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Oral history interview with Andrew Dreselly,
1981 June 26

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Andrew Dreselly on 26 June 1981. The interview was conducted in Osterville, Massachusetts by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: With Andrew Dreselly in Osterville, Massachusetts. This is June 26, 1981, Robert Brown, the interviewer. Mr. Dreselly, perhaps we could begin. Can you tell me, were you born, what, in the Boston area?

ANDREW DRESELLY: Born in Cambridge [Massachusetts], January 1893.

MR. BROWN: And was your family, were they in business or what sort of thing?

MR. DRESELLY: My father was a bookbinder. And he bound Webster's Unabridged Dictionary for the Riverside Press [Boston, Massachusetts] for 53 years.

MR. BROWN: Had he been apprenticed over here in that?

MR. DRESELLY: No. He apprenticed straight in the Old Country.

MR. BROWN: Where was that, the Old Country?

MR. DRESELLY: Munich [Germany].

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: And came here and had a good bass voice, and sang for many years in the church choir of the German Catholic Church on Sherman Avenue in Boston. All right?

MR. BROWN: Now, his training in Munich then was thorough in bookbinding. He could do letter work?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: He could do tooling and all of that?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: When he worked with Riverside, I suppose most of that work was job binding, wasn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: Job binding with a -- a job -- it was piecework. A job was 25 books. And that was a day's work.

MR. BROWN: So you grew up there in the home where your father was a craftsman? What was he like? Was he very patient and careful?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Yeah. And my mother had been a -- she -- a professional cook. And she worked for a Mrs. Hecht, who afterwards developed the Hecht's House, which was a boys club and I think still runs. But my mother was her cook.

MR. BROWN: That also was in Boston?

MR. DRESELLY: That was in Boston, somewhere in the Back Bay. Okay?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Um-hm. So you had brothers and sisters?

MR. DRESELLY: I had one older sister that died at 11. And I still have a younger brother and sister.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: [Inaudible]

MR. BROWN: Now, you were raised in another suburb of Boston, Arlington [Massachusetts], right?

MR. DRESELLY: Arlington.

MR. BROWN: Did you move there when you were very young?

MR. DRESELLY: One year old.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose they went out from Cambridge to Arlington? Was it more pleasant for children?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, it's a good place to raise youngsters. In those days there was no streetcar lines up through Arlington. There was a streetcar line through Arlington Center and just beyond. And then you walked the mile along Massachusetts Avenue until you got to where we lived.

MR. BROWN: What were you like as a small boy? What do you think you were like?

MR. DRESELLY: Just a skinny kid, that's all.

MR. BROWN: Did you have any particular interests?

MR. DRESELLY: No. Helped my dad in his garden. Can remember when he gave me a package of radish seeds. I had to plant one radish seed at a time about two inches apart. And I wondered why this was such a painful job. And it wasn't until long afterward that I realized that it was just something to keep me busy.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BROWN: Was he very stern?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Well, perhaps not as stern as my mother. But when I was about 10 years old, I helped him plant an asparagus bed, which was a kind of a novelty in this part of the country in those days.

And I had very pleasant experiences with my dad, and always remember no automobiles. And especially in the spring and the fall, he would take me and my sister out for a walk. And sometimes, you'd spend a couple of car fares. We'd walk for pretty near a mile to Arlington Heights and then take the streetcar up into Lexington [Massachusetts]. And that single fare took you as far as the Bedford [Massachusetts] town line.

From there we walked all through the back road, and we came to what was Parker Farm. And Parker Farm raised racehorses. And they raised a horse which was called Ulan [phonetic], which was the first horse to run a mile in less than two minutes. And we knew the trainer. His name was Eddie McGraw. And Eddie was very enthusiastic about the new sulky [phonetic] which they had, where they had discarded the old high wooden wheels and came with this new sort of a bicycle-type wheel. And I can remember Eddie holding this thing up and says, "It only weighs 27 pounds."

And it's only a couple of weeks ago that I was up to Bedford and talked to the man who lives in the old carriage house of the Parker Farm, which is all gone now. And he told me that over in the woods there's a horse cemetery with three gravestones, and Ulan is one of them.

MR. BROWN: My God. Did you ever see him race?

MR. DRESELLY: No.

MR. BROWN: Did you see him work out, I guess?

MR. DRESELLY: No, no, no.

MR. BROWN: You were pretty little then. So you had some pretty delightful times, then, with your dad, going out?

MR. DRESELLY: [Inaudible]

MR. BROWN: Doing things like that?

MR. DRESELLY: To look back on it, it was a simple life. But this Eddie McGraw lived in Arlington. And I wonder now how the hell he ever got up to Bedford to work every day, because he had a daughter Annie. And this is back in grade school. She went to school with us. Annie McGraw was one of my school pals. Okay?

MR. BROWN: Do you remember anything else about Arlington, your childhood there? You went through what

grade in school there?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, I went through the ninth grade, and that was it.

MR. BROWN: What kind of a -- just a general education? Did you -- history?

MR. DRESELLY: In those days, didn't have social studies. You had geography and arithmetic.

MR. BROWN: Languages? Did they give you languages?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. I think I got one year of Latin.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Did your family -- was German spoken to any extent in the family?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, you've got that shut off now.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. DRESELLY: It's still going?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: My sister was three years older than I. And when they moved to Arlington, German was the household language. And my sister was sent to school at five years of age, couldn't speak a word of English. That was a calamity. Three years behind her, but by the time I got to school, I was speaking English -- no more German in the house.

MR. BROWN: Did the family keep up any German after that?

MR. DRESELLY: No.

MR. BROWN: No? They decided that English was the --

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. The only German I learned after that was a language that you can't print.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. DRESELLY: All right?

MR. BROWN: Well, you learned this from pals and from --

MR. DRESELLY: From the shop. And that went from German and Swedish to Italian and Portuguese over the years.

MR. BROWN: You're talking now about the various woodworking shops?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Now, when you left school in the ninth grade, then you immediately were --

MR. DRESELLY: I was apprenticed to John [Johannes] Kirchmayer at the age of 14 in 1907.

MR. BROWN: And had your father arranged this? Did he know him?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. My father and John Kirchmayer were good friends and for many years afterwards.

MR. BROWN: And Kirchmayer turned out -- he was one of the top woodcarvers?

MR. DRESELLY: In his time, I don't think there was anybody in this country that compared with his ability and the volume of the work he did.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Now, he'd come over when, to this country? Ten-fifteen years before?

MR. DRESELLY: I don't know that. But I would say probably in the last few years of the previous century.

MR. BROWN: What was he like when you started there? What did you have to do, and what was he like as a master? He would be called a master, wouldn't he?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, the one thing I had to do was keep his water bottle filled. He drank water while he

worked. And you had to run to the sink, fill his water bottle with fresh water, and bring it and set it on his bench. And he could be a tough master.

MR. BROWN: In what ways?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, I can remember. It was shortly after I was married. And of course, my young family depended on me working.

MR. BROWN: When were you married? What year?

MR. DRESELLY: Hm?

