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Oral history interview with Allen Stuart  
Weller, 1992 May 1

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Allen Stuart Weller on May 1, 1992. The interview took place at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, and was conducted by Stephen Polcari for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

STEPHEN POLCARI: —ninety-two. Stephen Polcari talking to Allen Weller at the University of Illinois. I would actually like to talk about everything from the beginnings of art history, and your beginnings up and through the festivals and onward. First, something of your background. Uh—what—tell me about your family.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: No.

STEPHEN POLCARI: No—how you got interested in art as a young man.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, I grew up in and around the University of Chicago. My father was a professor of geology there, and I started in—at—in—at kindergarten at the University of Chicago, and ended up, eventually, with a PhD, although I did spend two very important years as a graduate student at Princeton University.

STEPHEN POLCARI: In—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —nineteen twenty-seven to '29. And—

STEPHEN POLCARI: In art history?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Oh yeah, sure. And I—there, I got an MFA. At that time, at Princeton, the great figure was Charles Rufus Morey, who was the great figure from the point of view of Medieval art, and he had never taken—he had never bothered to take a PhD degree himself. And he was so choosy about it that I don't think they had given a degree for years. [00:02:00] They did institute the MFA, which, at Princeton, was a history course. What it was, really, was everything for the PhD except the thesis, which was what you were supposed to produce at the end of a long lifetime, so on. Well—

STEPHEN POLCARI: But you're saying that there was an art history, an established art history program, here in America, of a—leading to a doctorate in the '20s?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN POLCARI: There was one, and Princeton was one of those rare places—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: That's correct.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Very old department.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: But ordinarily, people thought of the MFA as a studio degree, whereas it was initiated for a very different purpose, actually. Well, I—

STEPHEN POLCARI: When did, when did you learn that you were really interested in art? You say kindergarten. Is that your drawing and—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah, sure. That was fun. And as a matter of fact, I started going to summer art classes at the Art Institute [of Chicago] in 1916, and I happen to remember that actual date quite definitely. These were basic design courses, but they were very important to me. I was tremendously impressed. I have vivid mental pictures of the Art Institute as it was at that time. It was a totally different kind of an institution. The whole lower level was made up of a great series of casts. [00:04:04] This is the period in which almost all museums started out with collections of plaster casts, and we had, you know—Venetian Samothrace—and the principal works of Michelangelo, and so on. And then in Goodspeed Hall was what Taft had so greatly admired during his student years in Paris, the Trocadéro, which we had full-scale models, plaster casts, of the Gattamelata, and the Colleoni, and numerous Gothic—you know—Ilaria del Carretto—and numerous tomb monuments. All of those are gone, of course. They're totally forgotten.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, we have the museum here. What is it—what's it called again?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: There, there is—

STEPHEN POLCARI: World Heritage Museum.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —a museum here, but there is not a museum of casts, of course. Now, Missouri has preserved a considerable number of its casts, although they are very badly housed. Now, my first academic appointment was at the University of Missouri, and I went there 63 years ago. They have—they asked me—at the time they were celebrating the 150th anniversary that Missouri had been teaching history of art and archeology, they asked me to do a paper on what I remembered of that early period. [00:06:19] And I remember a lot, of course. I was appointed to take the place of old Dr. John Pickard, whose portrait is reproduced in the paper that I think you have—

STEPHEN POLCARI: That you just gave to me.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —a copy.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Thank you.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Dr. Pickard was—you know, he was a one-man department. Actually, he was a classical archeologist by training, and quite a competent one, although he later always signed himself as a professor of the history of art. Naturally, I, at the age of 22, who had never taught before, couldn't be a one-man department, and I consequently was, for administrative purposes, put into the classics department, which taught archeology. I guess that's why I was there. And the head of that division was Walter Miller, who was also pictured and mentioned at considerable length in the paper which you have. Um. Well, let me see.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So this is the beginning, but you had to teach all of the history of art?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I had—I taught all the history of art.

STEPHEN POLCARI: From the—did you do prehistoric, or did you start with the classics, Egypt and Greece? [00:08:02]

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I, for the first time, introduced a survey course, which they had never had. Ordinarily, they took what courses existed in kind of chronological order. But the second year I was there, I introduced a survey course, ancient Medieval one semester, Renaissance and modern one semester. At that time, Modern, in most places, didn't go farther back than Cézanne. As a matter of fact—

STEPHEN POLCARI: But they included Cézanne?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: What's that?

STEPHEN POLCARI: But they included Cézanne?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: He was mentioned, but nothing beyond, nothing beyond Cézanne. Mentioned rather disparagingly, as a matter of fact, as I remember, as—they always called attention to the fact that Cézanne had attempted, for years, to be accepted in the salon, but was always rejected, except on a single occasion, when he happened to have been on a jury, and jurors were allowed to include one person of their own choice, even without competition. Everything in those days was very, very competitive. People—in classes, people were graded so that they knew exactly where they stood in relationship both to their earlier work, and in relationship to the efforts of their contemporaries. [00:10:04] So just quite a different atmosphere.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So it was really very tense, you would think, among the students?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah, I think it was. Right.

STEPHEN POLCARI: But you were teaching these courses. So you started with the ancients. No prehistoric art, which I think people only started discussing in the '20s.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, there was just a little bit of it. I think there was about the same that you might find in Paro and CPA [ph] or something like that.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Paro and CPA?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, that was a famous text—French textbook, to which Professor Pickard contributed a brief account of [coughs] prehistoric and early art.

