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Oral history interview with David Woodbury,  
1977 July 1

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with David Woodbury on July 1, 1977. The interview took place in Ogunquit, Maine, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, just hear your voice. Saying—

DAVID WOODBURY: All right—

ROBERT BROWN: Okay.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Okay, this is July 1, 1977. Robert Brown the interviewer in Ogunquit, Maine. I'm talking to David O. Woodbury. Mr. Woodbury is the son of Charles Herbert Woodbury, who was one of the first important artists to come to—here to Ogunquit, I believe.

DAVID WOODBURY: I think he was the first.

ROBERT BROWN: The first and he was a founder, if not the founder, of the art association here. And I thought today I'd like to just ask you questions and ask you for some of your recollections of your father.

DAVID WOODBURY: [Laughs.] As far as they go back you can, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: When—what date do they go back in your—

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, I was born in 1896 in South Berwick, which is right back here. And, uh, well, it's a long story, but the first time I was here was when I was two years old and stayed at the river side. You might not now know, but they tied me up to a stake in the yard of the little condos, and I—that was my first introduction.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, your father was—

DAVID WOODBURY: And father—

ROBERT BROWN: —here by then?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well I, I think it's well to fill the thing in. He was a, I told you, he was a graduate of MIT. And he taught art while he was in his last two or three years. He had a little art school of his own. And in that there was a girl he happened to meet who had come from South Berwick whose name was Marsha—Susan Marsha Holtz [ph]. And Susie, well, the story goes that my father finally took her aside one day, and he said, "Ms. Holtz, I cannot teach you to paint, but I will marry you." Now I've heard to them—spoken—said that story so many times, and I still don't know whether it's a pocketful or not, but—[00:02:04]

ROBERT BROWN: Is it one your dad would tell though?

DAVID WOODBURY: But it's apparently the one that he—they got married in 1890, and then somewhere along the line about then she—her father was a judge probate over in York. And he owned property in York Beach, and she bought my—her then husband or coming to be husband over here and said this was a better place to look at. He was here about a minute before he decided that this was where he was going to grow up and paint, you see. And for a while this guy controlled the situation. He was an old bastard.

ROBERT BROWN: Perkins, this is.

DAVID WOODBURY: Old, yeah, almost—Perkins, yeah. And uh, so he—they finally dickered, and he parted very unpleasantly with a piece of land which is too small to do anything with. It's over there. There isn't any place where you can go to see it all at once. It's too grown up now, but they ended up my father was building a studio over on the next point in toward the cove, and, uh, from then on he never moved. He just—uh, well, he went to

Europe and all this, but—

ROBERT BROWN: I see, he did continue to do a bit more schooling in Europe, did he?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, oh yeah, and they—

ROBERT BROWN: So Paris and then—

DAVID WOODBURY: I can never remember the name of the—

ROBERT BROWN: It was the Julian's Academy, I guess.

DAVID WOODBURY: I guess it was Julian. And there was one in Boston called Juglaris [ph]. I don't know who he was, but I keep—kept hearing about him. And he and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: He was a European born painter who taught at Boston.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, he was, but I think Julian was the one that figured because both of them were there between 1890 and 1895 or '94 or something. And they studied on the Left Bank pretty much all the time, I guess, and then came back. And Father started his—built his studio in 1898. [00:04:15]

ROBERT BROWN: Here in Perkins Cove or whatever?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But in Ogunquit

DAVID WOODBURY: At that time it was all there was of it. There was no—there was no one here. There were no trees. There was not one single bush anywhere that you could find in this area at all. We've always wondered about that, but the truth of it was that he took the birds or something to bring in the seed for the trees. As soon as the people started to come, up she comes, you know. This is all a glacial area, and it was just ledge and very, very inhospitable but also very rock bound and very picturesque. And there were few outsiders, what they call ferners, who came here. The—what was their name, dear?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh, I'm sorry. What?

DAVID WOODBURY: The—

ROBERT BROWN: Early visitors?

DAVID WOODBURY: It's not the people of the island, the Hoyts [ph].

