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Oral history interview with Otis Oldfield, 1965 May 21

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Otis Oldfield on May 21, 1965. The interview took place in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Lewis Ferbraché 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.

Interview

MR. FERBRACHé: This is Lewis Ferbraché interviewing Mr. Otis Oldfield at his home, 455 Joost Avenue, San Francisco, California. The date is May 21, 1965. Do you have a middle initial, W?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, W, for William. [Never used it.]

MR. FERBRACHé: Would you tell me the date and place of your birth Mr. Oldfield?

MR. OLDFIELD: July 3, 1890. Sacramento, California. I was born at three o'clock in the afternoon, so I heard.

MR. FERBRACHé: You told me off tape that you father was a painter for the Southern Pacific?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, he was a coach painter originally, but he was master painter at that time.

MR. FERBRACHé: Do you think that had any influence on your becoming an artist at all?

MR. OLDFIELD: No. But I have a picture, very strange, up here on the wall, that while my mother was carrying me she got a sudden urge to paint. And of course, a coach painter has little tubes of paint, you know. And she had never painted, but she did, and bought a pantograph and what not. Her painting is still there, and I feel that that had more possibilities than what my father did.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you have any art classes when you went to school?

MR. OLDFIELD: No.

MR. FERBRACHé: You did go to school in Sacramento?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, until the end of my school days.

MR. FERBRACHé: Then you left home and went out on your own?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes.

MR. FERBRACHé: Working, as you told me, in Nevada, Montana…

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, the first thing that I did when I left school, I wanted to paint, so I just left but didn't tell anybody anything. I went downtown and saw in a printing shop that they wanted a young man, so I took that. And I used to push a cart around a little bit and set a little bit of type.

And then somehow I got a job running an elevator in an apartment house. And in that apartment house, there came down from Missoula, an elderly man. He tended the furnace, because it was too cold up there. He got talking to me and got me interested and said, "You ought to go up there." I was telling him I wanted to go to art school and had to have money. So I went up there and he had acquaintances and I got a job in a Northern Pacific lunchroom. Then finally, I got on the train to – well up in the hills there, and it was a local train. The lunch boys used to make sandwiches and sell them for ten cents or something like that. That paid well, and then I got an idea that I was ready to spend some money on art, but I thought it would be in New York. So I wanted to ride a ship. I had never been on the ocean so I took out for Portland, got on the old "Rose City" and we hit a storm. And I remember rolling in the bunk, a little tin can on one side, I never missed it, and that's about all I saw of the trip. When I got off in San Francisco, why, they told me the deck railing had been destroyed, and everything, but I was very glad to get on shore.

MR. FERBRACHé: What year was that that you came to San Francisco?

MR. OLDFIELD: It must have been 1908, I think so.

[Audio break]

MR. FERBRACHé: Would you continue, Mr. Oldfield?

MR. OLDFIELD: Well from then on I think that I got busy and went to Nevada, for what reason I don't remember. Oh yes, I remember there was a young man that had been there and previously, he was a Sacramento boy and he wrote me a letter. And I went there and it was just a row of bars at Battle Mountain in those days. Nevada was just a row of saloons, that's about all there was, but he was working as a bartender. So I got there off the train and I heard that one of the big farms out there – ranches, you know, cattle ranches – wanted a house boy. I didn't know what a houseboy was and a young woman had come in there with a cart, it was twenty-five miles out, so I went out there and the job was to feed horses you see. The cowboys would come in and leave their horses and they had a watering-trough in there. And there were cows to milk, see, they'd lose a calf or lose a cow they'd get that back there, I was shown how to do that by an Indian. And then I had to feed the pigs, you know, the pigs were way out. And then if I had time I weeded in the garden. Fortunately they had plenty of water, they had an artesian well. But I worked there for some time and then I got diphtheria and they sent for a doctor and the only medicine was in Reno. I got over that all right, and then I got out of there… Before I got out of there – I was speaking to the firemen on the little local train there, a little narrow gauge. I was telling him I was going to New York, getting money to go to New York to study art. He said, "You don't need to, I've been to art school in San Francisco. There's the best here, the Best's Art School there." And he told me about it, he said you just get a little money and go to San Francisco, and so I did.

MR. FERBRACHé: This was the school operated by Arthur William Best [1625 California Street, San Francisco, California], established with his wife Alice?

MR. OLDFIELD: That's right.

MR. FERBRACHé: Alice Best.

MR. OLDFIELD: Alice Best, yes, they had a small group there because it was originally, after the fire. I think it was a showroom for Atkins, Victoria Atkins, right after the fire, and then of course, when –

MR. FERBRACHé: The Altic Art Gallery?

MR. OLDFIELD: The Art Gallery, yes, and then that made a studio for him, and a classroom for their purposes of teaching. And we were taught there to work directly from the model. And in those days, the models were pretty well dressed, you know. I mean, if we had nudes, they were pretty much covered up. But anyhow, I stayed there. I must have stayed there about a year –

MR. FERBRACHé: This was about 1909?

MR. OLDFIELD: About 1909, yes, and there was a German boy and a French boy, and I ran out of money, of course, and I had to have a job. The French boy had a job as a clerk in a hotel. He told me "It's impossible for you to get a job, there's one fellow here by the name of McDermott," he said, "Go see him, he hires people overnight, you know." After eating you might get a job. So I did go to him. He said, "Well here's a twenty-four hour job at the Argonaut Hotel, bellhop." It appears that the bellhop whose place I was to take was killed by the elevator. He got in the door when the elevator went up and these big weights, the counterbalance came and hit him on the head.

The captain was a clerk that said, "Go to work," they don't generally do that in hotels, I hear. But anyhow, it happened that the owner liked me and the clerk liked me, and other various ones. And I got to be an independent, and then I changed over to nights – I got a night job there, tried to study in the daytime, and it didn't work out so well. Then finally somebody suggested the Cliff House hatcheck. In those days it was good because they didn't take your tips. But we had Claus Spreckels, and we used to see Raymond Duncan, I've seen there, oh various celebrities.

MR. FERBRACHé: Sarah Bernhardt, I think?

MR. OLDFIELD: Sarah Bernhardt was there, yes. And I remember one time there was a big banquet. Bob Evans was there, and there was a banquet and there were all derbies. Now we couldn't tag a hat, we had to remember a hat, and if we lost a hat it was five dollars out of our pocket. So that was quite a thing because when these people went out they tipped you with a gold piece. And the musicians there when they had a good night, they used to toss twenty dollar gold pieces at the performers. So I got a job there one New Year's night, or it was Christmas, I don't remember, but it was a big night. In the Serpentine there were lots of things, gold pieces, quarters, dimes, you could see them. I had to stay until two o'clock in the morning. My partner left me there to take the last customer on the way out. This money had all gone down on the floor and was wrapped up in tablecloths to sweep, to rake up the floor. I got in ahead of him and I think I got something like all kinds of money, gold pieces and whatnot, I mean from the things. I think I got over a hundred dollars, it was that much anyhow. I bought a trunk and a suitcase and made arrangements for Paris. I went home, and my mother was

willing to see me do it and send me a little money if I got short.

MR. FERBRACHé: Could we go back a little bit? May I ask about Arthur and Alice Best, how their –

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, when I was there, the great thing that was happening was Theosophy. I don't know if they were Theosophists or not, but they were much interested and I got interested in it too. But she was a beautiful person and he was a very competent man. He had the studio and he used to work all day long and she took care of the teaching. She had a good reputation. And they had a little boy at that time and they – I was telling you that not too long ago he called me up just inquiring and to say hello after all these years. It was kind of nice to look back. But the stuff people I was with, I can remember one by the name of William Keith. Now I don't know how much of an artist he was, but he was helpful around there. And then there was a person by the name of Davenport, I think he's down at Tillman Place. He had quite a reputation there and oh, there were various people there. It was a day, you know, you had big ostrich feathers on your hat, and skirts were long and whatnot. It's kind of dim, except for some photographs, and even then I forget the names, I don't remember.

MR. FERBRACHé: Do you remember if the Bests taught in the French method of –

MR. OLDFIELD: They taught the method of Jules Pages. He had come here, according to how I heard the story, he had come here a little bit after the fire and made an enormous painting of the ruins of San Francisco. About that time he got the big prize in France, and he had organized a group of newspaper men and they got an art school started under his type of teaching. It was the type of teaching that was done in the French schools in those days, and the Bests carried it on. I was advised when I came here to hunt up their art school, to go there, and I did, and they carried it on pretty well.

MR. FERBRACHé: The Bests that is, carried on with Jules Pages?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. But what happened see, to go back to this thing after the French boy and the German boy, it was unsettled in my mind whether I should go to Munich or Paris, and the French boy won out. He went home to Paris and he wrote me a letter, he got me over there.

MR. FERBRACHé: And from that money you got on this holiday thing?

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, that wasn't all, that was the extra part. But I got over there without a passport and didn't get a passport until I came home.

MR. FERBRACHé: France allowed you in the country anyway?

MR. OLDFIELD: I had some moments rough, but my passport, when I got it, came from Lansing, from the State Department, with his signature, a great big long thing –

MR. FERBRACHé: Secretary Lansing, you mean, the Secretary of State?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, his signature is on it. They went to a lot of trouble to see that their Americans get home all right, even those that have a special case. It was too long you see, and I spent I think it was fifteen years that I stayed there –

MR. FERBRACHé: The year that you arrived in Paris would be?

MR. OLDFIELD: 1910. And I stayed there fifteen years, and by three years, I had commenced little by little to lose English. I was so bad that after fifteen years when I wanted to get out of the country I couldn't find an American who could sign for me, and I went to the *New York Herald* out of distress. I asked the girl there if I could speak to somebody and there was a man reading a newspaper, so I told him my story of woe, and when I –

MR. FERBRACHé: You had been there so long American people would take you for a Frenchman?

MR. OLDFIELD: That's right. And as soon as I sat down this fellow crumpled his newspaper and sat beside me and said, "Mr. Oldfield, I've known you for twenty years. Come on and let's get that thing signed." His name was Roselee, I remember and I won't forget it, but it was pretty hard, because I didn't know any Americans and I had lost the manner of, you know, you lose –

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes, you were afraid you'd be taken for a Frenchmen and deported back to Paris again –

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I was quite afraid.

MR. FERBRACHé: that they wouldn't allow you in or put you on Ellis Island or –

MR. OLDFIELD: I even had trouble out here. It took over a year to get certain things, you see, for instance, you

know, we hear these foreigners with a “th” problem in various words. But I noticed that my tongue got fat on the end and I couldn’t say “th” anymore. It’s just one of the things, you see, because the French, they talk with their lips, you see. We have that facility of having, people don’t realize, but our tongue is kept thin on the end, and when you get amongst Americans and talk you see that disadvantage.

MR. FERBRACHé: Had you already selected an art school when you arrived in Paris? Or someone told you about one?

MR. OLDFIELD: No. This French boy had taken care of all that. I went to the Julian Academy, Rue Fromentin, that’s near the Moulin Rouge on Boulevard de Clichy in –

MR. FERBRACHé: It’s one of the famous schools that so many Americans attended.

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, I noticed on the sign there, it had been Bouguereau’s Academy at one time. But at the time I was there, Tony Robert-Fleury was the master there. He’d come in once a week. And it was very funny, when the master came in the word with him was “silence” and we had to be very quiet. He would never go to anyone except those who had worked with him for a while and then we would group around him and listen. However to get our place there, it was kind of big, we would have to make what they call an “esquisse.” That’s a sort of little composition that was put on easels and he’d come around and criticize that and –

MR. FERBRACHé: How do you spell that?