MR. BROWN: What year were you married?

MR. DRESELLY: 1915. And we were working on some models for cast stone work for Wellesley College [the women's college of Wellesley, Massachusetts]. And there was a big pediment with a symbol of Wellesley College and a pair of college women supporting this big circle. And I'm working on it. There's a ribbon on the bottom with lettering. And the thing is so big that I'm laying on a quilt on the floor to model these letters.

And he kept asking me all day long if they were tipped this way and tipped that way. And I was a little bit annoyed at the end of the day and felt like telling him to go places. But I didn't. And when the time to quit -- we had to cover this clay model with wet papers and cloths. And he, on his way out, passed by the bench where I was. And I purposely turned my back to him.

And he stood there, and he said, "Andy?" And I had to turn around. And he held out a stogie, and he says, "Andy," he says, "This is a two-cent cigar." He says, "If you keep it long enough it will be worth 10 cents." He says, "Enjoy it."

MR. BROWN: He recognized he'd been harsh and that you'd been annoyed.

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. When you started as an apprentice, though, you did just menial chores, did you, like getting water for him?

MR. DRESELLY: And on Saturday we had to stay Saturday afternoon and sweep up the shop, put all the rubbish in barrels. And it was not only wood chips. There was a plaster department, and there was a lot of plaster trimmings and waste. Oh, we had a lot of fun, too, you know. We'd catch a mouse and put it in somebody's shop shoe. Or nail the shoe to the floor. Some cranky old fellow that was giving us a hard time during the week, why, we'd nail his shoes to the floor and give him a little hard time.

MR. BROWN: What kind of tasks did you do in the beginning? What were some of the first things that Kirchmayer would have you do?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, some of the things we did was practice work. We'd have a little model, a rosette. And we'd copy it and then take it home to Mama. And then afterwards, after a few months, why, we did simple things like what we called stopping flutes. That is, a flute would be molded, and we'd have to finish out the end of it.

And then there were -- in those days there were different sorts of carved moldings. While I was a journeyman -- by the time we did the Eben Jordan house [home of the wealthy Jordan Family who co-owned a department store chain in Boston, Massachusetts]. But the Eben Jordan house had ceilings, all carved walnut. And there were miles of moldings. And along with the journeyman woodcarvers, I worked on those.

MR. BROWN: Now, when you'd start out on something, would the journeymen or the masters show you how to use certain tools?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah. Sure.

MR. BROWN: Or would they put you into the work and see whether you could sink or swim?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, of course, they fix it so you sank anyway. Then they'd pull you out.

MR. BROWN: You mean they would give you something that was a little hard for you at first, a little difficult?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right. That's right. And while the language was pretty good for a factory, but there were -- I can always remember, after I was there two or three years, the normal school was State College -- was the

normal school in Salem, Mass [Salem State College, now Salem State University]. And it was a Renaissance sort of a building, and it was stone cartouche on the end of the building, with big swags. And I can remember he gave me that job to do, and how I exerted myself to do a good job, and I got a raise for doing a good job. Things like that that you'll never forget.

MR. BROWN: And this was stonework?

MR. DRESELLY: Models for stonework.

MR. BROWN: Oh, models.

MR. DRESELLY: I don't know who did the stonework, somebody else -- maybe Indiana.

MR. BROWN: The source of the quarry, maybe?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Indiana Limestone [is quarried in South Central Indiana].

MR. BROWN: Yeah. So he was good at being stern, and yet giving you something and praising you?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. It was all right.

MR. BROWN: Now, was he on his own there? Or he was with a company at that time?

MR. DRESELLY: W.F. Ross Company. And he had some sort of a partnership there. Just how, I couldn't tell you.

MR. BROWN: What was W.F. Ross like? What did he do?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, Ross had been a cabinetmaker from Nova Scotia. He came down here. And he catered to some high-grade house architects, Marblehead [Massachusetts], beautiful homes down there. And he would do all the woodwork, all the carpenter work. And it was Kirchmayer, when he came with them, I think around 1905, he had been with Irving and Casson. And Irving and Casson had labor difficulties. Kirchmayer came to W.F. Ross Company and brought this Gallery Church with him.

MR. BROWN: This was the church in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania]?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: This was the first thing you worked on?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. It was also the first real church job that was done in Ross's shop.

MR. BROWN: Before that, he'd been doing mostly house architecture?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Well, this church, now, you did -- you told me, and looking at them again now in this photograph, you did these little symbols of the 12 apostles.

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah, the symbols of the 12 apostles. They were on shields that were probably about 16 inches high.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. And you did there on the choir screen and on the arroyos behind the altar?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And this was what? How long had you been there? You were still an apprentice when you did this? You were just starting out?

MR. DRESELLY: I was 15 years old, just the first year I was working.

MR. BROWN: So you had worked under close supervision, then, of Kirchmayer, or one of the journeymen, right?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Was it quite a challenge for you? We can't see them very well here, but were they fairly difficult, some of them?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, for the youngster that I was, it was quite a proposition. But when you look back now, it's a

very simple operation.

MR. BROWN: What did it involve, shaping, making the shield shapes and then the symbols?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. I mean, the shield, of course, was sawed out. And you had to shape it, make a convex surface, mark the symbol line, and carve around it and take the wood away, and then carve the -- whatever the symbol was.

MR. BROWN: And then in the end, was this colored or gilded?

MR. DRESELLY: There was polychrome and gilded.

MR. BROWN: Did you do that, or would some other --

MR. DRESELLY: No. No, that's the finisher's job.

MR. BROWN: So in your shop in general, were there people called finishers?

MR. DRESELLY: The whole thing was quite a complicated thing. The lumber came up from the mill, stock cutters. Then it came up into the first floor, and there were fitters. And then it came up to the cabinet shops. There were fellows that got the stuff out and fitted everything. Then it was sent to the carvers to carve. Back to the cabinet shop to assemble, and then to the finishing room for whatever finish or paint was required. And then to another crew that took it out and sat it up on the church.

MR. BROWN: So it was very carefully worked out, the sequence.

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: But you were in the carvers shop.

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: And the finishers were what? People maybe who were trained in painting?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, there again, see, the finishers were -- there were two different departments there. There were hardwood finishers who worked with stain and shellac. And then there were painters who did painting, both commercial and decorative. Okay?

MR. BROWN: Must have been a rather large workforce, wasn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah. Oh, I've seen as many as 35 in my department alone. And it was -- in that shop used to get up over 100.

MR. BROWN: Quite a few people.

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Kirchmayer then was your -- you passed, became a journeyman around when? Mid-19-teens or so?

MR. DRESELLY: I worked as an apprentice under him from 1907 till 1912, then became a journeyman.

MR. BROWN: And what did you have to do to become a journeyman?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, it was no formality.

MR. BROWN: There was no test? He would just --

MR. DRESELLY: No. It was a question of whether you were able to earn the journeyman's minimum pay. And --

MR. BROWN: Is that the question -- what did the journeyman do?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, the journeyman was supposed to earn a week's pay, and that was about it.