STEPHEN POLCARI: There was a book called *Apollo*.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: *Apollo*. I remember it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: That was a basic survey book, I think, at that time.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah, it was.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Barney [Barnett] Newman read that one. So there were some, very small. Sort of the early things of Janson later, and—so you had—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I devoted a great deal of attention, of course, in my study of Taft, on Taft as an author. Taft, of course, wrote and published, in 1903, his really epic-making, *History of American Sculpture*. It was the first, the first book which ever attempted to cover the whole field.

STEPHEN POLCARI: I remember that book. I read it many, many years ago.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: You probably read it, sure. And it's still a fascinating book. I have—there are—there is only one other book that's ever been published which is a fairly complete history of American sculpture, and that is by Wayne Craven—[00:12:06]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Ah, yes.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —at the University of Delaware. I've recently gone through Craven, and I notice in his index that he either quotes or mentions Taft's *History of American Sculpture*, I think about 35 times. He either uses a definite quotation, or makes a reference to him.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Isn't that amazing, though, that a sculptor could write a history of art that was so valuable? Isn't that rare? Could we have an artist do that today? I think that was quite extraordinary, the kind of learning —

ALLEN STUART WELLER: It's quite extraordinary. And he was not a research scholar. He—what he did was—he was quite critical when it came to the earlier sculptures. Of course, the two big sources are, uh, are Dunlap, *History of the Arts of Design*, about 1815 or so, and Tuckerman, the *Book of the Artists*, about 1835. And Taft is perfectly willing, and takes his factual biographical material very largely from those books, but when he gets up to the present, it is what one would call appreciation rather than history. And in fact, he definitely says, about his fellow sculptors, that it is not his intention to criticize them, but to—we are privileged, he says, to enjoy them all. [Laughs.] [00:14:13] But he was, he was very clever, because he managed to mention a lot of contemporary artists in a way which made it quite clear that he thought there were all sorts of things lacking from them. You know, he will say, "So-and-so, we admire him for his conscientious work." Uh, or he will—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yes, that's—yes. It's professional insults. Yeah, it's very subtle. [Laughs.]

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah, exactly. He hated the—Rebisso's great big equestrian statues, one of which is in Lincoln Park in Chicago. And Taft says Rebisso's equestrian statues are not good enough to be considered as art, or bad enough to be considered as picturesque. You know, things like this. So that I found kind of—[inaudible]—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, there's a good art competition there. But that Taft book indicates that there was some serious art writing at that time. Did you feel that you had to write a lot when you took this job?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: No, I didn't really. I was under no pressure.

STEPHEN POLCARI: It was truly teaching.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: At that time, young art historians were in considerable demand, uh, very largely because of the fostering by the Carnegie Corporation. [00:16:00] Now, the two years that I spent at Princeton, the first year, I was fortunate enough to get a Carnegie grant, and I was also fortunate enough to get a travel fellowship. I did the grand tour in the summer of 1929. You know, England, France, Switzerland, Rome, Greece, and—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Studying the major monuments.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes. And it was there, as a matter of fact, that I had my first contacts with Professor Walter Miller, because he was a member of what was then called the bureau of university travel. He took us through Rome and the Mediterranean, and—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Fellow academics and yourself.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah. And let me see—yeah. Well, the second year I was at Princeton, I got a local

Princeton fellowship. So I was really pretty well-prepared, and Dr. Pickard, interestingly enough, had no—he didn't—he wanted me to teach what I wanted to teach, and he taught a few very peculiar courses. For instance, for years, he taught a course in modern Dutch and Flemish painting, in the, in the '80s, and it was still possible to talk about a Belgian Renaissance. [00:18:00] And there were a few figures who had international reputations, but mostly they're totally forgotten. I, in a way, sort of inherited, but avoided, that sort of thing all together, of course.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Now, you taught one of the first modern art classes, right? You started teaching it right away there.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I think he may have given the first formal course in the history of American art.

STEPHEN POLCARI: When do you think—the person I know is Alfred Barr at Wellesley in '26 or '27, but you're saying Pickard did it around then, too? This is less well-known.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Pickard did it in 1907.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALLEN STUART WELLER: In 1907, he wrote—and I got—I published a copy of his letter—one of the first things I ever published, as a matter of fact. He wrote to a large number of then-famous artists and asked them for any material they could give him for the course which he was instituting. And among them was a fascinating letter from Thomas E—from Thomas—no, from Albert Ryder, you know, in which Ryder calls attention particularly to the fact that the last time he saw his painting, it looked very different. Which of course is understandable, because he used very strange—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Material.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —material.

STEPHEN POLCARI: —and they did change.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: But his letter is of particular importance, because it gives the source of his, uh, his, uh, painting the, the—whatever it is. [00:20:17] *The Life of the Mind*, you know. And the first thing I ever published was Ryder's letter. And it's often been quoted, you know. But it was an interesting letter from a whole lot of people there.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So Pickard wrote to contemporary American artists at that time, asking them to make statements, and he was going to discuss them in his course. So basically, across the board, this sounds like an original, very original, American art course.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I think it was.

