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Oral history interview with Nelson Aldrich, 1982 January 22-1985 April 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Nelson Aldrich on January 22, 1982, March 10, 1982, and April 4, 1985. The interview took place in Marblehead, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

What follows is a DRAFT TRANSCRIPT, which may contain typographical errors or inaccuracies. The content of this page is subject to change upon editorial review.

Interview

January 22, 1982

ROBERT BROWN: Beginning an interview on January 22, 1982, at Marblehead, Massachusetts, with Nelson Aldrich; I'm Bob Brown, the interviewer. And we want to talk about your life and your career, particularly as it's related to the arts. You were the son of an architect, William Aldrich?

NELSON ALDRICH: That's right, William T. Aldrich.

MR. BROWN: Where were you raised, or where did you spend your first years?

MR. ALDRICH: My first years were -- well, I was born in New York City, but my mother and father came to Boston when I was about three. And I've lived in Boston, Brookline, and Marblehead all my life except for the --

MR. BROWN: Were the family partly a New York family? Is that why you were --

MR. ALDRICH: It is basically a Rhode Island family. My grandfather was Senator Nelson W. Aldrich from Rhode Island for quite a long period of time. And my mother, although her father was born and brought up in Roxbury and was a native of this area, her -- my mother's mother came from -- was a Chase and came from Providence. So we really -- I'm three-quarters Rhode Islander.

MR. BROWN: A Rhode Islander. But you happened to be in New York. Was your father in practice there?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, he was. He worked for a Carrere and Hastings. And having returned from the Bozar where he spent off and on six years at the Bozar. And I guess the reason he got the job at Carrere and Hastings was that he bought his father's -- the job of building his father's house in Warwick, Rhode Island, into the firm of Carrere and Hastings.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. ALDRICH: And I think probably the whole time he spent with Carrere and Hastings was designing my father's house, which is still standing now in Warwick, and it's quite a magnificent estate.

MR. BROWN: Would this have been in the first years of the century or the teens?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Yes. The low -- see, I was born in 1911. So it probably was -- yeah, the first years of the century. I don't remember when he went to the -- or left the Bozar. It has got to be in those years when the great cottages were being built in southern New England, Newport and that kind of thing. And this was an estate that corresponded, not to a tremendous degree to the Newport mansions, but certainly it was quite a house.

MR. BROWN: Were some of your earliest memories there at your father's house?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And the earliest.

MR. BROWN: Was your mother also interested in the arts?

MR. ALDRICH: We never knew that she was. But I'll show you downstairs a picture she did, which came to light after my father died. She had been painting secretly for years and years, and never showed any of it to any of her children or her husband. I think possibly her motivation was she didn't want to get into any more arguments with my father than she had to.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: But perfectly charming things. And as I said, they came to light when -- after my father died.

MR. BROWN: What are some of your earliest memories? Did you have brothers and sisters?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I was the oldest. And I went away to boarding school at St. George's School in Newport, Rhode Island, when I was 12. And then my father built a house in Brookline, which we lived in during all those years. But I was away all winter, except for Christmas and Easter vacations. And then we came to Marblehead the minute school was out. So I didn't really --

MR. BROWN: So for your earliest years, you weren't really with your family.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. And even the earliest years, we were in Boston on Clarendon Street, a few steps away from Commonwealth Avenue. And I remember very well having a very happy life in the middle of downtown Boston, or Back Bay, I guess you'd call it.

MR. BROWN: Well, your father had established a firm in Boston, right?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. When he got back from the Army in 1918, he formed a partnership with Robert Bellows, it was called, Bellows and Aldrich. And that went on for, oh, I don't know, maybe five, six, seven, eight years. I don't remember how many years. But then Daddy and he broke up, and he established his own firm, William T. Aldrich, Architect.

MR. BROWN: Do you remember ever going to his office when you were a little boy?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. A lot, yes.

MR. BROWN: Did it intrigue you?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes. And I can't remember any specific instance that stands out in my mind. But I must have absorbed an awful lot of architectural law and, you know, just became part of -- like I don't remember being taken particularly to buildings by my father, but I know I saw them all. It's quite fascinating, because I once had a -- and I guess a picture of it is in here somewhere. After my father died, my uncle Winthrop, who was ambassador to Great Britain at one point, was on the chamber or the board of the Chase Manhattan Bank -- he inherited the family house in Providence that was lived in by my grandfather. And he bought a piece of land next to 110 Benevolent Street, and commissioned me to design a Georgian pavilion.

And I had never done anything but modern architecture. And this was after my father died. I found that I had judgment and knowledge about Georgian architecture so that I could -- or, I also had a marvelous draftsman and designer in the office who was (inaudible) at that point. But in his early 70s, I guess. So he knew the --

MR. BROWN: The vocabulary?

MR. ALDRICH: The vocabulary. And he really did the detailing. But I had enough instinct about this to criticize and to change a good deal of the design that he had created. I actually set the design of the exterior and the plan and all that. But -- and he did -- provided the detailing that was so important. And I found that I had a sense of this, and the only place it could have come from was my upbringing with my father.

MR. BROWN: His vocabulary, your father's, was mainly Georgian (inaudible)?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, Georgian, and we did a couple of Gothic buildings. He did the chapel for Boston University on Chestnut Street, which is now a condominium. And that was a Gothic. Let's see. What else? He did the St. James cemetery in France for the War Monuments Commission. And that is a really marvelous chapel, quite Romanesque in its feeling.

So that he was extremely versatile in the styles, but of course was a classicist. And his practice, I'd say, was probably 75 to 80 percent residential, residential where he did many houses around here and Providence. And there's the Worcester Art Museum, the addition back in those days; and there's since been another one, you know. That was a really neo-Renaissance, but very Renaissance in its feeling.

MR. BROWN: So this was -- certainly you're absorbing it one way or another, from your father.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. Right, I was.

MR. BROWN: You also mentioned that two of his sisters, I guess, were great collectors.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: And were you aware of this while you were young? Did you visit frequently?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh yes. Oh yes. Oh sure, we went.

MR. BROWN: What were they like? What impression might that have made on you?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I think that it's all of a piece, that not only my father was a very minor collector, actually, but had great taste and had lovely things around the house. And oh, the good conversations with his friends were all to do with the arts. And of course, these two aunts of mine, one of whom married John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and her name was Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. And as you know, she was one of the few people that started the Museum of Modern Art. And of course, led -- I guess you might say she really led the art world into appreciation of primitive painters and sculptors and so forth, so that she was really immersed in the arts.

And my Aunt Lucy was a great collector of Chinese and Oriental works of art and has, of course, left some very beautiful things to the Rhode Island School of Design Museum and also to the Museum of Fine Arts. And then of course, my Uncle John was a great collector of Chinese porcelain.

So one might say that I was really immersed in the arts from the day one.

MR. BROWN: Would they talk to you about what they were collecting? Or as a little boy, did they show you these things?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh yes. But I wouldn't say they paid an awful lot of attention.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. ALDRICH: I think this was overheard conversations between them and their friends that I might happen to have been with.

MR. BROWN: You weren't to be heard, too?

MR. ALDRICH: No. The children are -- what is that phrase?

MR. BROWN: Seen but not heard?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, better seen, but not heard.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: And in fact, you were then packed off to school?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: At the age of 12. Did you go willingly?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure. I can't remember being asked or having my -- whether my opinion was really very valuable whatsoever. I know that my mother told me that I was a terrible, terrible child to bring up.

MR. BROWN: What do you think she meant by that?

MR. ALDRICH: That I was a pain in the neck.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: So I have a hunch that I earned this trip to St. George's.

MR. BROWN: Did you know anything about the place when you went there? Cousins or anyone?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no, no.

MR. BROWN: And what was it like?

MR. ALDRICH: I had never visited the place. I had a wonderful time. I certainly think that school was -- I know that I carried with me to St. George's the pain in the neck that I was at home because the first three years I was -- I think I had the record of black marks. There wasn't any child in school that got any more marks than I. But I ended up as a prefect, and I think with some respect. So that they must have done a pretty good job with me.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: As you recall, was it a fairly strict regimen there?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, oh yeah, very. Yeah. But the fascinating thing is the punishments. If you got -- I can't remember the number of marks. Let's say 20 marks in a week, you would have to work them off. And you know what you had to do to work them off? You had to walk for five miles amongst some of the most beautiful land you've ever seen in your life.

MR. BROWN: (Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: It was a joy to work your marks off because you would walk out along Second Beach in Newport, Middletown to be exact, and out around the Sarconik (phonetic) Point and back through Vocluse (phonetic), as they called it, which is in the estate of Martin Van Buren's son or grandson. And it was just absolutely beautiful.

MR. BROWN: But they thought they were punishing you.

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah. Right.

MR. BROWN: For some boys, apparently it had been.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: It may have contributed to the fact that I got more marks than anybody else. I'm not really sure.

MR. BROWN: You have mentioned there was a particular teacher, William Drury?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, William H. Drury, yes. He was, as I said, a pupil of Charles Woodbury, and was a marvelous teacher, very sweet and understanding man. He and a couple of other masters, Jim Vermilion and one other -- I'll think of his name later, but I should know it perfectly -- really had tremendous influence on me, both from a disciplinary point of view and from an artistic point of view as far as Bill Drury is concerned.

And as I said, we -- Bill Drury took me off on two expeditions, one to the Caribbean, and the other up to Newfoundland. And those were two or three weeks in extent, and we painted every day. Sherman Morse was my companion, who went. There were just the two of us and Bill Drury. So it was really, as they say today, "hands-on" experience.

MR. BROWN: Bill Drury had taught you some art or painting or design at St. George's?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Yes. He was the art teacher at St. George's, and I took all the courses that he gave.

MR. BROWN: There was a pretty good selection, wasn't there?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. Really superb. Painting, etching, drawing.

MR. BROWN: Were the problems set down fairly strictly, or did Drury allow you to seek your own --

MR. ALDRICH: As I remember, it was both. There was definitely a discipline. But there was also impulse -- rather, incentive to do your own thing. I mean, I think they went hand in glove in his method of teaching.

MR. BROWN: But these trips, these two trips to the Caribbean and Newfoundland with him were the most intense?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, painting every single day. Particularly, you see, the ships would call at ports. And these were banana boats. And we would have a day ashore, and go off and paint all day. And then those days that we were traveling on the ship, well, we'd paint the water or paint something we remembered the day before or something like that. So it was intense.

And of course, the trip to Newfoundland was, we took a train from -- took a ferry from Sydney to Corner Brook, and then it was really a sort of a pack trip up the Humber River. And we painted every single day. It was a super, super experience.

MR. BROWN: So it was practically a wilderness trip.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yeah. From Corner Brook up the Humber River it was completely wilderness. It wasn't -- we packed, you know, just a camping trip.

MR. BROWN: And would Drury hover around you? Or would he be painting, himself?

MR. ALDRICH: He'd be painting, himself.

MR. BROWN: And come back later?

MR. ALDRICH: And come back periodically while we were painting and criticize what we were doing. And the thing I remember most clearly is, "Do not paint local color." What he meant by that -- I had a hard time -- I remember vividly not quite understanding what he meant. Well, what he meant is that the color you see out there, for instance, looks grey. But if you squint your eyes and compare it with something else, you will see that it's really blue. And what he was trying to get at us was not to paint what we thought we saw, but to interpret it.

And it did come across, finally, I think certainly after -- years after, I knew exactly what he meant. I wasn't quite so sure what he meant when he was saying it.

MR. BROWN: Did you think also that the fact that if you painted something with local color it would be very difficult in your composition, for one thing, to hang together with another --

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah. I don't remember him talking about -- well, a great deal was talked about composition. But relating the color to composition, I can't remember much advice about that. And of course, techniques and mixing of colors, how you get to get the blue you want -- you know, the technical aspects of those things.

MR. BROWN: You were working with watercolors primarily?

MR. ALDRICH: No, oil.

MR. BROWN: Oh, oil.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I've never done any oil since.

MR. BROWN: Well, did you think yours turned out quite well? You felt pretty good about them?

MR. ALDRICH: Of course. Of course.

MR. BROWN: He was very enthusiastic.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: And did your friend paint just as intensely as you did?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Yes. He became an architect, too, Sherman Morse. He was a partner in Shefley's office. And I believe he's just recently retired. I don't know whether he ever kept up his painting or not like I did. I meant to ask him.

MR. BROWN: What of Drury? Whatever became of him?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, he stayed until he died as the art teacher at St. George's. He also, of course, was an artist who had shows and sold his work. I don't think he ever became terribly famous. But he was a super man and a marvelous teacher.

MR. BROWN: You thought he did just right?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, exactly. Absolutely.

MR. BROWN: But did art increasingly become your main interest at St. George's?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I was never much of an athlete. And I was editor of the daily newspaper and art editor of the magazine that came out four times a year and that kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: Was it understood that you wouldn't go to an art school, say, that you would probably go on for academic training?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, there was absolutely no question that I was going to Harvard if I could get in, which I managed to do. And as a matter of fact, I got an honor in Latin, of all things. And that's sort of interesting. I really wasn't a very good student. I was about a C-plus or B, something like that.

But in this particular sixth-form year, we had a teacher named Herbert Preston, who taught Latin. And Virgil was the subject matter for the whole of the sixth-form year. And every morning we went into that class, he would

have the entire class walk around the room -- I can't say dance, but we had to walk in, according to iambic pentameter meter. On our (inaudible), walk around the room. And that got instilled into us like nothing human. And he also was a vivid interpreter of Virgil. So he made it live.

So we got to be damn good at that, at translation and reading. So when the college board exam came around, I waltzed through that thing. And I had about three-quarters of an hour left over after I had done the translation. So I don't know what hit me, but I said, "Okay, I'll take this English translation. And I'll put it in iambic pentameter," which of course was part of my very being. It was a cinch to do. And that explains the fact I got an honor in Latin.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: But I mean, you did have a bit of a gift for that, didn't you?

MR. ALDRICH: Of course not.

MR. BROWN: No? It was just a particular teacher to bring it out temporarily?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. That's right. Yes. Well, this prancing around iambic pentameter did the trick.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: Do you think you were pretty fun-loving, as that may suggest?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure, no question.

MR. BROWN: High spirited?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I guess, yes.

MR. BROWN: So you did then get into Harvard, and not only -- but with honors in Latin, among other things.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Was that what you expected it to be? Did you know a bit about college as you were talking about it with chums?

MR. ALDRICH: No. I was typical of the kind of kid that went to Harvard in those days from a boarding school atmosphere. You know, it was like getting out of jail, although that isn't what my impression of St. George's was, was jail. But at least we would -- you know, we were terribly isolated. We didn't get into Newport or -- and our only -- there wasn't any freedom at all. You were organized from the moment you woke up until you went to bed.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: And the only freedom I got, as I say, were those walks around (inaudible) point when I got too many marks. So that college was a really tremendous change. And I went on probation at the end of my freshman year.

MR. BROWN: Because you couldn't handle the new freedom perhaps?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, exactly. No question about that.

MR. BROWN: Did you have any goal in mind when you went to college, anything you particularly wished to study?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I knew from the age of 14, probably, that I was going to be an architect. I really never had any doubts whatsoever. And in fact, I went to the dean's office and asked if I couldn't go to the Harvard Architectural School at the end of my sophomore year. And they made a special arrangement so that I could take courses at the architectural school. So really, in effect, I had six years of training to be an architect.

MR. BROWN: Instead of the usual four?

MR. ALDRICH: Instead of the usual four.

MR. BROWN: And what kind of courses did you take? This would be 1932-3, the first courses.

MR. ALDRICH: I took specialized architectural history courses because I was majoring in fine arts.

MR. BROWN: You were.

MR. ALDRICH: And these were courses on Romanesque and Renaissance that were given under the auspices of the architectural school, not under the college curriculum.

MR. BROWN: Were they quite good courses?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. They were really great. I had two particularly good professors. One was Harold Edgold, who was dean of the school. And the other was -- oh, there's my memory again.

MR. BROWN: What did he teach?

MR. ALDRICH: He taught Romanesque architecture.

MR. BROWN: Post, maybe? Thelma Post? Or Porter?

MR. ALDRICH: It wasn't -- he did -- his great accomplishment in life was the restoration of Cluning (phonetic).

MR. BROWN: Oh, Comet.

MR. ALDRICH: Comet. That's right.

MR. BROWN: Well, he was quite a young instructor himself back then, wasn't he?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, yeah, maybe yes. Perhaps that wasn't his --

MR. BROWN: Quite (inaudible) you, you being younger.

MR. ALDRICH: Probably yes, in late 30s or something like that. He was -- oh, he was super. So enthusiastic. And he really was able to translate the excitement of the Romanesque architecture to us all.

MR. BROWN: What was it that highlighted that appeal to you, do you think, about the Romanesque?

MR. ALDRICH: I guess the humanity of it. You know, he would weave into the architectural aspects of it the life that was lived in those days. And also, the elegance of the primitive-ism of the Romanesque period, the robustness, and the -- I don't think any (inaudible) never showed in any of my work. But I've always loved Romanesque architecture. Of course, Gothic had this soaring quality and the basis of structure in the design to a much greater degree than Romanesque, but Romanesque was, after all, the beginning of it.

MR. BROWN: But you liked that robustness and that primitiveness.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, absolutely.

MR. BROWN: Do you think you'd been attuned to it by things you'd seen before?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no, no. That's -- not that I remember. I think that architectural school was -- although I'd been to Europe prior to going to college, with my grandmother who used to take me a couple of times abroad, she undoubtedly had an influence in that she knew a great deal about what she was seeing, what we were seeing, I'd say that architecture school and college was --

(Off the record)

MR. ALDRICH: (Inaudible)

MR. BROWN: Did you make models?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no, no. Drawing only. No models, all slide lectures. That's in two years before I went actually to the architectural school.

MR. BROWN: Was most of your fine arts majors in undergraduate then consumed by these architectural history courses?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I took that marvelous course in French painting under Paul Sachs, and then a course in fine arts 1A where you did do some drawing, copying of Rembrandt pen-and-ink drawings, as I remember, and other pen-and-ink stuff.

MR. BROWN: Were those pretty useful exercises, as you look back?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: Pretty stale?

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah. It was a real bore. Copying, you know, is a bore.

MR. BROWN: Sure. You don't think you really learned much of Rembrandt by copying his drawings?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, you learned what it took to do it, which was intense concentration and observation and those kinds of things, which was a good discipline. But I would have thought that the amount of time we spent doing it, it was a little longer than I would suppose. But I have a hard time criticizing discipline because I think discipline is a very important aspect. I mean, that's what was so wonderful about Drury was that he had the discipline, and yet he would give you and inspire you to be yourself, you know, at the same time, or almost the same time, so that you got both.

MR. BROWN: With Rembrandt it might have been better, you think, instead of imitating, trying to do something in the manner of?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, no. I think maybe a couple of sessions of imitation and then saying --

MR. BROWN: Oh, but it went beyond that?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Now be a Rembrandt yourself.