MR. BROWN: You were supposed to be able to do more complicated work than an apprentice?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. And then the other essential thing was, that was when you started paying union dues.

MR. BROWN: So you were unionized, were you?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah. Yeah. In fact, the woodcarvers union in those days had perhaps one of the earliest unemployment compensation plans in this country, where if you were loafing, you loafed a week. And after a week, if you were married and had a family, you were paid 12 dollars a week. And if you were single, you were paid five dollars a week. And that was all taken care of by union dues.

And it was well known enough so that afterwards, when the United States government went to install the unemployment compensation laws in this country, they had the secretary -- Henry Bamberg was secretary of the local union. They got him to Washington [D.C.] to completely explain how our system worked. It's true.

MR. BROWN: So was there any tension then in the shop between the owners and the unionized workers?

MR. DRESELLY: No.

MR. BROWN: Was Kirchmayer in the union, or was he --

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, no, no.

MR. BROWN: He was a supervisor.

MR. DRESELLY: As soon as you got to be a boss, why, you were on the other side of the fence.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. DRESELLY: And there were times when I've been on the fence. And when the fence got too high, it's really difficult. You can't be on both sides of it.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Well, these first years, what were some of the other important jobs the Ross Company had in the 19-teens, let's say? We looked here at the Calvary Church in Pittsburgh. You've mentioned a number of them to me.

MR. DRESELLY: It was a very interesting thing because -- and I not only had good association with the architects, but with the donor of the whole chapel, who was John Nicholas Brown.

MR. BROWN: Now, this was St. George's Chapel at Newport?

MR. DRESELLY: Newport, Rhode Island.

MR. BROWN: St. George's Chapel.

MR. DRESELLY: Jamestown [the town next to Newport in Rhode Island].

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: We did a good many of the models for the stone carving. We did some of the woodwork, some very nice teakwood doors with some carving on them. And I actually did some of the stone carving in the chancel where there was a series of angels in little niches all around this chancel. And they had the large prayer carved, verses on each little angel's ribbon.

MR. BROWN: It was very elaborate, was it?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. A very nice job, and we did all the work except a few very special things, which were done by --

MR. BROWN: Another Boston firm?

MR. DRESELLY: An individual sculptor. I should know his name -- Joe Coletti.

MR. BROWN: Joe Coletti.

MR. DRESELLY: He did a few special things. Other than that, we did most of the job.

MR. BROWN: Now, you said you got to know John Nicholas Brown at that time. Would he come around the shop?

MR. DRESELLY: He came around several times to look at the work, very much interested in it, and a real good client.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. This was 1923?

MR. DRESELLY: Twenty-two, twenty-three. And from then on, as soon as that was finished, we started on St. John the Divine in New York. And different parts of that, of models for stonework, some wood carving, that was a continuing job from 1923 till the Depression. I think in 1931-32, we were still working on it. And that ended.

MR. BROWN: Now, these jobs you were with the Ross Company still. And they were gotten through the architect, right?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: And the architect here was Ralph Adams Cram?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Well, I think we went beyond Cram, as Cram died around 1930, somewhere in there.

MR. BROWN: Did you get to know Cram at all?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was he like?

MR. DRESELLY: Cram? Cram was a better advertising man, newspaper man, than he was architect. He had the ability to organize and to sell. That was his forte. He was able to associate himself with very skilled designers and draftsmen, like Alexander Hoyle.

MR. BROWN: Now, the Cram firm got a tremendous number of commissions, didn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: All these churches we're talking about. It also had, you said, a strong connection at Harvard, too. So it got work there?

MR. DRESELLY: Yes. I don't think he did as much work at Harvard as some of the others did. I can remember working on some of the housing units of Harvard, like Eliot House and Dunster House [dorms at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts]. And those were done for Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn, who also were architects for many of the buildings at Massachusetts General Hospital [Boston]. And I had worked on some of them for them.

MR. BROWN: Would Cram come around the shops? Would he involve himself in details?

MR. DRESELLY: Most of the time he would leave that to Mr. Hoyle, to Chester Brown, or to --

MR. BROWN: Now, Chester Brown was another carver or another draftsman with Cram?

MR. DRESELLY: No. He's the man that wrote this book.

MR. BROWN: Right. What was his job with Cram, though?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, he was, had charge of the drafting room, and also had charge of jobs, the same as -- Mr. Hoyle would run one job, and Frank Cleveland would run another, Chester Brown would run another. But generally speaking, Chester Brown was sort of a foreman in the drafting room.

MR. BROWN: Now, what would come to you in the woodcarving shop? Would they bring you a plan, a working drawing?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. They would give us, usually, working drawings, with the exception of some of the sculpture, where they would give us a subject and that was it.

MR. BROWN: But the working drawings were for general patterns and such things?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Did you find that most of them were possible? I've heard other craftsmen say that sometimes from the architect you would get something that you couldn't realize in stone or in silver or something.

MR. DRESELLY: That's right, that's true. But not very often with Cram and Ferguson. They knew what they were doing. I can remember once an insurance building up in -- I think it was National Life Insurance in Montpelier, Vermont, that had barrel-vaulted ceilings in the main lobby. And they gave me something which I couldn't make. I went back and talked to Mr. Hoyle about it. And, "Oh," he says, "Ain't you a beaut, Andy?" He says, "You caught us." It's true.

MR. BROWN: It would be something you couldn't do in wood or plaster? They could make a drawing of it, but you couldn't execute it?

MR. DRESELLY: It was a thing that probably is not easy to explain. But you take this valve off like this.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. DRESELLY: It intersects with another one.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. DRESELLY: And if you took those two sheets and flattened them out, you wouldn't get a straight line where they came --

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MR. DRESELLY: But you take this valve off like this.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. DRESELLY: It intersects with another one.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. DRESELLY: And if you took those two sheets and flattened them out, you wouldn't get a straight line where they came together. You'd get a curved line. Well, when they designed it, they did it supposedly flattened out, and they made a straight line. I just couldn't put all the stuff in. There wasn't room enough. All right?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Okay. But those things didn't happen too often, did they?

MR. DRESELLY: Not with Cram and Ferguson. No. They were very thorough.

MR. BROWN: Now, with Cram and Ferguson, one other thing you did was Riverside Church in New York.

MR. DRESELLY: That's not Cram.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that wasn't?

MR. DRESELLY: That was Allen and Collins, associated with Henry Pelton of New York.

MR. BROWN: And you mentioned something to me earlier about that project with John D. Rockefeller, of course, who was the patron.

MR. DRESELLY: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did he come around? Did you --

MR. DRESELLY: This is John D., Junior, Nelson's father. Came to the shop several times. Not only on the Riverside Church [Manhattan, New York], but he was also the donor of a great deal of work at [Colonial] Williamsburg [Virginia] restoration, on which I did work. And he used to come around in those days on the train. You didn't fly from New York. You came by train.

MR. BROWN: And by the way, where was the shop, too?