MR. OLDFIELD: E-S-Q-U-I-S-S-E. Now he’d put that on the easel and move them around, you know, 1, 2, 3, 4, because every easel place was marked, you see, with chalk. That’s how we got up, because if you wanted a good place before the model you had to have a high number in your esquisse, and so on. I remember once I got third, and I was very happy about that. It so happened that I didn’t think the master liked Americans very well and here I was. At that time I was new there and I had to have an interpreter. The master just looked me over, and then he looked at the painting and he said, “All right, you’re an artist.” I felt it was very nice afterward when I thought about it because here –

MR. FERBRACHé: You don’t remember what type of work he saw – that you were doing?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, this was a scene of Daphnis and Chloe or something like that, I put them in a meadow that I was used to seeing. You see, I was there only shortly then, and I was used to the meadows of California, you see, and that’s what I did, that’s what it was. That’s the only one I remember. I don’t think I got that high a number ever again, or anything like that. But I did, later on, I did get third mention again in one of their, you know they had a little newspaper that comes out as a sort of advertisement naming those who were getting prizes. They called them the “concours”, I was happy about that. But that is of little importance because –

MR. FERBRACHé: Were you painting in the Bourguereau style then, or –

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no, no, he is, Tony Robert-Fleury, was , he had gone into Impressionism, and we were taught in that manner. You see, you get taught in a certain manner and I think that stays with you. You can try to get in or out of it, but what you have is kind of stamped there. I mean, an artist will think he changes, but his friends will know and see that he doesn’t change. That’s what I’ve been told. Walt Kuhn told me that. He says the artist thinks he changes but he doesn’t. So anyhow I spent a few years at Académie Julian until the war came. And that’s about the –

MR. FERBRACHé: What did you have to pay to the master for working in his studio?

MR. OLDFIELD: We didn’t pay the master, we paid the fee, and I think it was, you give it by six months or you give it by the year. As I remember it now, the first six months they advised me to take it that way, I paid twenty-eight dollars.

MR. FERBRACHé: For six months?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. A hundred and forty seven francs or something like that for six months, and then you renew it again. That was supposed to be a better way to do it than by the year.

MR. FERBRACHé: Would you go to the studio every day to this?

MR. OLDFIELD: We went to work at eight o’clock in the morning and we worked all through the week until five, Saturday included. Then in the evening we’d go from five to seven, quick sketching, we’d pay for that, it cost a franc – twenty cents. Then after that we’d meet at somebody’s studio and talk a little bit, and then we’d go out and find a cheap restaurant and eat there. You see, the restaurants were cheap, you had your napkin in a ring with a number on it, stuck it in a rack. And for us, there were probably ten of us, they had a long table for us. Coachmen would come in there, it was a place for coachmen. And then free night school, we went three times a

week with only a male model, and during that time we would go to night school until eleven o'clock. We couldn't go to the movies because they were too expensive. And Sunday we'd take a streetcar ride with our paint boxes and go out to Meudon, or some place at the end of the line, you know, and sit down and paint – the group of us – you know. And we'd take a little lunch or we'd stop at one of those bistros and have something. But that was the general way. And we kept ourselves pretty busy because that's all we had was to work and to learn. And to have fun, the only fun we had was I think smoking clay pipes and seeing how fast we could color them, or how well we could color them, and talk a little of our own business.

MR. FERBRACHé: You didn't have a studio you worked in?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I, at first I was with four boys. We rented a studio, and then that got too expensive so we took a little flat next door that had two rooms. And so we divided up that way, and we would cook our meals sometimes.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you sleep in the studio, or did you have a hotel or?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no, in these rooms we had, that's where we slept and where we worked and where we were at home. But as I say, if the weather was good, we took the streetcar for a ride. You could ride pretty far and pretty long for the fee that they took. Of course we visited all the places around there, like Rodin's [Auguste Rodin] place [Villa des Brillants, Meudon, France] and whatnot, I mean we were interested in their work.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you attend exhibitions and museums?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, that was part of the thing, the Louvre on our Sundays, that was sort of a ritual, see, if it was bad weather we went to museums and we'd just stay pretty near the whole day there. We each had our own likes and dislikes of certain things, and we didn't always agree, but we went around to see the things that were our loves at the time. See, some of the modern things that you see there today, they didn't have them there then. And then we would go to the Luxembourg and see what was there, because in there it's the living artists, you see. When they're dead they go into the Louvre. And then of course there were the trips across the water. We were from Montmartre, you see we were Montmartrois, and we'd go and see the boys over in the Latin Quarter side. We got along very nicely. Although none of us had much money, we were young, we could do a lot of things that you can't do otherwise, unless you're young and can do it that way.

MR. FERBRACHé: How would the master react to your work, would he get mad if something displeased him or would he attempt to –

MR. OLDFIELD: The master?

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes.

MR. OLDFIELD: I never made the grade with him, I had to watch –

MR. FERBRACHé: He didn't criticize your initial work?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, he never criticized my work because my work was never good enough at that time. See, I think I really commenced to paint after the wars. See there were four years of war in there that kind of disrupted things.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you have any exhibitions in this period before the war?

MR. OLDFIELD: I think in 1912 I made my first effort, it was the "Salon des Humoristes." They're more like a funny paper artist, you know, but I mean there were some good painters there too. But I mean, that's what they were. I sent them one of my creations and got a ticket back that they're awfully sorry they didn't have room for it.

MR. FERBRACHé: How do you spell that? How would you spell that for the typist?

MR. OLDFIELD: I don't know if I can spell it or not? H-U-M-E-R-I-S-T-E-S. [Salon Artistes Humoristes]

MR. FERBRACHé: Oh, humorists, in other words.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, humorists. Yes, that's what they call these, like our funny men, you know, but some of them you know –

MR. FERBRACHé: Those that draw comic strips or cartoons.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, some of them were very good, you know. I mean I can't remember, Pupo was one of them,

they were very good, they were tops, you see, they were exquisite people in so far as funny pictures go, it was satire mostly.

MR. FERBRACHé: This was a humorous drawing that you sent in?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no, it wasn't, it was a serious thing and they accepted serious things but they didn't have room for it, they were very polite. Then, of course, that was 1912, and then there was '13.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you meet any other Americans that became well-known? You mentioned, I think to me, Gordon Coutts?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, there was Gordon Coutts there, there was William "Bill" Hayter [Stanley William Hayter], there was George Holl, and there was one called Pushman, I think he's known as Pushmania [?] now, and there's Adolphe Berson, who was then one of the, he wasn't a student any longer, but he was an American, he was a San Franciscan and he was a member of the Grand Salon. See, later on I became a member of the Salon D'Automne.

MR. FERBRACHé: How do you spell that Mr. Oldfield?

MR. OLDFIELD: A-U-T-O-M-N-E. Then I think for a couple of years I went with the Independents [Société des Artistes Indépendants]. That's where you would see Matisse [Henri Matisse], and you could see Picasso [Pablo Picasso] – I mean they were all there.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you ever meet any of these famous Frenchmen?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I didn't at that time and it was strange, Picasso was still living up in the top of Montmartre, but I wasn't living in that part.

MR. FERBRACHé: Utrillo [Maurice Utrillo] was living there too, I understand.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I've seen Utrillo around there because I got acquainted with Francisco "Paco" Durrio and he was a member of the Salon d' Automne, and he was a Spaniard. And Moya del Pino, here, also went to see him, but Moya del Pino lived in Montparnasse and we never met. We met only once we got here to San Francisco. He was brought to see me by another Frenchmen. But I mean it's strange, we were there together. Now this Adolphe Berson still lives in San Francisco and he's a close friend of Pages [Jules Pages]. That connects up somehow, but that's how it was, and I got my pictures in these places, and there were a few sales and whatnot. And of course there were private galleries that I got around into.

MR. FERBRACHé: Would Frenchmen or Americans buy your paintings, do you know?

MR. OLDFIELD: Oh, they were Frenchmen.

MR. FERBRACHé: Who were buying your paintings?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, there wasn't much, I don't say there was much because after all I was beginning. Well, I don't know, some beginners are pretty good, I mean they have sparkle and they have zip, they have what it takes. I mean, the thing of art is a funny thing, we have it or we don't have it. And we might have it at times, and again we might not have it. I mean, to have that oomph and that sparkle and that thing that does make a work of art, that's a mystery to all of us. What it is I don't know.

MR. FERBRACHé: And then the war came in 1914.

MR. OLDFIELD: The war came and that was misery all around. Out of our group, there were quite a number, I wouldn't like to try and figure out an exact number but let's say there were about a hundred there in Académie Julian studio. I mean, not all at once, but I mean, the ones that I knew, maybe more. Out of them, there were quite a few friends, and after the war we only met five of them that came back alive. See there were some very bad spots. And we commenced to feel that maybe the arts at that time weren't a thing that would go on, and we'd have to get into practical things. So I started studying bookbinding, and –

MR. FERBRACHé: Excuse me, I want to go back a little bit. You joined the French Army, I understand?

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, I was more or less connected, not exactly a joining of anything, a little bit of interpreting and hanging around a little bit. And no gun fighting, I mean, I wasn't –

MR. FERBRACHé: Were you officially a member of the French forces?

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, I was just connected up in a way, that's all. But I wouldn't say that I was connected

definitely with them, and I don't like to have that said, because after all, you go through a thing like that, you see and the men who are in it are something. The men who are just hanging around are not so much, because I could avoid things. But my buddy [Marcel Roche] was closely in there and I hung as close to him as I could while he was going through it, you see, I had to move along with him and do what I could, and I could interpret. So that part is not a very happy part.

MR. FERBRACHé: No.

MR. OLDFIELD: See, the things there, you see, when the first gas came over, it was pretty bad because everybody was caught, and the airplanes they had in those days, the enemy, you see, they looked like these Curtis chicken coops, you know, came over and threw off reels of barbed wire and it tangled the men who had no masks or anything who were caught in this mustard stuff, you know. It's a pretty, something you like to forget, you see, entirely.

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes. My uncle was in the American forces and he was caught in mustard gas.

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, when the American's came over, that changed the picture because they were all eager and they had spirit that did a whole lot. My brother was one of them, and it was very odd, he couldn't manage to get to Paris. So I went to see about it, and I didn't know what to do. So I went to the Stars and Stripes, and it's very odd how small the world can get. While I was there asking a lawyer what could be done, because my brother was in Epinal, you see. He was working on truck motors, supposed to be for the [German] Goliaths [bombs] that came over France. He was a motor mechanic, and they set spent Goliaths on trucks, but they needed to keep the boys in there, and they could never get a leave. So while I was talking to this lawyer he said, "Well, we'll fix that up." I heard the name, somebody just said, "Well, McClatchy is not here today, but he'll be here tomorrow." So I didn't think I had any business and I went over to that desk and I said, "I heard the name McClatchy. Could that be Leo McClatchy?" They said, "Yes, that's who it is." And I said, "That's a Sacramento [Sacramento Bee family] boy where I come from." And there you are how the world was, and Leo was Captain in there, and after that I had no trouble with my needs to get my brother to Paris once and a while. And that was that part when the Americans came. See, I remember the first time that they came there. They cleared out barracks for them and they were well received. They called them the "Sammies". They were well received and they came with these felt hats on, you know, but the French were very happy to have them. That really did something, that started something going and the allies won out.