MR. BROWN: But most of your fellow students didn't have your facility, probably, did they?

MR. ALDRICH: No. And fine arts 1A was the gut course, and I'm sure a hell of a lot of guys were taking it just because it was supposedly an easy course.

MR. BROWN: You said Sachs' course in French painting was very good. That was -- what made it so good?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, dear me. The personality of the man.

MR. BROWN: What was it like?

MR. ALDRICH: The excitement of the -- he was a master of the English language. Go ahead and help yourself. A master of the English language, and of course, the subject matter was most exciting. And the French impressionists, that whole era of excitement -- and he just was a marvelous lecturer. And that's about all I can remember about college days, particularly.

MR. BROWN: The academic side, at least?

MR. ALDRICH: At least the academic side, yes. The other side was also good fun. I was a member of the speed club and spent all my nonacademic time there. Great fellows and companionships, which I think is a terribly valuable part of the college education, is the friends you make. It wasn't all drinking and card-playing. It was a great deal of chatter about what you were doing. And, you know, this is all a part of growing up.

MR. BROWN: Was there much awareness, at least as you recall, about the times, the early '30s and all?

MR. ALDRICH: The most vivid impression was Prohibition, particularly being in the speed club. I remember my first office in the speed club was assistant treasurer. And the assistant treasurer was in charge of dealing with bootleggers. So I got my first business experience buying of booze for the speed club.

MR. BROWN: Could be done? I mean, they were very happy in business?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yeah. Sure. They would come around once a week to the back door of the speed club, and I would be told they were there. And I'd go down and, with the club steward, we would put our order in for either the month or the week, I can't remember. And I can almost draw you a picture of that bootlegger. He was a fascinating man -- rugged and handsome and -- well, I just remember him very clearly.

MR. BROWN: And this was real booze? This wasn't homemade stuff that you were buying?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, no, no. This was off the boats.

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible)

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure, sure.

MR. BROWN: Well, the general climate, in the Boston area at least, was not pro-Prohibition, was it?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh Lord, no.

MR. BROWN: The law -- only carried out the law when it was it was --

(Simultaneous conversation)

MR. ALDRICH: I don't think I ever met anybody who was in favor of Prohibition, certainly not my family and not any of the families of any of my friends. Yeah, I just never ran into a person who was pro-Prohibition. And I don't think we ever even had the idea that we were breaking the law. I think it was so pervasive that you separated that out from the whole concept of obeying the law. You never made the connection.

MR. BROWN: So there were fine arts, particularly architectural, and your club.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Those were the high points of --

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Yes. I had a hard time passing the athletic requirement. I think I finally got my -- went to the pool and did the required number of laps of swimming in the pool in order to -- you know, they had that requirement in those days. You had to do X amount of exercise. Well, I was stroke of the freshman probation crew. That was the crew that were made up of kids that were on probation.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: That got rid of my freshman year athletic requirement.

MR. BROWN: But you didn't care too much for formal exercise?

MR. ALDRICH: No. No.

MR. BROWN: I mean, you were reasonably healthy otherwise?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, I didn't have any problems with the health that I can remember.

MR. BROWN: You had a six-year program going then, really, because you knew you were going to go right into architecture.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: And this, do you think, partly comes through your father's example?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I'll tell you, I even thought that I probably would go to the Bozar, which obviously followed my father's example.

MR. BROWN: You mean following Harvard?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And that brings up a fascinating little episode in my life. Because I remember I had to make up my mind what I was going to do at the end of my junior year, I guess. And whether I was going to go to Harvard architectural school or go to the Bozar. And I remember going out to my father one spring night, having dinner with mother and dad, and discussing this whole question of whether I should go to -- stay here or go to France.

And when I got through, I drove back to Cambridge and parked my car and walked up towards Massachusetts Avenue. And the riot was going on. Whole of the student body was assembled on Massachusetts Avenue in Byle (phonetic) Square, Harvard Square. And so I ordered my way through this crowd to see what was going on, and just as I got to the edge, there was an open area in which cars were driving through.

And a couple of -- one car with the top down had four or five guys in it who were leaning out and stirring up trouble. And one of them hit me with a wooden musical instrument. I presume it was a ukulele or something. He caught me across the head as I stuck my head out there and made me pretty mad. So I went to the local grocery store, which is still open, on Massachusetts Avenue, and I bought six eggs. And I got back there, and the next time they came around -- they had gone around several times, I had noticed, before this thing had happened. So I threw eggs at them the next time around.

The last egg was out of my hand when two officers grabbed me. And what did they do? Each one grabbed an arm and paraded me down in front of the students that were lining Massachusetts Avenue, all the way to the

Rattle Street Police Station. In the meantime, the entire student body grouped in behind the policemen and started to shout at them and so forth. I don't remember exactly what happened. But I do remember they got me down to the police station. And there was a flight of steps that led into the police station.

And I realized by that time that the whole student body was behind me. And so I thought I could escape. So what I did was to throw my arms up in the air like this and try to get out from under the two policemen. No way. They picked me up and threw me right through the door of the jail. I remember landing on my fanny in the hallway there, about three or four steps, or something like that.

Well, anyhow, that really started the riot, because the kids outside started throwing rocks at the police at that time. There was really only just milling around before I was arrested. But after that, of course I wasn't there, I was in the hoosegow. But I heard that it really became quite a serious thing.

Well, the upshot of that was that I was blamed for the riot and arraigned. The club steward bailed me out around two o'clock in the morning, and the next morning I was down in court. And the upshot of it was I was put on probation for six months. I had to report to the probation officer. But that's all that happened. I could have been thrown in jail and served time. But luckily they --

MR. BROWN: You didn't really start it. Things were going already. And who were those people that were milling around?

MR. ALDRICH: I don't know. Since then, somebody just said that it was the Kerry Cuano (phonetic) boys or something like that, local --

MR. BROWN: Local toughs coming out to taunt the students?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes, that's right.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: So what was the effect then of your being on probation?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it was just a bore.

MR. BROWN: But how did this affect your decision? You talked about your meeting with your parents.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, the decision. Oh, yeah, well, the decision was made that night that I would go to Harvard architectural school, not go to France.

MR. BROWN: But after your probation, did you have qualms about whether you should stay in Cambridge or not?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no, no. It was all treated as -- it didn't have the seriousness of the kind of stuff that goes on today, although, of course, it was exactly the same kind of thing, except that it wasn't -- the issue was -- there was no issue like there were in the '60s when the Vietnam War was -- there was absolutely no political overtones to this kind of thing. But you know it happened many, many times. The Harvard riots -- I guess the kids -- what was the -- Rinehart [John Bryce Gordon Rinehart] -- the freshmen would lean out the window and scream, "Rinehart!" and that would be the signal to start pouring out of the dormitories and raising hell, you know.

MR. BROWN: Did this lend you a certain aura in your senior year?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: There were others like you?

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: No, it was forgotten. It's fascinating. The aftermath of that was that Franny's father was a hydraulic engineer, and he was chairman of the water board of the city of Cambridge. And after I had appeared in court that morning, and I was told that I would have to come back and be on trial, and I'd better get a lawyer -- so I happened to see Mr. Turner, long before I married Franny -- I happened to see Mr. Turner on the street. And I said, "Who is a good lawyer to get to represent me?" And he said, "Well, the guy I know is the city solicitor of Cambridge, and he happens to be right here." The doorway to his office was right next to where I'd seen Mr. Turner. He said, "Why don't you go up and talk to Mr. Sullivan?"

So I did. And Mr. Sullivan said -- I told him that Mr. Turner had sent me to him, and he said, "Oh."

(End of tape 1, side A)

MR. ALDRICH: Mr. Sullivan said -- I told him that Mr. Turner had sent me to him. And he said, "Okay. I'll represent you," which he did, and he got me off, as I said, with no sentence, but -- or rather, I guess suspended sentence, probation.

MR. BROWN: Suspended sentence.

MR. ALDRICH: So that was that. Then comes the war, and I go to the Pacific. And at the end of the Pacific war, I got on board this ship to take me home from Manila to San Francisco. And the officers were put into a room about the size of this one, so let's say 15 by 20 at the maximum. And there were three tiers of bunks and a tiny little aisle that went around. And all the bunks were, one-two-three.

And the guy underneath me was already there. And I introduced myself to him, and said, "My name is Nelson Aldrich. And where do you come from?" "Come from Boston." He said, "Did you say your name was Nelson Aldrich?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Did you go to Harvard?" And I said yes. And he said, "Were you in a riot in Cambridge several years ago?" And I said yes. He said, "Goddamn you, my uncle represented you and lost his job on account of it."

By being city solicitor and representing me as a private client, he got in trouble. And I never knew it until that day. It must have been -- I don't know --

MR. BROWN: Eight, ten years later?

MR. ALDRICH: Eight, ten years later.

MR. BROWN: Good Lord.

MR. ALDRICH: And here was his nephew. Extraordinary.

MR. BROWN: I was going to ask, since he was a city employee --

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Representing you against the city.

MR. ALDRICH: I never had heard that he had gotten in trouble. He never told me or anything. Nobody ever told me that.

MR. BROWN: Back to the architectural decision for a minute --

MR. ALDRICH: (Inaudible)

MR. BROWN: Why did your father, and mother, I guess, too, think that you should go to Harvard rather than to France? This was about 1933 or 34.

MR. ALDRICH: I think it was really more -- money was not involved. I think it was really more philosophical. I think my father felt really that I had a better chance of practicing architecture because the beginning of the revolution of modern architecture had already started. And I think that, in spite of his feelings about modern architecture, which were lower than anything you can possibly think of, his opinion of it, I think he probably -- I wanted to go to Harvard because I had been there and was not all that anxious to go away from home and go abroad and all that. So that it was a mutual decision.

MR. BROWN: Looking back, was the Bozar training -- had it retained its prestige into the '30s?

MR. ALDRICH: It was waning.

MR. BROWN: It was waning.

MR. ALDRICH: Hefner, who was a great Bozart teacher, was on his way out. Actually, I had him for a year, and then Gropeson (phonetic) -- or rather, Hudnut (phonetic) was appointed the dean.

MR. BROWN: But in France itself, was the reputation of the ecole waning, too, by then?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, I think so.

MR. BROWN: It was?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, I think so, definitely.

MR. BROWN: After your BA, you did take a BA then at Harvard, did you do anything that summer before you went? Or did you go right away into the school of architecture?

MR. ALDRICH: That summer, I think that was the summer I went to Europe and did that painting I showed you.

MR. BROWN: Was that with an older (inaudible).

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, with a fellow named Hustausen (phonetic), who wasn't at the school of design, or the architecture school, as it was called then.

MR. BROWN: And did you set up -- did you and he sort of set up a deliberate program of places to visit to sketch?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes. He was out on traveling fellowship, you see, the Wheelwright Fellowship. And I joined him, and he did the things he wanted to do, and we visited the places we wanted for his fellowship purposes. And I went along with him and painted. He was painting all the time, too, so that we both had a great time together.

MR. BROWN: What were you particularly looking for? Looking at structure, at style?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it wasn't -- it was really a painting expedition. There was no real inclusion of architectural education in this at all. Of course, we did (inaudible). We did -- the chateau, we went through the L'oire de Chateau district and all the cathedrals along the way. Chartre and (inaudible) and, you know, all the usual things you would do in that part of the world. And then we ended up in Brittany, and that's where that picture was done in Brittany. And that was a wonderful experience. Of course, there was a lot of chatter about architecture, too. But I don't remember it as being a particularly -- concentrating on architectural training or history or anything like that, particularly.

MR. BROWN: That summer really marked probably the first time in some years that you'd been able to concentrate so steadily on painting; is that right?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. That's right.

MR. BROWN: Did you ever think of becoming a painter?

MR. ALDRICH: Strangely enough, no. No, I never did. I wish to hell I had.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. (Laughter)

MR. BROWN: Why, to be much more on your own?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: More free-lancer?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I think it was just by colored by the last years of practice of architecture, which became pretty tough.

MR. BROWN: So you did come back to the school of architecture, which was still then -- this would be '34?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: So still fairly traditional?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Well, I got out of college in '34, so this was '35, '36, '37, '38 were the years I was there. And of course, the end of it, I went back for another six months to get further instruction from Gropius and Broyer (phonetic). So then I really took an extra half-year on my own, so to speak.

MR. BROWN: Can you compare or contrast their instruction with that of your -- the other teachers you had before that?

MR. ALDRICH: Very much so. I mean, here was the -- the change was radical, of course, between the teaching of Hefner, who was Bozart, who was completely concerned with the plan and the classical aspects of planning and function from the point of view of the user, and nothing to do with structure, nothing to do with new forms. All the forms were classical, or the styles of -- and I don't think we did any Gothic or Romanesque type things in the early days.

We did a lot of drawing of Corinthian columns. I came across one upstairs. And that was really the preliminary years. And then projects that we were given were very Bozart-y, and your grand estates and that kind of thing. And then all of a sudden, we were projected into the world of modern architecture, more structure, you know, form follows function, which is the message.

MR. BROWN: And under Hefner, there had been no projects or problems to deal with the contemporary needs of housing?

MR. ALDRICH: No. No. That I remember.

MR. BROWN: Still about the grand structures.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: But under Gropius and Broyer there was a much -- a greater breadth of type of building?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. Everything that you -- every problem you were given was a modern contemporary problem.

MR. BROWN: And you really had not been asked to think about those things until then.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Did you find it difficult?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: Were they very good, effective teachers?

MR. ALDRICH: No, it became more exciting. And you realized you were in a movement and you were a pioneer. You had that sense of fighting a cause. And it was -- I was, too, and my father, because we finally had to agree -- never did discuss architecture because we had violent fights, philosophical fights about architecture.

MR. BROWN: Did your father -- he really felt its business was beauty and grandeur?

MR. ALDRICH: Right, and exquisite detailing and the classical rules and symmetry. Symmetry was their god, and asymmetry was ours.

MR. BROWN: And so him, a well-finished detail, imitated detail, from the best examples, was practically the height?

MR. ALDRICH: And of course, he would say that the originality that art provides is in the use of these details and how they are made to -- he was a marvelous draftsman. And when he drew a detail, it had a grace and delicacy that was all his own. But its form, basic form, was classical. I mean, in a cancer sleeve (phonetic), it was a beautiful cancer sleeve, not a clumsy cancer sleeve.

MR. BROWN: But you saw that as a dead end? It could only refine to a certain point?

MR. ALDRICH: Right. And of course, it was -- the prison of symmetry -- it was a terrible handicap to have to create a solution to an architectural problem and have to have it symmetrical. And that was really the biggest breakthrough of all, was this concept of asymmetry being a balanced -- of course, that wasn't new. The Gothic principle exploited asymmetry to glorious extremes.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. ALDRICH: But the Renaissance and the classical aspects of things really demanded symmetry. So this was all woven into the revolution of modern architecture.

MR. BROWN: Were Gropius and Broyer in fact good teachers?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, marvelous. They were fascinating because they were totally different. Gropius would come and criticize your work and never take a pencil out of his paper and never draw a line. The crit was entirely verbal and intellectual, philosophical. Broyer had a pencil in his hand the whole time, was drawing the whole time, and was concerned with form and fun, definitely fun.

MR. BROWN: Fun? You mean a sense of humor?

MR. ALDRICH: A sense of humor, and approach to life was fun. I mean, just -- one was emotional, and the other

was intellectual, is the easiest way to define the two.

MR. BROWN: But in contrast, had Hefner been much more formal and dignified as a teacher?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, very much so, yes.

MR. BROWN: And unapproachable?

MR. ALDRICH: Very, very.

MR. BROWN: You couldn't have had those discussions you had with your father with him?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: There's no question.

MR. ALDRICH: No, and -- well, of course, I was only the first two years when we were with Hefner, and then there was a slight hiatus with a fellow named Bogner (phonetic), who was not very inspiring. And then Grobius and Broyer came in. So there was a transition period. It's very vague in my mind there.

(Off the record)

MR. ALDRICH: They set, too -- they really set the philosophy that I bought, really, and guided the principle -- formed the principles on which my practice is based. Not so much the aesthetics as the basic underlying philosophy of the program -- in other words, what the owner wanted the building to do for him being the principal inspiration for the design. And my job was to instill into that those requirements, say, a useful and happy solution.

MR. BROWN: Do you mean to say that prior to your (inaudible) coming under Grobius and Broyer's, this approach, had the teachers not stressed what the client might need or want? Can you explain that?

MR. ALDRICH: I never heard about that at all.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. ALDRICH: In the Bozart.

MR. BROWN: It seemed therefore the client was to take what you, the trained architect, provided?

MR. ALDRICH: Right. That also pervaded a great many of my compatriots or contemporary students who felt that now -- you know, there was a great deal of feeling amongst modern architects, both as we were growing up, entering into our practice -- but today that the architect knows best, not only how to design the structure, but how you should live and how you should operate.

And I used to be very careful that I was getting the truth from my client as to how he operated or lived. Quite often, you found your client would say something, but mean something else.

MR. BROWN: Wow.

MR. ALDRICH: And so I had to be very careful, by asking lots of questions and interviewing other people, that I was getting the truth -- not that they were deliberate in falsifying anything, but their emphasis on aspects of things were many times irrelevant to the architectural solution, or the emphasis was not proper. That they thought some things were more important than others; and actually, the other things were more important than what they said.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: Politics, empire building -- this was particularly true in all the work I did for universities and for schools. You would find you would talk to the dean of this versus the professor of that. And the president and the building committee and the trustees -- there were always slightly different angles to the building and its purpose. And the architect had to sift through all of this information to get at what he deemed to be the truth.

MR. BROWN: And yet you would say in a case like that, you would rather have talked with each of those separate groups than to have had one distilled point of view.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, absolutely.

MR. BROWN: Because that might have covered up --

MR. ALDRICH: Absolutely.

MR. BROWN: Or added too much compromise?

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah. It would have been impossible to design a building if you had a written program and had to go back home and design from that written program that you had to distill out of all the information that you got the essential ones for the functioning of the building. And you also had to -- at least, I always felt that it was my duty to reflect a rational opinion of the aesthetics, that I was very concerned with neighborliness, the quality of neighborliness of a building that was going to be next to another, or a group of another, that there should be -- well, I think that word "neighborliness" is as accurate as I can get as a description of this philosophy.

MR. BROWN: And did you reckon that this ability, these concerns, stemmed initially from hearing Grobius and Broyer talk about such things?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I think --

MR. BROWN: You did think so.

MR. ALDRICH: I think that perhaps the neighborly concept and the concept of the -- the degree of importance I gave to my clients' opinions and feelings and emotions and so forth was probably a little bit more my own than it was, certainly than Grobius.

MR. BROWN: He didn't talk much about that kind of thing?