MR. DRESELLY: In East Cambridge, which meant across the city [Boston] and over the [Charles] river.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. DRESELLY: I can always remember Mr. Rockefeller would come to the shop. And he could be the most congenial client you ever saw. But at any time when he wanted to end the conversation, he could cut you off as politely, but firmly, as anybody I ever saw.

I'll always remember, called me Andy, and when he'd get after looking at his work in the shop, he'd get ready to go, he'd say, "Call me a cab, Andy." And I'd say, "Well, I'll drive you over to the South Station [Boston], Mr. Rockefeller." And he'd say, "Okay." And I'd go down, I'd my old Hudson car out. One day I started taking him over, and I hadn't been over the bridge when the horn starts to blow. And the horn blew all the way to the South Station. I let him out and said good-bye to him, lifted the hood, and pulled the wire out.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BROWN: Did that faze him?

MR. DRESELLY: Probably didn't [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: You were working still under Kirchmayer, until he retired about 1921 or so?

MR. DRESELLY: Twenty-one, twenty-two, I don't remember just --

MR. BROWN: Was he very elderly then? Or did he retire for any other reason?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, it was a threatened building trade strike. And of course, that was always an ordeal for anybody -- the employer, the employee. You're going to make loggerheads with good friends. And he had lived through a half-a-dozen of them and decided he would quit. That was it.

MR. BROWN: It was just too much, too painful?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did he live on then for some time, Kirchmayer?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. I think he -- it's rather strange that he and Mr. Ross died within a year of each other, around 1930. And from 1921-22, he worked at home and did special work for some special customers. And you know, we did the fabrication, got out the material for him. And he did some very nice carvings at home.

MR. BROWN: As you said before, in your estimation he was the leading carver in the country in his time?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: There were others that were coming along. Well, you then took over the shop when he retired?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: You were by then -- what would your rank have been, a master or something by then? You'd been a journeyman since 1912.

MR. DRESELLY: Well, let's just say a journeyman, all right?

MR. BROWN: Okay. You didn't have such grades then?

MR. DRESELLY: No.

MR. BROWN: By then, that sort of system had petered out?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. The only grades you had were -- the woodcarvers had a sliding scale of wages. And the fellow that carved moldings and finished tracery and that sort of stuff, he got the base pay. And then the fellow that did a little more skillful work got another two dollars an hour -- a week raise. And then you got up to where the fellow that did the sculpture, the statues and figures -- he was the highest paid man. And in the early days, those wage scales ran from around 16 dollars a week to around 27. This is in the early days.

MR. BROWN: In 1907 or '10 or something?

MR. DRESELLY: Seven or ten, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Now, did you then finally get to the point where you were the figure carver?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: By when, the 1920s or the late 19-teens?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, I worked on figures even when I was an apprentice. I didn't get to do them on my own until maybe 1915 or something like that. But that big picture you had that, there row? The big rood [phonetic] beam?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. DRESELLY: I worked on those figures. He'd rough something out, and I'd finish it.

MR. BROWN: You mean Kirchmayer would?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: So you were really, until he retired, his principal figure carver?

MR. DRESELLY: I was his right-hand man, I'm telling you, for many years.

MR. BROWN: How did you learn figure carving? I mean, you knew how to use the tools. But how did you learn to design them, to do the human figure?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, we had a kind of a crude system of anatomy measurements, where a statue, generally speaking, was eight heads tall. A female might be seven or seven-and-a-half. And then you had -- you divided the figure up. The knee was two-and-a-half heads up from the floor, and you had measurements for everything, arms, hands, all the way through a figure. You won't find them in any book because they were not that formal. But they worked for us in the shop.

MR. BROWN: And this is one of the important things you'd be taught by Kirchmayer?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Okay. And what about the appearance of whether something was to be heavy or light? Whether the figure was to look Classical or Gothic? How did you learn that? Did he teach you this informally?

MR. DRESELLY: You learned that from experience under him, to -- then we also went to school as youngsters at the Boston Architectural Center.

MR. BROWN: Oh. And would you take drawing there?

MR. DRESELLY: I took the five orders of architecture.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah.

MR. DRESELLY: Professor Gardner from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts] taught us that. Shades and shadows, all done according to formula. And that was, it was all very good experience, all tied together.

MR. BROWN: Did you draw from models? Did you have life drawing?

MR. DRESELLY: Had life drawing with a man named Major.

MR. BROWN: Ernest Major, probably.

MR. DRESELLY: Ernest Major.

MR. BROWN: Was he a pretty good teacher?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. He could be rather theatrical.

MR. BROWN: I've heard that. His costume and his --

MR. DRESELLY: Like -- I remember him talking about, I think it was Anna Tanguay [phonetic], an actress, and talking about body shapes and what-not. And somebody got up and said, "Mr. Major, they all look good when they're far away." He gets that down.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BROWN: So you did have, then, some informal and some classroom work?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: That got you toward being a figure carver. Now, you mentioned a little earlier like bringing in someone like Coletti to do certain sculpture. Now, would a fellow like that have had different training, or was he paid even more?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Joe Coletti really had training in monumental sculpture. And that was about his limit; that is, he didn't do the many things architecturally that we did. John Brown paid for a European education for him, which he had. And he did --

MR. BROWN: But in effect, you people were doing monumental sculpture, as well, weren't you when you were doing figures for Riverside Church or a big church like that, or St. John the Divine [Manhattan, New York]?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. But for instance, Joe Coletti did a monumental figure of Colonel Logan for the airport in Boston [Logan Airport]. We didn't do that sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: An individual figure?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You probably could have, couldn't you, if you had been --

MR. DRESELLY: Well, yes and no. I wouldn't attempt it.

MR. BROWN: No?

MR. DRESELLY: No.

MR. BROWN: Why?

MR. DRESELLY: I don't know.

MR. BROWN: Okay. You also did, through the Ross firm, which you were with until 1943, I believe --

MR. DRESELLY: No, 1934.

MR. BROWN: Oh, '34. And then you went to --

MR. DRESELLY: The Schwam Company.

MR. BROWN: The Schwam Company in Arlington, right?

MR. DRESELLY: Till 1948.

MR. BROWN: Okay. You also, though, during these years did work for Charles Dunham McGinnis, who did a lot of Catholic churches?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Could you talk to anything about that? I know you knew Matt Sullivan, who is one of his original --

MR. DRESELLY: Original partners.

MR. BROWN: Yes. What about him?

MR. DRESELLY: Matt Sullivan? Well, Matt Sullivan liked to tip the cup a little bit. And at time they broke up so that Matt Sullivan was on his own. And McGinnis and Walsh -- this is while Kirchmayer was still very active. And we did a church, St. Katherine's in Summerville, which was at that time a very nice church. And Mr. Kirchmayer made the foolish move of selling a couple of lunettes to Father O'Brien in the church, without going through the architect. And Mr. McGinnis just cut Kirchmayer off like that. And Kirchmayer never did another nickel's worth of work for McGinnis. And it wasn't until after Kirchmayer died that we got back and did work for McGinnis.

And, well, I was by then in Irving and Casson's shop, and Irving and Casson had been doing most of McGinnis's work at the time.