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh, the Hoyts, oh right, sorry.

DAVID WOODBURY: The Hoyt family was a lead trust, and our—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Detroit?

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh, it's out west somewhere. I don't know exactly where. But anyhow, they were very nice people and very—

ROBERT BROWN: But the by and large there weren't many summer visitors. It was mainly still a—

DAVID WOODBURY: I wouldn't suppose so. There was a hotel which had been here, The Ogunquit House. I think it'd been here for quite some time, but it was an old seaport. You wouldn't believe it, but there was a day when ships came in from the sea and had to be wedged up there, hauled up by ropes and stuff into the marsh, which is now the coal. And they traded a great deal in—well, in the sand was the principle thing. I think they took an awful lot of sand to Boston or something. [00:06:09] This was a good place to get it because this was one of the terminal moraines of the big glacier that came all the way down through here, and near the end Long Island was the principle dumping ground. But we had—we still have a lot of sand. And then they sold lumber, and they made bricks, and so it was quite a port. And of course they gave out, but there was a pretty fairly hefty bunch of old geezers who ran things their own way here. And uh—

ROBERT BROWN: How did your father fit into all this?

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh, he loved it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he—he began living year round?

DAVID WOODBURY: He was just spoiling to have dealing with these old characters. It was Joe Littlefield and all the rest of them whose descendants are all here now, but, uh, he got on swell with them. And when he was in — abroad during the '90s he and Mother both got very interested in the Dutch, and they went and did most of their painting in Holland.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, did they?

DAVID WOODBURY: And the places that there were—this house is not particularly loaded with it. There's two Dutch figures behind you there. She was—he had told her, as I told you, that he didn't think she could paint. He taught to paint but wasn't very long when they had gotten to Europe and she painted better than he did.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

DAVID WOODBURY: Now there's—this one she did, that little sketch of an Italian there. And she was 20 years old when she painted that. And she went right on through. I often wondered whether there was some hard feeling between them, but I guess not. He painted almost exclusively the ocean.

ROBERT BROWN: When did he begin doing his seascapes? Was this from the beginning, seemingly, his—  
[00:08:02]

DAVID WOODBURY: He was—he began—well, first he started out in engineering when he was a child, and he built a model, which is up there on the shelf, of a locomotive, which was in Lynn. He came from Lynn.

ROBERT BROWN: Lynn, Massachusetts.

DAVID WOODBURY: And Lynn, Lynn is right next to Swampscott, and Swampscott has a good beach, and he started his first class in Swampscott. Must have been in the early '80s, I guess, something like that. And then he moved to Boston, and they—and then they—he finally got married in the '90s, and then they decided to go to Europe, having first gone to Quebec and so forth. But he—

ROBERT BROWN: Was he—who did he study seascape with, or did he pretty much teach himself?

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't think anybody. I think he studied with MIT, if he studied it with anybody. He—because he knows so much about the physics of it that he knew a great deal more than most marine painters have known, and, uh, took a very different view of it. He took an analytical view of what was going on in the ocean and was devoted to the last inch with it. And most marine painters you see have a more or less stylized type of waves that many of them don't float. They don't—

ROBERT BROWN: Anyway, they take many shortcuts.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, he was a real student of what goes on when water is moved. And I suppose that isolated him to some extent because most everybody wants to have human beings around in a picture. As our friend Niehaus [ph] said in Holland when I was a child, "I have never been able to sell a picture that didn't have a baby cradle in it." [00:10:08] That got into one of Dad's books finally, but he didn't particularly care of humanity at all, and the beaches around, largely the one here, have no human figures in them at all, you see, or has that one got one? I don't think so.

ROBERT BROWN: Hope, there's not a thing in it. Now, this would be fairly—

DAVID WOODBURY: And he doesn't feel—

ROBERT BROWN: —this would be the typical type?

DAVID WOODBURY: That's right. And he went all over this area, and then he went down year after year in the Caribbean.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he?