MR. ALDRICH: No, but Broyer did. Broyer was the humanist, as I said earlier. He was the romantic. And I got this okay. The romantic, whereas Grobius was the intellect, the intellectual.

MR. BROWN: But clearly, they didn't indicate that you were to impose an aesthetic, or did they?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, Grobius was pretty dogmatic. I mean, he was a revolutionary. He instilled the concept of form following function and the exploitation of materials, the interpretation of materials, the (inaudible).

MR. BROWN: But form and function were related to your idea of helping (inaudible) the clients?

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: That was something that occurred --

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, but --

MR. BROWN: -- fairly early on.

MR. ALDRICH: But I don't get -- I think I evolved this philosophy of dealing with the client to a greater degree than I was ever taught. That maybe seeded to mine, but I think I'm different a great deal to many of my contemporaries in being more concerned with my clients' concerns of ideas and feelings than -- well, for instance, Ben Thompson's work, early work when he was with Tack (phonetic). I mean, you couldn't tell the difference between buildings at Brandeis and buildings at Exeter or Andover School. I mean, those are the two examples. If you see the two, they could be on the same campus.

Well, I -- those houses you saw, the fact you could never tell the same architect did them was a reflection of this real concern for the feelings or the aesthetic reactions to clients.

MR. BROWN: Now, apart from the -- perhaps the egotism of many of your contemporary architects, do you think the lessons you learned when you got this post-Bozart training at Harvard, that you get to the fundamentals of structure and materials -- do you think that may in part explain why, say, the buildings at Brandeis look somewhat like those at Exeter or Andover? Because they said you use this basic vocabulary.

MR. ALDRICH: Well, no, they never got quite that definite, that you use a basic vocabulary. I think that a great many of my compatriots call on at a very early age the concept that architects, like painters and like authors and any other people in the arts, are better off if they can put an identity stamp on their work. I never felt that was legitimate. If it happened, through the development of one's habits, perhaps it's reasonable. But I think that many of my peers actively tried to develop a style that would be identified with their practice.

MR. BROWN: You felt, on the other hand, the contrast, that architecture is more of a service art?

MR. ALDRICH: Right. Absolutely. It is making an art out of a service. (Inaudible) painting -- you've noticed that, while I am developing something here that -- in this hull-less and mast-less paintings, that they begin to have a

family relationship. But it's a very important tool for professional artists to have an identity. But it seems to me that it's terribly restrictive, and in architecture, really not quite fair.

MR. BROWN: No, no. Did you perhaps get some of that attitude from your father?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: Was he of that mind, do you think?

MR. ALDRICH: As I told you, it's tragic, but Daddy and I really didn't talk about architecture after I got out of school. We just found we talked too much about it. We tacitly agreed just not to talk about it. It's a sad, sad thing, but it had to be that way.

MR. BROWN: Now, you had found these few months with Grobius and Broyer -- had you also in going to Europe at this time possibly been looking at contemporary structures?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, sure, and cloying over the magazines, you know. And the intense --

MR. BROWN: And back here, you were involved very early in some way with what was then called the Institute of Modern Art?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Which grew out of a group of students at Harvard.

MR. ALDRICH: That's true.

MR. BROWN: What was the nature of that involvement? How did it come about?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I knew Nat Solstol (phonetic) quite well. And I guess I was looking around for something to be involved in in the community. And there it was. And I went to them and said, "Look, I'm interested in doing anything I can." And you know the regular process of getting involved with some extra-curricular.

MR. BROWN: What were they, and especially he -- what were they trying to do, do you think, in the beginning?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, there was no gallery, no exhibition of contemporary art in the city of Boston. You just couldn't find anything that was being done in Europe or the United States of an avant garde nature. And Nat saw the need for this, along with Angus Mongen and Metcalf and Allen. Tom Metcalf and --

MR. BROWN: Thomas Allen?

MR. ALDRICH: Tom Metcalf and -- what was his name, Mr. Allen? They were a group that -- and of course, my aunt having -- and my father both were involved in the -- my father not very much, but certainly my Aunt Abby in the formation of the Museum of Modern Art. And that certainly propelled me in this direction.

MR. BROWN: Would you visit down there quite a bit?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: And see what's going on?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: Was that pretty exciting?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, oh, of course.

MR. BROWN: They were having shows, a good many exhibitions, weren't they?

MR. ALDRICH: Right, right. I remember going to many of those. And so it was very natural. So I got on committees, and I remember -- oh, yes. Then Jim Clout was made the director. And we had our galleries on Dimer Street right next to the church there over the -- what used to be called the Society of Boston Artists? Or what was it named?

MR. BROWN: The Boston Art Club, possibly?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, that was it.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: And we had the top floor. And Joseph's Restaurant started on the next-to-the-top floor. And then the club was on the ground floor. And I can only remember the first real participation I had with that organization was the -- Jim and I decided to put on a Frank Lloyd Wright exhibition. And we wrote to Mr. Wright and asked if we could come out to talk to him about it. This is a long story. Do you want it?

MR. BROWN: Okay. Sure.

MR. ALDRICH: And maybe I told you this one before. But anyhow, we got a letter back that said sure, come on out. So Jim and I took the train all the way to Madison, Wisconsin. And we got a taxi from Madison to Green Spring, and wound up at the front door of Tally's and East, and knocked on the door, because there was no button to press or bell. You just had to knock like this, I remember.

And after a long wait -- the taxi had gone, left our bags there. Long wait. We wondered, How in the dickens do you get into this place?

MR. BROWN: (Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: Well, finally the door opened. And a student answered, opened the door, let us in. And didn't seem to know what to do with us. So he scurried off, and finally came back after another long wait, and said, "All right. Follow me." And we were taken to a double bedroom with a bath. And I'll never forget drawing the bath and seeing a cockroach emerge from the walls and scurry down the drain. That's a vivid memory, and the (inaudible) beast is my first impression.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: The building you lost sight of.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And then Jim and I get dressed and went for dinner. Oh, yes. And as we left our bedroom, we heard this marvelous music, organ music. And it later turned out it was emanating from the bell tower over the dining room. And I think it was Russian music. And due to the fact it was coming from a direction, we followed the car door towards that direction. And we finally came upon a rather doorway, and on the right there was this vast group of students. Now, I don't suppose there were more than 25 or 30, something like that.

MR. BROWN: But you had no idea until then that there were people.

MR. ALDRICH: No, that's right. And there they were. And we had not heard anything except the music. And it wasn't all that loud. But there was this group of students eating, nobody speaking to each other. They were listening to the music. That's what the apparent reason. And then we turned to the left, and there was this very small group of people, adults, each of whom had a little separate table. And on the table was a tray of food. And they were all facing in one direction. And around the corner, on a raised platform, was the master, Mr. Wright, with his own table. No conversation going on there, either.

And we poked our head in the door, and somebody did get up and, as I remember, we got fed and got given a table, and we joined the group. And I just really don't remember whether we eventually had some conversation or not. But it didn't see -- didn't talk to Mr. Wright because he didn't see fit to talk to us. And we went back to our bedroom.

MR. BROWN: You had no idea that they knew why you were there?

MR. ALDRICH: No. There was no official contact at all, that was the first thing. And to make a long story short, we spent that night, the following day, the following night, and the following day and the following night, and the morning of the third or fourth day. Somebody came around to us and said, "Mr. Wright would like to see you."

MR. BROWN: What had you been doing meanwhile?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, taking walks and looking around. I really don't remember anything happening.

MR. BROWN: Was the architecture stunning?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, it was beautiful, beautiful surroundings, and lovely countryside, and all that. Just frankly, it was a long time ago. That was 1939, somewhere around in there --'40, perhaps.

Anyhow, so this student led us down to the buildings where Frank Lloyd Wright's students and himself worked.

And there was this beautiful big drafting room, and Mr. Wright had his own little office off to the side. But as I say, this was the first recognition of the fact that we were there. And I've always had a theory that he was just testing us. He knew we were young. He knew we came from this rather young and unknown organization known as the Museum of Modern Art in Boston. And I think he really was testing to see how earnest we were about doing the show.

Well, for the next two or three days, we spent going through his drawings and models. And you know, he all of a sudden became a totally different person. He was fatherly and interested. And we went on picnics with him. And incidentally, on the picnics, several students would join us. He would invite students to come with him on his family picnics. They would never talk to each other or to the master. It seemed to me the conversations that went on between the master and his students would take place in the drafting room, but not in a social sense at all. It was a very strange atmosphere.

MR. BROWN: Were you and Jim Clout able to talk with him?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: He wasn't averse to talk?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. At great length. We had one (inaudible). And so that he was really dedicated to doing this super show. And we selected the things. And I talked to him about the installation because I was going to do the design of the installation. And we're back to Boston and started to prepare for the show. And I did design the installation. And Mr. Wright was due to come to Boston to bring all the material. We didn't bring any material back. And he was going to stay a couple of days to help us install the show, which he did.

And he liked my installation. Everything went along just fine. We put him up at the St. Bardof (phonetic) Club and dined with him for these couple of days. And then we arranged for him to give a lecture at the John Hancock Hall. That was the famous time when his opening remarks at this lecture were, "Several architects have asked me what I would like to do about improving the architecture of Boston. And I replied to them I'd take 500 architects out and shoot them."

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: That's the way he started the lecture. He just was two different people, because with us he was just marvelous and kindly, and we really established a wonderful relationship, the three of us.

MR. BROWN: And what did the exhibition attempt to do? Did he sort of suggest what it should be?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yeah. There were models, and there were drawings of various projects, with descriptive material, which he provided.

MR. BROWN: Was it a retrospective as well as contemporary work?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, oh, yes. It went way back to the beginning. And a great deal of his beautiful drawings, and we even had some -- I think some drawings that he had inherited or owned that Louie Sullivan had done, so that it sort of built the tradition that --

MR. BROWN: But you were able to ask him questions?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: Had he done this and that?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And he would tell you, straightforward?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: As opposed to this public manner.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: He was approachable.

MR. ALDRICH: He was two totally different men. And as sort of proof of how solid this was, move 10 years on. And I was in the Navy, and was about to go overseas to the Pacific. And finding I had gone to the theater the

night I was to take the train to go to the Pacific -- this was 1943. And actually, going out of the theater, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around, and there was Mr. Wright. And he said, "Nelson, I haven't seen you for years. How are you doing?" He knew my first name and knew me from the rear, believe it or not. So that shows that there really was a relationship. And there was. There's no question about it. Well, that's the end of that story.

MR. BROWN: Was he someone you occasionally got in touch with?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no, never did. Well, I went out to Arizona on our honeymoon. Of course, we went to (inaudible) in the West. But he wasn't there, unfortunately. We'd see his students and go over the building and so forth.

MR. BROWN: How did he -- would he put it into your (inaudible) thinking on design and art and the role of architecture at that time? Did he, say, compared with Grobius or Broyer or Bozart?

MR. ALDRICH: This contact was terribly brief, really.

MR. BROWN: So it was not comparable to that you had with the others?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no. And I think that I was impatient with the decorative aspects of the Wright's architecture, but entranced with the planning and with the artistry of the buildings. I don't think I ever, and into this day, what you might call sympathetic to his aesthetic. But as a mind, as a philosopher, as an inspiration-giver -- after all, he started the modern movement, really. His work went to Europe and didn't come to this country until it had come back across the ocean to make an impact on us. And his influence over Dudark (phonetic) and the modernists, Covisay (phonetic) and (inaudible) and all of them -- Misvanderal (phonetic), I'm sure would give him a tremendous amount of credit for their thinking behind the revolution, so to speak.

But his decorative and his decorative aesthetic -- it wasn't until the simplified architecture of the Kaufman house and the Locken (phonetic) factory, for instance, where the structure really dominated the -- triumphed over, perhaps the decorative aspects of his earlier career that he began to have a big impact on everybody, I think.

MR. BROWN: But meanwhile, back in Boston, one of your early jobs was as a draftsman in your father's firm?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Which was a very different thing there.

MR. ALDRICH: Right. I was --

MR. BROWN: Did you just hone your talents?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I was just learning drafting, really. Well, I had learned it in school, of course. But drafting in an office and drafting in school is a very different matter, you know. You were told exactly what to draw in an office. You had very little -- as a lowly draftsman, you had very little, if any, call upon your design talents.

MR. BROWN: Did you feel that it might deaden you? Did you feel that at all? Or did you just practice your drawing?

MR. ALDRICH: No. I was -- well, I think I was -- well, I was content to learn what the business side of it was all about, what the routine was all about, what was happening in an office from day to day and hour to hour and that kind of thing. And it was valuable in that, when I left and went to New York and got my first job outside of the family, why, I knew something about what an office was all about. And that really was the only --

MR. BROWN: Is there a certain pace and pressure that you needed to know?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. That's right. And why things are assigned to draftsmen, and how the architect actually performed vis a vis as draftsmen and designers.

(End of tape 1, side B)

MR. ALDRICH: And then the -- my father had an engineer as second-in-command at the office, structural engineer. And he organized the assignments to the draftsmen. Knowing their capacities, he would assign the work. And that's pretty much the way architects' offices run, I think even today.

(Off the record)

MR. BROWN: But in architectural school, you wouldn't have had any preparation for that because you didn't go into such.

MR. ALDRICH: No. No.

MR. BROWN: It's division of labor.

MR. ALDRICH: No, you did the whole thing yourself, and you were designing all the time from a written program. And your professor would come around and criticize your concept, such as the program, and then your plans as to whether they satisfied the program, and then the aesthetic criticism.

MR. BROWN: As you look back, do you think architectural education might well have had a little brief treatment of how the division of labor should have been? Do you think that was something that varied so much from office to office?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I remember hiring some kids from Canada who had been to McGill Architectural School. And they came down extremely good draftsmen. They knew exactly what to do and when to do it and how to do it. And you didn't have to tell them anything about joining the office routine. They had been trained that way. But they were not good thinkers. They couldn't design. They got a great training as draftsmen, but not as architects.

And so I think I come down on the side of the American system of concentrating on the principles of design and what architecture as an art or as a science really is all about. And I think that's very important, those learning four years you were going to get an intense training and that kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: And the teaching can be either theoretical, such as with Grobius, or it can be more directed as it was, say, with your Bozart teacher or with Broyer.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, right.

MR. BROWN: The craft is something you can learn on the job.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: The skill.

MR. ALDRICH: Exactly right. And I always advise young architects who have not yet gotten to architectural school not to go to an architect's office, but to go and work for a contractor. That's one thing I'm sure I missed, and I wish I had had more of an intimate contact prior, in the early years, with the whole building process, from the point of view of the guy that actually builds it.

MR. BROWN: Because that something you get neither in school nor in an architect's office.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. That's right.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: And it's very, very important. It wasn't until I built this house that I ever went through the building process, minute by minute. And I wish to God I had done it 50 years ago.

MR. BROWN: So you advise people now (inaudible) before they go to architectural school?

MR. ALDRICH: Absolutely. And I just talked to about three guys who want to go into architecture, sons of friends of mine.

MR. BROWN: What do you suggest? They work in the foreman's office?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Yes. Become assistant timekeepers, they're called. And their job is to log in all the materials that come on the job and run errands. And they're generalists, assistants to the superintendent of the building. And get into all phases of the building, including the delivery of materials, the amount of materials, where they go, how they -- and it's a marvelous training. It's very important.

MR. BROWN: Well, then after '38, '39 or so, you went to work with Wallace Harrison in New York?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Right.

MR. BROWN: He was what, an MIT architectural graduate, something like that?

MR. ALDRICH: He never went to college. He never went to an architectural school. He got his -- whatever formal training he got at the Boston Architectural Center. And then he went to work, I guess, for Raymond Hood, and learned on the job at Raymond Hood's office and went right up to the top.

MR. BROWN: How did you hear of him? Or did he --

MR. ALDRICH: Well, he was married to this sister of my cousin Abby Rockefeller's husband. So he was -- Abby Rockefeller -- God. Embarrassing.

MR. BROWN: Cousin-in-law or something?

MR. ALDRICH: No. She -- it was my cousin. My aunt Abby's daughter, only daughter, was also named Abby Rockefeller. And she married a guy named David Milton. And David Milton's sister was married to Wally Harrison. So that there was a family relationship. And although I'd never met him before, after being told by several other firms in New York that they would hire -- they would let me work for them for nothing, I decided I'd go around to see Wally Harrison to see if he would at least pay me enough to keep me in cigarettes or something, which he did. He took me on, paid me 25 dollars a week.

MR. BROWN: Which was some sort of phenomenal wage.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: It went a big further than it does today.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right, because it sure didn't pay the rent.

MR. BROWN: But the professors were probably beleaguered that point. Wasn't it late in the Depression?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, that's right. Very little work, except Wally did have some work. And I stayed there until '42 when I went into the Navy, and worked on -- my first assignment was the Bronx Zoo. I did the studies that resulted in the establishment of the site for the African exhibit and the Nile exhibit.

MR. BROWN: The site? Had you ever done such studies before?

MR. ALDRICH: No. No, this was all brand new.

MR. BROWN: This was what, landscape?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it was sort of landscape, but it was getting a program, and then forming my own ideas as to how the land at the Bronx Zoo could be best adapted for the habitat groups that were to be built. Now, whether my plans were followed at all -- but they at least served as illustrations of -- they formed a basis, perhaps, for presentation of ideas by Wally to his client. And you know, I never got feedback on it because I shifted to another job, worked on a house for his partner, Andre Fuyou (phonetic). And then I worked on the Princeton Library. And then I worked on housing.

MR. BROWN: And was his -- was Harrison's vocabulary quite eclectic? Was it modernist?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, very much modernist. But I think perhaps it's there that I got this feeling for the client, because I think that he let his inspiration come from the project. I don't think there were -- I know there were no preconceived stylistic departures in his thinking. The tremendous variety of architectural expression came out of his whole career.

MR. BROWN: In each of these, you did research, did you, as well, so to speak?

MR. ALDRICH: Some. Yes.

MR. BROWN: Was this at the library? Would you go down and meet with his --

(Simultaneous conversation)

MR. ALDRICH: No, no, no. I was a designer.

MR. BROWN: He would do that.

MR. ALDRICH: He also had a way of grouping a bunch of us younger people out of architectural school into design units, groups. And we would be designers, and not draftsmen. And we would come up with design ideas, both detailed and larger scale. And they would be taken into the front office and hashed over, and be returned, and told what was good and what was bad. And try again, and how about another idea? You know, this kind of thing -- we were a creative unit.

MR. BROWN: How did you find working, though, with several people?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, fun. Really great. You know, we were very close and very good friends. And we had a ball doing that.

MR. BROWN: Did Harrison seem to have an ability to pick compatible people?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes, very much so. He was a marvelous, marvelous man. And avuncular and tough. But you knew that there was a human being in there all the time -- a really great fellow.