STEPHEN POLCARI: How about modern art, in terms of what we consider now when—Renoir to—that type of thing?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: It—the—I inherited all of the slides. They were all kept in the wonderful, big office which I had, that since then has been carved up into three or four smaller offices, of course. There was an interesting letter from—I remember the Eakins letter very distinctly. I gave all of the original letters—there were not very many, but there was a handful—to the Archives of American Art years, years ago, actually.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you picked up on this American art course at Missouri, and yourself—you know, differentiating the idea of modern from American, when did you begin teaching that? [00:22:05]

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Second year I was there.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Second year. And could you describe that course? The modern as a whole.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, it went—it sort of ended up with all of the very elaborate decorations, still very, very conventional, of which Dr. Pickard had formed for the state capitol at Jefferson City, you know. That was the last big academic program of sort of neo-classic, academic, Beaux-Arts design. Now, I went farther than that, because I had the old original slides of Benton, which of course a Pickard would have detested and wouldn't have admitted at all.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So you were doing Benton at that time, circa around 1930?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I got, got that far anyway, yeah.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So that's really doing contemporary—yes, very much so. Did you do any Picasso or Matisse at that time?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes, I did. I knew about Picasso, because Taft mentions him specifically in the 1917 lectures, the Scammon lectures, which he gave at the Art Institute, and he detested him. When he showed his audience a slide of Matisse, he said, "Do you see Matisse is as good as—he is as good a sculptor as he is a painter? [00:24:13] And both of them were deplorable." You know. He had very harsh words.

STEPHEN POLCARI: For him, yes.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: For them.

STEPHEN POLCARI: How about Rodin? Did Taft like Rodin?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Taft—oddly enough, as a student at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, he knew nothing about Rodin, although this was—

STEPHEN POLCARI: That was the 1880s. Rodin was—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Rodin was doing some of his most important things.

STEPHEN POLCARI: But I don't know if he was that well-known.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: The Beaux-Arts was so conservative that Taft, although he knew Rodin existed, he didn't realize that he was important. Rodin did not become important to Taft until he saw reproductions, casts, that were in the 1893 French exhibition at the world's—in the Fine Arts Palace at the World's Columbian Exposition.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So that's probably introduction to America of Rodin. That was the big introduction of Rodin here.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: That's right. And there is a very—there are very interesting references to that in Taft's account. He found it very difficult to accept Taft's late works, but the works of the period—

STEPHEN POLCARI: You mean Rodin's late works?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: *The Age of Iron [Bronze]* and all of that sort of thing. And of course, he was very distinctly influenced by that, in *The Solitude of the Soul*, which is the whole idea of the figures emerging from the core of the material itself, is a very Rodin-esque motif. [00:26:16]

STEPHEN POLCARI: And the blind upstairs [ph], too, is very Rodin-esque.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Very much the blind, yeah. Now, I might also mention, in connection with the festivals, that those of us who were concerned primarily with the festivals were quite frequently asked to serve as jurors at various local exhibitions. I remember jurying shows in Tulsa, and in Oklahoma, and here and there and so on. And actually, I know [Cecil V.] Donovan, who was the director of the—the first director of the museum here, he also served not infrequently as a juror in Florida and elsewhere. And we selected things that we would never have seen in New York or in artists' studios, which we saw in some of these out-of-the-way places. As far as our activities in connection with the festival was concerned, of course we always went to New York, to Chicago, to Los Angeles, to San Francisco, and there were a couple of times in which we—I think we went to Texas one year. I think we went to Washington once a year. [00:28:00] But basically, those were the places that we went to, and we became quite well-known to dealers and artists whom we visited in those—

STEPHEN POLCARI: —those days.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —those places.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, a festival—I mean, we'll get to the subject of the festivals in a moment, but yeah, they're a wonderful episode of American art history. They reflect a wonderful time.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I instituted a series of Sunday afternoon lectures down in Gregory Hall on the—at the period of the festivals, and I tried—we usually had a visiting artist, and I'd ask him—I'd ask—I tried to get collectors of contemporary art, patrons of contemporary art. I tried to get museum people, or art historians who were helpful. And I must say, I got astonishing support to do this. For instance, the—a lot of the things we did right here would never have been possible if it had not been for George Stoddard, the president of the university

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STEPHEN POLCARI: Absolutely.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —and Coleman Griffith, who was the provost. Both of whom were very supportive and very much interested. Now, we had some strong differences of opinion—at least I did—with Stoddard. Always got along very well with Coleman. But in those years, the whole university really was run just by two people. [00:30:05] There weren't any vice presidents and vice chancellors, this and that, you know. A person—nowadays, a person who is simply a business manager is a vice chancellor for public relations or something like that, you know. And the increase in the administration is just unbelievable at a place like this.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I think it's true across the board everywhere.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Everywhere.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Horizontally and vertically. Just increased numbers of people's duties, responsibilities, and things. Those days, things could be very direct. The president just could decide something, and it was done. You didn't have to go through all this stuff.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, you know, when you wanted to appoint somebody, you generally just simply wrote to some friend of yours and said, "Do you have any recent graduate students who could do this sort of a job, and if so, would you recommend them?" You never advertised. People didn't apply for positions.

STEPHEN POLCARI: We were just talking about that last night. Yes. Affirmative Action changed that in the early '70s.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Exactly.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Before then, it was this calling on the phone system, and sometime in the—CAA [College Art Association of America] in the '60s—I've seen the listings—people advertised themselves. "Situation wanted. Can teach modern art."