MR. FERBRACHé: Were you able to do any art at all during the war years?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no, none at all. The only art that was done I think was by the artists that had been made prisoners. But the worst part of being made prisoner was it might have been discovered that you were a deserter, and when you got back, why that was it. You were taken care of as a deserter, not necessarily shot, but I mean it was a very bad name and you were ostracized. You see, that's all, a Frenchmen is that way. If you just let him down, why he doesn't forgive very easily.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you take up art again right after the war? In France?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, right after the war, and that's when I got in with the Salon d' Automne. We were all going to do it again, of course, I was doing bookbinding at the same time and I stayed with that until I got here in San Francisco.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you study bookbinding under someone there?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I went with a very good bookbinder and he told me that it takes four years, and he said, "What we do here, the boys take the pushcart for three years." And he said, "If you pay the tuition sum like in the old time days, we put you on the bench right away." And that is what I did. I paid the sum and he looked at my fingers and twisted them around and he said, "All right, you go with the finisher." So I was an assistant to the finisher. I mean when the books came along at certain stages I would pick them up and they'd go on to the finisher, you see. But I didn't know what a book was. And I had it in my mind that I was going to learn what a book was, so I used to sit with the women and try to learn how to sew the books, you see –

MR. FERBRACHé: Most French books at that time, I understand, came out with paper wrappers and if you wanted them bound –

MR. OLDFIELD: That's right.

MR. FERBRACHé: – you had to take them to a –

MR. OLDFIELD: They were called "brochures", then you would take them to a binder.

MR. FERBRACHé: On your own?

MR. OLDFIELD: On your own, and you'd get the kind of bind you want. Now the commonest kind of bind we had there was called a "bradelle", it was buckskin what they call here, you know, that's a temporary bind to hold the pages. But a good bind was always Morocco, and that's what the French are good in – Morocco. I hear that the English are best in parchment, that nobody can equal them.

MR. FERBRACHé: Vellum.

MR. OLDFIELD: Vellum, yes. Well vellum we consider was made from calf's hide, and parchment from sheep, I mean that's what we consider, I don't know what vellum really is myself, but I know that, see, that's mostly what the old manuscripts were made of. See, the French are good in Morocco, they'll make anything out of Morocco, and the Morocco is a fine leather. But that's all you learn –

MR. FERBRACHé: That's goatskin?

MR. OLDFIELD: That's goatskin, and to soften it up they run a herd of sheep over it, you know, but then you get it, you get it in colors that are very, very beautiful and strong. And the leather is nice to work because it cuts down. It's something, you see, you have to pare that off. "Pare" is the French word for it. It's slicing it off and you have to hold it on a block of marble, you see, and you go under your fingers to do that. I've seen them do it here and they do it the opposite way. But we were taught to go with a sharp knife under our fingers, you see, which I don't think is dangerous at all. Because I mean, you see, you have to slice that till the edge in order to paste it down on the cardboard. You go along, but I never found any difficulty going with that sharp knife under my fingers. It never bothered me, and it's a better way because you come in at yourself. The way I've seen here, they go out from it, so if you get too thin there, you can tear it like that. Now that's just an objection because I heard the same thing about Frenchmen who use bucksaws over there to cut, and they'll tell you an American saw is no good. I mean, it's just a matter, and they'll tell you our horseshoes are no good. One man, it takes five men to shoe a horse over there, and they'll tell you when the Americans come over there, yes, and during World War I they came over there, their horses were always casting their shoes. But you can't get around it because that's the habit they have. They don't know how to cut with a straight saw, but this big bucksaw, it's a matter of, as I say, in the matter of bookbinding you learn one way, and you do it that way, and the other way, if you've learned the way that I told you, you think the other way is not so good, that's all.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you work as a bookbinder then in Paris?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I worked, I did. I set up and it went pretty well until, like everything else, the type of mind that I have, one day I said, "What am I doing with this stuff? I want to paint." I didn't throw it out the window, I just let it stay there and I didn't touch it any more.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you do any tooling of designs on books and so on?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I didn't work in that. I had little tools that I made pressed work with a hot tool. You see I wouldn't work with the gilding and things like that because the gilder's art was considered there something else, and you had to go into a shop where they did gilding. And the old tooling that's what they did because in those days we just did the book. What I learned to do was another kind of engraving on the book with a hot, small tool, and different things. And I could put the design on and then discover some sort of color that I could put in there that would work, that would stay, would stick, because on this leather when it is shined up, I mean, before you decorate it, it has to be shined up and taken that way. You see I never worked fancy for myself. To make a good decoration I never used Morocco. I just used goatskin, the natural goat, and I had my own way of doing it. I felt my own way that was all right for what I did. I don't think I could compete with the ones who had had long years in Morocco.

MR. FERBRACHé: So you went back to art. Did you attend school again or just –

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I didn't. I got into the Salons, you see, I think it was about five years I was with the Salon d'Automne. I mean I was accepted, I wasn't exactly what you'd call a member, I mean, but I was accepted in there every time I sent. And then of course that was in 1924 when I came back here to the United States.

MR. FERBRACHé: You came directly to San Francisco? Or did you –

MR. OLDFIELD: When I left there – I commenced to get homesick, that's the trouble, after all these years I felt an urge that I wanted to come home. And I brought what I thought was necessary, books and things – I was allowed a square meter, a wooden box of a square meter, and I had some paintings along with me. So I got the boat, the "Leviathan," and the Leviathan had been, I don't know, some German Crown Wilhelm something. And on it was very funny, there was a Jewish boy in my room and a German boy who tended to our, made our beds, who had been on that ship in some capacity in the war. And he used to get mad because it was the Kaiser's birthday or

something, and this boy and myself, this boy was named Golden, and he was a nice chap, he was bringing over, oh, what was his name? The books that were burned on New York dock, you know the writer? Well, anyhow, he had bought in Paris through London seven of these books, he said, “Will you do me a favor? Will you slip some of these into your suitcase?”

MR. FERBRACHé: Things like Henry Miller’s things or – ?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, it wasn’t Henry Miller, it was a famous writer –

MR. FERBRACHé: Erotic type things?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no. But anyhow I did that. And he said, “By the way, you’re a painter aren’t you?” and I said, “Yes.” He said, “Got any paintings?” You know it was very odd, so I took him down to the hold and I opened up the box and picked out one he wanted and he gave me ten dollars. Now ten dollars, see I was counting in francs, I thought it was five times that. In those days, you see, I mean, after the war, it was much more, and for me that was the biggest price I ever got. And that’s why I remember his name. And I did take the books for him, and when we got to the dock I gave him the books. It happened there was nothing wrong with them at all, so nothing happened.

But I had met people on board ship. There was also a woman there who wanted me to stay in New York. She said, “Here, I’ll send you to a hotel and I like what you’re talking about. I can use you, I have an agency. You come and I’ll be sure that you can be of great use there. And it will be alright, I like what you’ve got.” She didn’t see any of my paintings or anything like that, but heard what I was talking about, you see.

Well it was very funny when I once got on the dock, over on one side people were drinking their champagne that they had, and I was fighting the fellow there to get my pictures out, and they wouldn’t let me go. I wanted to catch a train. I said, “If I don’t go to California now I never will get there. If I stay in New York –” That was it. And I had this fellow, I asked for the inspector because I had everything written by the Consul in Paris to let me go, and he wouldn’t do it. So he came around and he said, “You slip two dollars in my pocket,” and I got mad of course, and then I thought –

MR. FERBRACHé: That was the immigration officer?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, that was for the, you know where stuff comes in.

MR. FERBRACHé: Customs?

MR. OLDFIELD: It’s Customs, yes, and that was it. And I supposed that’s the usual bribe. I suppose the people sitting over there drinking champagne knew that, you see. I didn’t know it, didn’t think about it, and if I had had any sense I would have done it, given him something in the first place, knowing that that was the thing to do. There’s nothing wrong about it. Afterwards, when I thought it about it later, when I got on the train, I said, “What’s wrong with me that I can’t think of these things? Everywhere that I’ve ever been people expect a tip or a bribe. There’s nothing wrong in this case for pictures.”

MR. FERBRACHé: So you came to San Francisco again?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I went to Sacramento. And it’s very odd, I got there and it was morning. There had been an old hotel there, that had been the marvel of the days of the rich steamboats, when they ran up the river, called the Western Hotel. It was on pretty near the waterfront. Of course, the city had grown, and that had become the slummiest place, and I said, “Well, here’s a chance for me to sleep in that hotel.” When I got there and registered, I could see it was just a place to hang out for the down-and-outers. But the room that I got into had great, big, high ceilings, it must have been fourteen feet high. A great tremendous bed, everything heavy furniture, and with all that I didn’t sleep so well. And then I took a taxi as soon as I could and got home and even my people didn’t know me. I came here with one of these Parisian overcoats, you know, with the flaring skirts on it, and a French hat on my head and a cane and spats. It took me some time to get back into overalls again, you know, but I came over here with ten hats.

MR. FERBRACHé: You must have done pretty well though in those years that you were painting then?

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, see, I lived with a girl who was in the hat business, and she was older than I was, she was a very fine person. I stayed with her until she died. She was eighteen years older than I was, but that’s how I understood a great deal of art. [French common-law wife, Jehanne Roche].

MR. FERBRACHé: You had painted in various parts of France, in villages?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I was in Normandy. I’ve been to Brittany a great deal. And I went to the Pyrenees and stayed there quite a while, around Pau, and up in the higher Pyrenees. See the Basques were just on the other side.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you paint in the same village that Gauguin did in Brittany?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no, I went on the side called Argelès. Argelès, let's see –

MR. FERBRACHé: Didn't Van Gogh paint there at Argelès?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I think they painted on the Rhone side, at Arles, away over from where I was. You see, the place where I was there was Tarbes on one side and there was Pau on the other. Pau, you see, is in that part of the Pyrenees. I went up in the High Pyrenees after that and got in a place called Pontacq. Now Pontacq is only a few miles from Lourdes, the sacred city there, or the sacred town with its churches and whatnot where the miracles have happened. And I spent a season there just looking at the miracles and whatnot and going up and down, and staying at this place called Pontacq where there was nothing but shoemakers and tanneries. It was, there was one hotel there, and then this little auberge, what they call it, where I stayed. There was a smattering of houses and probably two or three hundred people there. And I painted there. I got there in February. Now we think that France is a pretty southern country but here there was snow on the streets and I had to keep warm because I'm cold anyhow all the time. I painted and made lots of drawings of the people there and they were very interesting. The shoemakers, such as they were, you see, it's all handmade, they made mountain climbers shoes. And when I got through with that, I went back to Paris, and that was getting near the end anyhow, at that time. And I don't think, there's probably a couple more years before I left. That's about it. Then my life here commenced, as I say, I left a country that had ready-made pictures in it, the atmosphere was down, heavy and all seemed to melt nicely into one thing. And I got here in Sacramento and I felt I was looking through a microscope at everything, everything shown was clean like somebody had been out polishing the landscape.

MR. FERBRACHé: The bright, clear air of upper California.

MR. OLDFIELD: It was bright air and it took me a whole year to get accustomed to that. I mean, I tried to paint a little bit but it wouldn't work, and then finally it did at the end of a year. Also, the language was difficult at first, but by a year, things were going, and I could commence to adjust myself to this feeling of polished-off landscape, it was so bright. I supposed if I went back to Europe now it would look awfully dirty to me there. But nevertheless, there it's so old, everything is a ready-made picture, and here we have to work a little bit harder. I guess we've got to find it within what's out there, and it's not ready-made. The artists here work, and they have to find it. If we miss on it sometimes it's because, I guess, it's our own mind that's not assisting us and we just have to work hard, that's all.