MR. BROWN: Were there quite long hours?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: Or were there other things that you did (inaudible) that somehow might relate to your career?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, went to the usual museums and that kind of thing. But I was between marriages at that point, was I? Yes. So I was sort of a lone bachelor, and I didn't go out very much and didn't have much money. And I don't remember -- then I got married again and moved into an apartment and right next door to one of my co-designers at Harrison's. And we became very great friends. I don't really recall much outside of the office.

MR. BROWN: Had your father suggested you leave the Boston area to try elsewhere? Or was this your idea?

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah, Daddy really didn't have much to do. It was the tail-end of the Depression and was really getting ready to throw in the sponge. So it really wasn't anything great going on in Daddy's office, nor was there in Harrison's really, compared to what later came.

MR. BROWN: You (inaudible) World's Fair in New York?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Of course, that (inaudible) was pretty much up. But what did you think of that? Do you recall any impressions of the fair?

MR. ALDRICH: No, that was in '36.

MR. BROWN: '39 and '40.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, was it?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yeah. I didn't work on any of the --

MR. BROWN: I thought maybe, though, as a visitor to it, you had --

MR. ALDRICH: I can't recall any profound influence that had on me.

MR. BROWN: What about the Museum of Modern Art? That first building was going up, or had, I think, just about gone up.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, right. But, you know, this was all in the --

MR. BROWN: Part of your --

MR. ALDRICH: -- part of my being. I can't remember being --

MR. BROWN: Sure. But you had also been aware of what Grobius and Broyer were beginning to do up here. So you were aware of the so-called international --

MR. ALDRICH: Oh. Yes. That's all I was aware of. (Laughter)

MR. BROWN: Because it was being built, right?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. It was all of a piece, you see, and not really very -- there was -- it was a movement, and we were all in it. And I can't remember any particular incidents of great influence on me.

MR. BROWN: Were there clubs or anything in New York where such things might be discussed?

MR. ALDRICH: No. There may have been, but --

MR. BROWN: Not too much at that time, for you?

MR. ALDRICH: No, it wasn't for me. I was just out of college and 25 dollars a week and lowly designer in an office. And it was a vague -- it is a vague era in my memory.

MR. BROWN: Well, when the war came, did that begin to --

MR. ALDRICH: Then Wally said, "Look. I'm going to have to cool this whole operation, and you'd better go get yourself a job, and I recommend you go down to Washington and catch a job with the United States Housing Authority. That's what you have got some skill at," because I had been working on housing for Harrison towards the end of the two years I was there.

MR. BROWN: Public housing?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes. So that's what I did.

MR. BROWN: And that was a pretty big program at the time, wasn't it?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, oh, sure, with the war coming on. That was a dreadful period of life. I'd have to go -- well, I was in the Washington office for about eight months, I guess, six or eight months and had practically nothing to do.

MR. BROWN: No? Because there were plans that were sent out and carried out by regional --

MR. ALDRICH: It's a real blank. Until I got to Boston and then became really thankful because what I had to do was to go from architect's office to architect's office and see that they were following the book.

MR. BROWN: Wow.

MR. ALDRICH: It was a terrible bore, and you had this terrible feeling of being completely useless and, surely they're following the book. What could I really do about it? You know, it was just a mess.

MR. BROWN: And the work they were doing was so trivial, I guess, wasn't it?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And painful to see that?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it's all done for you in the book.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: They told you the size of the rooms and the shape of the buildings, and the site plan was handed to you from Washington. Oh, it was awful.

MR. BROWN: At least could you see that the buildings would be well built?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I would see that they were following the book.

MR. BROWN: But you stuck with that, then, for what, a couple of years?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: Through Pearl Harbor?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Pearl Harbor, and I was out of there and down to the recruiting office, and in another couple of months I was in Quonset.

MR. BROWN: Was it patriotism on your part, to a degree?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, a combination, perhaps. But mostly, get the hell out of the house.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: So you then signed up with the Navy?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And what were you --

MR. ALDRICH: I signed up the first thing that they wanted people to sign up for, and that was the aircraft -- the so-called 90-day wonders, aircraft volunteers. And the training was to be offices connected with this tremendous growth of the Navy air arm. And some of us were sent to Naval ground -- Naval air stations, they called them. And I was sent to Puerto Rico. And others were -- the ones that manifested the greatest intellects were assigned to intelligence, Naval aircraft intelligence. And they, most of them, were sent onboard carriers or attached to squadrons and were the keeper of intelligence and the translator.

And whereas my job was to become personnel officer of the Naval air station in San Juan, which to my mind was a lot more exciting. I had 3000 men that I had to take care of. And it was a marvelous job.

MR. BROWN: Was it?

MR. ALDRICH: I got a real training in handling people and routine. And you know, it was to a certain degree rather closer to the command and the reason for an air station for being and what it was there for. And it was a fascinating job.

MR. BROWN: Were you to find the things for them to do, or rather for the recreation, or the morale?

MR. ALDRICH: I had anything to do with recreation, morale, clothing, discipline, punishment, promotion, seeing that they took their tests for advancement and grade -- all of the housekeeping and personal aspects of the people on the station. I was rather like a nursemaid.

MR. BROWN: You found that quite engrossing?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, absolutely fascinating.

MR. BROWN: Because it was such times that, as routine as it may have become, that made or broke the experience for the men, I guess.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And you know, there were real contacts with -- because I was the guy that they had to come to for any personal -- and I mean person, vis a vis, personnel -- personal problems. And a lot of kids used to come to me to try to get back home on leave.

One kid -- I'll never forget. One kid came to me and said, "I want to" -- he came from Appalachia; I don't remember what state -- and said, "I've got to have leave. My wife is going to have a baby." And I looked at his service record, and he had already been nine months in Puerto Rico. And I said, "Well, maybe your wife is going to have a baby, but you're not the father because you've been here for over nine months." And he said, "Oh, no, I'm not the father. My best friend is."

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: "I left her in his charge." Completely natural. He wasn't ashamed or embarrassed or anything, about this. Well, needless to say, the Navy would not permit him to go back home.

And then there were kids -- we were really, in a way, a receiving station because we used to have drafts of men that were coming to the Caribbean to be shifted from our receiving station, which we acted as, to ships in the Caribbean area. And we used to get drafts of 1000 men, and I would have to see that they were billeted and -- through other enlisted men who would carry it out, but I'd have to plan for it.

And I'll never forget, one draft came in with only one pair of shoes. And a lot of the one pair of shoes were not Navy issue. And I had to arrange to have the Navy ship down 1000 pairs of shoes. Well, that was a silly kind of housekeeping thing for that.

MR. BROWN: That didn't discourage you or make you cynical?

MR. ALDRICH: No. No, it was fascinating that this could happen.

MR. BROWN: It wasn't too bad a place for a tour of duty, either, was it?

MR. ALDRICH: It sure wasn't. My wife had frostbitten knees, while I was out on the beach on liberty days.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: I had a house and two servants. I shared the house with one other guy. And oh, it was a great life, it really was.

MR. BROWN: How long were you there?

MR. ALDRICH: Just over a year. And then I came back to the United States for a year at an experimental anti-submarine station, which was involved with the Air Force, the Navy Air Force. And I was personnel officer of that outfit. That wasn't anywhere near as exciting because it was much smaller. And then I put in to go to the -- go overseas.

MR. BROWN: You thought there would be more action there?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: It had been dull at the last station?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, that's right. So there I was granted my request after about a year, and went to the Pacific, and became the personnel officer of a strange unit. Well, first, I went in on the -- in Lingarin (phonetic) invasion. No, no. I was first assigned as a personnel officer of an outfit that ran an airfield on one of the Admiralty Islands. And then the word came through that there was to be an invasion of the Philippines, and I tried to -- and successfully tried to get shifted to that enterprise and was assigned as a commanding officer of a thing known as an AESU, aircraft emergency service unit.

And our job was to go onto airfields immediately on their capture, put them to rights with the Seabee outfit, and then sit there waiting for a ship -- for aircraft that might be injured in danger of dunking in the sea, but could make an airfield rather than get back to their carrier. So we were there as an emergency service unit for airplanes that couldn't get back to their carrier. And a lot of action took place around those airfields. So I went in on the Lingarin invasion.

MR. BROWN: Well, that's much more intense work than personnel work, wasn't it?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: A great deal -- a tremendous pace to it, I suppose, taxing.

MR. ALDRICH: Again, it was an organizational job. And we were commanding officers. But you had expert warrant officers who knew exactly what to do with airplanes. And I had to arrange, if anybody was hurt, to get them to the nearest hospital or medical unit, and that kind of thing.

And after that, I went to another outfit, sort of as a holiday, really, because I was there only about six months, and I had -- again, I was commanding officer of a unit. But none of the men were with me. They were all onboard ship, and I was on land. All I had to do was, about five minutes a day when a guy came through, see to it that his service record was stamped and arrange for him to be sent onboard the ship that he was assigned to. So I had about five minutes a day work, and the rest of the time I did jewelry and read every book in the library there.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: This was in an airfield, too?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, this was in Tacloban. It's a little island off -- no, it was Aji Namak, a little island off Tacloban, which is on the island of Lahi. And then I was assigned to another aircraft service unit over in Palawan, which is another Filipino island. And by the time the war was over, after I'd been there about six months as personnel officer.

MR. BROWN: Why were you doing jewelry? Had you brought along some --

MR. ALDRICH: No. Well, you're not allowed to destroy American coins. You knew that. But two Australian outfits were assigned to the place I was assigned, and they would give me shillings. And what I'd do was to go to the local machine shop of the Seabees, and I had all the equipment to melt down those shillings and make silver jewelry out of it. I had a lovely time doing that.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: Those last jobs you had required very little of your time?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Well, the one at Palawan was the usual personnel duties.

MR. BROWN: Well, you were finally probably glad to be mustered out at the war's end?

MR. ALDRICH: I was, yes. A hell of a lot of boredom. But I only had a few moments of danger when we went in the Ligarin invasion. I was brought to shore in the wrong place from where I was assigned. It was a huge beach, and I was assigned to go here. But I was landed here. And it was about 10 miles from here to here. So we had to

make our way through the devastation of the landing. By that time, our troops had gone inland a few miles, not terribly far. Had to ford a river. And the night after fording the river, we couldn't get to our destination.

We camped on a beach. And at about sundown, it was a lot of noise out in the harbor where the invasion fleet was. And all of a sudden, this shrill shrieking sort of sound occurred. And down came a shell, which was on the proximity fuse, and exploded in the water not very far from us. And so all of us dug holes goddamn fast, crawled in. And another one came, didn't hit us. And it turned out they were being fired by our ships at Japanese air raid. And they had armed these proximity fuses. They missed the airplane, came down, and went off when they got close to the land.

MR. BROWN: Oh, my.

MR. ALDRICH: So the proximity to the land was what set them off, rather than the aircraft they were aimed at.

MR. BROWN: It's as good as being near a fuselage.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, right. But we -- as I say, that was the closest I ever came to be fired upon.

(Off the record)

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March 10, 1982

MR. BROWN: This is March 10, 1982, right? Mr. Aldrich, we ended last time talking about your time during World War II. And when you came back, did you immediately go into something else or resume your architectural career?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Right. A friend of mine, not a very close friend, as a matter of fact, at that point, named Warlick Campbell (phonetic) had recently returned from his overseas duty and had established a small firm under his own name with one draftsman, Carmen Destafano (phonetic). And I can't remember exactly how I wandered into his office, but I did. And before I left, I was a partner in a new firm called Campbell and Aldrich.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: And so we moved out of that office that he had at 50 Beacon Street, and we went over to Newburg Street at C37 Newburg right over Schwartz's toy store.

MR. BROWN: What did you know of Campbell? You said you didn't know him.

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I knew of him and knew his work and knew the kind of guy he was. And was very impressed with him and his work that I saw that day. And I exaggerated. I actually -- we didn't sign anything that day. But it was pretty obvious that this was the right thing for me to do, and he seemed to be pleased with the idea himself.

MR. BROWN: Was he a somewhat older man?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, he's 10 years older and had been a partner in the firm of -- there goes my memory again. Better turn it off, let me think.

(Off the record)

MR. BROWN: The firm was Hogg's.

MR. ALDRICH: Hogg and Campbell. And I had known their work previous, not very well because I really wasn't around town until after the war.

MR. BROWN: Was his work conservative? Or how would you characterize it?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Yes, it was quite conservative. And mostly residential work, as I remember it. So we opened this office. And he had a couple of commissions. And I started making it known that I was an architect in Boston, to my friends. And the first commission I got was to design a house for Dr. Eugene Record and his wife Emily, whom I had known for years, and on a piece of land down at the Charles River, as I remember it.

They liked it. But events in their life, I guess, made them decide not to build, but to buy. This happened more often than not.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: What did you design for them? Something fairly modern?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it was certainly no -- it was not going to make the Architectural Record. It was sort of a modern interpretation of a colonial house, as I remember it. It's vague in my mind. These two were very conservative. And I think that that was the beginning of my consideration of other people's tastes and preferences and style. And of course, the site had a great deal to do with it, with the solution, and always was a major consideration of the way the site lent itself to the house.

MR. BROWN: Even before the war, you mentioned you had a growing awareness of the need to take into account the needs and the client's references.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: Was this more or less Walter Campbell's outlook as well?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, we had no quarrel with that idea. I think he tended to be more conservative than I. And I was always trying to seek something new, something fresh, something individual out of the requirements and the tastes and degree of conservatism that my client had. I think I showed you the houses I did on Corn Point Road, which is nicknamed Aldrich Alley.

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible) yes.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: They are good examples of adapting something traditional to the site.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: But also, you incorporated a number of newer things as well?

MR. ALDRICH: Right. And I think if you looked at all those houses, one could tell the -- well, number one, you never could tell that they were all done by the same architect. And secondly, they did fit the site, with one exception, the Sturgood's house, which Mrs. (inaudible) said she did not want to go up or down stairs that wasn't a full flight because she was sure that she was going to go blind someday and it would make it very difficult.

However, to get back to the firm, we gradually, Mr. Campbell and I, through our friends and contacts, I became -- had been interested in the Institute of Contemporary Art prior to the war. And when I got back, I renewed my interest in it. And I'll have to look up the dates here.

MR. BROWN: Well, about 1947, you told me, you succeeded in (inaudible).

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: As president of the board.

MR. ALDRICH: Well, that was --

MR. BROWN: You really became rather deeply involved then?

MR. ALDRICH: Correct. That's the same time as the firm was getting going.

MR. BROWN: The firm. How did you happen to become so involved in the ICA?

MR. ALDRICH: I was just terribly interested in it.

MR. BROWN: Did they do anything, in your opinion, pretty exciting?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes. And I was really very, very dedicated to that side of things.

MR. BROWN: What were they trying to do at that time?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, they really were trying to bring to Boston the artistic world that Boston, prior to their existence, hadn't seen any examples of. They talked about the avant garde art, which, in retrospect, doesn't seem very avant garde now. But it certainly was in those days. I'd have to go through the catalogs to remember all the shows that were in those early days.

MR. BROWN: Was Boston pretty receptive to what they were doing?

MR. ALDRICH: A segment was. But there was also a segment that was -- thought we were all, you know, radicals and revolutionaries. And it was tough going and still is, as a matter of fact, tough going to deal with the avant garde in Boston, although I think that there -- it is much more understood and sympathetically regarded than it was in our day. But my entire 14 years of presidency of that organization was just a struggle to get support, financial, and to broaden the base of people who are really sincerely interested. And I think it happened. It was broadened, and we did survive. But it was a way to --

MR. BROWN: Why do you think Boston was so, in general, unreceptive to current art?

MR. ALDRICH: I've always sort of thought -- I don't know that I have any backing for this concept. But there's -- there was a Puritan hangover in Boston. There are two sects that are responsible for it, I think. There's the Puritan hangover, the concept that education and health and welfare were the -- had first call on a person's charitable dollar, that the human condition was the primary recipient of the donated dollar. And that art and theater, particularly, were somewhat sinful.

I don't think that applied to music, but it certainly applied to modern music. I remember my family, my mother in particular, coming back from symphony and complaining about the modern works that were being played occasionally. So that for some reason or other, it didn't hurt the symphony, particularly, but I think that certainly the reception of modern music was received with about the same enthusiasm that modern art was at the Institute.

MR. BROWN: So that was one reason.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. The second reason was -- and it was always tough to raise money for the arts, and I thin it still pertains -- is that there are very few rich Bostonians who didn't work for some large company. The movers of Boston were salaried employees. There's no really outstanding, terribly rich patron of the arts in Boston. There never has been, and there certainly isn't now. You have a lot of very well-to-do people, but no outstanding wealth like the Pillsburys and the Melons and the Rockefellers, and, you know, the big families that you know of.

Of course, Henry Lee Higginson founded the symphony, and that's about as close to that kind of thing that happened in Boston. I think the Museum of Fine Arts was founded by a group of well-heeled individuals, but no outstanding -- although the Evanses and there's a family the Evans wing is named after.

MR. BROWN: Few?

MR. ALDRICH: A few.

MR. BROWN: But rare and far-between?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, and not terribly well known for their wealth.

MR. BROWN: But if this was the scene, the case, then probably other museums, the Fogg, or the Museum of Fine Arts getting first call on those who are art-inclined, the ICA had its work cut out for it.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, absolutely. Particularly inasmuch as its product was not that universally acclaimed.

MR. BROWN: Well, how important was the fact that James Plought was the director in the late '40s, I think into the early '50s? Was that an important factor?

MR. ALDRICH: In --

MR. BROWN: In respect to the prosperity and the success, or lack of it, of the Institute?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, Jim did a Herculean job. In fact, he had great taste, great foresight, great insight. He was a superb museum director. And it's a shame that he never carried on with that after he left the Institute. I'd say the fact that it lived that long was due to Jim's product. He did a superb job, and those people who were interested and knew about it knew that he was doing an extremely good job.

MR. BROWN: Were you adequately housed in those years? Did you have exhibition space?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. We had a building on Newby Street between Dartmouth and Clarendon. And we had the whole building, and the ground floor was the exhibition area. It wasn't tremendous, but it was enough to house significant exhibitions well done.

MR. BROWN: As it is now, was that getting also sort of a street of fashion? Shops and bars?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I should mention that the most exciting place, from my point of view, that we had was the

one before we moved to Newby Street when we were in the attic of the building, Boston Art Club. Is that correct? Is that the name of it?

MR. BROWN: Yes. It's on Dartmouth and Newberry Streets.

MR. ALDRICH: Dartmouth and Newberry Streets, on the corner. There we had a big exhibition space and very small office space. In fact, it was Jim and a couple of secretaries; I think that's about all they had. But that's where the Frank Lloyd Wright exhibition was held. Did I talk about that last time?

MR. BROWN: Yes, just before the war.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You and Jim Plought went out to sponsor him and so forth.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. And while we were away in the war, it moved around under the auspices of Tom Metcalf.

MR. BROWN: He was one of the original (inaudible)?

MR. ALDRICH: Founders, yes, right. And Mr. Allen. What's his first name?