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Oh, you see that in the CAA program.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Things at that time. What we consider today—universities announce jobs, and then people apply—that's really the last 20 years.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, you know, I keep reading about people in the upper administration here—the newspaper will tell us, so-and-so and so-and-so is one of the five people who is a finalist for the presidency of this or that. [00:32:17] You know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, I know. Well, yeah, they do it by numbers nowadays. It's quite different. We'll get on to the festivals in a moment. Let's finish up with the early years, your early years in Missouri. So you taught there when? Nineteen twenty-nine to, uh—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Until 1947, really, but I was away for four years during the war, in military service, two years of which were spent in Italy. I was an historian, but I was a military historian.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You were there to preserve the monuments, or watch over the monuments.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: That's right, yeah.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So this was military intelligence,

ALLEN STUART WELLER: It was actually quite an interesting job. Yeah, I was a—as far as writing was concerned, I was sort of a ghostwriter for the general, and—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Which general was it?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —prepared texts for him to send down to the War Department and so on in Washington.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Which general was it?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Appropriately enough, our general was General Cannon. [They laugh.] He was a—

STEPHEN POLCARI: In more ways than one.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: He was an old-time pilot from World War I, so he was one of the oldest brigadier generals around, I guess. But uh—

STEPHEN POLCARI: So you were there to watch over and to catalog and see what the Nazis had destroyed or stolen, and to make sure that things were returned properly. [00:34:02]

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: That was, that was your duty.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I was very much impressed by the extremely specific and very elaborate directives which Eisenhower, when he was still in the Mediterranean, circulated, with lists of specific works which should, in all cases, as far as was possible, should be avoided, should be saved.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Monuments that—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Specific monuments. Now, of course there were some very bad mistakes made, but there was a real attempt at controlling this—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, they did a very good job. We know of some of the disasters. The Mantegna show just opened in New York, of course. The Orvieto Chapel was bombed there. But for the most part, things were fairly good.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: The destruction of a lot of the things in the—in Pisa, of course, was terrible, and—but—

STEPHEN POLCARI: But—so you worked in the army on this preservation with it, and I assume there was a whole series of an organized effort in the US army as a whole, the Allies, in preserving monuments and preventing the looting that the Nazis engaged in. All right, so those were your years during the war. But how would you describe the change in American art history, both its teaching and its understandings, from 1929 to 1947? What changed, if at all, say during the Depression? [00:36:03] Did that have an effect on things? The regionalism, the political conflicts?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, of course there was a lot of emphasis on regionalism. I'm sure it was considered in general courses. Although the tendency now is for young art historians, I think unfortunately, to get settled into a limited field of interest too early in their careers. I'm glad that I happen to have gotten started at a time when I was not under pressure to produce a lot of published work.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You could grow and develop on your own.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah. But I notice now that the young people here at the university who get appointed, there's a special category of people who have apparently made a reputation of being outstandingly good as undergraduate teachers, but they are given a very substantial—I think a three-year period—in which they get a substantial salary increase, which can be spent in any way they want to. If they want to employ a graduate assistant, or if they want to use it in travel to go and see specific things which they need to see, they can do it. There are a couple of people here right now—Manthorpe [ph] is one of them. I don't know whether you've met her. [00:38:01]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Cathy?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yes.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I don't happen to know her.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Cathy Manthorpe?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yes. Yeah, she is American art—she teaches American art now.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: She's had one of these—

STEPHEN POLCARI: University grants.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —one of these grants, I know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, I think it's a good idea. It tries to counter the emphasis on research by emphasizing



teaching, I think. Steve Orso also won an award. To get back to the topic, however, when the Germans came over, fleeing Hitler, during the Depression, did you see any immediate effects on American art history? A lot of them were art historians. They started heading up—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I don't recall that specifically, but I recall the fact that we were by no means negligent in being in contact with some of those figures. I remember particularly that during one of the festival years, we had as a visiting artist Germain Seligman, who of course was one of the inventors, really, of Surrealism. I've always remembered one very nice remark that he made to me at that time. He said that he did not admire contemporary architecture, and I said, "Why not?" and he said, "Because it makes such unattractive ruins." [They laugh.] And you know, he's right, because even a fragment of a ruin Greek temple, you can visually, mentally, reconstruct it, and it has elements of design and of beauty which are inherent in the actual form. [00:40:17] So I didn't realize what—what he meant.

STEPHEN POLCARI: I think Bob Smithson once said that, however, in contemporary civilization, we put up our ruins right away. The buildings we put up are ruins. We don't wait for them to fall into ruins. They're—some of them are so badly made and designed. You were in, you were in Missouri. Beckmann came to Missouri in the '30s to escape the Nazis.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Beckmann came to Missouri specifically because of Kenneth Hudson. Did you know Ken Hudson by any chance?