DAVID WOODBURY: And there he has a certain amount of human interest, but the geological and hydraulic, uh, elements are much more to his liking and choice, and he did things that no one had done before, and a great many people said it doesn't look natural this way. And then he'd come down here, and they'd find it damn natural.

ROBERT BROWN: Indeed it was.

DAVID WOODBURY: Indeed it was. And, uh, I don't think I've known anyone who attempted to copy it exactly except Gertrude—

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

DAVID WOODBURY: What's the name now?

ROBERT BROWN: To copy him or to copy the sea?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, to copy his urge to do, what did he want to do with a picture of the cove? I've always thought the interesting thing about it is that you watch a wave come in, and you see it's come probably 2[000] or 3,000 miles, and finally you see the end of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: That's quite an event for anything to come—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: A few over there in that picture that are doing that.

DAVID WOODBURY: Gertrude Fiske.

ROBERT BROWN: Gertrude Fiske, yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: She was a friend of the family, and I think—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Student.

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't think she painted any marine stuff, but during his class years, and they lasted for 50 years, beginning, I guess, about 1894, he had built his studio, and a lot of Bostonians, see, they—he had been associated with them by then in Boston, MIT and all, came to him for instruction. [00:12:17] And so as I say, he got going on the beach at Nahant and then Swampscott.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, how did he support himself? Did he have some sales of considerable success?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, the funny part of it is is that his father, who was a wood-be inventor who couldn't invent anything that hadn't been invented before, was broke, stonily [ph] broke all his life, and, but, he said he didn't want his son to have to face what he had faced, which is always to find he was too late to get anybody with these things. So Father went to MIT just because it was the thing that appealed to him. And in the course of that he earned enough money from teaching painting to support himself, his wife, and his mother, and his father, four of them. And they all sat there and took it without a thought.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Did his father and mother move up here as well, or did they stay down there?

DAVID WOODBURY: No, no, no, no, they—they're all—Grandma and Grandpa were Beverly people, Beverly and Salem. They came from there way back, three, four generations, Gallop's [ph] is what their name was. And well, each one of them was entirely different character. They—but anyway, Grandfather was a very good cabinet maker and loved doing it, did a beautiful job at it. And when the class started in earnest here in Ogunquit, he made all the boxes, the paint boxes, those little portable paint boxes. With his own two hands made the pochards [ph] and the whole damn business, you see, and the easels or whatever they had to be sold to these—well, there was approximately 100. [00:14:15]

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, he really started in with a—

ROBERT BROWN: A big school.

DAVID WOODBURY: —with a big school, yeah. And he drove on a great many of the colleges, Wellesley, and he drew on the campus, to some extent. The Cabot was in the bushes somewhere around—nearly in Boston. And let's see. What happened next? He—then he began to get more or less successful. People, particularly in Boston, I wish I could remember the names of the—of his cronies or—in those days, but I can't. I've lost my memory now I'm getting a little bit old. But he found a great deal of sympathy on the subject of doing the sea without particularly caring who was on it. In other words, the other people would all get busy with the curling waves and like how 8-5-0 [ph] has a, you know, the big—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, they get more melodramatic.

DAVID WOODBURY: Melodramatic things.

ROBERT BROWN: And then conventional.

DAVID WOODBURY: This is fine, but he—no, he wanted—well, he hadn't studied any physics as far as I know, but—and in fact I don't know how much they taught in those days. That was in the late '60s or in the '70s of the last century, so not a terrible lot was known about hydraulics in those days. But anyway, the—

ROBERT BROWN: He was, as you said earlier, interested in the analysis, in what goes into the ocean?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, he wanted—and that was against him in one way because most of his other artists, his friends, just banged through and painted what the audience seemed to want to buy. [00:16:10] Well, that is—has always been the right thing to make a fortune.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, do you remember—know who were some of his close friends that you knew as well, I'll say, yeah? Were there some other seascape painters that—

DAVID WOODBURY: Um, no, the only anecdote I know is—and I've lost my mind more or less as far as memory goes. I'm studying that too. Who was that fella up in, uh—up along the coast there, you know?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh yeah, uh—

DAVID WOODBURY: She always remembers.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: [Inaudible.] Take a little minute to get it though, I'm afraid. Elliot O'Hara.