MR. FERBRACHé: Some of the people in Sacramento told me that you taught them up there.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I went up there. I was here in the Art School [California School of Fine Arts, C.S.F.A.] for seventeen years.

MR. FERBRACHé: You didn't do any teaching in Sacramento right away?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no I don't think I did. No, no.

MR. FERBRACHé: Not at the Crocker Art Gallery or Kingsley Art Club, or –

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no. I taught there I remember, but I don't know, I think that came later after I got into art school here, as a job, you see.

MR. FERBRACHé: You came down to San Francisco.

MR. OLDFIELD: I came to San Francisco, how it happened, I was up there in Sacramento, you see, and I built a studio. I built it because, I don't know why. I had a little money on me and my father said, "Here, you take this piece of land that's out there and if you believe in yourself, build a studio and commence something." And I did. I spent it all on that end, of course, maybe I did get around a little bit there and teach, I don't know, I guess I must have. Because then, Ray Boynton came up to see me and he liked the place and he commenced talking about San Francisco. Well I made a couple of trips there but I didn't know anybody anymore, and that means going into restaurants all alone, you see. I didn't know what to order and whatnot. I had come down for my stuff that was in the Customs house and I was alone. I didn't know anybody, and then finally Boynton came up and he talked, got me all excited about things. He asked, "What have I got this studio here for?" Then he went back and I got a telegram from Stackpole.

MR. FERBRACHé: This is Ralph Stackpole, the famous sculptor?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I had met him in France, I had known him there, and he sent me a telegram. He said, "Come on down here and see us, and I'll show you the whole gang." So I went to the city and he took me around. I met everybody, it made me feel like I was back in Paris again and there wasn't much difference in the way that they

conducted themselves. There wasn't any difference from what I knew in Paris, except that it was America. And I got in with all these people and made friends and I went back to Sacramento. And in a little while I packed up everything and moved to San Francisco. I got in this square hotel that was the first, and then I went to the Monkey block, that's Montgomery Block. I remember getting in there, and I didn't have a bed, I had some covers, and I went down the alley and got a fish box, they're five feet long, and dragged it up there, and then found it was kind of hard. So somebody said, "Well you don't have to do that, Oldfield, if you feel out of cash. Somebody's just moved out downstairs, there's a camp cot there, in this vacant room, go and get it." So I got the camp cot and I about froze to death but I found that by putting newspapers on it, it was all right. But things weren't working out very well. Then I commenced to write letters home to get some stuff and I started to set up bookbinding, and had my tools sent to me. As I said, I had hand tools and I only had a big cutter that I just brought the blades and then I had to build a press myself, you know. I went and got a house mover's jack and I got a carpenter to make some heavy timbers, and also the bookbinder's small press that he works his books on. I had the other material that they call the A's. The A's are shaped boards with iron on top on which we back the book. See, here you do it with a machine, but in hand bookbinding you use that. I had to get a thing to screw up, so the carpenter got me an old automobile wheel, you know, and a screw from an old bench vise. And he rigged me up a fine machine out of ironbark wood, you know, six inches square. It was really a marvelous thing, and I could get pressure on that. But I had to build all those things, you see. Then I started –

MR. FERBRACHé: Started bookbinding?

MR. OLDFIELD: I started bookbinding. The artists wanted their journals put up, you know, the things when they'd get news items and whatnot. And I was doing that, and I'd do it for a dollar. It could be quick, because I could work quick in certain things and cheaply, you know, I could put pages in there without any spine on them, stub a little bit of glue on them, put a cover on them, it was good enough. Then I got word from George Holl in Hollywood. He called me up once by phone. He found out where I was and he told me that he had a book to do and whatnot. And he was lonesome down there in a big house, all alone. And George Holl at that time was with Graumann's. And he said he had twenty artists working under him. Anyhow, I went down to see him and he introduced me to Stanley Rose, who had the Satyr Book Shop. And then things commenced to work, I commenced to get books that were very expensive to do, I mean they paid well. I think there are a couple there of Von Stroheim's that I covered for them. But I got a reputation for that. But then again, you see, I wasn't painting. And I just dropped the whole thing again. See, I had a job at the art school at the same time. And that wasn't working too well either.

MR. FERBRACHé: You were teaching in what is now the San Francisco Art Institute?

MR. OLDFIELD: That's right, I went there with Lee Randolph.

MR. FERBRACHé: About what year was it that you started teaching?

MR. OLDFIELD: 1925. Piazzoni was there, Randolph, Mrs. Albright, Constance Macky, and Alice Chittenden –

MR. FERBRACHé: Alice Brown Chittenden?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. Well, Alice Chittenden, that's what we knew. And she was a painter of her day. I remember looking in some of the –

MR. FERBRACHé: She goes back to the 1890s as I recall.

MR. OLDFIELD: I looked at a book of the San Francisco Midwinter Fair [1894] and saw her name in it, they say that's where the Californians start as painters, the exhibition they gave them there, and her name was in it as one of the outstanding artists. I think she did floral pieces and things like that. But I knew her when she was quite elderly. And she was marvelous with children, and they all loved her, and she knew how. But she was there. Now there are several others that were there, I can't recollect very well, and I know that Marian Hartwell was there also. And there was a boy working with her, an assistant and, let's see, I can't remember well now. But anyhow, see, all of those have gone. And it used to be an institution.

MR. FERBRACHé: Was Mary Curtis Richardson [1848-1931] teaching there then? She was a famous woman portrait painter.

MR. OLDFIELD: I don't remember her at all, no. But we had savoir vivre there at that time –

MR. FERBRACHé: Arthur Matthews, was he teaching there?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, he was out, but he used to come there and give us talks. Arthur Matthews, as Stackpole told me, was the old fire eater. He meant business when he did things, and he was a wonderful person, I mean, he fought for art as art should be.

MR. FERBRACHé: He did a lot of early mural work.

MR. OLDFIELD: Well he did one in the Capitol up there you know, it's still on the walls as far as I know.

MR. FERBRACHé: In Sacramento?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. He was well known, and of course he went with a group of artists, like the architects and all that, that were well known here, such as Willis Polk, I believe. You see, I missed all that because I was out of the country, and I missed all that. And I had to grow into it, from what I knew of the people that were in my midst at that time. Well, anyhow, I remember one boy we had there, to show you how it worked, you know, we used to give scholarships. And winners who didn't attend to the scholarship, it was taken away from them. And I remember one day a boy appeared there. A German boy who could hardly speak English, his name was Paul Hans. He was born in Bayreuth, Germany. Of course, he's an American now. But he came there because he wanted to study art in Munich. His father was a tobacconist there in Bayreuth, and he said, "No, I've got a relation in San Francisco who's in ships. You go over there and learn shipping." He sent the kid over here. Of course, it happened at that time in the Palace Hotel, the kitchen was French but the dining room was German. So he went there to the headwaiter and said, "I need a job." He got a job as a busboy. And he appeared shortly at the Art School. That went on, and he got appendicitis. He had no money so we got together on that, and got that fixed up. And when Christmas came around we gave him a box of paints and tuition for six months and he commenced to cry. He said, "Well here I am only a foreigner." But it was a thing, you see, if anybody got sick over there. We had Russian boys, you know, that just came, Arnautoff was one of them, Sazevich was another. There were five or six, and they were housed in a place there to make frames and whatnot, to eke out a little bit. We tried to do things that way. That was the old school, you see, and of course, maybe it's not a profitable way to do. Maybe you don't build up a school, but that was the way it was worked there, and the way I came into it.

MR. FERBRACHé: What were you teaching there?

MR. OLDFIELD: I taught still life mostly, and I started, see, in the beginning, oldsters were put in with students. So I asked Mr. Randolph, "What's this? It's not good form. Why don't you take the seniors in a Saturday class?" That's long before the Museum had it, you know. So I was given that opportunity and the class soon got full of the older people. I found out what they did. They were awfully slow, I saw them once a week, I saw them and they were slow and it took time. But after six or eight months they came up and they did some good work. On the other hand, I went into the classes with the young fellows. They went fast. Oh, they did wonderful things, but at the end of six months they commenced to linger a little bit, so it evened up. What they did, the oldsters, once a week, and the youngsters, they would get tired, painting out you know, because they worked awfully hard, you see. Of course, they only worked six hours to our full day Saturday, included on the other side, you see. And of course, I don't know whether there's any difference there at all. I don't think the intensive study, so called training, does anything because they had, in the beginning there, they used to have plaster casts. And then, after a while, they graduated from that and got into quick sketching, to get used to the figure, and put the things together a little bit. But then you can get in a life class, and it's the same thing all over again. But I don't know, I remember Walt Kuhn saying all that is not necessary. He says if a student can arrive to make three hundred nudes, you know, it takes some time. First thing, you can whack them out in twenty minutes. But to be good you have to be able to stay, to spend a whole week on them. That's what he said. If a student makes three hundred nudes, he'll know how to draw. And maybe he's right. See, I don't know. And after all, if you've got it, you've got it. And if you haven't got it you might develop something. That will take a little bit longer.

MR. FERBRACHé: Were there other famous artists from the East coming out to –?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. Arnold Blanch was the first that had come out here, then Maurice Sterne. And Blanch made quite a figure here. See, by that time I had gone back to New York to see Walt Kuhn. I had work in the Montross Gallery, you know, I expected the –

MR. FERBRACHé: What year was that, that you went back?

MR. OLDFIELD: I guess it was '31. I don't remember whether I did the ship model first or not –

MR. FERBRACHé: For the record, Walt Kuhn visited you in 1928 here in San Francisco?

MR. OLDFIELD: That's right, and got interested and really became a close friend, and wanted to help me enter New York.

MR. FERBRACHé: He was exhibiting here at the Beaux Arts Gallery?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, he had to put up a show, it wasn't a big thing, but he put up a small show when he was here, I think he must have done some work somewhere. You see, he used to take a trip. He was with the Harriman Gallery, I remember he made the Forty-Niner, decorated it, and they took him to Los Angeles.

MR. FERBRACHé: The Forty-Niner, what was that?

MR. OLDFIELD: The Forty-Niner, Overland, or whatever it was –

MR. FERBRACHé: Oh, the train?

MR. OLDFIELD: The train, yes. And he said, “I fixed this up with the brightest colors and any elderly woman can go in there without a veil.” He said, “If you don’t know how to put colors together they’ll become gray.” He said he went into one of the railroad shops there, and they showed him the terrible tapestry. All melted down into grays, you know, beiges, beige color. He had everything torn apart and re-upholstered in his own way, with these very brilliant colors. So that’s what he did. And he used to go down there, and he used to see some of the movie actresses that he liked.

MR. FERBRACHé: In Hollywood?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. He was acquainted with quite a few. And from that he’d always sneak up, that’s what he called it, he’d sneak up here.

MR. FERBRACHé: Would he do some painting while he was here?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, he would do a little bit of painting, that’s what –

MR. FERBRACHé: Portraits or what?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no, he did still life and some landscapes, that sort of thing and not much. I mean, when he could do them. I think that’s what he was doing here at that time. He’d come up with a few things he wanted to put in a show, and anyhow, he came to see me. And then, from then on I went back there.