STEPHEN POLCARI: No, no, no.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: He—he joined the University of Missouri as head of the other department of art. He was also theory and practice of art. And Ken was a mural painter who had his training at Yale, in a typically Beaux-Arts, neo-classic manner. Then, he was called to Washington University, long before I left Missouri, as dean of the school of art at Washington University. He wasn't the dean of anything else. Now, the dean here, of course, has everything, but at Washington University, the dean was just the dean of the school of art, and Ken occupied that position very successfully for 30 years. [00:42:06] And he was amazing to me, because his staff was perfectly willing to let him decide everything for him. And this was so different from Illinois, where the staff input has always been very, very strong on the development of departmental programs, you know. But Hudson was really sort of a marvel, the way in which he just did everything for them.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, he brought Beckmann over when Beckmann was probably not very well-known. That was quite a feat.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: That's correct, yes. Ken was very much annoyed, because later, Perry Rathbone and other people took up with Beckmann and their—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Brought him to Boston.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —Morton D. Mays made a big collection in St. Louis of Beckmann's, and both of them completely forgot the fact that Beckmann was there because of Hudson, you know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, Beckmann went to Boston area, I think, in the late '40s.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah. Well, I came to know him, I think, in the summer of 1951. I was asked to be a visiting professor for the summer quarter, or whatever it was, at Berkeley. And the same summer, Beckmann was at, I think, Pomona, or Mills College, one of those liberal arts colleges out there. [00:44:05]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Uh-huh [affirmative]. In California.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Neither of us had ever been for any great length of time in California, and we saw a good deal of the Beckmanns, because we did a lot of weekendening together.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, Mills is near the San Francisco area, so it probably was that place there. Well, he had an impact, of course, in a great way. I think to finish discussing the early period, tell me about the beginnings of the CAA. This began, you said, in the Midwest, or—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Absolutely. It's an amazing story. And oddly enough, it began, really, at the University of Illinois. There was, earlier—it's in the—my paper, really. There was an earlier organization called the Western Manual Training and—I think—Design Organization. They appointed a three-man committee to make a survey of the training in art at the university level. All three of the people who were on that committee were practicing artists, watercolorists mostly. They took their time, but they made their report, and they found that, at that time, there were about 200 institutions on the East Coast, and about 200 on the West Coast, and about 200 in the Midwest, which had some work, of some kind, of graduate work in art, in art subjects. [00:46:23] The Illinois

thing comes in, into the fact that in—I think it's 1910—there was a meeting here, at which this committee presented its report, and Dr. Pickard presided as the then-president of the—what was the—what was then given the name of the College Art Association. And he served in that position for three years. It was he, at the Illinois meeting, who, for the first time, proposed publishing *The Art Bulletin*. That was his title, and he served as its ed—

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STEPHEN POLCARI: —CAA was editor of *The Art Bulletin*. That's the way he proposed it in the beginning?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And so it began here. Did you have regular meetings of the College Art Association, of its members, at that time, or as a group?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Interestingly enough, it was not until, I think, the last year when Pickard—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Which year is that?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —was the president of the CAA that it met in New York. The earlier meetings were in Detroit, or Ames, Iowa, or places like that, you know. And the really weird episode in the whole history, you know, since, is John Shapley, who was the president of the CAA, I think for about 17 years. You know, just year after year after year, uh—he retained that position. He also was, to my mind, as far as I know, absolutely unique in his timing. He graduated from the University of Missouri as a student of Dr. Pickard's in 1913. He got a master's degree in 1914 from Princeton University. Believe it or not, he got a PhD in 1915 from Vienna, writing a thesis under Strizogofsky [ph]. [00:02:02] He's the only person I've ever heard—

STEPHEN POLCARI: A degree a year.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —who has sailed through those degrees in a time plan like that. Unbelievable. He was a brilliant man, who unfortunately succumbed to drink and had an alcohol problem, but he had a devoted and a wonderful wife. I don't know whether you knew Fern Shapley.

STEPHEN POLCARI: No.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Who—she ended up, of course, as the—I think the chief curator at the National Gallery in Washington. She stuck by her husband, although they lived separately, she was living and working in Italy when I was a student there. I wrote my master—my PhD thesis, the first draft, at I Tatti, working in Berenson's library, where, of course, it was wonderful, because he had the great paintings around of the period that I was writing about, and I appreciated that very much. And in those years, Berenson seemed very awe-inspiring to me.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, he was.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: He was one of these people who had exquisite, elegant, perfect manners, and demonstrated them, used them, but at the same time, could make you feel like an ignoramus. [Laughs.] You know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, the profession hasn't changed a great deal. [00:04:01]

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah. But he had changed greatly when I reencountered him at the very end of the war, 1945, you know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: The other one was the first war.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I think I was one of the first Americans that he met after he emerged. He was in hiding, you know, throughout the war, in Vallombrosa, in a villa which belonged to the Vatican, to the pope, actually. And it was declared off-limits to the Germans, and they didn't disturb him. But he came—when he came back, I—he was, he was very different. He was very glad to see me, apparently, I think largely because every time I went out to see him, I'd bring him some magazines or books, and he hadn't had anything new to read for years, and he loved it, you know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You said he changed a great deal—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Oh, he had changed a lot. He was much more approachable, much more agreeable. Still very, very elegant. And it was kind of exciting for me, because I met a lot of interesting people. I remember—of course, I knew Ms. Mariano, the famous Nicky Mariano, who lived with the Berensons, and kept on living with Berenson long after Mrs. Berenson succumbed, was dead and gone. Ms. Mariano would come up to me and

would say, "Oh, I would like you to meet—I'm sure you would like to meet his highness." [00:06:05] And she would introduce me to somebody, and it turned out it was the last king of Bavaria. I think he must have been the heir or something, to the Mad King Ludwig, but you know, those different German principalities still had separate royal families until they were all dethroned during World War I. Several of them seemed to have settled in Florence, and they would turn up at these séances, you know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: With Berenson and others. I Tatti also. Yeah. So the CAA began, you're saying, 1910, and it—the *Bulletin* was established. Shapley became director for a number of years. Did they have lectures and things in the beginning?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: The early—the early *Bulletin* published lists of lectures which had been read to them, but they didn't have money enough to publish the papers. They generally published—in those days, the president of the organization always made an address, and that was pretty generally published. Also, in the early years, a good many of the contributions which were made at the meetings of the College Art Association were published by the magazine, which was called, I think, *Art in America*. [00:08:05] It was a publication of contemporary, critical things. I was able to reconstruct a good—a number of the Midwestern meetings from papers which were published in that periodical.