DAVID WOODBURY: No, well, Elliot, yes, but much later. Who was the man that gave him the prize when he was 16 years old?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh yeah, Winslow Homer.

ROBERT BROWN: Homer, I see.

DAVID WOODBURY: He was approximately a half a generation ahead of Dad, I guess. And Father joined a thing when he was a boy in Lynn in—called the Boston Watercolors Club, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, right.

DAVID WOODBURY: I believe that's so.

ROBERT BROWN: I think it's still going. Or at least I know about it.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, well, its shadow is still going anyway. And out of that came an occasion when prizes were given out, and this young boy showed his picture, and Mr. Homer gave him a prize and said, "My god, you're a boy."

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: You're only a boy.

ROBERT BROWN: You're only a boy?

DAVID WOODBURY: You're only a boy, yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: He thought it was a more mature artist.

DAVID WOODBURY: He thought he was a grown up person.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

DAVID WOODBURY: In other words, he had taken to the sea so precipitously that—I don't know that anybody knows why he did, but because he didn't live—when he was a kid he did not live in the shore part of Lynn. He did later. He lived on [inaudible] Street, but originally he was over on the other side with GE and things. [00:18:03] And—

ROBERT BROWN: Down the southwestern part.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, well, over in Lynn [inaudible] area. I don't think I can remember the street.

ROBERT BROWN: Did, uh, Homer give him encouragement at least in that way [inaudible]?

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh, very much. Oh, that one remark gave enough to make the papers and all that.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, how soon was he showing in a gallery and all? Was he handled by—

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, that's a hard thing for me to say because I don't know—

ROBERT BROWN: Do you remember when you were a boy, was he—did he have a dealer in Boston or New York or what?

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh yes, he had—by then he had—

ROBERT BROWN: Was Ian [ph] Macbeth one of them?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, I think so, but when I—by the time I became conscious of it, which wasn't too early, he had been already selling it and helped to organize the Guild of Boston artists.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that's about 1914, yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, I don't know what the date of that was. But, uh, then there was the St. Botolph Club. Did you ever hear of that?

ROBERT BROWN: Oh yes, certainly.

DAVID WOODBURY: That had a really rare gang. There—Ed Amoskie [ph] was in it and a lot of musical people that came from—to the symphony, and I knew them because I was more or less studying music. But no, I think he must have taken hold very rapidly, and I don't think that his wife—his coming wife's family thought much about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, suppose not.

DAVID WOODBURY: But the funny thing is that they hadn't been married more than a couple of weeks or years before they began to get contracts to do illustrations. And they teamed up and did several books of Sarah Orne Jewett's together using the South Berwick characters. And they are to be found in both—in all the books she wrote, I think, *Deep Haven* and *Tory Lover* and all that. [00:20:01] And she was—Sarah was—I remember her very well. She was a very intimate friend of mother's. She was quite a lot older, but it was a question of whether it was my father or my mother who took the interest all along because she was painting like fury, and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Your mother?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, you bet. She—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Well, wasn't she more interested in the figure and all her things are portraits whereas Mr. Woodbury was a marine painter?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, it looks as though she had a yen to undo some of the possible criticism of the empty geological picture that he liked to do, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: By working on the figure?

DAVID WOODBURY: By putting—yeah, there was a family called Brookes here, which—the last remnant of Lakeshores [ph], our plumber at the moment, but the Brookes family had 13 children, all dirty and all small, and a drunken father who spent his time under the back porch with a bottle, which he'd long since emptied. And she adored having those kids to paint. And they didn't know why not, so they came, and the place if full of—has been full of oil, I think, mostly, portraits of the kids. And so—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was your mother's personality like? Would you characterize her and then maybe your dad as well?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yes, Mother was—well, she was—I guess she would say she was a New Englander alright. She wasn't quite as severe as Queen Victoria, but she was—she went along pretty well with the right thing to do, you see. And I don't go that far back. When I go back beyond my birth I can't really—

ROBERT BROWN: Can't tell us too much?