MR. BROWN: Frederick?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, Frederick Allen, that's right.

(End of tape 2, side A)

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: What were his tastes?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, he was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable, as was Allen. Both of them were modern art aficionados, no question about it.

MR. BROWN: And Nat Solstol.

MR. ALDRICH: And Nat Solstol, of course, he founded it and was -- after I became president, was right there at my elbow and continued his interest in every way possible, including financial and advice. He was very knowledgeable and was -- those three probably were prominent Bostonians. And their endorsement of the Institute was -- combined with Jim Plought's product, resulted in the success that we did have. I'd say it was very successful, but that the strain of raising the money to run it was horrendous.

MR. BROWN: Was that your principal role?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: One looks at the catalogs and the lists of exhibitions of those years, and it's very impressive, with your many avant garde Europeans.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: I think you had exhibitions of art in industry.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes. Jim was very -- well, we all were, and perhaps I had something to do with this. We tried to be useful, as well as educational. And that led -- that sort of policy led towards the establishment of an art and industry department, if you could call it that, in which we tried to bring industry and the art of our time together, and actually institute programs in which the Institute became advisors to -- well, two significant companies, the Stubing Glass and also Reed and Barton Silver. And I can't remember the name of the china manufacturer, but we also had a contract with them.

MR. BROWN: Can you explain a bit what you did?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. What we did was, number one, to persuade them that there was something in the field of modern art that they could use; and secondly, and most importantly, we actually arranged the employment of artists in those firms.

MR. BROWN: In the case of Stubing Glass, for example, were you people who got them to do their present, what

they still do today, contracting with artists and designers?

MR. ALDRICH: Correct. I mean, that continued.

MR. BROWN: You got that underway?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. They have continued to do that, and I think that we were responsible for at least -- well, certainly, we actually arranged the employment, as I said, of artists that we found.

MR. BROWN: Did you remember some of those?

MR. ALDRICH: No. I'm afraid I can't remember the names.

MR. BROWN: What about William Barton? Did you also --

MR. ALDRICH: Same, exactly the same process and exactly the same role we played, as we did with Stubing. In other words, Jim used to be called by those companies to come down to look at the new designs that were being created by the people that we introduced to the firm, and we'd give them a crit, a criticize. And I went on several of those trips and had a fascinating time putting in my two-cents worth, as far as that kind of thing is concerned.

MR. BROWN: And it had some long-term effect, particularly with Stubing?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, and I think Reed and Barton, too. Not so much with Reed and Barton, but certainly Stubing's -- they had had one artist name Waugh, as I remember. And he did practically everything they did. From that point on, there had been a variety of, not only the S glass, the work of art on the surface of glass, but also form. I think the form, the revolution in form that took place at Stubing, would be much more responsible -- our responsibility than the etching and that kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: I know about that same time the Museum of Modern Art was doing -- or at least beginning to document design. And what was the relation in general with the Museum of Modern Art?

MR. ALDRICH: Now you're getting into a very interesting aspect of the Institute's career. Right from the beginning, I'd say -- not the very beginning, but certainly even during Matt Sonstol's time -- I think we divorced ourselves completely from the Museum of Modern Art during Matt's presidency. So that by the time I got there there was no relationship.

I think the reason for the divorce was the fact that we had to send a lot of money down to New York and got very little in return. And that was basically the thing. But then as we existed and MOMA existed, we became -- well, the first place, our principle was never to own any work, so that we were different from them right off the bat. Then there was a period of time in which Jim and I and other members of the board of trustees became increasingly, possibly as a result of the difficulty we had in persuading people that modern art was something that they ought to be interested in, and that it was a really significant movement in the art world, we felt that the Museum of Modern Art was getting further and further away from the everyday experience. It was becoming more and more esoteric and more and more divorced from people's consciousness.

Well, the ultimate result of this was this famous manifesto, which the Institute put out, and changed its name at the same time from the Institute of Modern Art to the Institute of Contemporary Art. Well, in retrospect, perhaps it is a tempest in a teapot and a purely semantic exercise. But I do think that it did something to clarify the policy of the museum, which was to be of the moment, and not a historical enterprise, that we were concerned with the art of the day rather than looking back to a body of art that was to be treated in a typical museum fashion of chronology and attribution and all of those aspects.

MR. BROWN: So you were saying that you saw that MOMA was already doing that, was beginning to do that, was beginning to look back more?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Right. And the -- how to put this? Well, Alfred Barr was the director of MOMA. And he almost single-handedly charted the course of American contemporary art, by his selections, by the imprimatur of the Museum of Modern Art. And I think we had a strong feeling that there were an awful lot of art being done that was equally good that didn't happen to suit the tastes of Alfred Barr. So there was a little bit of that behind our move and our manifesto.

MR. BROWN: But the words "modern" and "contemporary" weren't the crux of the matter. The real crux was trying, by changing your name from that used by MOMA, to make yourselves distinctive?

MR. ALDRICH: Distinctive from it, but also it said something about our mission.

MR. BROWN: What was the tempest? Can you describe that?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, the manifesto was quite radical, and I think a great many people who, for the wrong reasons, had it in for the Museum of Modern Art, grabbed the manifesto and made something of it. Arthur Holten paid for the printing of it and had a lot to say about the content of it. And he was on our board. And he, of course at that time, was the head of Stubing Glass. I've never really -- have no evidence, but I always sort of felt that perhaps he had some personal feeling about the Museum of Modern Art.

MR. BROWN: But did he, on the other hand, also back you people and your interest in contemporary art?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, definitely. And he gave us money, not a great deal, but he helped significantly.

MR. BROWN: Was there other reaction in New York or Boston to this manifesto?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Sydney -- I caught hell because my cousin Nelson Rockefeller was President of the Museum of Modern Art at the time, and I was President of the Institute, and a lot of people tried to make a family brouhaha out of that. But because there was nothing in it, and Nelson and I never had any words or even any conversation about it.

(Off the record)

MR. BROWN: What about among artists? I know in Boston, at least, they had at least one meeting to, I think rather heatedly discuss this change.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I can't remember anything specific now.

MR. BROWN: Were you at all involved in that?

MR. ALDRICH: No. I think that there had been and still is a whole group of this in Boston. It's a traditional thing to scream bloody murder about museums (inaudible) show enough of their work and that kind of thing. And I imagine that -- well, I'm sure that that kind of thing went on at the Institute. But I don't remember any specific instances of any confrontations or anything like that.

MR. BROWN: Was the ICA occasionally showing local artists?

MR. ALDRICH: Not very often. Well, Levine --

MR. BROWN: Hyman Blum?

MR. ALDRICH: Hyman Blum, who else?

MR. BROWN: But only a few?

MR. ALDRICH: A few. Most of whom had left Boston and gone to New York by that time we showed them. So there wasn't any conscious program. I think it's probably a mistake that we didn't have a show for good Boston artists.

MR. BROWN: Well, were there changes then when Plought retired as director? And I think Frederick White would have been his assistant?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: What role did he play? What kind of a job (inaudible) that he did?

MR. ALDRICH: Curator. He was the curator. And his job was to play an advisory role in the selection of exhibitions, although Jim had the final say about that. But he did all the work connected with exhibitions, the housekeeping work as well as writing some of the -- a good deal of the material that went into the catalogs, research, and -- well, he was full-fledged curator (inaudible). Jim, of course, had a tremendous amount of work to do to raise money. And he had to run the place, from a director's point of view. In other words, it was a traditional relationship between a director and a curator.

Fred was very sensitive. He was a painter himself and a very good one, an art historian by trade. And so he was a superb curator. And as his life has proved, he has been, and perhaps still is, for all I know, a professor of fine arts at -- out in California. I'm not sure which --

MR. BROWN: He's at UCLA, I think.

MR. ALDRICH: Is it UCLA? He has had a distinguished career at that.

MR. BROWN: What about Tom Messer?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, Tom is a fascinating guy, very sensitive, very brilliant, very understanding, very well educated in the field, a very persuasive teacher of the understanding of contemporary art. He was a superb choice for the successor, and continued on the tradition that had been established by Jim. I can't remember anything specific that he -- as far as exhibitions are concerned, that he departed in any way from the tradition we had established.

But he was extraordinarily persuasive. He really understood what was the intent and the -- he really understood the artist and what he was doing, and was able to describe it to the layman in a way that I don't think I've ever seen anybody else be able to do. He had a sensitivity and an ability to phrase his understanding in a way that people could understand it and really get excited about it. He was (inaudible).

MR. BROWN: He continued as director about as long as you continued as president, didn't he?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, that's about right.

MR. BROWN: You more or less exited at about the same time?

MR. ALDRICH: At approximately the same time, yes. One of the outcomes of the financial strain on the Institute, it was always hand-to-mouth, barely making what we needed to exist. And after a great deal of deliberation, we decided to approach the Museum of Fine Arts, who had nothing in the way of contemporary art activity, to see if there would be a possible relationship between the Institute and the Museum, and that we could provide for the Museum a twentieth century arm.

And accordingly, I approached -- I can't remember who -- at the Museum, possibly Perry.

MR. BROWN: Perry Rathbone?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Possibly Ralph Lowell. I can't remember particularly who I approached to see if we could -- the two institutions could come together. And I guess it was Ralph Lowell who agreed to appoint a small committee from the Museum, and the Institute appointed a small committee. It's awful, but I can't remember who was on the committee for the Institute, except Jim and myself, and Phil Hofer, probably, who was also trustee at the Museum. I think there were just three of us and three of them. And one of the members of the Museum group was Jefferson Coolidge, and Perry, and I just can't remember who the other was.

Well, the outcome of our discussions resulted in our being given space in the Museum School for exhibitions and offices, so that we moved from Newberry Street to the Museum School.

MR. BROWN: Was this in the mid-50s or something, shortly after Perry Rathbone came?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And shortly after Tom Messer came.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: And we put on shows and continued on our route, with the understanding that this would -- this visit or this move to the Museum School would be experimental. See how it would work out and where we should go from there. Well, the result was that Perry and Tom both did not want to have any formal connection between the two.

MR. BROWN: Why was that? Do you recall?

MR. ALDRICH: I'm sure that it was a result of two powerful individuals who didn't want to change the status quo. I think Tom felt that his work would be buried, and Perry felt that his work would be challenged. I think it was a typical human situation. And I also think that the Museum's -- as a result of this rapprochement, I was invited to become a member of the board of trustees of the Museum. I'm sure that the reason was that, well, my father had been trustee, was a trustee at that time -- was that hopefully there would be a continuing pleasant relationship, due to the fact that the head of the Institute was on their board.

And of course, we had had several members of the board of trustees -- Phil Hofer stands out in my mind -- on our board, so that there was --

MR. BROWN: Sure. (Inaudible)

MR. ALDRICH: But the fact of the matter was that it wouldn't work with those two fellows as the head of the two institutions. And I think there was a feeling amongst the board of trustees of the Institute that we would be gobbled up. And then this very human tendency to identify with your own institution, sad as it is, is a real fact and led to the amicable --

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: So about that time, I mean, the fact that we had to move out -- I wish I could remember the detail of all of this, but I can't. But the fact is that at this time there was a movement on the part of a fellow named William Morris Hunt, who was a theater buff and, I guess you could call him a professor producer. He had an idea of putting a theater up on the Charles River. And I had the idea of moving the Institute of Contemporary Art in conjunction with the theater.

Now, this concept came out of my experience with the arts festival, where we had successfully joined the visual arts with the performing arts. And I thought that a permanent arrangement on the banks of the Charles River would be a marvelous bringing together of all of these ideas and forces and activities, into a permanent center for the arts.

MR. BROWN: Something that had worked so well -- was working so well at the arts festival?

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: I wanted to ask a word about the location. Even at the Museum School, how did that, as a location, succeed?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it wasn't very good. We had about as much exhibition space as we had in Newberry Street. But that's where you're all cheek-by-jowl with the students, and it really wasn't terribly successful, although we had some interesting shows. I was never conscious of any great interplay between the students and the Institute, which was hoped to have been a plus. I guess it was, but it was not featured in any way.

MR. BROWN: It didn't have any perceptible, at least financial or --

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: -- effect on the Institute?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: Of course not. So you became a co-founder, then, with Mr. Hunt, I suppose?

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: Of this --

MR. ALDRICH: Of MBAC, Metropolitan Boston Arts Center.

MR. BROWN: That was in 1959 you got underway on that?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Yes. Gosh, was it that late? Yes.

MR. BROWN: What did you have, a building in mind? Or what was (inaudible)?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I got Nat Solstol to design the building to house the Institute. And he did a superb job, and we had a wonderful exhibition space and offices. And of course, the site was dreamy, you know, looking at the Charles River. And Carl Kope became the architect for an experimental and fascinating concept for the theater, in which there was a steel support that held up a balloon, which formed the roof of the theater. And we got the Metropolitan District Commission to pay for all of this.

MR. BROWN: It was their land?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

(Off the record)

MR. ALDRICH: This old stuff.

MR. BROWN: We're talking now about the new Metropolitan Boston Arts Center.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: On metropolitan district commission land?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And you got them --

MR. ALDRICH: I became very good friend with Charlie Greenhill, who was the MDC commissioner. And he was just marvelously helpful. He saw this as being a really superb thing to do. And of course, our idea, as far as the theater was concerned, was, this is an incredibly inexpensive way of getting a theater built. And it was extremely successful, with one exception. And that was that the balloon roof had to be taken down in the fall and put up again in the spring. And it just couldn't stand the treatment. And it became pretty obvious that it would going to be very expensive to replace that balloon every three or four years.

And so the expense -- but that wasn't the thing that killed it, that Charlie Greenhill got through as the MDC commissioner, after the third year. And a new MDC commissioner came in by the name of Mahoney, who turned out to be on the take. And there was a big scandal connected with the building of the Metropolitan Art Center, which soured all the legislators. And it was finally decided to abandon the whole thing because there wasn't any money forthcoming from the state.

MR. BROWN: The building had occurred under Mahoney? No, it had occurred under Greenhill, but there were already --

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, but I think the transition from Greenhill to Mahoney took place after the second year.

MR. BROWN: While it was just underway?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I can't remember. It might have been after the first year, but it was in there somewhere, because I do know that Mahoney was in place because some of the contract -- the building contract situation occurred under him, and that was what resulted in the scandal. So that he must have been.

MR. BROWN: So your funding dried up?

MR. ALDRICH: Right, yes.

MR. BROWN: So then you had to turn to the private sector?

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah. And as far as the theater is concerned, I think that it was -- our activities in these buildings kept on under private support. I mean, the theater had some pretty marvelous shows and were well attended. And I think they broke even, or at least they came -- the financial aspects of it were containable.

MR. BROWN: And what about the ICA?

MR. ALDRICH: The ICA did better out there. But --

MR. BROWN: It was well out of the city by now, but people could come to it.

MR. ALDRICH: Had to. I mean, that was the only way you could get there.

MR. BROWN: Was a good deal of your community by the late '50s -- I mean your public with the ICA in the suburbs anyway?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure, yes. I would say 75 percent, probably, lived outside of Boston.

MR. BROWN: This brings up -- you by then had a place since 1950, in fact, the Decartever (phonetic) Museum in the western sector of Lincoln.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: And how did you relate with them? Were you rivals? Or did you complement one another?

MR. ALDRICH: I think we complemented one another. They were -- I don't think we ever had the kind of -- I think we had much more of -- locally interested in showing artists that were around town, so to speak. And of course, there was a great deal of, as they say today, hands-on experiences to be had at the Cordova. They were really much more local, where we were interested in the avant garde art of the world, so to speak.

MR. BROWN: And you continued through the '50s to bring in the important shows?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Right. When that collapsed, when MBAC collapsed, the Institute, of course, was kept on going for another year or so, but was unable to -- I can't really remember whether we were kicked out by the MDC, who owned the building, or whether we realized we had to get out because there wouldn't be any support for the structure, so to speak. And I think that the failure of the whole thing -- I had been president of it for a long, long

time. And I think that very tactfully it was indicated that it was time for a change of leadership as well as -- so as I remember it, Arthur Sullivan became the president. And he moved the Institute to -- gosh, I've forgotten where they moved to.

MR. BROWN: They went back into the Back Bay section?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, the Back Bay, but I can't remember.

MR. BROWN: What was the root of his interest and involvement?

MR. ALDRICH: He was a trustee and a collector and a very, very informed and very experienced fellow. He's a doctor, a brilliant man. And was a successful head of the Institute, guided it through the next years. I -- my participation in it faded. I was still a supporter, but as the years went on I became more and more interested in the two trusteeships I had, which were Radcliff College and the Museum of Fine Arts, so that I didn't keep up with the Institute functions as closely as I had before.

MR. BROWN: Maybe we could at this point go back a little bit. In '52, you became a co-founder of the Boston Arts Festival. Perhaps we could now talk about that for awhile.

MR. ALDRICH: Right. Okay.

MR. BROWN: How did you get involved with this? Then we'll get into your architectural practice, which you must have done at night or something, with all these other things. But how did you get on the arts festival?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, the arts festival started for me at a bar, at the Ritz bar. No, I guess it was the snack bar. At lunch on a day when I was suffering from a terrific hangover. I can't possibly tell you why I had a hangover. And I had lunch with Jerry Rosenfeld and a fellow named Dan Hern. And Dan and Jerry had an idea to put on an art show in the public garden. I think the original idea came from Jerry Rosenfeld's wonderful wife named Elaine, who went to the Museum School and who has been terribly interested in the arts ever since.

MR. BROWN: And Jerry himself? What was his --

MR. ALDRICH: Well, he's an absolutely superb guy who, at that time, ran an organization known as the Jerome Press. Well, he will tell you all the things that he did.

MR. BROWN: Well, particularly through his wife he had a growing interest in the arts?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, right, and particularly the theater. And as he will tell you, he's finally gotten into the theater business the way he wanted to all his life, and that is, he's now the lesser of the Colonial Theater, and will be putting on shows there for the next 15 years.

MR. BROWN: And Dan Hern, what was his role and background?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, he was really a publicist, public relations fellow, who had, I think, some experience in the political field as being public relations for the -- through politicians. Jerry, of course, one of his major activities in the Jerome Press was to be what some -- he told me he was a political printout, which meant that he printed all of the signs that go up on trees and tarmac poles and that kind of thing, and plotted and arranged for and designed public campaign material. So that he was very knowledgeable about the political field, particularly in the city of Boston.

MR. BROWN: And that would be very important, wouldn't it, for --

MR. ALDRICH: Absolutely. And he was a very good friend of Mayor Hines, and also of the mayor's best friend and probably closest advisor, who is a marvelous guy named Andrew Dazzy (phonetic), who was the -- his job was the head of the classified advertising for the Boston *Globe*.

Well, anyhow, go back to this luncheon. They put forth this idea. And in my weakened state, I said I would accept their request to become the chairman and the manager, head of an organization that would put on a Boston Arts Festival.