STEPHEN POLCARI: At the beginnings—I have two further questions. You mentioned Mrs. Shapley here. How many women—what was the position of women in the CAA in the beginning? Were there very many? Was there a sense of active discrimination, or were they just simply rare at that time?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I expect there was what was then the usual kind of discrimination. There was certainly no specific intention of giving special responsibilities to women. Now, the present female dean of our college here is really a very avid feminist, I would say. She has made it quite clear, so am I—so I am told—that she expects that search committees who are looking for replacements, or for filling new positions should invariably include women in the names which are submitted to her. [00:10:00] On the other hand, I should mention that she has been very supportive of me. She seems to like me, and she has made it possible for me to carry on my work here better than what had been the case otherwise, because she has assigned a graduate student who runs errands for me. He checks books in and out of the library for me. He is able to—once I get the books, I can get them renewed by mail. But I've made quite a certain limited amount of progress, which I do here, because she has given me very generous support.

STEPHEN POLCARI: But in the beginning, women were rather rare in the field, I guess.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: They were rare in the field, I think. I can distinctly remember individual people on the staff here who I think were—had very conservative views.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Toward hiring women?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Toward hiring—the, the—I don't know whether you remember Warren Doolittle, who used to be—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Before my time.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —he was one of the chief painters. He had the graduate painters for a good many years, but he had all of the usual doubts as to appointing a woman because of the fact that they would have to be gone during the period in which they were being mothers and taking on family responsibilities. [00:12:02]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So that was always a factor there. Of course, that's greatly changed from that time. Uh—one other question. In the regional emphasis in the '30s, did that spill over into the CAA in teaching? The sort of political fights of the '30s, the way art history now was full of political fights. Were there a lot of radical politics in the CAA in the '30s?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I really don't think so. I can't recall that. I can think of individual cases. I think, for instance, of the protest, highly political, lithographic suite, which Billy Morrow Jackson made. And he's recently done a new one, which I don't understand. The only reproduction that I've seen of it has been a rather inadequate reproduction in a newspaper article, but it obviously is also very political, but he has never identified himself as belonging particularly to the CAA. If he went to any meetings of the CAA, they would have been the studio sessions.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you're saying that the CAA, in the 1930s, was not a very politically-fractured—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I can't recall.

STEPHEN POLCARI: There was a studio and art history component even then.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: There was.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Of course, one thing that astonishes me, I was very much interested that one of the awards which the CAA gave this year was for a teacher—what's his name? [00:14:11] Vincent Price, I think, who is a studio teacher. And I thought it was very fine that they gave an award, but the amazing thing is, they never tell you in the squib about him, in the CAA record, where he teaches. Very peculiar.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Very.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: He's given this award, but—because he's good at—they say—at all levels of studio teaching, but they don't tell you where he's doing this.

STEPHEN POLCARI: That may be just a clerical oversight and things. All right, to turn our attention now to the festivals. I was reading the history of it. The idea was proposed in 1947, and the first one, 1948, which was an open competition—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: In part.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [Inaudible.]

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Half of it was open. Only half of it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: The first one, only half.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Half of it was selected in New York, mostly from the Grand Central Gallery.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, really?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes, which was a conservative, but very active—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, I'm engaged in getting their records—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —gallery.

STEPHEN POLCARI: —from the archives.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: But half of it was open, and the—astonishingly enough, they had reserved \$7,500 for purchases, and believe it or not, at that time, that was considered a lot of money. In fact, I remember an article in *Art Digest* which says it's the largest open competition from the financial point of view that there is. [00:16:07] And we consequently got, I think, over a thousand uninvited submissions.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, it was quite good. But the art world was small at that time, don't you think? If you had an open competition today, how many you think would you get?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I don't have any idea, because I have the impression that, even then, a lot of the most important artists would theoretically not just enter competitions at all, you know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Even then.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: They would submit only if they were guaranteed at least an adequate remuneration.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So the Ben Shahns at that time, and others, wouldn't—didn't do the competition?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: No. Well, one thing we discovered in selecting the festival shows was that, in a number of cases, we practically had to promise the artist that we would purchase his work. Otherwise, we would find that, after we had selected the show, which would have been perhaps September, possibly even October, uh—that it already would have been purchased by somebody else, or already had been earmarked for some other place. I know, for instance, Shahn was an example of a painter whom we said, "We're going to—we want a Shahn, and this one we will keep," and he consequently was in the show. [00:18:05] But we had to assure him that it would not be simply a popularity contest. We—in the earliest ones, we had an outside jury, which made recommendations, but later, I think only—we only did that about two years, because later we decided that it was just as good and less expensive to get the opinion of the professional staff of the art department as to what things they thought ought to be purchased. We also ran a public—there was a mailbox in which the public could nominate their favorite, you know. On only one occasion was a painting ever purchased which was a, one of the