DAVID WOODBURY: —tell too much about it. But I think—

ROBERT BROWN: And your father, was he more outgoing? [00:22:00] Was he a—

DAVID WOODBURY: Uh, yes, but there peculiar—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Reserve.

DAVID WOODBURY: —competition between them as well as—well, that first remark he's—that apocryphal remark he's supposed to have made that she—he could—he would marry her, but he couldn't teach her to paint. Does that mean that he really couldn't teach her to paint, or what does it mean? Because, damn it, she started painting the minute she got free of him off the school, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe it meant that he wouldn't teach her to paint.

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, I think he wanted the—a fairly good compartmentation, to put her in one studio and him in another because when he—when they built the house over here, the next year to the studio he built her a studio in the house with a huge big north window. And she went to work in that with all of Brooke's children and everybody like that. And he stood out and froze to death in the winter pointing—painting snow scenes. He was very fond of snow. He loved it. And so no, I wouldn't say there had ever been any contention between them really, but they didn't try to encroach on each other's field. I guess he—it's true that he never was a figure painter because when this Sargent was painted here in 1921, he and their—in father's studio, and, uh, oh, on Charles Street right there on the corner of Charles and the—

ROBERT BROWN: Public garden?

DAVID WOODBURY: Public garden, yeah. When that happened they—the Sargent came in one day and said, "Well, Charles, I want to make—order portraits of you." Charles said, "Okay, but if you do I want to make a portrait of you." So they sat down together with two easels and stuff and went through the motions of painting two pictures. [00:24:07] Now, I don't know how good a Sargent that is, but it must be pretty good.

ROBERT BROWN: It's pretty fine.

DAVID WOODBURY: It probably is. I haven't ever had it evaluated, so I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you—did—was Sargent something of a friend of your dad's? Must have been.

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh yeah, I don't know where they met. The St. Botolph Club was a sort of a gathering place for a lot of artistic people, I think. I wish I could remember [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], you remember being there? Would your dad take you there?

DAVID WOODBURY: No, I don't remember ever being there. I don't think I ever was, but it was infested by Cabot, Fred Cabot was a great hand at being there. And uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Do you remember many of your dad's artist colleagues? Did you get to know some of them when—would they come up here?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, well, some did. If somebody would tell me the names of a few of them, uh, I would immediately say that I know. I'm sorry I don't. I could look it up.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Who was the man who [inaudible] docks [ph]?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, Frank Benson. Was he—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Frank Benson was one.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he—

DAVID WOODBURY: Benson, Benson was one.

ROBERT BROWN: And Tarbell, was he—

DAVID WOODBURY: Tarbell and Benson were the two familiar ones. They were always coming and going there.

ROBERT BROWN: Joseph DeCamp was the—

DAVID WOODBURY: DeCamp I can remember but not well at all.

ROBERT BROWN: How about William Paxton? Was he something of a friend?

DAVID WOODBURY: Paxton, yes, mm-hmm [affirmative]. So they're all—they're all from Boston mostly.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the Prendergasts? Did he know—was he friendly with them?

DAVID WOODBURY: I remember the Prendergast picture that—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: The Prendergast, yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't know whether we still have it, but it came to us in the will, and was he fairly celebrated when he—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, Maurice particularly, and then there was a lesser well known Charles, the brother. What about Childe Hassan? He was a—

DAVID WOODBURY: Childe Hassan was a New Yorker, wasn't he?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, he painted a good deal in Boston and New England.

DAVID WOODBURY: Father hated New York. I do not know why he—

ROBERT BROWN: As a city or he hated its art?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, anyway you want to take it. It was a place, I guess, that turned down his pictures, and I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah, ah.

DAVID WOODBURY: But he was a member of—there was the Playhouse Club, or was that your father?  
[00:26:06]

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: No, my father was in the, um, uh a different club.