MR. BROWN: What was their idea at that point? Do you recall?

MR. ALDRICH: It was simply to put on an art show in the public garden. He said that he had discussed the matter with Andrew Dazzy. Whether he had actually discussed it directly with the mayor, I'm not sure. But at least he had gotten enough encouragement from the mayor's closest advisor to go ahead and ask me to put together an organization. And I guess the reason he came to me was because I was the head of the Institute of Contemporary Art.

And so that's where we started. Well, that was in April. We put on the first Boston Arts Festival that June. And I'll have to refer to the program here in order to get you the names of all the players, so to speak.

What I did first was of course trot right over to Jim Plought and say, "Hey, look, here's this idea. What do you think about the arts festival -- I mean, the Institute of Contemporary Art running this festival?" And Jim thought about it for awhile, and finally he decided that there was just too much on their plate to undertake this job.

(End of tape 2, side B)

MR. ALDRICH: '56 was really a super year. We had the Saint of Bleaker Street by Minati (phonetic), very well known; Abe Lincoln in Illinois, by Sherwood; and Archie McLeish himself won the poetry award. And this is something that sticks in my mind as really a great highlight, was the appearance of Andre Glesky, the great ballet dancer, who appeared with Maria Tolchief. And a member of the chorus -- I guess you'd call it that -- of the Corps de Ballet was Allegra Kent, who recently has become a great prima donna. And that was under the guise of -- under the New York City Ballet.

In '57, we had another Minati, the consul, that was very good, very good, as I remember it. And George Devil Disciple (phonetic) -- the poet was e.e. cummings.

MR. BROWN: How did he fare? How did it go?

MR. ALDRICH: It went very well. I mean, all of these poetry things stand out in my mind, in my memory, as being great successes. I can't -- there's only one poet that we had that I remember an anecdote about, and that was Marianne Moore, who was famous for naming the Ford Impala. Did you know that?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, the Ford Motor Company went to ask her to come up with some names for their new car. And she is responsible for the name "Impala."

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: But she -- right in the middle of her reading, she looked out at the audience and paused and said, "Aren't you all getting wet?" And what had happened was that the trees over the stage -- there was quite a breeze blowing. The trees over the -- the leaves of the trees over the stage were starting to scratch the roof, and it sounded just as if it was raining.

MR. BROWN: (Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: So when she made this remark, everybody -- it was completely -- couldn't understand what the hell she was talking about. And I finally -- I think I whispered to her the fact that it wasn't raining out there, or something. But I remember that as an incident.

But the Glevsky performance was really wonderful. And all of the ballet dancers from that time forward were just wild about that stage because, being made of plywood and being designed to be taken down and put back up again and so forth, it had a bounce to it that they never get in a theater. So they probably were able to jump about six inches to eighteen inches higher than they've ever been able to jump before.

The reception of ballet throughout the years was very, very warm. And I think there was tremendous interest generated. And I think it was an art form that -- more than almost any other, was new to the public in those years.

MR. BROWN: Did it draw the same breadth of public as, say, the painting exhibition did?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, well, one cannot compare, I don't think, the performing arts with the visual arts in terms of attendance because the visual arts were all day long, you know, all night.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. ALDRICH: And I'd say that that was fairly consistent, that just huge crowds all the time. It's very hard. We never had any --

MR. BROWN: Counters or anything like that?

MR. ALDRICH: Counters or anything like that. Of course, here was an interesting thing, the fact that during the performances, you still had a tremendous number of people going through the tents that didn't want to go to the performances. But there is no doubt about it that there were at least 20,000 people per night over on the stage

side.

Joan Baez appeared there. Robert Lowell in 1960 got the Folger Prize, Richard Wilbur in '59. In 1958, I think the most interesting thing is that Sara Caldwell's first public opera was performed in the Boston Public Garden, and it was Voyage to the Moon. And she to this day will say that she got her start at the Boston Arts Festival, which is really quite interesting. She is an absolutely fascinating person, as I remember -- very tough financially -- the toughest person we had to meet with as far as how much we were going to pay. Plus, this extraordinary self-confidence in her expertise, the opera. She really is a giant character as well as physical figure.

MR. BROWN: You didn't often, though, have too much temperamental problems?

MR. ALDRICH: No. She always ran over budget, and our arguments with her lasted year after year after year because she wanted to collect more than she bargained for. And I guess in some cases we were able to help out, but in other cases we just weren't. But that's the nature of that whole aspect of things, was the very weird sort of world that you are in when you're in the theater business. And all the unknowns and the time element and everything makes -- it made it impossible for us, for instance, to have a budget that could be stuck to.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: And it's right here that accounts for that deficit after the 14-year period is that we never were able to see ahead as to what the bottom line was going to be, either from the expense side or from the collection side. We really almost didn't have any control. We just knew we had to raise as much money as possible to do.

MR. BROWN: And you were able to persuade quite a few people, even though you couldn't give them a firm cost figure, particularly in the case of the performing arts?

MR. ALDRICH: Right. Yes. And being a public, no-admissions charities and so forth, we were able to get breaks from the performers and from producers and people like that. And although we still had to pay equity rates and that kind of thing, people by and large would -- well, for instance, one of the reasons that -- you asked how we financed the thing from time to time. The -- Tom Horn, who was the contractor who built the theater every year, he went for years without getting paid. And other people had the same kind of indulgence of our situation, so that we were able to keep going, even with some deficits.

MR. BROWN: Do you feel that the political structure in Boston was behind it, after this first success?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, Mayor Hines was 100 percent behind us and did everything that any mayor could possibly do to help us. And it was almost as much his baby as it was Jerry's and mine.

MR. BROWN: And he wasn't doing it for publicity of his regime?

MR. ALDRICH: No. No, no, no.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. ALDRICH: No, he didn't capitalize on it in any way that I can remember.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. ALDRICH: John Collins was very much the same. I don't think he was as enthusiastic about it as John Hines because he didn't found it. I mean, he wasn't in it at the beginning. But he never blocked us in any way, and he was very helpful. He was a great mayor. Both of them were fabulous.

MR. BROWN: In the '60s you began to see, gradually, some changes?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Well, in the first place, Peter Temple decided that he would go into business. And he was a very young man. And he decided his career would have to be -- and he joined Harbridge House and has since become a leading management consultant. I hope you get him to do one of these interviews because he would give you insights into it that would be very valuable. I called him, you know, and he agreed.

(Off the record)

MR. ALDRICH: '59 was an interesting year. We had Richard Wilbur. This was under Diggery Van's (phonetic) directorship in 1960. We had Robert Lowell as the poet. And Deglevsky (phonetic) came back, this time with Melissa Hayden, and also with the following names: Judith Green, Valila, and Pat McBride, all of whom have become leading dancers.

MR. BROWN: Leading dancers.

MR. ALDRICH: That was the year we also had Joan Baez at the jazz night.

MR. BROWN: She was just beginning her popularity, wasn't she, as a folk-jazz singer?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Yes. Right. And it was the year of the geodesic dome, when Rocky Fuller was prevailed upon, I think, through his architectural firm in Cambridge called Geodesics, I guess -- Hayward Cutting was the chief architect out there. Well, between both Rocky and the guys out there, we put up a geodesic dome. And just before we opened the festival, one of the struts gave way and everything almost collapsed. And Bucky Fuller was due to give a speech at the Boston Architectural Society. And he appeared there in crutches, and said that -- made reference to the fact that his dome had almost collapsed, and that's why he was on crutches.

MR. BROWN: What was the dome to be used for?

MR. ALDRICH: An exhibit. I think it contained some of the architectural photographs of the prizewinners in the architectural competition, which we had every year with an architectural jury picking the best works built in New England in the preceding year.

MR. BROWN: Almost all of them were featured?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, that's right. And the photographs, of course, of the winners were displayed. And it was very interesting and very --

MR. BROWN: What role do you think that publicity and award system may have played in developing what I gather Boston became in the '60s, quite an architectural center? Many, many prominent firms and --

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I think perhaps -- it would be hard to trace cause and effect there. But certainly, public awareness of architectural was enhanced. And I really -- I suppose it's Harvard and MIT's schools, plus the kind of lifestyle one can develop in Boston that attracts so many architects. Certainly today it's just unbelievable. You go through the architectural pages of the Yellow Pages, and there are four pages of architects. Unbelievable the number of architects that are trying to earn a living in this community. And frankly, I don't understand how they do.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: So I guess I should get now to one of the basic reasons for its demise. I feel we got too big and too ambitious, that those years when we -- at the longest of the shows in those best years were only two weeks. And in the late '60s, or rather '62 and '63 and '64, I think we got up to three weeks. And from June 20 to July 14 in 1962, just exhausted everybody. They almost all went to the hospital one way or another. I know I did, but that was earlier, not in '62. I know that I wound up in the hospital after one of the shows; I can't remember which year it was.

But it's absolutely exhausting to have to be there every day, every single night. And there was always one kind of problem or another that arose which had to be settled. In the last interview, did I tell you about the tornado in Worcester? Do you remember my telling you about that?

MR. BROWN: No, I don't think you did. No, I don't remember that.

MR. ALDRICH: I can't remember what year it was. But right, I'd say, around eight o'clock in the evening, we got word that there was a tornado that had hit Worcester. And you know what happened out there. It was really a tremendous disaster.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: And that I was advised to shut the festival down and tell everybody to go home because there was a very strong feeling that the tornado was on its way to Boston. And I had one of those terrible moments of decision. Well, I didn't make up my mind right away, but I walked out of the tent and looked up into the sky. And there was a black line right across -- right above my head, very distinct black line that stretched from left to right.

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible)

MR. ALDRICH: On the north side of the black line was blue sky with stars. On the south side of the line, obviously very, very heavy clouds. Well, at that I said to myself, if that's right up here, I know that weather goes from east to west -- no, from west to east, and therefore there is no threat to Boston right this minute. So I said, forget it. We're going to be all right. But I'll never forget having to make that decision and having it made for me right up

there.

MR. BROWN: And in fact it did blow out to sea.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Right. Yes. That's, I think probably due to the fact that I was a sailor and knew my weather signs.

MR. BROWN: (Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: So I think that that covers the highlights of the festival as I remember it. As I said, I think that it was a terrible mistake to last that long. I think we lost tremendous expertise when Peter Temple left us. Diggery Van did a swell job. Austin Evans also did a good job. She was head of it for awhile. But they just didn't have the showmanship and the contacts, and it may have been the times that we were not able to sustain this incredibly high quality. And as far as this is all to do with the performing arts -- I think the visual arts maintained its value and quality.

MR. BROWN: Do you suppose the spreading of performances over three weeks sort of dissipated some of the energy or the intensity of it?

MR. ALDRICH: Right. Right.

MR. BROWN: Why was it -- do you recall why it was decided to go so far, long as three weeks? Was the pressure --

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I think we thought we could get more money by having performances back to back. You know, we would run a play for three nights or four nights and the ballet for three or four nights. So it was an ongoing thing like that, whereas in the early days, there was usually one performance.

MR. BROWN: It was only four days long when it first ran?

MR. ALDRICH: The first one.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. ALDRICH: And I think that the -- looking back, two weeks is just about right.

MR. BROWN: Do you think also there were more opportunities by the early '60s for people to see ballet or theater or hear poetry or opera, in greater Boston?

MR. ALDRICH: Gee, I'm not aware of any great change in that respect. I don't think so.

MR. BROWN: And on the visual arts side, you were still the primary vehicle for showing?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Because the --

MR. ALDRICH: That was unique and remained unique.

MR. BROWN: Because the Institute of Contemporary Art, I believe, in the early '60s began showing a lot of New York things, and that's very expensive?

MR. ALDRICH: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: The Museum of Fine Arts certainly didn't have a contemporary flavor even then, did it?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no, absolutely none whatsoever. It didn't even have a work of art.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: Now, you've mentioned New England. This was to be a festival for New England, by which you meant almost everything down to the New York suburbs? What was your conception?

MR. ALDRICH: New England as the six New England states. And we had to -- although that wasn't very conscious. I can't remember that we would have eliminated everybody because they came from New York. In fact, we had a lot of entries from New York. Not great emphasis was placed on the New England aspect of it.

(Off the record)

MR. BROWN: We might as well build up our credits. If you'd leave a message at the director's office?

(Off the record)

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MR. BROWN: Interviews with Nelson W. Aldrich; Robert Brown, the interviewer; April 4, 1985; Boston, Massachusetts.

As we last talked, at which time you talked to a great extent about the Boston Arts Festival and other civic involvements related to the visual arts, for the most part. And I thought today we could begin by talking about your involvement as a trustee at several arts organizations. You were trustee at the Rhode Island School of Design from 1955 to '62. That's seven years. How did you become involved with that? Your family had (inaudible).

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I think that's maybe the reason, plus the fact that I was an architect, and they have an architectural school, along with painting and sculpture and all the fine arts, a landscape architectural school also. And I hadn't realized I was on the board that long. It was at a transitional stage when an old president -- and I've forgotten his name.

MR. BROWN: John Frazier?

MR. ALDRICH: No. Frazier came in.

MR. BROWN: He came in.

MR. ALDRICH: During the time I was a trustee. And I didn't make all the meetings because it was in Providence and I was here. And I think that's what led to my resignation on whatever date that was.

MR. BROWN: Was the transition fairly fundamental or do you recall?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I got the impression that he was a welcome change. That's just an impression. There's no evidence I can bring to bear on that one. But he was a member of the staff of RISD when he became president. I think that was unusual. And I do remember Mrs. Danforth, who of course was the guiding light of RISD for many, many years and a great benefactor of it. Her son, I think, had taken over it just recently as president from her, president of the board of trustees.

But that's about all I can remember about the institution. They also were going through a building period when they built dormitories for the students while I was a trustee. And that's about it.

MR. BROWN: It was probably in a time of some expansion?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: And I imagine it had been popular to bring Frazier in from the start?

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: To head the (inaudible).

MR. ALDRICH: Exactly. And I don't think he was a great innovator of any kind. But he kept up the tradition. And of course, it was then a very good school, as it is now a very good school. It was quite a lot more formal than the one here, the Museum School here in Boston.

MR. BROWN: That's always been somewhat less structured?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I think the tradition of not a great structure has stayed with the school for a long time, the Museum School.

MR. BROWN: And you've had some involvement with that?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, I've had a great deal of involvement. In fact, I've been on that committee at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts for -- God, I guess it must be 20 years.

MR. BROWN: Well, that we can talk about.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, right.

MR. BROWN: You were always trustee there. You were also a trustee roughly at the same period at Radcliff College, from 1957 to '72. How did you come to be involved there?

MR. ALDRICH: I really don't know.

MR. BROWN: Were you approached by --

MR. ALDRICH: By Helen Gilbert, whom I've known a great deal.

MR. BROWN: But she was head of their trustees?

MR. ALDRICH: She was president of the board of trustees, yes. And the president of Radcliff was -- oh, I had his name on the tip of my tongue this morning. But -- Jordan, Jordan. He, I think, had a year or two while I was a trustee. And then Mrs. Bunting came in and was -- she was president during most of the time I was there.

I think they wanted somebody who could -- who didn't mind trying to raise funds. And I think that my association with the arts festival and being an architect were all qualifications, perhaps, that they were looking for.

But I had a fine time being a trustee there. It was a fascinating experience because they had a great deal more autonomy from Harvard than they do now. In fact, at the very end of my term and the end of Mrs. Bunting's term and Nate Pusey's (phonetic) term, several of the leading lights of both institutions were bent on a complete takeover of Radcliff by Harvard. And several of us trustees of Radcliff felt very strongly that we shouldn't give everything up. And we managed to persuade everyone else that we would keep our real estate and keep our endowment under the Radcliff organization.

So when the merger took place that exists today, we still had the ability to revert to a college which might have more of a role in women's activities than they do at present. I think that Harvard has pretty well swallowed up the college, which of course was always -- got its education from Harvard, but had its own president and policy making and trustees and all that kind of thing, which they still do today.

So that it's in a position, I think, to respond to social, educational changes as they may come, because they will always be less gobbled up by Harvard as seems necessary at the time.

MR. BROWN: So you felt there was a good deal of confidence, then, by way of spelling out the terms?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, I do.

MR. BROWN: Were the arts at all expanded at Radcliff while you were there?

MR. ALDRICH: The building -- they had a lot of building going on while I was there, too. The Radcliff Library, for instance, was built. And I think that served to stimulate interest in the arts, strangely enough. It was more than a library. I think they had art exhibitions there continuously. And it is, I think, a strong factor in keeping Radcliff as an image separate from Harvard.

And then there were dormitories built. And one more cooperative dormitory, which the girls kept house, so to speak. They bought all their own food, quick-cooked it, and organized themselves into a family. And they had already had two of those. And then the third one was financed by Mrs. Hillis (phonetic). And that was built while I was there. So a great deal of expansion, as well as change in its relationship to Harvard.

And of course, the degree -- degrees are granted now by Harvard to Radcliff. That was part of the change during my trustee term. And today -- I have a couple of daughters who went there. Today they insist that they went to Harvard, not Radcliff, which they mention frequently, you know, to get my goat.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: But it was an interesting period. Mrs. Bunting was a very good president. And unfortunately, I was not there during the years -- not a trustee during the bust years. What was the date that I finished?

MR. BROWN: '72.

MR. ALDRICH: Well, then it was, because -- but I think there was only one episode of real difficulty, and I can't remember the details of it. But Mrs. Bunting handled it so well I don't think the trustees were involved in it at all.

MR. BROWN: You mean the times of sort of unrest in the late 1960s?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, that's right.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: So.

MR. BROWN: You were also more connected to your profession as the Director of the Boston Architectural Center at this time.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: Had you been -- I suppose it's really the chapter's school here of the AIA chapter locally school for training?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, the Center is not, I don't think, in any way connected legally, shall we say, to the Boston Society of Architects. They are separate entities. And as they are separate also from the Massachusetts State Association of Architects. So the Center was on its own bottom, so to speak, and raised its own funds.

And those were years of also responding to student needs more than they had in the past, I think. I remember a good deal of differences of opinion amongst the directors as to whether some -- the student body should be represented on the board of trustees. And we finally -- I was very much for the idea of having students on. And it was accomplished. We did have two students each year appointed. No, they were elected. They were elected by the student body to be trustee representatives of the students.

MR. BROWN: Why were you for student representatives?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I think at that time, one of the reasons behind the student unrest throughout the country was an awareness of the fact that students were being spoon-fed and had nothing to say about their education. And I felt that that was a very valid complaint.

(End of tape 3, side A)

MR. ALDRICH: (Inaudible) two very intelligent young potential architects on the board. They were very helpful. And it served, I think, to allay any unrest that might have transpired later on. It was a good idea.

MR. BROWN: Had you been acquainted with the school for years? I suppose you had, even when you were (inaudible).

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I never went to the -- as a student. I wish I had because I think that they had an esprit de corps there that perhaps Harvard and MIT didn't have because they were all working in offices. And this combination of working and studying at night, I think, is a very healthy one.