MR. FERBRACHé: You visited him back there?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, and he thought that Montross wanted to hang on to me to do something. But he just warned me, he said, “Well you might like it, and you might not, I’ll just warn you, because if you get a gallery like that, and you’re asked to do twenty-five paintings when you don’t feel like it, you’ve got to do them.” So anyhow, I just thought it over, and I was recently married and I just said, “Well it’s best for me to go back home and be a provincial painter.” I mean, it didn’t work out very well for my mind. Of course, that never hurt Kuhn any, he didn’t care for that pursuit. But anyhow, that was an opportunity, if I wanted a good opportunity, and I let it go. But those things can’t be helped. I mean, what you think at one time, you think differently at another time, so that’s why we’re here today.

MR. FERBRACHé: Do you remember when the Blue Four [Lyonel Feininger, Paul Klee, Alexei Jawlensky, and Vasily Kandinsky] were showing here?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, yes. Let’s see –

MR. FERBRACHé: Feininger I think was one.

MR. OLDFIELD: Feininger, yes, and Klee was another I think.

MR. FERBRACHé: Paul Klee.

MR. OLDFIELD: Klee. I was trying to think of a lady’s name –

MR. FERBRACHé: Scheyer?

MR. OLDFIELD: Madame Scheyer, that was it. [Emmy (Galka) Scheyer (1889–1945)]

MR. FERBRACHé: They showed it at the Oakland Art Museum.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, and then there was – who was the Russian who was there? His wife stayed around here in San Francisco quite a time. It was the time Dixon was still alive and he –

MR. FERBRACHé: Max Ernst I believe was here too.

MR. OLDFIELD: Max Ernst? Well I don’t know –

MR. FERBRACHé: Henri Matisse came here I think –

MR. OLDFIELD: I was at the art school then and we received him and gave him a little something in the library.

At that time he had his nice red hair and his red beard and he was awfully nice. See, at that time most of us had been in France – Macky [Spencer Macky] had been there, Randolph had been there and Stackpole. And of course that made a little unity and the Frenchmen would come over and see us. Now Jacques élie Faure was there also, and élie Faure looked at Mrs. Beatrice Ryan and thought she was a remarkably beautiful woman. That's something, you see, we think of the French with the French women. But I've heard over there, also, that remark that the ambassador's wives, and things, are really something. You know, not what we think commonly, that every French girl is just lovely. We have it here, we have it here.

MR. FERBRACHé: They admire American beauty?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, well, we had élie Faure, I mean, it was quite remarkable, but he came out, you see. What I remember of him was mostly that, he was around [C.S.F.A.] there, and of course he told us, "Don't read my book in English, read it in French." There were others, but these were the most outstanding that we had in our midst there, you see.

MR. FERBRACHé: You taught at the [C.S.F.A.] art school from 1925 to –?

MR. OLDFIELD: Up to the time of the war.

MR. FERBRACHé: Until '41?

MR. OLDFIELD: I guess it was '42, wasn't it '42? Now there was Lucien Labaudt. We were all together at that time. Labaudt called me up and said, "Come on over. Here's the thing I just got from the shipyard here, how they teach you over there with tracing paper to be a draftsman. Anybody that's anybody gets out of that [C.S.F.A.] school and goes into the shipyard." He said, "I'm going in, do you want to be with me?" And we got together on it, and I went to a ship fitter's school and that's how I got in it, see, we just left the [C.S.F.A.] and I remember the last day.

MR. FERBRACHé: Left the Art Institute [then the C.S.F.A.]?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. The last day that we were there together, I remember the class there, that the boys were all going into the Marines and the girls were going into the WACS or WAVES. I was going into the shipyard and we all hugged each other and went off. It was very remarkable because one of those boys on the front was in the Marines. He was at Iwo Jima, and would make drawings. I said, "How could he have done it?" In the days that I remember the war, nobody had enough left in them. I mean the distress was so they couldn't think, they just couldn't think.

MR. FERBRACHé: If I may go back a little bit, it was during the depression that the government began to hire artists and –

MR. OLDFIELD: Depression? Oh, that's PWAP.

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes, you worked on the Coit Tower [1933-1934], Telegraph Hill, San Francisco, California?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, that came in there. Dr. Heil had some charge of it here.

MR. FERBRACHé: You went to a meeting at the deYoung Museum?

MR. OLDENFIELD: I went there, we did several things, and I think I was asked to go out to cover some hospital. I had a little bit of trouble there because the doctor didn't want it.

MR. FERBRACHé: To do a mural or –?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, it was of some ships, it was one of these military affairs, and it disagreed with him, and I went back and told Heil that the doctors didn't care to be molested.

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you do some drawings or anything on that PWA program first?

MR. OLDFIELD: The thing was, yes, it came up that the Coit Tower came into view.

MR. FERBRACHé: That was about January 1934.

MR. OLDFIELD: I don't remember exactly when I went there, it must have been '34 because I went to Logan that year to teach in the summer class.

MR. FERBRACHé: Logan College [Utah Agricultural College]?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, it was. The head artist there [Calvin Fletcher], who wrote me a letter, said he would like to have me come back with him. He had been out here and he looked around and he knew people, but anyhow it was that year. Now there was a meeting at which this Stafford Duncan and Dr. Heil were –

MR. FERBRACHé: Charles Stafford Duncan?

MR. OLDFIELD: Charles Stafford Duncan and Dr. Heil were the important ones in this meeting. Now there's everybody there: Stackpole and all the whole crowd were doing frescoes with Arnautoff and they were set. They had the bottom walls in there, so I –

MR. FERBRACHé: Fresco?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, so I was in the entrance room and outside there was a little waiting room. Upstairs there were others. Rinaldo Cuneo was out there and William Gaw was out there and Moya del Pino was out there, and a few others, and that's all I had on my mind. And I was called in, I went in there and Dr. Heil asked me if I had anything on my mind. I said, "Yes, I have. How about all these guys are fresco painters. How about we oil painters? What are we going to do?" He said, "You've got a good idea there [oil murals]." So they told me, "You take the lobby. Have you got your men?" I said, "Yes, they're out there." So I went out there and they were sitting and talking. I said, "Come on in here and don't say anything but yes."

MR. FERBRACHé: A couple of assistants that you had?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, no, there was Moya del Pino, Rinaldo Cuneo and Gaw. So they went in there and said, "Yes." And when I got out of there I said, "We got the lobby." So it happened that Cuneo did two, del Pino did one, I did one, because it happened that Gaw had some work, so that he couldn't do it at that time. See, he was unable to carry it out, so Cuneo did two murals. And then I finished all the lunettes up there around, over the elevator doors, you know. They're circular, above the doors, and the doors are cut square and there's these circles up there, I did seagulls and stuff like that. And we painted it up to suit ourselves.

MR. FERBRACHé: You did a panel showing shipping, you showed me a photograph.

MR. OLDFIELD: That's it, yes, ships. We all did.

MR. FERBRACHé: The San Francisco wharf and ships alongside.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I think it was all shipping, but each one went his way because Cuneo was very good at Bay pictures. Now he was the one that said, "Paint the Bay with lots of red in it." I was amazed that he felt that way. He was a tug and barge man, he'd been everything, but he was an art student at the same time with Piazzoni. But later in life he got into tug and barge, and he knew the water. He was a handsome Italian, he'd been on the battleship Oregon when it went around the Horn.

MR. FERBRACHé: Oh, was he?

MR. OLDFIELD: and stood night watch before Santiago Bay and was the man chosen, one of the boatmen to take off Admiral Cervera [Almirante Pascual Cervera y Topete]. He had Admiral Cervara's soup tureen, I don't know how he ever got it. He was one of the men chosen from each ship that went to take off Admiral Cervera.

MR. FERBRACHé: The Spanish Admiral, when they captured Santiago Bay?

MR. OLDFIELD: That's right. And he stood watch there. The Battleship Oregon was chased by something off Chile and then it got around the Horn, or through the Magellan Straits I guess it was, and they got up to Brazil. It was a white ship, you see and overnight, the boys went down and painted it gray, and then they were soon up in Santiago in line. He had come all the way from San Francisco to Cuba to the battle of Santiago. And he was chosen, and I've seen pictures of him as a gob of the day. And he said he cheated, because he told them he was much older than what he should be. And he had the aft cannon. It was a small cannon, I think a three inch cannon, starboard of the aft cannon. He said, "When I got back here [San Francisco], I had friends down in the commercial district, I had ten sacks of potatoes under that gun, just placed around there, and I sold them for the officer's mess." And he, from that, there was waterfront shell-back there, an old shell-back that was a tattooer. Of course he didn't do anything you know, I mean he was a good tattooer but he couldn't make a drawing. So he used to ask Rinaldo to come there and make a drawing in ink. So Rinaldo got interested in drawing, and what he told me, he said, "Well that's all right, the guy made a stiff flag." I'm the one that came on and made the ripple in the flag. And he had a big battleship here on his chest.

MR. FERBRACHé: Rinaldo had?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, full sailing ship. He said, "I had that put on by a good professional because it's part of the trade." He said, "I used to put on butterflies, a pair of butterflies for fifty cents." In those days the sailors, you

know, in the, where they were –

MR. FERBRACHé: Rinaldo took up tattooing too?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, he became a fine tattooer. And I was very interested in hearing his tales about it. He said he tried to tattoo a fireman. You see, they had stokers in those days with coal, and this fireman wanted one on his belly, a tattoo of some sort, and Rinaldo broke his needles. He said, "We used to work with the baby needles we bought in Brazil, or somewhere. And they were set on an angle, and we'd set them in a piece of wood. They'd just dig in and break up a little bit of skin to let the ink go in there and that's the way it was done." It was all done by hand. He said this fellow had such a tough stomach from being in front of a furnace, he just broke every needle and it wouldn't take.

MR. FERBRACHé: To get back to the Coit Tower, you were all working –

MR. OLDFIELD: We worked there, the first job done was Victor Arnautoff's. He was the first, and of course anybody that did a job there was celebrated. That got us into trouble because there was a person in charge of the Tower who didn't understand our celebrations. But whenever everybody got through with a job, it was celebrated with sherry, we could buy, I mean, that was the thing, and that went fine.

MR. FERBRACHé: As everyone finished his panel or –

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, his work.

MR. FERBRACHé: Then you'd have a little party with some –

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, it wouldn't be a party, we'd just, somebody would break out a gallon of wine or something like that and they'd have crackers or something, just a little thing. I remember Zakheim working back there, he was trying to put on charcoal outlines and he went to pounce it on, you see, and he would fill that place up with charcoal dust that would come. Because with the others, they did it, but they used to rub it. Rivera had a system of rubbing the charcoal, you see, to get the first imprint of charcoal on the walls for when the plasterer came along. He prepared a square meter. A fellow like Stackpole, you know, could work fast, and they'd often work two square meters. But they had to be joined the next day, I mean, because there's a lap in there. And Stackpole was very nice, he'd have all the students come up there, anybody came up there, students or whatnot, "Here's a little bit of paint, now get busy." Now what we had there –

MR. FERBRACHé: Did he have some of the students do a little painting in the area?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, in the fresco he'd give them a little part to do, he'd say, "Matt [Matt Barnes] has just fixed that place down there, you get down there and do it." Now in the back we had a big table, we all had the same cutter, we were using oil, they were using fresco, and we had a grinder back there.

MR. FERBRACHé: Some of the artists were using fresco paint?

MR. OLDFIELD: All of them, except us four.