MR. BROWN: So that was in the late years of McGinnis, wasn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: Yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: So really there was a long interruption on account of that. So you mentioned Sullivan, you worked with him. Did he try out on his own for awhile?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Sullivan did quite a few churches in the Fall River [Massachusetts], New Bedford [Massachusetts] area, Catholic churches. And I think that -- I think that he did a big building at Providence College [Providence, Rhode Island]. But he never did the quality work that McGinnis and Walsh did.

And I can always remember Matt Sullivan. I think he kind of took a liking for me. It was when I first started to estimate work and run the shop. Called me up, "Come over and figure a job." I'd go over and figure the job and

hand him the price right there. And he'd say, "Well, Andy, I don't think we can afford that. This is not a very high-grade church." He says, "Can't you cut it a little bit?" So I'd cut it a little bit.

And he'd say -- he'd always say, "A man bought a pedigree Boston terrier and paid 75 dollars for it, took it home, and it got kind of rough around the house, tore the draperies and tore the ladies' laundry off the line and so forth. So he had to get rid of it. He wanted to sell it. He says, "How much is it worth?" Well, the answer is, "It's worth what you can get for it."

So it didn't take long to -- next time that Matt Sullivan brought me in to figure a job, that I padded it a little bit because I always had to cut it.

MR. BROWN: That's generally true, isn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: Sure.

MR. BROWN: Even when you were working with a client like Brown or Rockefeller, there was some --

MR. DRESELLY: Sure. You had to give a little.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. DRESELLY: Is that running?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: Shut it off. I've got to go --

[OFF THE RECORD]

MR. BROWN: We talked about several of the major projects between the world wars. How about Washington [D.C.] Cathedral? You were with the Ross Company, and you were in charge of the shop?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Washington Cathedral was a very interesting thing because I worked there at the time they were doing the main building, the nave. And the intersections of the axe moldings up in the peak each had a stone corbel, some of them a couple of feet in diameter. And they all told Bible stories. It was a very interesting job to do.

Another thing I had to do was a figure of St. Francis of Assisi, which went in the College of the Preachers in their garden. I also did some bronze inlays to go in the floor.

MR. BROWN: Metalwork was something you didn't usually do, was it?

MR. DRESELLY: I didn't do the metalwork, but I did make the models for them.

MR. BROWN: Now back to those corbel ornaments, the Bible stories -- did you have to figure out ways so that people could see them far down below?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, of course, you always had that in mind, that they're going up about 80 feet in the air. And you had to make the scale so that you could read them from the floor. And that's true of any building that we were working on. We had to think of the location, the distance from the viewer, and all that thing.

MR. BROWN: Well, now, you mentioned earlier, your rough rule of thumb, say, for a male figure was -- the body was eight times the head. But when a figure that was going to be placed up high, you had to make adjustments, didn't you, with proportions?

MR. DRESELLY: Sometimes you elongate it to allow for foreshortening in the view.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Or maybe you had to make the head bigger.

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. I can remember working on the Riverside Church [Manhattan, New York]. They had a frieze of seven kings upon the façade of the church. And I can't remember now, but they were more like 10-foot figures, kind of, you know, giant things. And a lot of pleasure making them.

MR. BROWN: Why was that? Because they were big?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. A little bit earlier in architectural character, too. They were -- the building is more like a twelfth- or thirteenth-century Gothic, which is just a development from the Romanesque, the Byzantine, when the Gothic was new. And it retained a lot of the detail of the Byzantine. So it really became an interesting thing

where we had been working on later-year models.

MR. BROWN: And this was -- these figures were different shapes than your others?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: More massive?

MR. DRESELLY: You get a different drapery fall and all that.

MR. BROWN: Now, did you at the Ross Company -- did you have the ability to take, say, the first model of a figure and put it up at the approximate height at which it was going to be seen so that you could study it?

MR. DRESELLY: I've done that so many times. On this frieze of seven kings that I'm talking about, I had taken casts, one of them in plaster, sent it down to the church and had it hoisted up. And I'd stand over in the grounds of Grant's Tomb [across the street from the church] and look up at this thing and when the wind was blowing across that river at 25 miles an hour, and the temperature was 10.

MR. BROWN: So that's what you'd do? You'd usually, if you could, you'd take a cast, say, and put it on the building and see how it looked?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right. And I remember many times, working for Cram and Ferguson, they were going to do some big levering that's going to go across a building. You'd make a model of it and put it up on the roof of the four-story shop building so they can see it.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. There was no way you could get around that?

MR. DRESELLY: No. I think that me and my helper in the shop had experience enough so that we wouldn't go far wrong if we didn't do it.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. DRESELLY: But you couldn't satisfy the architect. You had to prove it to him. All right?

MR. BROWN: Okay. What you had to work with, you had experience. But you'd work from drawings, and you'd get the dimensions.

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And did you have some way of figuring out, if a figure were 80 feet high, how you would alter its proportions as opposed to if it were down at 10 feet high?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. It's a question of the scale of the draperies, mostly.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. DRESELLY: The farther up this thing is going, the course of the drapery falls will be.

MR. BROWN: But you didn't have a formula for that?

MR. DRESELLY: No. No.

MR. BROWN: It was just experience.

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. From the school of hard knocks.

MR. BROWN: But usually, was it possible to persuade the architect? Was it usually possible to persuade the architect?

MR. DRESELLY: You had to show him.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. DRESELLY: You had to show him really.

MR. BROWN: Was someone like McGinnis very exacting?

MR. DRESELLY: McGinnis was very knowledgeable.

MR. BROWN: And Cram?

MR. DRESELLY: And Cram, too, yes. Although we didn't see much of Cram. We saw Mr. Hoyle and Mr. Cleveland and Chester Brown.

MR. BROWN: So the architects, were they in a way your boss, or not? Or was the boss Mr. Ross, let's say?

MR. DRESELLY: They were not only my boss, they were Mr. Ross's boss, too. You had to cater to them. They were the king of the alley.

MR. BROWN: Also during the -- between the wars, you started working -- the Ross Company started working on St. John the Divine [Manhattan, New York]. You said earlier, I think, in the '20s you began.

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah, in the 1920's, three or four, St. John the Divine. And I think that I had some work in the shop continuously between 1923 and 1931 or '32, always something for St. John the Divine.

MR. BROWN: Now, was there anything particularly notable about that work, the work you did for St. John the Divine? Because it's a huge church, isn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: Hm?

MR. BROWN: It's a huge church.

MR. DRESELLY: Yes.

MR. BROWN: So did that impose certain conditions on you?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, I think the first thing we did was the baptistery, which is a comparatively small unit on that big building. And relic with caps and friezes and the panel with a pair of angels and some symbols -- and there was some special sculpture, I think, eight statues that were done by an Englishman named John Angel in that baptistery. Other than that, we did the rest of it.

And then I think the next thing was all the different caps and corbels in the nave, which was years and years of work.

MR. BROWN: Was that interesting work? Because you had so much of it to do. Did some of it get almost repetitious, at St. John the Divine?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, there was always something new, always new wrinkles to -- and even outlasted some of the designers of the stuff, and new ones in, and some of them gone.