MR. BROWN: But you had -- you knew some people, or knew of it back in the '30s and '40s, even?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. In fact, my father being an architect, I think we had -- he had in his employ people who traditionally went to the Architectural Center.

MR. BROWN: I think maybe we could talk now a bit about the last years of your practice. If you want, we could look at -- if you want, beforehand, just to look at some of these to see if I've got my data correct. We'll turn off the tape.

MR. ALDRICH: You know, that was the decade that we did the most interesting work.

MR. BROWN: Was in the 1960s?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You became, you told me, a managing partner in 1963?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And it became Campbell Aldrich and Nolte until '73. Mr. Campbell retired in '71, you said?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: But you, in fact, have been the dominant partner, or in effect, the design partner for quite awhile?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it wouldn't be fair to say that I was the design partner. I think that Mr. Campbell's jobs that

he brought into -- in fact, I know the jobs he brought into the office, he headed the design responsibility and exerted it. And the same thing was true of myself. But we were the only two that ever brought in any work to the office, so that I think I brought in more work than Mr. Campbell did, so that you could say I designed more than he did. But it's not --

MR. BROWN: It's not a comparison.

MR. ALDRICH: We decided that we would consult each other about the design, the concept, and so forth. And if there was any disagreement, the partner in charge who was responsible for bringing the job into the office would have the final say. But we discussed all the projects and had very little friction. I don't remember ever insisting on -- well, the only real argument I think we ever had, a really serious one was, he felt that competitions were a waste of time. And I felt that we ought to go into the Tufts Library competition. And we had quite a battle over that. And luckily, for me, we were able to go into the competition and win it.

MR. BROWN: He felt it was just too much extra effort?

MR. ALDRICH: Too much effort with too great a risk of no return. But I felt that this was a competition in our backyard, so to speak, and that we really ought not to avoid it.

MR. BROWN: Of that time, we selected to begin to discuss a bit -- you designed the New England states pavilions at the New York World's Fair for 1964 and '65.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: And I've seen other plans of this. If you want to look at the brochure just to refresh your memory. But I gather from the plan it was a loosely linked group of pavilions?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right, with six-sided design units, grouped together into four buildings.

MR. BROWN: What was the -- was this -- not a competition, but you were selected by --

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. We were selected by (inaudible) job and getting it from the Massachusetts State Commission on the World's Fair.

MR. BROWN: What precedent did you --

MR. ALDRICH: I don't know why we were selected until -- at least I didn't know why we were selected until I was asked out to lunch by one of the members of the Massachusetts Commission. And it became obvious to me during the course of lunch that there was some quid pro quo expected. And I remember saying to this gentleman that I was so dumb about these kinds of things that it would be very, very dangerous for him and me if I was going to go along with his suggestion.

MR. BROWN: Which had something to do with --

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: Well.

MR. BROWN: What part did you draw upon, precedents, for your design? Or had a committee spelled this out in considerable detail just what they had in mind?

MR. ALDRICH: No, they --

MR. BROWN: They didn't really?

MR. ALDRICH: They left it to -- Jim Plought, who used to be the head of the Institute of Contemporary Art was taken on as an exposition consultant. And he and others worked up the program that the pavilions were going to -- we enlisted the -- or he enlisted, he and his group enlisted the participants like Vermont Country Store was one I remember. And then the Dumphrey brothers hotel chain had an exhibit. And there were other things like that all through the show. And that's about all I remember, actually.

We had an art exhibit with Dekuning and other artists -- Dekuning's portrait of Jack Kennedy was there. We had the Liberty Tree, which now is down at Danvers.

MR. BROWN: At a shopping mall.

MR. ALDRICH: At the Liberty Tree shopping mall.

MR. BROWN: Was that your idea?

MR. ALDRICH: No, that was Jim Plought's idea. And he got the guy to make -- I can't remember his name now, to build that tree and then hang on it all of the historical episodes in the history of New England.

MR. BROWN: Your choice of these old hexagonal units --

MR. ALDRICH: That was a design. That was mine. And I had always been intrigued by the shapes of straight lines connected to members that were at different angles, which caused this kind of --

MR. BROWN: Probably for the whole lattice effect.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: I saw various slides criss-crossing.

MR. ALDRICH: They form what's known as a hyperbolic parabola. When the plane that forms the connection -- that is formed by connecting these members, as a parabolic --

MR. BROWN: Parabolic in form?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: And it's rather intriguing. So these were sort of the connectors and formed -- I think that idea was the jumping-off place for the --

MR. BROWN: Did your forms have to be rather recessive, though, so that these rather pronounced commercials things would show, for instance, the Country Store?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, these parabola, which had no roof on them, were clearly decorative. And then the hexagon formed to the buildings connected together did provided the shelter for the exhibits.

MR. BROWN: But it was different kind of tasks than ordinarily when you were doing a building. The building itself was sort of to be the shell, the container for things that would hit them in the eye.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Right. The various exhibitors had the obligation of furnishing and decorating their spaces.

MR. BROWN: Did you find this kind of collaboration went fairly smoothly?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. There was no problem at all. We had our -- in fact, the commission -- in fact, we had no contact with the commission at all after that lunch.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: The commission was made up of all six state governors. And they had representatives on -- I think the only state in New England that had a member of the legislature on the commission was Massachusetts. The rest of them had governors' appointees to serve on the commission. And they really had no input to it at all. We had to make sure that the various states were represented in the exhibition part of it. But other than that, very little.

MR. BROWN: Were you inclined to go on and do more work of this sort?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I never happened to get another commission of that kind. World's Fairs didn't proliferate.

MR. BROWN: No, they didn't come very often.

MR. ALDRICH: Like they're doing today.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: Well, that was in '64. And then I think it was the next year that you apparently, let's see, we have the date on that Tuft's -- the library at Tuft's (inaudible).

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: And you said you entered a competition. Was this a highly, widely advertised competition?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, no. It was a competition of four different architects. We had been retained by Tufts to design a library. And it was not felt by some of the authorities over there that it was a design that they particularly liked. So they decided to have a competition and invite four different architectural firms. I can't remember who -- I know Shefley Bolfidge (phonetic) was one of them. And ourselves, and then two others, and I can't remember who they were.

So that this was -- it was a vindication. Our winning this competition was really a vindication of a -- you might say firing of a firm as the first designers of it.

MR. BROWN: What were you supposed to do, and then what did you attempt to express in this building?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it's on the side of a hill. And it was a traditional open space in the sort of image of Tufts. So by putting 60 percent of this library underground and emphasizing the terrace effects of the design, I had hoped to marry the library to the slope and thus, as much as possible, continue the use of the open space that was tradition at Tufts.

All of these roofs that you see there, they were covered with grass, grass plots, so that we really tried to symbolically and actually add to the open space that was already there.

MR. BROWN: This has sort of a Babylon effect, doesn't it?

MR. ALDRICH: It has.

MR. BROWN: The verdancy of it.

MR. ALDRICH: Sort of a Mideastern.

MR. BROWN: Did you have any sort of thing like that in mind?

MR. ALDRICH: No. No. I think that I felt that there really wasn't very distinguished architectural which we had to be polite to on the campus. It was really Victorian and not very good, at that. So that I felt quite free to express a design motif that was pleasing to the eye. I hope it was.

MR. BROWN: Choice of materials, was that a large factor?

MR. ALDRICH: It was limestone.

MR. BROWN: And that, again, was not meant to blend with earlier buildings?

MR. ALDRICH: No. No. In fact, they were all brick.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: I had a very strong feeling that the library is the heart of an educational institution, and that this could well be quite different from everything else.

MR. BROWN: You were already in the midst of doing a number of commissions for various educational institutions when you won this competition?

MR. ALDRICH: Right. Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: In such a building as a library, do you have an awful lot of specifications to follow? I suppose you do, don't you, regarding the requirements of the library itself?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, the world is full of library consultants. And we had Mr. Metcalf from Harvard to tell us what's what. And we also had a very positive librarian who knew exactly what he wanted. And there were some discrepancies between the two of them, which we had to resolve. But the basic design criteria was security. It had to be designed in such a way that there was only one way in and one way out, except for emergencies. So that pretty well set the basic design concept, particularly when it was sloping down a hill and there was 60 percent underground, you didn't have to worry about too many places that they could get out or get in.

MR. BROWN: (Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: Then there were the various divisions of the collection, the rare books, the reserve section, and the rare books department and so forth.

MR. BROWN: You had to subdivide that a bit.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And they gave us the number of volumes that had to be designed for. And a great deal of the design impact is derived from the fact that we had these carrels, which are individual study spots, places, which we cantilevered out from the exterior and expressed them very prominently in the faÃ§ade.

MR. BROWN: Where it broke up the rather long faÃ§ade very decidedly.

MR. ALDRICH: It broke it up. And also the way we spaced them provided a great deal of light --

MR. BROWN: In each carrel.

MR. ALDRICH: Well, in each carrel, but also into the area where the books were housed, which could be used in the carrels. So that -- and it was very interesting. Although we didn't realize it at the time, the very fact that we put 60 percent of the building underground made it possible to almost heat that building from the electricity that we had to turn on for lighting.

MR. BROWN: Good Lord.

MR. ALDRICH: So they saved a great deal of money on the heating bills.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: I wish I could take credit for that concept. But it is a very efficient building from a heating point of view.

MR. BROWN: And it has turned out to work quite well, too, from what I've heard.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. And I think that the fact that it's a rather unique design had many people who have gone to Tufts since then tell me that it really ranks as the sort of the heart of the campus.

MR. BROWN: Were you then -- I think it was about this time or so you tackled a project with Dartmouth College, of providing a master plan. You were not merely dealing with your own building, but with integration of older and newer --

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. This was the first of --

MR. BROWN: This was right about that same time, wasn't it?

MR. ALDRICH: It was before. Well, we started before. Although the master plan, like all master plans should, was undergoing changes from year to year, as far as detail of the plan is concerned, the broad concept of the plan, which was to maintain the existing density of building -- that was the philosophy behind the master plan -- was maintained during the entire 25 years I was consulting architect at Dartmouth College.

MR. BROWN: But that was their predominant, overriding charge, that you not increase density?

MR. ALDRICH: That's what I suggested, and it was accepted by the board of trustees as the design principle behind the master plan.

MR. BROWN: So if they needed to expand much, they would have to expand outward, or on the periphery?

MR. ALDRICH: No. There was a great deal of space that was not built upon within the campus. Other areas that were fairly well built up around the green there --

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, it's a large campus.

MR. ALDRICH: And it was that particular density there that we were pledged to maintain in these places outside of the exterior of the heart of the campus, although always within easy walking distance of the center of that open space. It was a large (inaudible) library use right here.

MR. BROWN: Yes, right there. Sort of a focal -- again, the library. Of course, there are also the hotels, the other large focal buildings.

MR. ALDRICH: That's the one that's opposite.

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible)

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: But was this work that would occupy you merely occasionally? Did the college have you up a few times a year to review --

MR. ALDRICH: Well, this was a time of expansion of Dartmouth. Hopkins (phonetic) Center was the first job that I had anything to do with it. And my role in that was to write the program. Now, that took quite a long time because it had been designed prior to the war, and when the war was over and when things had settled down, they decided to resurrect the whole concept of Hopkins Center.

MR. BROWN: As an art and theater complex.

MR. ALDRICH: Right. And we -- all of us, not only the consulting architect and myself, but the trustees were not too fond of the solution that had been designed prior to the war.

MR. BROWN: What had that been? Do you recall?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, it was a big chunk of pseudo-Georgian building, and rather tight, and really didn't express the openness and the -- what word can I use? The welcoming sort of atmosphere that they hoped the Center would create. An indication of that openness was a decision that I made in writing a program that the Post Office should be in the heart of Hopkins Center. So every student in Dartmouth, whether they wanted to or not, had to go into Hopkins Center.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: And it has become over the years what they hoped it would be, a cultural and an arts-oriented structure. They have music and drama and art exhibitions and a touch of the outside world through the Post Office.

MR. BROWN: You did find it gave a focus on the arts that was more pronounced than Dartmouth had known before, didn't it?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Absolutely it had very little realization of the importance of the arts when this was started. And I think it was some controversy. I recommended that the street be closed between -- I can't remember the names of the two streets. This little street here -- be closed to create more space for Hopkins Center to be given some breathing room, so to speak. And that was a controversial subject which we finally -- the college got the permission to do from the town.

MR. BROWN: Did you have the backing of the college administration?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, sure. Yes.

MR. BROWN: You came up with this idea, really, for a focal point?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Well, see, I didn't design the Hopkins Center. But I did write the program, which is a document which tells the architect what is needed and why, from the college. And that was the document which was accepted by the administration and the trustees. And Wally Harrison was the architect and did a great job.

MR. BROWN: For whom you had worked for as a young man?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right, when I got out of college.

MR. BROWN: So as a master planner of a campus, at least, with buildings a number of generations, do you feel it's essential to find or create a focal point, or maybe more than one focal point? Do you find that the green, for example, at Hanover, wasn't sufficiently a focal point in itself?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, no. Actually, quite the contrary, that the location of Hopkins Center was not only fulfilling this cultural need that I understand we were talking about, but also firmly anchored the open end of the --

MR. BROWN: Of the green?

MR. ALDRICH: -- of the green.

MR. BROWN: I see. So it closed off that --

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: And each institution I've worked for as a planner had its own personality that you would -- that

one would study very carefully, and then be guided by that personality, if it exists. And then in some cases it didn't exist, then one would have to try to design one, a personality, which is a little difficult. But put an imprint of unity into the -- and an expression of unity into the future building programs.

Exeter, for instance, when I got there, they had already designed a library for Exeter which, by its placement, would have divided the school into two very distinct parts. And I felt that was a terrible shame, to divide the organization. It really ought to be tied together more. So we managed to persuade everybody to move the site for the library. What was done was taken off axis and --

MR. BROWN: Well, as a master planner in these several situations, probably one problem of the fact that the buildings sort of had stood to themselves, didn't they? They'd say, "Well, we need a library," and so that would be designed without taking into consideration the effects it might have overall.

MR. ALDRICH: That was true of Exeter.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, definitely.

MR. BROWN: So the master planner had to sort of gently point out these.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I think that the master planning of college campuses is an absolutely fascinating thing because nobody had ever thought of the personality or the impression, that sort of subconscious impression that people carried around of their alma mater as a physical entity. And it was fascinating to point out this personality by description of buildings, and also by elucidating the reasons for placing new buildings. And it was very satisfying to be able to participate in that and this momentous and long-range decisions as were required for master planning.

MR. BROWN: You couldn't find precedence really among Bozart planning, could you?

MR. ALDRICH: No, no. Each place was a very unique situation.

MR. BROWN: Whereas the Bozart tended to homogenize or to imprint itself?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, there weren't -- at least in my experience, there were no institutions that had any real plan, as such. There were quadrangles around which buildings were placed. But the image of the entirety was, in most cases, pretty well lost.

MR. BROWN: Well, I guess I meant to ask, you didn't try to go to the outside to find precedents in terms of regularity and order?

MR. ALDRICH: No.

MR. BROWN: Rather, as you've said, studied the personality of a particular place.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. And then try to augment it or provide --

(Off the record)

MR. BROWN: I think we were saying (Inaudible) mountain near San Francisco.

MR. ALDRICH: Right. It's --

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible), California.

MR. ALDRICH: It's on the way to the airport from San Francisco. It's a mountain that's maybe 500 feet high, got a flat top, and is a very omnipresent feature of the landside of San Francisco, the opposite side to the entrance to the Bay. And my cousin, David Rockefeller, plus the salt company -- what's its name, the salt company? And the Crocker --

MR. BROWN: Crocker Land Company.

MR. ALDRICH: Crocker Land Company, and I'll think of --

MR. BROWN: There's (inaudible) called West Bay.

MR. ALDRICH: West Bay was the organization that was formed by these three entities, Crocker Land, David Rockefeller, and the salt company, whatever it was.

MR. BROWN: The third one.

MR. ALDRICH: Anyhow, the salt company owned a great deal of the Bay land, the land that was on the edge of the Bay.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: And the Crocker Land Company owned other properties. In fact, I think they owned quite a bit of San Bruno Mountain. And the concept was to build a new city, which is -- and Skidmore and Merrill were hired to do this. And Mr. Nat Owings, being a resident of the area, felt that he really didn't want to get into the fracas that was going to take place when this was really proposed. So David turned to me and said, "Would you take this on?" And I said sure.

And we conceived of a building system to provide housing on this very steep bank of the side of San Bruno Mountain, facing San Francisco. And it was really quite fascinating to determine the size of it, the open space, the transportation problems, and everything you can think of that was necessary for a small city. And we decided that it probably should have two groupings of governmental -- making enough for two governments to take place side by side.

In other words, it tells what political scientists that we discussed this with -- was the prophecy for a size for a New England town meeting. And it turned out to be probably somewhere around 600 families, would be the ideal size for a town meeting. So we, in effect, visualized two major units, this one and this one, as being about 600 families, 600 dwelling units.

Now, the big problem, of course, was how do you build on that steep a slope as this. I can't remember what the --

MR. BROWN: But this was the side, not the tabletop?

MR. ALDRICH: Not the top. We didn't want to put it on the top. We wanted it on the side, meeting the top as a park for the whole of the area, which had been used for many years anyway. And there was a weather station on the top and other aspects of the thing. I don't think we could get to that land even if we wanted to. So it was mandated that we build it on the slope.

And so what we finally came up with was a building system of panels, which could be deposited anyplace that you wanted by a -- let's see. How to describe this? We had a tower at the top of the property and at the bottom of the property, which went horizontally. Both towers moved horizontally.

MR. BROWN: On tracks?

MR. ALDRICH: On a track. And then between the two towers was a catenary or a tremendous wire structure. And so we were able, by moving the towers and a crane arrangement on the wire, going up and down, to be able to put whatever we wanted wherever we wanted on the side of the mountain.

MR. BROWN: These great panels you mentioned?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And you previously would have done your (inaudible) and excavation?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. And sewage disposal and transportation and, you know, all of the necessities for a community. Unfortunately, the powers that be -- and this is in the beginning of the save-the-Bay campaign which was taking place all over the Bay area. And they effectively stopped any development of San Bruno Mountain. So although we designed it all, towards the end, we came to realize that it was -- they kept on trying for quite awhile. But it never came to be.

MR. BROWN: The conservation just thought it was too prominent a land feature to be built on?

MR. ALDRICH: No. I think they didn't want to -- San Bruno was just a phase of the overall project. I never had anything to do with the other part of it, which was to build a hotel and office and recreational facilities on the edge of the Bay. I think it was to use the fill that was taken from the mountain to build the city to augment the land on the -- and I think that's what killed it, not so much the mountain as it was the Bay.

MR. BROWN: What were some interesting aspects of the project for you? You mentioned this covert way of depositing the panels, the walling.