public favorites. That painting by Charles Rain was the only time that the department actually purchased a work which had been a popular favorite. Which, you know, it's kind of nice to know that.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, professional judgment really running things rather than popular opinion. I grew up in the '50s, partially in Boston, and I remember a festival of contemporary art on Boston Common, in which they had all of these arts, lots and lots of paintings, I think open competition, on sort of temporary walls in the Boston Common, and the public could vote for their favorite there. And that became the purchase award there. It disappeared as a festival later.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: They had that sort of an enormous, non-juried exhibition for several years in the enormous galleries at Navy Pier in Chicago. [00:20:13] And then—maybe it was the Art Institute—would make a selection of things that they would consider, you know. So there would be a more select kind of a show form as the result of those great big Navy Pier shows, which, from the sociological point of view, were really fascinating. I wrote quite a long piece, somewhere or other, I think in the *Art Digest*, one year, on the reappearance of the same ideas again and again, and again that emerge in this sort of a non-juried show, you know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Certain—consistently the same number of people, same people—different people, same ideas, at that time. Yeah, I think Baziotes was purchased once. In 1947, he won one of their awards, William Baziotes was there. These things are quite open, though. Did you—were you worried about there being American—or any competition with Europe at that time when you were looking these things over? Did you feel you were establishing American art vis-a-vis Europe? Did you feel any sort of national competition?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: No, because I really think that a lot of people during this period felt that America was ahead of Europe. [00:22:02]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Later? Later? I think a little later.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I don't know just when, but in some period, there was a good deal of talk about the New York school having taken over from the school of Paris.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So it became a non-issue? You just didn't talk about it. You just assumed things were better, and then left it like that,

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah, I believe so.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: But in—you don't remember the early—late '40s, I'm thinking. America still had to get its confidence in that it was as good as Europe. But it doesn't seem to have been a factor at all in the things I look at there. You saw these things as a cross section of American art at that time, and that the responses seem to have been great all over the country, and in fact Europe, as this paper indicates here.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes. Unlike the Whitney and some other places which had marvelous recurring shows, it was never a theme show. We weren't attempting to emphasize any one aspect. It was entirely from the point of view of what seemed like important and interesting formal qualities.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Formal qualities, inventive aesthetic qualities. Did you attempt to select things based on their themes as you understood them? You seem to have made choices based on visual originalness, originality, here, but not so much on doing something different. There's not a great deal, for instance, of Pop art later selected and things. [00:24:01] It was a sort of a painting—inventiveness with painting and form that appealed to you the most in these things. So you got huge crowds. These things bring in—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Tremendous crowds.

STEPHEN POLCARI: —people all over, including people from all over the country, to attend the festival.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yes. There was, there was one year when a very interesting couple from New Zealand were doing a tour in this country, and they came, and I think they stayed in Urbana for two or three weeks, because they said they could see more here than any other place that they—these were the—I think his name was Oakley. He was a painter, and I know—I carried on correspondence with him for several years, and he sent me catalogs of New Zealand uh—painting. There were other people who always came from out of town. There was a little group of people from Memphis, who always—you could come up here on the train, you know, and—

STEPHEN POLCARI: It's not very far away.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: The Memphis group would turn up almost annually. Lots of people from Chicago, of course, always came, particularly a number of the artists, and particularly a number of collectors, you know. The Ludgins and the Shapiros and so forth all turned up at these events. [00:26:02]

STEPHEN POLCARI: The Shapiros, uh—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Shapiro. Shapiro was, and still is, one of the trustees of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. A collector.

STEPHEN POLCARI: These were very powerful and very original shows, and dominated—they were really more important than the Whitney shows for many, many years. There are great moments in the '50s. Uh—how did you feel when things turned into the '60s? Did you start feeling things were losing their energy a bit?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well—[laughs]—the festival as such became less important, because of the fact, particularly with the construction of the Krannert Center for Performing Arts, there was so much going on that the festival didn't have the unique impact that had formerly been the case, you know. So I would say there was a period in the '60s when it lost quite a bit of power.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Power. When was the Krannert established? I know the big center was much later, but—

ALLEN STUART WELLER: The center—well, I think it just celebrated its 25th anniversary last year.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So it's '67. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Yeah. I think that's when it opened.

STEPHEN POLCARI: But you have to think the festivals were—occurred at a time when the American art world was small, and therefore wonderful things could be done right away with very talented people, much as you described the university earlier, that you could do things much more directly. [00:28:06] But then the art world grew and grew, and then things got established in the '60s. Of course, cultural centers opened everywhere, and the American art world sort of exploded, the cultural world—Lincoln Center and all these other places.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Of course, in 1972, we had—in fact, we had to cancel the show because of the—because, as a result of student disorders and other things, insurance costs had skyrocketed. We simply could no longer afford to pay the insurance, which you had to have in order to borrow a lot of things, you know. But we put on, I thought, a fascinating show. Of course, I'm sure you've seen the catalog of that show, in which we brought together everything which we had purchased from all of the festival shows, plus a few other things which were owned locally, mostly by Rachel and me, which had—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Your wife, yeah.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —been in the festival show.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But it was 1972, it was the student disorders that increased the insurance cost, or was it the value of the work, that American art had just become increasingly more valuable, and therefore more expensive to borrow?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, I suppose both, although at the time, I attributed it largely, simply, to the very uneasy quality on campuses. Actually, the University of Illinois got through this period better than most of the other Big 10 universities. [00:30:05] I mean, we—they did have to have the National Guard a time or two, but nobody got killed. Nothing was ever burned. The effect here was somewhat more civilized than was the case, for instance, at both Minnesota and Wisconsin, which I recall.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yeah, terrible things many, many places.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Now, what years were you here?