MR. BROWN: Who was the architect you worked with on that church, on St. John the Divine?

MR. DRESELLY: St. John the Divine, mostly Frank Cleveland from Cram's office.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. And what was he like to work with?

MR. DRESELLY: First-class. The thing is, if you extended yourself and did the best you could for Frank Cleveland, it was very appreciated. But I've seen people that try to slip something over on him, and he could be real mean. You couldn't fool Frank Cleveland. You didn't.

MR. BROWN: And at the Washington Cathedral, the firm was Frohman, was it?

MR. DRESELLY: Frohman, Robb, and Little.

MR. BROWN: And which of that firm did you work with?

MR. DRESELLY: On the Washington Cathedral, mostly Donald Robb. And you'd have to understand that. That is, Frohman was from a theatrical family. And sure, I had some background in architecture. But the reason he got Harry Little and Donald Robb in and made a firm out of them was because they had the skill to really do this job. And there again, Harry Little, although he was a pupil of Cram's, as was Robb, Harry Little was a specialist in Colonial and Georgian architecture, while Donald Robb was a pure Gothic student.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned once being with Mr. Frohman in Washington. So he did take an interest and played some role in the church?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah. He was active in that end of the job. He went down into the job. He took care of the work on the job, but he didn't actually design these things. He knew enough to talk about them. But the design

was left to Donald Robb.

MR. BROWN: What about the patrons of these jobs? That is the bishops, the clergy, and all. Were they fairly easy to deal with?

MR. DRESELLY: When we worked on St. John the Divine, I had a little contact with the dean, but not very much. And in Washington, no contact. I never saw any of the clergy, never.

MR. BROWN: So they were, as far as your work was concerned, not much of a factor really.

MR. DRESELLY: Not really. And they left it to the architects.

MR. BROWN: Now, also, at that time in the '20s and '30s, John Rockefeller's project to restore Williamsburg got underway. And you did some work there, some carving, didn't you?

MR. DRESELLY: On the [Colonial] Williamsburg [Virginia] restoration, one of the things that I remember the best was on the ballroom wing of the governor's palace were the arms of King George III [of England], which filled up the triangular pediment over the entrance.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: And I did some brick carving. And inside of that ballroom, there were the architraves around the windows and the cornice were all carved. And it was sort of sad because the architraves at the windows came down as a molding and then went into a great big carved scroll. But after they finished the building, they put draperies on them which completely covered all the carving around the windows. It did.

And there were certain places where we even did brick carving. There was a main doorway over that ballroom wing. It was all special molded brick. And they say that even in those days, it was better than 10 dollars a brick.

MR. BROWN: God. Now, was there -- I've heard that there were time pressures at Williamsburg. There was quite a push to get the project completed.

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was this true of many jobs? You've mentioned that one thing that you got tired of after many years was the pressures of deadlines. In most of these jobs, did you have them?

MR. DRESELLY: Not on most of them. But for instance, if you were working on a telephone company building, then you also not only were working for the architect, but you were working for the general contractor, who might be Turner Construction or one of those big national outfits.

And they would give you a schedule. You got a list of 40 or 50 different models that you've got to make for stonework on this building. And they'd give you deadline dates for each model. And help you if you don't get them done. You get them done, that's all. So I've worked overtime, weekends, and everything else to try to please them. And not always successfully, but --

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

MR. DRESELLY: And not always successful, either.

MR. BROWN: You mean sometimes you had to work so fast you couldn't do your best job?

MR. DRESELLY: [Inaudible]

[OFF THE RECORD]

MR. BROWN: This is side two of the interview with Andrew Dreselly. This is June 26, 1981. You were with the William F. Ross Company until 1934. And what led you to leave them and go to the Schwam Company?

MR. DRESELLY: I was forced to leave because they closed up the business. You must remember that 1934 was the middle of the Depression. And if you had 10 dollars at the end of the week, you were lucky. So we went up to the Schwam Company, which was a very progressive outfit, worked more for the general contractors than they did for the architects, and did a good active business.

And Thomas Ross, who was then my employer, and I went up there. And we did succeed in bringing church work into the outfit. And along with it, for many years, it was a very successful thing.

MR. BROWN: What kind of work did you do for them? Church work, but other work, too?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, I worked on some of the insurance buildings, public buildings that they were doing, where there was a little ornamentation. But most of it was church work. We did a lot of work for the East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania] at that time. And many little jobs for Cram and Ferguson, and did all the models for the main telephone building in downtown Boston, and until mid-1940s.

But along with it, during the Second World War, I worked in the mill at most anything, when there was no carving to do.

MR. BROWN: So there was just, what? Planing and getting moldings and --

MR. DRESELLY: I ran what they call a high-speed router. Ran a hollow chisel morticer [phonetic] and anything from a circle saw up --

MR. BROWN: Well, the Depression in a way killed off a lot of the fine woodcarving, didn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: I mean, a lot of it was petering out, wasn't it?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: What happened to the wood carvers union? I know --

MR. DRESELLY: Well, at the wood carvers union, I think I mentioned before about the unemployment --

MR. BROWN: The benefit?

MR. DRESELLY: -- program they had, the benefits. And in those days, they had somewhere around 60,000 dollars in the treasury, which at that time was quite a considerable thing, much more than it would be today.

MR. BROWN: That was in the Boston area?

MR. DRESELLY: Just the Boston local.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: And then, of course, when the Depression came, why, it just petered that thing out. There was no money going into it, and everything was outgo until it finally got down to nothing. And the last I knew the union got down to about three members. And see, for many years there were no apprentices, no newcomers. And the old fellows just died off one by one and two by two until they were all gone.

MR. BROWN: Did you stick with the union?

MR. DRESELLY: No. I was in the union from about 1912 till about 1921. And then I -- they didn't want me in the union.

MR. BROWN: Was that because you were -- well, that's when you took over from Kirchmayer.

MR. DRESELLY: I'm over on the other side of the fence.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Okay.

MR. DRESELLY: All right?

MR. BROWN: I know during the Depression, some of the woodcarvers did work under the WPA [Works Progress Administration].

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Were you aware of that? Did you know some of them?

MR. DRESELLY: Sure. I knew a lot of them.

MR. BROWN: But that was what, just piecework, fairly small projects?

MR. DRESELLY: It was nothing -- nothing made that was ever really used on a building. In other words, they didn't -- they didn't do work for buildings. They did individual pieces. And I often wonder who got them.

MR. BROWN: Who was in charge of them?

MR. DRESELLY: That I don't know. I never got involved in it. I always remember one fellow that I knew that was in, Fred Bruner [phonetic]. He was a Belgian. And I can remember him when he first came to work for me, he couldn't speak a word of English, but a good workman. And he learned the English right quickly and was a pretty good carver. And he was smart enough so that when he got into this WPA [Works Progress Administration] work, he'd design some great big piece of work that required a big piece of mahogany. And if he was afraid the project was going to close up, why, he'd chop into it and start the thing going so they couldn't shut him off.