MR. FERBRACHé: Except you four –

MR. OLDFIELD: And Jane Berlandina was working egg tempera, and you mustn't forget, Labaudt had one of the most striking things. He did the stairway, and he had everybody in it: Piazzoni and the cop on the beat, the mailman, the negro porter that was down on Geary Street that opened the doors. He had everybody, he didn't forget one person, everybody, all his friends were in it, and that happened to be on a stairway. And of course with a fresco if you scratch up with your thumbnail you rip it off. It doesn't gauge too deep, the paint lasts years, thousands of years I guess. But you see, the people who used the stairway had scratched it all over, and they had to shut that down. Now the lobby has an elevator in it. I haven't been up there for years, I don't know. The only thing I do know is that this Haig Patigian monument with the fireman was supposed to piddle water out of the hose, you know, it was to go in the place out front as a finishing job for the Coit tower –

MR. FERBRACHé: A sculpture?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. But there was such a laugh about it, a kick about it. This fireman holding a woman and another fireman with a hose and out of that hose would come a fountain of water. They put it down in Washington Square in front of the St. Peter's and Paul's Church there. But now somebody else has come along, and I guess it's the Columbus Day crowd, and I hear that they've got Columbus sticking in there. I haven't seen it, I don't know, but that's what's there now. Of course, I think the hole that was there with marble around it was good enough. With a little water in it, it would have been fine. Or you could have a little spout, you know, of water, like you see some of the things in Versailles. Just spouts of water that as the sun would hit it, it reflects a rainbow. It would have been simple like that, but putting statues on the thing, I just can't see it. I mean that

round circle there with water working would be much more beautiful than somebody's statue.

MR. FERBRACHé: To go on with the Coit Tower, you were doing your work in oil?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes.

MR. FERBRACHé: After doing cartoons first?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, we worked hard on that, I mean we took it down in Cuneo's studio and it was worked on the wall there and it was taken down and rolled up.

MR. FERBRACHé: It was on canvas?

MR. OLDFIELD: It was on canvas. And then we had to get, there are certain kinds of housepainters, I guess you call them decorators, and they would marouflé the back with white lead and Venetian turpentine. See, that made, and then they'd go over the surface with a roller, and that sticks, because once that's on, there are no dents. They get all the bumps out of it and whatnot.

MR. FERBRACHé: They'd roll your canvas on by that method?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, marouflagé is what they call it.

MR. FERBRACHé: So you did your Coit Tower oils separate, away from the Tower?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, then after we got through, we waxed it to hold it down, you know, I mean this varnish that you call wax varnish, it takes it down a little bit. I mean, to keep it matte, because you see, when you paint outside, it won't go so well with the room. There might have been a little touchup there, but I think very little. Then we put this wax varnish on, whatever they call the stuff. And that's to keep it matte, to go in with the light, since there was a lamp in there we didn't like. And there was in there also a plaque for Haig Patigian. See, they hadn't finished the thing at all. I mean, it had been a year, but they were just getting ready to finish it because we were coming in there. I know we had trouble because they got in the way of some of our work that had to be moved. And they had to put their materials on the outside somewhere, instead of the lobby, that was held out for us, now that was it. The next thing came along, see, in that time –

MR. FERBRACHé: There was some controversy over the Coit Tower at the time in the newspapers, wasn't there, some sort of Red-baiting or something like that?

MR. OLDFIELD: There was a controversy, yes, you're referring to the little Communistic emblem? Is that what you're thinking?

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes. The *Examiner*, Hearst.

MR. OLDFIELD: I think it was Clifford Wight, who had been with Rivera, and he depicted a worker, it was one of these small panels that they gave to these top students. He hadn't yet his shingle out as an artist. On the worker's tobacco, you know, the Bull Durham tag, on that, he had put a sickle and hammer, see. Now it's a little thing, but that was discovered. We couldn't get our pay, because to get our pay we had to go down to a notary public, and the PWA is Treasury, you see. We had to go there and notarize our signature. But it came up, and I don't know who told us that you won't get paid until that emblem is painted out –

MR. FERBRACHé: You weren't paid during, you were paid at the end of the project?

MR. OLDFIELD: We were paid weekly, I forget how much, maybe forty dollars a week, I don't remember. Anyhow, this thing here, they told us, "Until that's removed, you don't get paid, none of you." So not one of us moved. They said, "Who did it?" We wouldn't tell, and that was against us, and it got us a lot of trouble. Finally they couldn't get the artists to paint it out so they hired house painters to paint it out. I mean, just a little bit of a thing, the artists wouldn't tell who it was. Of course when they went after Wight and when they did get him, he was out. He was hiding someplace in San Francisco. They discovered he was a Canadian, he wasn't an American at all. He had been living here all these years and was not a native at all. He was getting this money, American money, as an American. Something must have come up, you see, that's all I know. We all refused to paint out anything, and we wouldn't tell where he was, we didn't know. After all, there are lots of places where you can go, I imagine he went back to Canada. I don't know after that, but I know that they didn't get a hold of him because nobody would say anything. They tried to penalize us and he wasn't there. But we got our money.

MR. FERBRACHé: There was some picketing I think or something going on –

MR. OLDFIELD: Well, I don't know what it was, but anyhow Roosevelt at that time had had his man out here, whoever the man was, to get us.

MR. FERBRACHé: Edward Bruce, was it, who had been an artist in San Francisco?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I remember Bruce. Yes. But he wasn't the one that was sent out. We were given a talk because in his mind, in the President's mind, if we sent personal letters it's a crank. We were advised to get an artists and writers union, and if we had any grievance then, through that, we should be heard, we wouldn't be cranks. And that started the Artists and Writers Union. And that goes back to some of the names that you have in the literary world. I mean, because the artists didn't have much of a chance, because they don't use the verb, you see, we're not writers. If we do write, we write letters or something like that, but I mean, the art of writing we don't know, that's not our art. And we had nothing to say in meetings and everything, and we were just, it became more of the, handled by the, I mean the words. Of course we could all be members, I got the card around here somewhere. It's got punch holes in it like you use on a street car. No punches, I never went –

MR. FERBRACHé: You never went to the meetings?

MR. OLDFIELD: That year, you see, I left for Logan, Utah. I think it was under Governor Frank F. Merriam we had the big bloody Thursday, do you remember?

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes, the longshoremen's strike [1934].

MR. OLDFIELD: The longshoremen, and out in the Bay there were ships with some of the college boys, I heard as strikebreakers.

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes.

MR. OLDFIELD: And it happened that all the little businessmen, people like myself and the artists, were not for the trigger happy Home Guard coming in there, that's what happened, you see –

MR. FERBRACHé: The National Guard, you mean?

MR. OLDFIELD: The National Guard, yes. When soldiers come in, you can respect a soldier. What I mean is a regular, there's something about the regular that's regular. And the other is not looked up to, it's just another citizen carrying a gun. Of course they mean well all right, but that was it. And I had been in Logan, Utah.

MR. FERBRACHé: Excuse me, Mr. Oldfield, we're coming to the end of the reel, and I want to switch it back and then we'll turn it over –

[END OF SIDE 1.]

MR. FERBRACHé: We are continuing on this side of the reel with Mr. Otis Oldfield and the things that he recalls. To continue, did you have something more to say about the Coit Tower, or did you wish to go on to the other, the WPA following that?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I think that's about finished. I was out in Logan, Utah at that time, I had left in the summer to take a job in the Utah State Agricultural College, it now has another name because they have gotten so good that they – I met Larry Gould there, who went to Antarctica, and I made friendships there, and the next year I managed to get Stackpole interested, and he went back, but the trouble was he didn't like their indoor studio. He said students should get out of there, and when he did, he got the people out on the land. That's remarkable, because here, before he left for France, with the same idea, he said, "I'm starting the "Udder School." He had bought a ranch up there in Sonoma, and did things pertaining to the ranch. And of course, the cows, therefore, udders, you know and whatnot. You see, there's something about him that likes the soil. And I don't think he's ever managed soil, except that one time, and I don't think as a farmer he was very successful, I mean, that's bringing back the reason why he wanted to get students on the outside in Logan. I think the person who asked us there is still alive. Here's the picture, I should know his name [Calvin Fletcher]. I just sit here and forget things so easily, you know what I mean, I don't go out very much, and if you don't meet people, you lose contact just the same as losing track of your own language, if you speak another language. That's what happens.

No, not the Coit Tower, but one of those big things that happened here when I was in Art School. A little while back I was going out with one of the girls there. It happened this way, when I first went to the Art Institute, it was in the old Mark Hopkins mansion when I first came down here, and I was asked to give a talk to the students. At that time, as I say, my English wasn't too good and some thought I was a little British or something like that. It happened that there as a group there of young people, students in their midst, and when Macky would come around they'd walk out, they felt so good. So I gave this talk and to my surprise, I'd never talked before in my life to people, and they asked me to give my views on art. So I asked for a piece of paper, and I turned my back on the audience and I did what I could the best way I could. And I was told about it later, the boys got me on the outside and they said, "Well, we like your color zone idea and we'd like you to show us something about it." Because in this audience I saw that they weren't all students, there were some quite old. I knew that I had been

taken on, you see, and I had to give a talk to other artists, and I was kind of afraid of that. I didn't think I knew too much about it myself, compared with what I was looking at, you know, I mean, it was all right with the students, I wasn't afraid of that. So these boys said they would like a session, and I said, "I have no studio." "Well, we'll take care of that." One of the girls said, "I've got a studio" and that was Clifford Wight's studio. It was down on Sacramento Street where Macky commenced before he ever got in the art school at all. He commenced there with his wife, teaching. And she used to bring the baby in a suitcase and leave the suitcase open in the studio, there, on one of the chairs, and go around helping her husband teach. So it was one of the common studios, and they were quite big, and the students had gotten together and built a fireplace and whatnot, and in it they all came. I didn't know how much to charge, so I had somebody pass a hat. Of course, one of the girls said that was no way to do, and they organized the thing that I got a little something out of it. But it happened that first night, the girl I married had listened in on me. She never went in there, see, because Macky used to go in there and talk about the skeleton. He'd talk all sorts of things, holding the hand of the skeleton, you see, they weren't interested because it wasn't anatomy, it was just holding the hand of the skeleton and reminiscing about a great many things, probably like we're doing now. But anyhow, I heard the whole thing, and she reported to me what I said. Well, somebody asked me if, "I'm supposed to paint with a brush?" and I said, "You can put paint on with an old shoe for that matter, it doesn't make any difference how you put it on, but whether you put it on right." And that's brought up to me, you see, and anyhow, she was one that went to this class. Well, of course, when I came back for real, living here, I got into the art school. I mean, I just hung around there. It was a temporary building on California Streets. I just hung around there and didn't do much. But it did me good, because they'd ask me to help somebody and I would, see, I just hung around. Rather than going to a movie, or something like that, you should do those things. So they gave me the summer class, "You take the summer class the school is not going to have it this year." So they gave me the material and all that, the stools and whatnot, and said it would be called the California School of Fine Arts [Fall semester, 1925, new building at 800 Chestnut Street, San Francisco]. And I had to go out and hire a studio, and I got two other girls to take over the office job for me, and to hire models. That's how I started, and when the school opened, I went in with it. Well, of course, Stackpole noticed I was going around with this girl [Helen Clark]. And he came to me one day, and he said, "Well, if you ever get married Otis, we'll set you up, we'll give you a wedding." So I went and told Donna, about marrying Helen, we'd been going together for a little bit, and she said, "That's all right." So the students got busy, they got Reverend J. Henry Ohlhoff, he was supposed to be a tough guy. He was a friend of Raymond Boynton's because Boynton painted outside of his church of St. Mary the Virgin, I think, that little brown shingled church on Union Street. He painted a fresco there, on the outside. And, by the way, later on, a Peruvian family came up here with one of the Virgin statues that had been stolen out of a church from the fifteenth century. I don't know just how it was, they had to get it out. I asked Revered Ohlhoff if he would like it, because I couldn't use it, you know, and took it out there [to Union Street], and he said, "This is where She belongs in God's house." He had lilies around it. He said it just happened to be on St. Mary's day and he took it out of my hands and put it – It had velvet clothes on it, you know, and very nice. Well anyhow that was Revered Ohlhoff. He didn't get along well there. He took a little mission [Canon Kip] out here later on. But he was supposed to be a tough guy, you know what I mean, but he wasn't. But he was somebody that should be with artists to marry them. So the students went to Stackpole's studio, where an old ship had sunk under his stoneyard, and they had there ribs of the ship that had been dug up, you know, laying alongside. So they built an altar out of them, the ribs of the ship, you know. And they set down below it, they had squashes and still life, and Maynard Dixon, it was Prohibition, you know, Dixon had the Idaho Shack over there in the stoneyard where he served, where we could get wine. We all had Italian friends and we could get Dago red as much as we wanted, and that was served. And Labaudt was there. And, oh, Mrs. Salinger [Jehanne Bietry Salinger] was there. She wrote me up in the Courrier de l'Ouest. She was on that paper at that time. The students got busy on the big wall up there, see, and had soaked bricks in kerosene for weeks. They hung those down, you see, and then set them on fire. The wedding was at eight o'clock at night, and I don't know, the pianist came along and played the wedding march, and my wife came down the long stairs. Ralph Stackpole was my best man, and Helen had a bridesmaid, she was a student at the C.S.A.C. [California School of Arts and Crafts], and she had her girlfriend there with her. That was it. We had this big surrounding, Charles Stafford Duncan was there, and all the people around, and it was quite a thing. There was a lot said about it. But anyhow, that was one of the big things at that time, and all managed by Stackpole. I mean, to get this wonderful setting of, it was really barbaric, you know. I remembered from that, in my early days, that the groom was supposed to give the preacher a twenty dollar gold piece, so I tried to do that. I mailed a 20 Franc gold coin to him, he sent it back to me. He had a sick daughter, and he had come all this way, when I saw him I said to one of the students, I said, "Look, what did you bring me here? Here is this fellow all in lace, I thought you were going to bring me a tough preacher?" He was in lace, you know, with the things –

