whether it was mobilization, man power whatever it was it was brand, spanking new. And the old agencies, simply, I don't know what they did.

MRS. WILLIAM WELCH: A lot of the people were absorbed.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, and the expertise, I suppose, went along with it. But nonetheless, it was well developed. He even bypassed the Attorney General and appointed Sam R----- as the White House Counsel, and he went to Sam R----- instead of Biddle

END OF INTERVIEW

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