MR. BROWN: Now, you were a supervisor from 1921 when Kirchmayer retired, on. And you took in some apprentices, didn't you?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah. Yeah, the apprentices I have are mostly Italian American kids from Quincy [Massachusetts]. No reason for them except that --

MR. BROWN: You mean no reason for --

MR. DRESELLY: Why they were from Quincy.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah.

[OFF THE RECORD]

MR. BROWN: Were they easy to train, these fellows?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, I think that -- is that on?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: I think that Cascieri -- or Angelo [Arcangelo] Cascieri was one of the best because he always had ambition to do and to better himself. But he really was very successful. And of course, when he first came there, for the first year or so, Kirchmayer was there, and he started under Kirchmayer, probably around 1920. And then around 1921 or '2, Kirchmayer left and I took him over. And I gave him all the leeway I could. And he really made good and is a pretty good sculptor.

MR. BROWN: He went on to be a sculptor more than a -- he went on to take extra training?

MR. DRESELLY: He -- at that time Ernest Pellegrini was running a sort of an evening school and teaching the boys sculpture. And of course, you must remember that Pellegrini was a figure sculptor alone and had no appreciation or knowledge of decorative ornaments whatsoever. So that he was very capable in his particular line, but it was that limited. And of course, he had Cascieri and two or three of these other boys in evening school for many years. And I think he taught Cascieri until Cascieri almost ran the school for him, did.

MR. BROWN: Had you known Pellegrini for quite awhile when -- before the '20s?

MR. DRESELLY: Had I known him?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. DRESELLY: The first I ever saw of Pellegrini, when I was still an apprentice boy under Kirchmayer, and Pellegrini came and got a job modeling. And it was somewhere around 1910. And we were working on the ornaments for the Arlington Town Hall. And over the center of the stage was a large cartouche with a pair of sort of cupids supporting either side of it.

And Kirchmayer put him to work on that piece of thing that somebody else had started. And I can't remember now what the pay was. But I think Kirky let him work for a day and then paid him off. And the pay wasn't very much. And that was the end of Pellegrini in Ross's shop. And it wasn't long after that that he went to work for Irving and Casson, where he spent the rest of his life.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose Kirchmayer found wanting in Pellegrini?

MR. DRESELLY: I really don't know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, because you were just a kid then.

MR. DRESELLY: I'm just a kid.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. DRESELLY: And probably because Pellegrini's work might have been a little too Renaissance in feeling or what-have-you. I really don't know. But he didn't last very long. And I don't say that to discredit Pellegrini.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. DRESELLY: I'm just saying what happened, and for why I don't know.

MR. BROWN: But now was Irving and Casson the big rival to W.F. Ross Company?

MR. DRESELLY: That was our competition, sure. And it was tough competition.

MR. BROWN: Who was in charge of their woodcarving shop?

MR. DRESELLY: Hiram Hughes. And it was when Hiram Hughes died that I took over in 1948.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see. He was there for many years then?

MR. DRESELLY: He had been there. He was an apprentice boy under Kirchmayer when Kirchmayer was there at the turn of the century, see?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Was their work more or less the same as yours, in your estimation? I mean their earlier work.

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Good public buildings, churches, fine houses, furniture. I think they had a much more extensive line of furniture than we ever had and did a lot more of upholstery and draperies and that sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Ross Company didn't really do much of that sort of thing at all?

MR. DRESELLY: No, no.

MR. BROWN: Nor did you at Schwam, either? They didn't do that?

MR. DRESELLY: No. If Schwam had anything to do, he'd let it out. Ross in the early days kept one upholsterer, and once in awhile he might have an extra one for awhile. But no draperies and things like that.

MR. BROWN: Ross was a pretty good boss, was he? Knowledgeable?

MR. DRESELLY: Fairly knowledgeable except he didn't know anything about styles. He was a pretty good cabinetmaker. And you always knew where you were with him. He was right straight from the shoulder. If he had a criticism, why, it came out. And after I worked for other kinds of employers for some years, I have learned to respect him all the more for his straightforward attitude.

MR. BROWN: But you said earlier that his sons really couldn't carry it on very well. They didn't have that business sense. Who was the boss at Schwam?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, the two partners were Mickerson and Davis. And Mickerson was a pretty smart guy, didn't have much practical experience in the woodworking business, but knew how to sharpen a pencil and pretty well acquainted with business and was quite successful.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Well, you stayed with them until '48. And what led you leave them?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, the opportunity presented itself at Irving and Casson's.

MR. BROWN: You mean with the death of Hiram Hughes?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: So you came on. What was your position then at Irving and Casson?

MR. DRESELLY: I had charge of the woodcarving department.

MR. BROWN: And was the work they were doing pretty much what you had done at Ross, church work?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. Not much different from Ross and Schwam's, all along the same general lines.

MR. BROWN: And you stayed with them, really, through the '60s, until you -- '67?

MR. DRESELLY: I stayed with them until 1967.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. DRESELLY: And then I retired at 74. Thought I'd had enough. I mean work, not money.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BROWN: In fact, they continued then, doing this kind of work? Or did you see changes occurring in general in the woodcarving trade in the '50s and '60s?

MR. DRESELLY: By the time I retired, there wasn't much left of the business. And that was due to the inflation. The increase of cost of buildings and, where they still had to make them waterproof on the roof, they just did without the ornamentation.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Okay. The practical things overturned --

MR. DRESELLY: That's right. That's right. They just got rid of the frills.

MR. BROWN: I suppose, then, Irving and Casson had to be competitive to get any work, had to cut corners in order for the clients to afford them, right?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: So that made it harder and harder to do thorough work, I suppose?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right. And the trouble -- one of the troubles was that they made too many chiefs and not enough Indians.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. DRESELLY: The office force was twice as big as they needed. And if there was a shortage of work, the workmen got laid off. But the office force stayed, until they went broke.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Which they did, yeah. Were there any memorable projects you worked on for them that you could mention?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, they had some pretty good boat jobs for the concern in New Jersey that built the boats. We did all sorts of decoration, principally on boats that were cruise ships in the South Pacific. We made what they called tikis, which is a South Pacific native --

MR. BROWN: What, a boat?

MR. DRESELLY: No. It's statues, carved out of the log of a tree. And they -- well, there were various things. For instance, if somebody got killed by the roadside, why, his colleagues would carve this tree trunk to look something like him and set it up at the point where he got killed.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. DRESELLY: And then the other extremes of the thing was that they had miniatures of these things. And the women wore them. They wore them around a string around their neck or on their fingers. And it told whether this was a single woman or a married woman. They had all sorts of applications through their life.

And we made many of them to go on these cruise ships. It was very interesting. I also made a reproduction of an eagle. The eagle originally was put on the frigate Lack [phonetic] at Lancaster when it was in the Portsmouth Navy Yard to convert it from sails to steam. I can't tell you the date. But at that time John Bellamy carved this eagle with spread wings. And it had a 21-foot wingspread from the tip to the tip.