MR. FERBRACHé: Vestments.

MR. OLDFIELD: His vestments, you know. I expected just a rough preacher. But as I say, I needed this job and he was very nice about it and became a very dear friend to us. So my wife told me, she said, "Now he's a man that is concentrating all the time. Now what we'll do, we'll take some paintings down and let him look at them. When he looks up from his work at the desk he can have something to look at." That pleased him very much. He got

something he liked. He said, “Yes, when I left my eyes I can relax.” That was very nice. And when my oldest daughter was married she chose this little chapel at Canon Kip that he had, because it appears to make a lucky deal. And that was it. So that part ended.

Now, the other part, as we go along after the Logan job, and it was just at that time that Maurice Sterne came in. The Russian boys were doing well for themselves, they were working all out, you know. And I remember this Nick Karpenko –

MR. FERBRACHé: Archipenko?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, Karpenko, Nick Karpenko, he died in New York not too long ago, he was, I remember him as, an outstanding, handsome person, very nice. Of course he had lost a little bit of his finger. I think he was working with a sculptor. Steel wool got in there and he had to have it whacked off. Well, from there on, it was just a go until I got interested in – Somebody told me the steamer, the steamboats in Sacramento, stern wheelers, going up river to Butte City, were going to make their last trip. This man had been everything and he was a lobbyist in the Capitol for his party and of course he could get around, so he said, “Now this boat is going up and I’m going to get you a ride on it.” They don’t take passengers, and they had been saving their wheat up there for a few years. These were big warehouses, big, big, farm warehouses, and some of them had modern machinery in them. So it was a five-day trip because the boat I went on was to go up and come back to Colusa, where they changed barges. See, the up river is not as deep, and they can only take a thirty inch draft. From Colusa down, there’s six foot barges that are 225 feet long, a thousand ton, you see, they go down deep. The water, the river in many places is not wide, but it’s deep enough, and the water is slow. See, up above, it runs, oh, I don’t know, they say it’s hardly walking stuff down below Butte City. See up above, it gets quite rapid, and I forget exactly what the rate is now. But I took that ride and they gave me one of the old-fashioned rooms. Of course it’s all inhabited by men now, who work aboard, and it took us, oh, eighteen hours or so to get to Colusa. They switched the barge around and then they took a smaller barge and went up to Butte City. That was twenty-four hours it took. The distance from Colusa to Butte City was about the same as from Sacramento to the mouth of the Feather River where they count that their navigation commences. Now we made that in three hours, from Sacramento to the mouth of the Feather, but from the same distance from Colusa to Butte City it took us eight hours. See the stream gets deeper, there’s more current, and these barges are heavy and the steamers are slow. So the second day, I mean, I sat at the table and ate with them, and it was good with the officers. I was put in the pilot house talking to the oldsters, where there were a lot of them. The engineer was seventy-six I think, and the second engineer was eighty. Of course, they’d all been chief engineers but they got old and they didn’t want responsibilities. So they had a lot to tell me about the old times and the old boats they’d been on. But the next day I got tired and weary, so the captain came to me and said, “Well, you saw the warehouses, all the machinery and the different things.”

That’s the reason for that painting of Yolo that I showed you there, it’s because as a little boy I saw the wheat fields. And when I looked at this immense combine harvester I saw, thirty-two horses would come and six men would be on a horse and each would take five horses. The horses were all cut to pieces with sores from their heavy harness. And before anybody could do anything, they’d stand there patiently to be doctored, you know. Then after they were doctored and cleaned up a little and fed, the men would go to these wash basins. There was a comb hanging up there, they’d go and clean themselves up. It was quite late when – that gave me the idea of this tremendous heat and the part that we don’t see. Here are these nice sacks and each one of the sacks they got to, they’d reach in there and grab out a handful of mice. I said, “What’s the matter with cats?” They said, “Cats! We got fifty cats but they all gone off to sleep. When we start pulling the sacks they commence to get mice.”

And so after that I waylaid the captain and he said, “Well, if you want to go home, there’s a man that’s coming tomorrow, he’s going to Colusa. He’s a farmer, he’s got such and such a car, and you wait out there and he’ll take you to Colusa.” So I did. And I went home on the train, an electric train. That bunk you see, I was so small my legs. It was built high, it was built for up river going of these tall farm laborers, and I just rattled around in there, you know, like a peanut. I was tired because I wasn’t used to the life on board. Anyhow, I had made sketches all through, and when I came back I got working on them and made bigger drawings of the trip. “The Dover” was one of my shows that I sent to Montrose in New York. And from that, showed the drawings to Bertram Allison of the S.F. Stock Exchange. And he liked a couple of them and he bought them right then and there. He said, “Now listen, why don’t you have a real trip on a real ship. I’m connected, you know, with one of these ship companies.”

MR. FERBRACHé: Excuse me, you did some work in the Stock Exchange though, was this about the time, the Stock Exchange Building?

MR. OLDFIELD: The Stock Exchange, I don’t remember. The Stock Exchange how it was, Stackpole was on the outside making over the doorway. He had the scaffold covered on account of fog and what not, it was pretty cold. He had me up there making sketches of what he was doing and his students, see, he had quite a crew up

there, you see, art students and whatnot.

MR. FERBRACHé: This was what – about 1931?

MR. OLDFIELD: I don't remember exactly [1929], around there somewhere. Well anyhow I made quite a few sketches and then finally he told me, "Well, I just had you up here to tell you that Timothy Pflueger has an interest in you. You go down and see him." So I went and he said, "Yes, I've heard that you've done stained glass windows." I said, "Yes, I've done a little bit of stained glass window. I've worked with a fellow in France, a neighbor, who did it, and he did it the old way. He did many of the stained glass windows, repaired them, in Notre Dame de Paris." And so I saw him and he said, "Yes, I want stained glass windows in the taproom." Now in the taproom, in those days, you went there to your locker and took your own pocket flash. They had in the taproom a beautiful rosewood bar, it was an enormous thing, and some lockers. And that's where the Stock Exchange gentlemen would go after business hours and have their drink and talk about their golf games and hunting trips. Some of them were good hunters, you know. So I said, "Yes, I think I can do that. If I make a maquette for you, I think you have to go to Boston to get the glass made. And I think they'll want about a thousand dollars a window. These ones weren't big, but I think so." He said, "Well, that's a little bit too much. I don't think it would be a good deal." I said, "Well, I can make an imitation paint." "Oh, we don't want imitation." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I can do. I can make painted glass. How would that go?" He said, "That's fine." I said, "I'll tell you the difference, if I paint the glass you'll only lose fifteen percent of your light, if you get stained glass in there you're going to lose twenty-five percent, and more of your light. That's going to be pretty dark in a small space like that, it's not like a big church, you know." And so I made the maquettes for him, I made one of the banker who likes to shoot bears, and another, who's rough you know, and another who likes to go gracefully out with his pointer shooting quail with his fancy bag and his hunting gear. His costume, everything, is what he needs to have his perfume and whatnot while he's hunting. Then I made the deer hunter that gets up in the forest. He's pretty rough too. Then I made the guy who liked to be alone in the little punt with his cocker spaniel on the front of the bow, and he's just in his hole like an Eskimo kayak, pushing the tules aside and waiting with his little decoys out there. But it happened some years later, see, I was working up there at the eleventh story, and I was on a ladder and I used to look out and get fearful because there's no protection. I had the windows open as I had to work that way and that thing of being so high and looking down at the street on these little ants, you know, it worried me. I was afraid I'd get shaky, but anyhow I managed it, and I got the thing done, and it was well-liked. And in that Stock Exchange, when Diego Rivera first came here, he made his first American fresco. Peter Stackpole is in it as a young boy, as a lad.

MR. FERBRACHé: Peter Stackpole? [The photographer]

MR. OLDFIELD: And who is this famous athlete girl who is a tennis player?

MR. FERBRACHé: Helen Wills Moody.

MR. OLDFIELD: That's right. She's in it. She's the big, graceful figure at the top. And then it came along –

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you know Rivera very well?

MR. OLDFIELD: Oh yes, yes. I'll tell you about Rivera. You see it happened that Tim Pflueger and Stackpole got together. There is a Family Club down here, and one night Stackpole came and said, "Get on your duds, I'm going to take you down to the Cat's Whiskers." Well, I didn't know anything about it, so I got there and here was Rivera. Rivera was six foot, maybe two or three. I'm five foot, and he's big, he weighed three hundred pounds, and I weigh 106, so you can understand what it was. He spoke no English, so they had us out and they told me, "You get out there and interpret for him." I mean it was nice of him.

MR. FERBRACHé: Rivera spoke French?