STEPHEN POLCARI: I was here '79 to '82. Eighty-two, and the festivals were gone then, and things got quiet by then.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, you see, the last big national show we did was '74, but it was not a festival as such. But we did get money from the National Endowment of the Arts, and the National—

STEPHEN POLCARI: Which was new.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: —Endowment for the Humanities to form a national show. I think we did a very good show. But as you know, they don't like to make a—they don't like to do this again. They—we applied for another grant but were turned down.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, they do one grant and that's it. That's the end.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Consequently, we really haven't had any major, locally-organized show in the present museum.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, the NEA spreads its money everywhere, and of course with things being so expensive, it's a really big undertaking. Looking back in perspective, though, what would you see its ultimate contribution, the festivals—looking back in perspective, how would you see its ultimate contribution—the festivals to the history of American art? [00:32:15] If you were to evaluate it, comparing the world now to then.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I think it was tremendous. I mean, the—I think [Winton] Solberg's paper quotes quite a number of really very strong statements from other universities. There are lots of letters from university administrators who say, "We think it's marvelous what you're doing. I wish we could do the same thing here, but I doubt whether we would be able to do it." And I don't think you could do it now.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Why do you think that?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: I just don't think there's anybody on the present staff of the studio part of the department who have either the interest or the abilities, or would think of devoting the time to it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Or would be rewarded.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Oh, yes, exactly. Now, I think one of the very unfortunate things around here is the demise of—the museum bulletin, you know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: When did that go?

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Well, the last issue, the last issue was about—well, we still had it in '83, but very shortly after that [Stephen] Prokopoff did away with it. [00:34:03] And that bulletin contained scholarly-type articles by staff members, mostly art historians, or by graduate students, on things that are in the permanent collection. Unfortunately, Prokopoff has published several very elaborate and wonderful catalogs of special shows. There is no place for a continuing publication of works in the permanent collection.

STEPHEN POLCARI: The emphasis on changing exhibitions, and not to study—scholarly study of permanent collections.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Have you looked at the really weird Peter Witkin show?

STEPHEN POLCARI: No.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: [Laughs.] You ought to look at it. It's a very controversial photograph show on this level, you know, and it's very disturbing, very offensive to a great many people, you know. Painful. And there are a lot of people who think it's really frightful. But you ought to take a look at it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: I will. I will take a look at it.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: It's on this level. It's just beyond the African collection, to your right. And Peter Witkin is a professional photographer, at I think the University of New Mexico, who has just simply went out of his way to offend people by, you know—he delights in—his work—they are sort of photographic collages, technically remarkable, but very, very strange, in which you—photographs of, you know, crucifixions being pissed on, and cats being sacrificed, or on crucifixes, or skeletons being disgustingly displayed. [00:36:41] And that's—

STEPHEN POLCARI: So it's like the old shock tactics.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: The shock tactic. Now, the present director of the museum, Prokopoff, he—I think he gives too many shows, for one thing. You see, there are one, two, three, four really pretty big galleries, which have the separate programs, and I have long advised that more use be made, things which are in the permanent collection. There are so many things here which I think a lot of people would be glad to see, which have never been examined in all the years that he's been here. It's very strange.

STEPHEN POLCARI: That's typical—[inaudible]—American art, with an emphasis on contemporary and sort of changing exhibitions, and less attention to the slow, solid work, both of scholars, museum bulletins, and cultivation of the permanent collection, study of the permanent collection. [00:38:02] It's like you have to have glamour, and you have to have something changing to amuse people and bring them in—a permanent collection isn't sufficient enough in itself. I think that may be changing, because money is running out, insurance is off the wall, and people don't come in to see the permanent collections. They see it once and forget about it, and that's not really right in the end. They should do shows around the permanent collection, and they would enjoy things. You've seen a lot of these changes over almost 70 years now. It's really quite amazing. Had you ever thought

that the American art world would grow in this fashion, where it's really so powerful and—it's a virtual industry, the American art industry, never mind—you mentioned no one here on the faculty could do the festivals. It may be that the art world is so big now, no one is capable of doing something that was possible at that particular moment in the late '40s and '50s, when the art world was interesting and varied enough, but also small enough to somewhat get a grasp on things.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: It was possible. It was exactly the right time. A good time. The only predecessor really, are the summer exhibitions, which Lester Longman put on at the University of Iowa in—[inaudible.] He did a show there in the summer, which, in a way, sort of inspired Donovan, who was more responsible than anyone else for getting—[inaudible].

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, I think you have to look on the great accomplishments from a very, very simple beginning, the CAA beginning of things, and now a mature—culture that is both very sophisticated—some would say perhaps too sophisticated and corrupt—but it's really quite something as an accomplishment—Illinois is rather strong in it, its contributions in it. [00:40:21] As I said, I think—[inaudible]—together all the original material from the painting and sculpture catalogs, the book, and the statements, a nice thing to do.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: We'll see, yeah.

STEPHEN POLCARI: We'll see. All right, why don't we finish.

ALLEN STUART WELLER: Okay.

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