And that eagle is now in Navy Museum at Norfolk, Virginia. We had occasion to take measurements and photographs of it and reproduce it with a seven-foot wingspread to go on one of these cruise ships. So it -- there is a certain amount of interest.

And there was another one that we had a figurehead from an early schooner that went as a decorator thing.

MR. BROWN: So there's great variety in that work?

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned, I think, they did have the carving work, some of it, at the New Cathedral in Newark, New Jersey, didn't they?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was that interesting work? Or was that -- it was pretty routine?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, one of the things -- there was a great deal of all sort of graphic tracery, pinnacles, and that sort of thing, which, when you get the volume that we had there, were a little tiresome. But I did have -- I probably had half-a-dozen or eight. I don't remember just exactly the number. But coats of arms of all the previous bishops in that diocese. And they were carved out of basswood, and they were about maybe five feet by four foot, and they were hung -- they were mounted in the chancel.

And that was quite an interesting job because you not only had to design these things and get all the attributes in, but then after we got through with them, it was a question of the color. And that gets to be, oh, sort of like heraldic things, the colors. That was a very interesting part of the job.

MR. BROWN: You also, at that time -- didn't the firm work with -- was it McGinnis or Cram on the Baltimore Cathedral? Wasn't that --

MR. DRESELLY: That was McGinnis's job.

MR. BROWN: And that was in the 1950s or so?

MR. DRESELLY: Probably the '60s.

MR. BROWN: So that was among the last large projects you worked on?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Who did you work with on that?

MR. DRESELLY: What do you mean "with"?

MR. BROWN: Well, I mean like from the architectural firm.

MR. DRESELLY: Oh, Eugene Kennedy. I don't know whether you know much about McGinnis's office, but Eugene Kennedy came there as his office boy. And I've known Gene since he was 15-16 years old. And he really grew up to be McGinnis's right-hand man, very capable and handled all the work. And he has done a raft of work on that shrine in Washington [D.C.], along with the Cathedral in Baltimore [Maryland].

And recently the bottom has gone out of their business, too. They had to move the business. But Eugene Kennedy is a very capable architect.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. So it was with him that you worked on some of those last projects at Irving and Casson --

MR. DRESELLY: Yes. That's right. The shrine in Washington and also on the Baltimore Cathedral.

MR. BROWN: Were you -- you decided to retire in 1967 then?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: And what did you plan to do, to do the things you'd had to put off doing?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, because I think everybody tries to plan a little for the future. And it doesn't always work out. I had a room upstairs, which I figured I'd do a little carving. And my wife used to be quite a professional rug hooker. I had visions of her and I spending winter days up there and doing a little. But somehow or other, by the time we moved down here, my wife sort of lost interest and just tapered off. So there wasn't much done.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Talking about retirement and the things you'd planned to do, maybe aside from your profession, you moved to Lexington in 1926 and I think were instrumental in getting an art center, an art association going in Lexington, Massachusetts?

MR. DRESELLY: Yes. I got acquainted with a few painters and jewelry workers. And we got together and got a little exhibition in the Lexington Town Hall. And that was in 1935. And then we started this Lexington Arts and Crafts Association. And we used to meet once a month in the Masonic Hall of Lexington, and sometimes in the

old Belfry Club. And that took quite a few years -- I don't just remember how many -- before we were able to get money enough together to put up a building, which is on Waltheim Street in Lexington. The original building was one single room with a little kitchen L on it. A single room -- that is a basement and main floor.

And I had the honor of being a charter member, along with another dozen or so of them. And that has developed now into a membership of something over 500. They've had two large additions put onto this building.

MR. BROWN: And it exists for exhibitions, but also for classes?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, they have a wide range of classes. They have guilds in most of the crafts. And the guilds meet at their pleasure. They have a monthly meeting for eight or nine months of the year. They have a sale of members' work in the fall before Christmas. They have an open house and exhibition along in May each year. And other active little sales and exhibitions -- an exhibition going on every month in the gallery.

MR. BROWN: Who were some of the other artists that joined with you to form this association?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, one of them was really my best friend, was Philip B. Parsons. Another one was Judge Hellmann.

MR. BROWN: Was Parsons a painter?

MR. DRESELLY: Hm?

MR. BROWN: Was Parsons a painter?

MR. DRESELLY: Parsons was a painter, per se. Hellmann was a fair painter, but more of an illustrator.

MR. BROWN: And these became close friends of yours?

MR. DRESELLY: The best.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. DRESELLY: Honest to God down-to-earth people. You weren't supposed to hear that.

[OFF THE RECORD]

MR. BROWN: So you maintained very active involvement in Lexington until you came down here to Cape Cod?

MR. DRESELLY: I was very active in it. And we did a lot of work of building the thing up. And when I moved down here, I figured I wouldn't be able to go back to the meetings and be active. So I wrote a letter and resigned. And the answer I got was that I had been made an honorary member and I was still an honorary member, and I have the pleasure of belonging without paying any dues.

MR. BROWN: Have any of your children -- you have what, two children?

MR. DRESELLY: Three.

MR. BROWN: Have any of them gone into the arts?

MR. DRESELLY: No. No.

MR. BROWN: Had you discouraged it, encouraged it?

MR. DRESELLY: I didn't encourage them. Let's put it that way. I wouldn't say that I discouraged them. But one of the things was that I didn't have a formal education. And my wife and I decided that that was one thing we'd do, was educate our kids if we did nothing else. And we did. Ray has a masters from MIT. My daughter has a degree from Jackson, master's degree from the Accounting Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. And the other boy has a -- well, an engineering degree from Northeastern [University, Boston], and we won't talk too much about that because for many years he was what we called our all-American freshman.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Why did you choose Cape Cod [Massachusetts]? Did you have a number of friends already here?

MR. DRESELLY: Yeah. My wife's sister and her husband built a house in Osterville [Massachusetts]. And that was the principal reason why we came. Although they're long since gone, we're still -- I'm still here.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Do you get to carving occasionally?

MR. DRESELLY: Well, I do a little, but not much. We live in a neighborhood where it's a very cooperative thing. And you want a little electric work done, you ask Bob Slaven to do it. And if Bob Slaven wants a little woodwork done or Mrs. Dobb wants her chair glued up, I do it.

MR. BROWN: Okay. You keep your hand in.

MR. DRESELLY: It's been very nice. We help each other putting up electric garage door openers and all that sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. But you really -- although you wanted your children to have formal education, you're glad you went on in this very highly skilled profession?

MR. DRESELLY: That's true.

MR. BROWN: You're glad you went into that?

MR. DRESELLY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Although I suppose when your father first put you to apprenticeship, he had no choice.

MR. DRESELLY: Well --

MR. BROWN: But you pretty quickly came to love it.

MR. DRESELLY: No, the thing about it, when I look back -- I have met quite a few really important people. Some of the bishops in the Catholic Church, the dean of the Episcopal Cathedral in New York and the one in Washington. I met John D. Rockefeller, Jr. I met some of the best architects on the East Coast of this country. I never made much money, but I did have the pleasure of the association with all these people.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Um-hm.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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