MR. OLDFIELD: He spoke French, and he was speaking to me in Montmartrois French, and I was translating into English. You see this thing, why he came up here, now, what was that thing, the shooting down there of this Communist, a Russian, what's his name now? Trotsky. Up here, Pflueger and so forth, I mean, they were working at the Fair, the '39 Fair. The station wagon they had here, they sent down the station wagon to get Rivera, because he had housed a man who shot Trotsky. I mean, it got complicated that way. And they sent the station wagon to get Rivera out, because he had trouble also with the government somehow. And the way I heard the story was that the man who shot Trotsky, whoever he was, got away in the station wagon, and Rivera is a little bit like Courbet, you know, who tore down the statue in the Place de Vendome in France after the war. They got after him, after the Commune was over, they got after him but they didn't, they arrested him, but they didn't, they let him escape. Now that's the way I heard the story that's what happened to Rivera. Paulette Goddard was in the back with her car and the cops made a lot of noise coming up to the front door. He rushed out the back and jumped in her car and they got out. The cops made a lot of noise and went to the front and followed them to the airport. But something happened, a tire would always go off, they let him get in the airport. He was so frightened, and when he arrived here, got off the plane, he had no necktie, no hat. They took him to the Mark

Hopkins Hotel, you know, up on the top floor, where you get a drink and of course he went in. He had on the tweed he always wore, and his English wasn't so good at that time. Stackpole was there and Pflueger was there and they wanted to give him a drink to cool him down a little bit. The elevator man opened the door and said, "Nobody without a tie up here." But Pflueger said, "Do you know who you've got here?" He said, "I've got orders to keep everybody out that hasn't a tie." So Pflueger ordered the manager to come around and he said, "Do you know who this is?" and the manager bowed and all that, and he said, "Yes, he goes up." Rivera had understood enough English, he said, "What! You won't have me because I have no tie? I'm going to Stackpole's studio to sleep." And then from that time, you see, he was hidden here. Well, I knew where he was and Stackpole knew where he was. He was on Calhoun Street, but everybody knew he wasn't supposed to say that. But Cárdenas [Lázaro Cárdenas] came along and made an amnesty and took him home. And Frida [Frida Kahlo] was here –

MR. FERBRACHé: His wife.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. And they both got amnesty and taken back. Then of course, he got busy and worked there a little bit until he died. But I don't think it went so well. I don't know, from what I could hear, he was doing great things. But see, Orozco [José Clemente Orozco] was the same. There was something about Orozco I liked. See, Orozco had one hand missing.

MR. FERBRACHé: Oh did he?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, he was hurt in a high school experiment, some explosive, you see. But Orozco had these piercing black eyes and this mustache. But he came here years ago to the Art School [C.S.F.A.] to learn English. And then he came back to see friends and I was there one night when –

MR. FERBRACHé: Orozco attended the art school here?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, he did for a time. That's why they claim he was a student here.

MR. FERBRACHé: The Fine Arts School?

MR. OLDFIELD: The same, the California School of Fine Arts. But he came here, although he was a competent artist at this time. He simply came here to perfect his English and I guess get acquainted with students, and he choose that way of doing it. Because on another visit here, I forget who it was, I don't know whether it was Jack London's widow or not? I think so –

MR. FERBRACHé: Charmian London?

MR. OLDFIELD: I think it was, I'm not quite sure, but I kind of think it was. Anyhow, I remember him saying that he didn't like the gringo.

MR. FERBRACHé: He did live at the Beaux Arts Gallery here, I know that.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I know. I told him, "You know, Orozco, you're talking to one and it gives me pleasure because you're not hiding anything." He said, "I like Americans all right."

MR. FERBRACHé: What year was this?

MR. OLDFIELD: I don't know. I don't remember. [1927-28.]

MR. FERBRACHé: But you did get a chance to talk to him here?

MR. OLDFIELD: Oh, yes, it was it was an acquaintance, I mean, because he was, but this fiery eye, you know and this hand off, missing left hand, that was it, I mean –

MR. FERBRACHé: He was here two or three times.

MR. OLDFIELD: Oh, he came up many times. The thing was, you see, ever since Boynton [Raymond Boynton] started going down to Mexico there was a relation. See, Boynton brought here a knowledge of fresco painting. He was the one that started it. He got interested and went down there to the Mexican artists –

MR. FERBRACHé: Especially Rivera and Orozco –?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, he went down there and they commenced to come back and forth. It got to be something that should be done, going back and forth and I imagine still is –

MR. FERBRACHé: Mexican artists had great influence on the mural artists here, didn't they?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, they did. I'm telling you for one, and of course Stackpole was always interested in any experiment, you know, but he did good frescoes also.

MR. FERBRACHé: Yes.

MR. OLDFIELD: Very good frescoes. And even the way of doing it, Rivera even influenced me in painting at one period. Mine got tight and hard [1932-37], you see. Because that was the thing, in spite of myself, I was dragged into it unconsciously or consciously or subconsciously somehow, I mean, it works that way. It did for me at least.

MR. FERBRACHé: To get to your lithographs. You got on to the lithography project under Ray Boynton?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, I did with that. And that was quite an experience because we were supposed to be the artists and there were men from the Smith – Schmidt, I guess it is Schmidt Lithography Company. They used to do the old circus posters, you know, and these huge bill boards, you know. These men had been craftsmen there, making lithos. I remember I was down here at the type foundry, Carol Harris' Type Foundry, one day, and we got into a discussion about it. He wanted to know when lithography had started here, and he called them up and they said 1880. Well, of course, that is in 1880, you see, they were making peach cans and pears, you know, the labels for them. That's probably because you can take any of the Forty-niner newspapers here, I mean, Placer Times, or others like that, when they were doing daguerreotypes. The daguerrian artists, they called them, you know, that came in here were also doing lithos. I think the artists were experimenting also at that time, but it was commercially out. And I think probably what was meant was that it came in 1880 because it was commercially out. We had all this fruit stuff, you know, and there was a big industry of making labels on pear cans or peach cans or whatnot. And Karl Baumann's father was called over here especially from Germany to make embossed labels. Karl himself came here as a lad of fifteen to join his father because he had no parents in Germany. And he's also one of our good artists but –

MR. FERBRACHé: And you got onto the project?

MR. OLDFIELD: I got onto that Federal Arts Project with these men who had worked at Schmidt Litho. They showed us all their tricks. It was very interesting and we did what we could to put our aesthetic value in their hands, if we could –

MR. FERBRACHé: Did you ever work with stone before?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, I didn't. That's where I learned. I was taught how to do it there at Schmidt Litho with the association of these simpler men who knew –

MR. FERBRACHé: Do you remember what year that was offhand? Was that about '35? '36? '37?

MR. OLDFIELD: I don't. [It was in 1936 and 1937.]

MR. FERBRACHé: That you did this one you showed me?

MR. OLDFIELD: All I know is that Roosevelt was still president. Let's see, the time I made that was the time when Danysh was at the head of it.

MR. FERBRACHé: Joseph Danysh? [Western Regional Director for WPA-FAP.]

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes. At that time Bufano was also chosen in the sculpture department. And then he did quite an enormous amount of things. We were all working at it and I made the series, the Bridge was under construction. Now that will give you the time because the Fair was in 1939, you see. The Bridge was under construction, I went in every part that I could, here and there, and underneath. I didn't go up above. That's where Peter Stackpole got his honor because he climbed up there and made photographs. That got him started in his profession at that time. He was very young then but he had the daring to go up there. But I stayed underneath and did all the various things and made the "Building the Bay Bridge" Series.

MR. FERBRACHé: Made some drawings that you could take back to the project and work on those?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, see, I had to learn to work backwards on the stone that is, I had to look in the mirror to work on the stone. See, all that was new to me to get it right. But if I do it now, I do draw backwards. It doesn't make any difference, nobody will know the difference anyhow. I mean it's easier. And the stone is very nice. Now we could take it home. Also they would give us transfer paper. I don't know, Ray Bertrand fixed that up. He put on tissue some Chinese white or something so it would be very easy. Now here today, somebody asked me if I'd show him something about the process. I said, "I don't know much about it, I've forgotten." They brought me a type of transfer paper that they use today. I know they don't use stones anymore, because I saw Walt Kuhn doing lithos and he was doing it on plates of aluminum. But the transfer paper that was made then, you see, was just smeared over with Chinese white. We'd draw on it, over the stone. Of course it wasn't as nice as drawing

directly on stone, but the image could be transferred.

MR. FERBRACHé: You used wax pencils or crayons?

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes, printer's ink and some kind of wax, like the kid's wax crayons, you know, and that's about what that is. So I made 16 of those and six were chosen for President Roosevelt's, I don't know whether he had a collection or not, but they were offered to him. They were sent to him and they're now with him. There were several, you see, six pieces were chosen here, I think there were at least five of us nationally, from each one of those five they took six lithos, you see. And of course, my series was the Bay Bridge under construction. Now, I don't know what the others were. When I got through with that, I worked on stones a little bit more and then I didn't keep interest and just didn't continue it, that's all. I might have trouble if I wanted to do it again, because methods have changed in all this time. The processes have changed and I'd have to learn all over again, I think. As I say, these papers that I've seen, transfer papers, I don't know how to use them at all. I don't know what they are. And that would be a nice thing to do, because lithographs are very beautiful things. They're intense black and they're intense white, and they're very beautiful. So that stopped there. And then of course –

MR. FERBRACHé: How long were you on the FAP lithography project, do you remember offhand? A year? Or two years?

MR. OLDFIELD: I must have stayed about a year, I think a year, I don't know clearly how long. And then in 1930 I commenced to get interested in ship models, making them, you see –

MR. FERBRACHé: That didn't go on to any more mural work or fresco work on the Federal Art Projects?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, there was no more. You see, I tried to some of the post offices and things like that but wasn't successful. Moya del Pino was quite successful in that, see, it's a sort of certain know how. See it's a decorating thing, and I imagine mine didn't have the punch that was needed to express themes. I mean you're supposed to be able to convey topics to the public or something and I suppose that's, I don't know, but I wasn't successful. And neither was I successful in the 1939 Fair here. Cuneo got a job for us to work together for some architect and it was in the Agricultural Building. And we were to make these great big still-life affairs. I guess they were thirty feet long, great, big, huge panels you see. And that had to be done outside. And we had to get a studio for that. I figured out a method where we could use spray guns because of the type of work it was, and what we would get for it.

MR. FERBRACHé: Large areas to cover?

MR. OLDFIELD: Large areas, and Cuneo and I could experiment on something with a spray gun. So it happened that there was a strike on Treasure Island and we got together. We said, "Yes, we'll make them, but only if it'll be f.o.b. sidewalk here." You see, there was a strike, and they couldn't handle what the painters were painting, so in that way, we lost out. It was up to us to cart those over there with this strike, you see. And as I say, the others, most everybody got something at the Fair.

MR. FERBRACHé: You did them, but they wouldn't accept them, I mean they wouldn't take them over?

MR. OLDFIELD: No, we didn't do them. That was it, you see, we were going to do them but this business came up. We were sure that we could do them fast, because it was a matter of getting spray guns, and having plenty of them, you see. And if you get paid enough, you can get cash ahead of time to get all your materials which you need. We didn't need a big space, you can get one of those lofts down on the waterfront, you know, that are empty, that have been old warehouses, stick canvases up there and just paint over them. It wouldn't have been much at all. But it didn't get that far. On account of this trouble and the f.o.b. sidewalk, we were out. See, the other artists had gone over to Treasure Island. They went and worked at their Treasure Island facilities, see. And we had gotten with another deal, another set of architects, another building that made it that way.

MR. FERBRACHé: Well, Mr. Oldfield, it's getting a little late, I found so much good information, interesting information from you on the development of art during your period. We can close off the tape at this moment and take a rest.

MR. OLDFIELD: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

[Not stated: Otis Oldfield's 1933 prize winning painting *Figure* was displayed in the Fine Arts Building at the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition for which he was awarded the "Governor Wilson Gold Medal."]

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