MR. ALDRICH: Well, actually, that was essential to decide how you were going to build on this slope. It came

close to being 45 degrees in many, many places. So that that one had to be worked out with the Vectel Corporation. You know them?

MR. BROWN: Yes, the great engineering people.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, where both the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense once worked.

MR. BROWN: Right.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: And they are the ones who really came up with the thought that that kind of tower and wire arrangement would work. And the panel systems building was being explored by many architects and many producers, and the Vectel Corporation didn't have any problem with that, either.

MR. BROWN: Were they to be then bolted together once they were -- how was that --

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Was this to be moderate housing or upper-income?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, upper and moderate. No low-income, because I don't think it could possibly have been financed by low-income. And of course, all the vertical transportation was done by some kind of vehicle that would run on a track up the hill, like San Francisco's trolley system.

MR. BROWN: Yes, trolley car.

MR. ALDRICH: Cable car.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. ALDRICH: And all of the horizontal was to be done on your own two feet. So we had to determine how far the last dwelling unit could be from the major -- from the stopping point. And we figured about 500 feet was the maximum that that would -- so that we gradually, over the weeks and months that we worked on this, came to delve into all kinds of aspects of planning and architectural and engineering. And that was its fascination, was putting together all of these essential elements to a dwelling community. We had garages down at the bottom, playing fields, and movies, and all that kind of stuff on the flat area.

MR. BROWN: And fairly low-density land use, wasn't it?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Wasn't it a lot of parks and so forth?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. And at the end of each 50-foot walkway was an excavated small park for the kids to play who were young enough to want to play at the end of their -- right out in here, see?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. But it was simply a (inaudible) after a few years? Just couldn't get anywhere?

MR. ALDRICH: No, that's right.

MR. BROWN: The whole idea. Toward the end of the decade, you were involved -- in the association with the competition winners Tom and McKinnel and (inaudible) for the new Boston City Hall project. Were you involved in that from even before? 1968 is sort of the date of the opening. But I think it was in the air much before that.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I can't remember when the competition was announced, the winners were announced.

MR. BROWN: I think it was the earlier '60s.

MR. ALDRICH: Was it --

MR. BROWN: It may have been earlier -- than '68 for sure.

(Simultaneous conversation)

MR. ALDRICH: It might have been -- I think it took about two years, maybe even longer, maybe three, to build the city hall.

MR. BROWN: Well, you said that you were -- when it was being planned, it was a choice of whether it was to be designed through a competition or simply appointing a top architect.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. And I remember being very much in favor of the appointment of a top architect and being against the competition.

MR. BROWN: For what reason were you?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, again, I thought that the history of competitions in the United States was pretty bad. You know, the Chicago Tribune competition was won by --

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible)

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, nearly Gothic. That's right. Whereas Sarandon and Grobius did marvelous buildings in the modern vernacular, and would have been in many people's minds a much better solution than the pseudo-Gothic tower that was finally chosen. And there are other examples of the winners of competition that were not very successful. So I was going on that, the record.

MR. BROWN: Were you involved in the planning group consulting to the city at that point?

MR. ALDRICH: I was on the design review board of the Boston -- of the redevelopment authority. But I was the only one that was very vociferous about going to a single architect, and got nowhere.

(End of tape 3, side B)

MR. ALDRICH: So when the competition was announced, the winners, at the Museum of Fine Arts one day, I looked at it and I thought it was an absolutely marvelous building, and said so to some reporters. And the next day it turned out I was the only one who was in favor of the building.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: All the other Boston architects were carping on it and saying nasty things and so forth. So when these, the winners, Coleman and McKinnel (phonetic), both of whom had never built a building before in their lives, one of whom was a professor at Columbia University Architectural School, and the other one was his student -- Coleman being the professor and McKinnel being the student. Nowles was a friend of theirs who was an architect, but he didn't have a license to practice in Massachusetts. So they had to get an architect to form a company to build the building, who was registered and who had kind of feelings for the building that they wanted.

And so they came to me, I being the only one who had appeared in print in favor of their building. And so I said, "Sure, I'd be delighted to be the -- but I must have the freedom to set up the office, and I must have the -- if I'm going to be responsible for the building, then I must have a good day of say about it. But I do admire the building, and I think I'm in the same spirit that you guys are about the building."

And as it turned out, I didn't -- the only thing I added to the design was really a subtraction inasmuch as I said -- when we found out that it was a million dollars over budget when we got it designed, I said, well, the only thing to do is to knock four inches off the module. And that's what we did. And we got the million dollars back just by doing that. Absolutely the same plan, but four inches less -- a module of three feet four inches.

MR. BROWN: But the building, of course, was a bit more compact, almost imperceptibly?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right, almost imperceptibly. And it was a little big tighter, which enhanced the design, I think. And I think -- I know they did, too.

MR. BROWN: Did you -- at that time in Boston architectural circles, you say most of the people, other architects carped about it. Were they possessive of their own turf?

MR. ALDRICH: They, of course, said -- I can't remember some of the comments. But --

MR. BROWN: Well, was that a time when -- were Boston architects feeling a bit threatened? Were there a number of -- or some outside architects were already doing large projects, weren't they, in the city?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And the people who criticized were not very formidable as influential architects. But it was splashed all over the papers, you know, how the papers would react to that kind of thing. So I think there was a certain Mayan quality to the building. I think they pointed that out. And of course, there was this big hole in the middle. And they were accused of wasted space in that area, and other criticisms like that. But it's a great building.

MR. BROWN: You had had some ideas for it, probably, yourself, hadn't you, as you were on that Boston Redevelopment Authority's advisory group?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Well, we decided, as usual, not to go into the competition, and particularly as I was against the competition anyway.

MR. BROWN: But was the program always for it to leave on a great open space?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Well, the plaza was part of the program. The amount of land that was dedicated to the building included the entire plaza. And Mayan Paye (phonetic) did the master plan for it, located the building. And then the mayor's office and the government center commission, which the mayor appointed, wrote the program for it.

MR. BROWN: Had you seen the need for there being a focal point? I mean, you knew it when it was Scully Square.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Oh, sure, there's no question that we all agreed that the urban redevelopment concept of that area of Boston was essential. Boston was -- you know, up until that point, practically nothing had been built since the first John Hancock building, of any major size, in the city of Boston. Twenty-five years of almost no building at all in the city of Boston -- it's extraordinary.

MR. BROWN: One thing that reflected was a decline in the downtown, I suppose maybe.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I don't remember that it was ever described as a decline, but I think we really realized that there was certainly not going to be any progress in the city unless there was new building and enticements to new building. And that was seen -- the city hall was seen as a major earnest of the city's desire to become of the time.

MR. BROWN: And to put its foot -- I mean, commit itself, at least --

MR. ALDRICH: That's right, in fact.

MR. BROWN: Slight (inaudible) to your design of a bit earlier for the Tufts Library, the overhanging top parts of the pronounced cantilevered areas are like your library (inaudible).

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I think that was purely coincidental. I think the design concept of Coleman and McKinnel was that those upper floors, the overhang was a recall of a Greek frieze -- a Greek --

MR. BROWN: Cornice?

MR. ALDRICH: Cornice. Of course, it's three times as big as a Greek cornice and has no dental courses.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. ALDRICH: But there is a classical flavor to it. Let's put it that way.

MR. BROWN: This is your design in '68 for Rockefeller University's Science Building.

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes, right.

MR. BROWN: A very pronounced high-rise structure.

MR. ALDRICH: That was one of the very first science buildings, I believe, that was designed to go into a high-rise building. And the design concept there was to have all of the scientific and building services. You know, clean air and gases and all the things that were needed for a medical research building would be in these corner elements with the laboratories in between them.

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible)

MR. ALDRICH: And it was originally, as you can see from this model, designed to have two buildings similar to each other, which would serve as the research areas for Rockefeller University. They were quite spread out at this time. But I think -- I know the powers that be decided one was sufficient.

MR. BROWN: How did you happen to become a -- they become aware, because you had done other educational buildings?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. Not only that, but we'd also done a vertical -- I guess this is the second. The first one was the University of Massachusetts Science Building. I can't really remember what came first.

MR. BROWN: I think there it is.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes, there it is.

MR. BROWN: This here -- and you'd already done, then, a high-rise within a complex of some low-rise buildings.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. And I had done some gateway, a memorial gateway for Rockefeller University and gotten to know the people there. And of course, I'm related to the Rockefeller family. So it was --

MR. BROWN: Were they quite involved then in the planning for Rockefeller University?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, no. Det Bronk (phonetic), who was the president of it, and I were the two people that were involved. Really, nobody else, just the two of us.

MR. BROWN: So it was far simpler than, say, the California master plan or the city hall.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Yes. Det Bronk is a wonderful person, and he had built many buildings in his various capacities as a science educator. And he and I probably conferred with some of his staff, but I never was involved.

MR. BROWN: You did pretty -- particularly as Rockefeller University Science Building, it was quite strong, but rather a simple structure.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: It was in the '60s. Were you thinking in terms of sculptural form, do you think?

MR. ALDRICH: I never had an all-over philosophy of architecture that would apply to all buildings. I think -- I know my modus operandi was to seize upon the unique features of a building and ask those unique features to help me design the building.

In other words, in this particular case, for instance, the -- I, having had some experience with science buildings for research, knew that there were great complications if one did not simplify the distribution of gas and electricity and air handling equipment, and that these were -- we did a building, for instance, in Bar Harbor, for the Jackson Laboratories, where air, pure air was a vitally important aspect of their research. And I knew that that would be true here. So that by concentrating the distribution of these services close to the laboratories, I would be getting a very efficient building. Well, there they are.

MR. BROWN: Right in these corner towers.

MR. ALDRICH: And so the use of the building is the guiding principle of design. And then the architect's job is to make that as handsome or, depending on its location, whether it should be at variance with its surroundings or whether it should be companionable with its surroundings.

MR. BROWN: But at Rockefeller University, it could be at variance to a degree, because these are distinct buildings?

MR. ALDRICH: Right, particularly as it was the only high-rise on the whole site. But we used granite, the same as the other buildings -- or rather, limestone. I think it was limestone, actually.

MR. BROWN: The next building is one familiar to me, the first -- perhaps one of the earlier large bank buildings or large high-rises downtown here in Boston, the First National Bank.

MR. ALDRICH: First National Bank, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Since 1971, it's at least (inaudible) date of commission, commission or completion. And one which is familiar to us, particularly, I think, for its overhanging bulge and lower stories.

MR. ALDRICH: That's the only reason I get involved in this one is because it was fundamentally Walter Campbell's job. But we had a terrible time with that particular requirement that the bank floors should be 40,000 feet, and all the other floors should be 20,000 feet, for reasons of rental. The 20,000 was the most efficient number of square feet in a mass of rental -- office rental space.

So you had this really very difficult situation. They also wanted a main office building of 20,000 feet -- a main office, banking office of 20,000 feet at the ground level, and did not want to have stores or other things like that. So the program of this building was very difficult to accomplish. And we did a tremendous number of sketches. And finally, I got involved with it, with one of our designers. And we both decided we would tell it as it is, and

stick the 40,000 feet out into the air, and then build 20,000 feet on top of it. And that's how that --

MR. BROWN: You really had no option, though, did you? If they wanted it small at street level, then larger --

MR. ALDRICH: The other thing was to bring columns down and disguise the facts, and then offset the --

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. So you just -- so it simply (inaudible) from that ground floor, the large banking floor, into the bank's office stories.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Right. And luckily, we persuaded them that there were three divisions of the bank that could have less than 40,000. But they insisted on 10 floors at 40,000. So we were able to --

MR. BROWN: But you wrestled with this design for some time?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, God. It was just agony.

MR. BROWN: Were you pleased with the way you solved it?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. I was, having had a great deal to say about it. But I think it was one of the most controversial -- and still is one of the most controversial buildings in Boston. I'll never forget, I took a taxi back to the office from some meeting or other. And the taxi -- we got talking about the architectural with the taxi driver. And just as I was getting out, he said, "You know, there are just two buildings in town that I really hate. One of them is the city hall, and the other is the First National Bank." I gave him a good tip and said I was the architect of both of them.

(Laughter)

MR. ALDRICH: So it was very funny.

MR. BROWN: How do you think it's settled down, now that there are more high-rise buildings to be seen in downtown Boston, this building with its --

MR. ALDRICH: Well, I think that it serves its purpose. It's like, as I said at the office many times, this is a building that is a craggy, handsome old man's face that has character. You can't say it's handsome, but you can say it has character. And the surface treatment, the polished granite, is beautiful granite. And it has a distinction, which is one of the things the bank wanted to have, is a distinction in their home office. And so I think we successfully solved the problems. I think that I can understand some of the people, like Walter Whitehill, who thought it was the ugliest building in Boston.

MR. BROWN: He would have --

MR. ALDRICH: He was rather conservative in all his opinions. And I think other people felt that it was extreme. But I just have no idea what the opinion of people is today.

MR. BROWN: You felt that, back as with Rockefeller University, that it could be at variance with its surroundings? Partly, you said, your client the bank wanted it that way, didn't they?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. That's right. Well, it's at variance solely in its shape, not in its materials. I think the materials are of extreme elegance.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Do you feel in general, speaking of a very congested old downtown like Boston or parts of Manhattan or in Europe, that new buildings should blend in, should stand out? How do you come down on that? Or can that really never be solved? It will depend on the client?

MR. ALDRICH: I think to ask a very high-rise building, say, 50-60 stories, to blend in with a 10-story brick building is perfectly ridiculous.

MR. BROWN: What about its fellow high-rise, two or three miles away, perhaps, but --

MR. ALDRICH: I think it depends a great deal on the proximity of one building to another. I think the varied colors from white to black, almost --

MR. BROWN: The ranges.

MR. ALDRICH: -- the ranges is tremendous, is very fascinating. I would be very careful of the street pattern and make damn sure that changes in street pattern, which might come about, which should come about in a complex city like that, is more important than the buildings, and that the alignment of buildings to the street

pattern is vitally important. I think that's the only thing that I dislike intensely about the John Hancock building, is the variance with the -- totally at variance, really at variance with the street pattern in the Back Bay.

MR. BROWN: You mean what?

MR. ALDRICH: It's on a diagonal of the block. And you know, you can't get any sense to it. Of course, it does give you, the minute you go onto the diagonal of the square, you get greater area. But -- I don't know. I think that's a -- that you ought to be able to read the fabric of a city from the alignment of its buildings.

MR. BROWN: That these great new buildings should not violate that fabric.

MR. ALDRICH: Definitely not.

MR. BROWN: At the street level.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. ALDRICH: But I think that the new architectural, the new post-modernism, I just don't understand it, the application of a pseudo-classical motive, not well done, but sort of a caricature of a pediment or an arch or what-have-you, just tacked onto a building to give it a uniqueness or -- uniqueness, I guess, is the word. It's just very superficial and it is begging for muscle flexing on the part of the architect. And I hope that that fad doesn't last very long.

MR. BROWN: You don't feel it is, as they sometimes claim, that it makes a bow toward the past?

MR. ALDRICH: Well --

MR. BROWN: The Georgian past or the classical?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, my idea of what it does to the past is thumb its nose at it.

MR. BROWN: Of course, it's using the same techniques as you used, say, here in this bank. They have to, don't they?

MR. ALDRICH: Yeah. Did you see the picture in the *Globe* on Sunday of the -- I can't remember the name of the building, but it is a modern building except for the entrance? And they put an ugly-looking segmented arch in the center of it, surrounded it by different-shaped windows than the rest of the building, and let it go at that? Just perfectly silly. Well, I don't think this is probably very pertinent to this kind of interview.

MR. BROWN: Well, I want to get your ideas, your opinions.

(Laughter)

MR. BROWN: Well, this -- toward the end of your practice, you did some housing, urban renewal work. Right here are examples. You wanted to talk a bit about it in the Salem Institute --

MR. ALDRICH: I don't know. Salem (inaudible).

MR. BROWN: In 1973?

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: I don't know if you wanted to comment a bit on them. Salem is very -- both towns, and Portsmouth, very old, small cities.

MR. ALDRICH: No, this is way outside of Salem proper. The housing was --

MR. BROWN: It was Pequot housing, 250 units.

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. It was a Massachusetts housing, MFHA, Massachusetts --

MR. BROWN: Oh. Something like finance --

MR. ALDRICH: Finance Housing --

MR. BROWN: Agency --

MR. ALDRICH: Agency, something like that.

MR. BROWN: Yes. For the government.

MR. ALDRICH: It was built under their aegis, and it was a miserable job to satisfy them.

MR. BROWN: Was that because there were so many requirements of a practical sort?

MR. ALDRICH: Oh, yes. They really got even down to what the floor was going to be made out of. And it practically had no opportunity to be much more than somebody who drew up what they wanted. There was little opportunity to be creative at all.

MR. BROWN: But you were seeking that work among others at that time, weren't you?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. That was my first experience with MFHA. I had hoped that I could do something that was a little more innovative. But it didn't work out. And I was into it by that time.

MR. BROWN: Were those requirements not so much sensible as written into the bureaucratic procedures?

MR. ALDRICH: Well, there was a philosophy of not wishing to have any elegance at all in that it would -- these were apartments for low- and middle-income, and it would not be appropriate. And they also wanted to save money, of course.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. ALDRICH: So I think that really was the basis for it.

MR. BROWN: Well, this is your -- the next one here, also in Salem, '73.

MR. ALDRICH: That was urban renewal.

MR. BROWN: East India square.

MR. ALDRICH: Right.

MR. BROWN: Here it seems you have much greater variety of forms.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. We were working for the Salem -- we were working for the Montreal Development Company, which is called Mondev. I went in as a limited partner with them in this production. But then I was unable to meet the financial commitment necessary. So I just became the architect for them, for Mondev. And that was good fun. We had a very good redevelopment authority to work with. And we had the obligation to do a plan that was different from the one that had been accepted nine years before that. We were also in competition, again, with other developers. And one is competition with our plan, and then went on to build the buildings within it.

MR. BROWN: So this was at the beginning of a prodigious redevelopment we've seen along the coastal cities of New England?

MR. ALDRICH: That's right. Exactly.

MR. BROWN: Unfortunately, you said, these were times that were difficult for architecture, '72 to '75, something on that order?

MR. ALDRICH: Yes. '73, I guess, was the pits. It was the year that I had finished my own development in Portsmouth. And we just couldn't rent the project, and so I had to -- the bank had to take over from what I had done. But it was -- I never could quite understand the government. On the one hand, urging architects and developers to renew cities, and at the same time pose kind of restrictions that -- not architectural restrictions, but legal and red tape and all that kind of thing that delayed projects so that when the depression or recession -- extreme recession of the (inaudible) depression of the mid-70s came along, it was very important to get things done fast to beat the inflation.

MR. BROWN: Yes. But you couldn't because of this red tape.

MR. ALDRICH: That's right.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

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