ROBERT BROWN: A different club, okay, well, [they laugh], what I wanted to ask, were you in Ogunquit much of your childhood, or were you—

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, I—let me—

ROBERT BROWN: —did the family just live here part of the year.

DAVID WOODBURY: Let me answer that this way. I often boasted later on in life that I had been sent to 17 schools, 17, alright. And that meant something, because it meant that we were always on the go, and his only anchor was the two months while he—or six weeks really, while he taught his class here in the summer. Then he would go to Boston, and for years he had a studio on the river way there and a number of people he knew and I got to know. Well, that was later on. You are—you know where that building that blew up with the glass was? Where was that? That was Clarendon Street, wasn't it?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, right there on Clarendon Street, right behind the church there was quite an old building which had been a laboratory tech, I guess, and he had a studio there. Right across the street was the enormous straight, Providence Railroad, terminal there.

ROBERT BROWN: The terminal, right.

DAVID WOODBURY: And it was glass, all the broken glass all the hell over the whole place too. I don't know. I just remember that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he paint in Boston? Would he work up his seascapes? He paint them there as well?

DAVID WOODBURY: I suppose so. You never can tell where he did what because—

ROBERT BROWN: Or were you—as a boy, were you around him when he was painting a lot?

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh yeah, I was sent to Country Day School in Newton when I got a little older. [00:28:04] And then eventually went to Harvard, but I always saw him all the time, and then—

ROBERT BROWN: What would you say—what was his approach in the painting? Can you remember how? Did he—would he just go directly to, or did he sketch a lot, or would he just go directly to it?

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't know, but the best way to describe that is what he did when he went off on the—uh, his trips. He had three-week trips to the Caribbean, and he wanted regularly, at least 10 watercolors every day. He was just squatting on the deck the whole time. And of course I sat there and watched him. We've got a picture of that somewhere.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes, a photograph.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh yeah, very—

DAVID WOODBURY: Little baby sitting there watching the—

ROBERT BROWN: Well there's—we have some notes that were made, I guess, by one of his pupils in 1928, and he told her—well, I mean, she notes in class that he said you paint a thing once. You don't go over it nervously again.

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, I suppose—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Put on the last coat first.

ROBERT BROWN: Just get right to it.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, from—

ROBERT BROWN: And this sort of is similar, what you're saying. I mean, it would be indicated by these quick watercolors.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, they—his technique, which he taught to his students also, was get it right the first time. Don't horse around, and don't daub and push and pull and rub out. And course they all did, but he was a wonderful teacher because he was terribly gentle. He never damned anybody or scolded anybody, but he often said, "Well, half the class cried before they got through," and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Because of what? Because they were such hard work?

DAVID WOODBURY: Because they just hadn't been able to do what he wanted him to. And we both were in the class, finally, and when we first lived here, and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: What was it like?

DAVID WOODBURY: It wasn't like anything you can imagine.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, was there—

DAVID WOODBURY: Because we went off at 7:00 in the morning to make a picture of something that we had chosen, a rock or a pool or something or other. [00:30:05] And we were supposed to paint that the whole damn week and paint it not all in the morning but all during the day with the idea of getting—he was a great, great hand at the effect of light. He maintained that light was the key to the color scheme. And, uh—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Color masses was—

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't know. He wrote two or three books on light, and—

ROBERT BROWN: He brought this—would he lecture, or did he just make you get out there and paint, and then he'd come in and quietly talk to you?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, he spotted you all around, and you sometimes had to walk some distance to find you, I guess. And no, he didn't. He would sit there for a minute when he visited you and say nothing and then walk on. Everyone got—of course what has he done now—what I have I done now, or something. And then on Saturday morning there—all the pictures came together.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, in critique.

DAVID WOODBURY: In racks, and he would walk up and down and make cracks at the different artists who hadn't quite made the grade, you see. They hadn't expressed anything that he thought was a full reasonably expression of what he—what they must have seen. And I was probably the worst of all because one day he was standing at this studio window in the morning, and his assistant was standing next to him and said, "There's a fellow out here that I was just talking to who can't seem to paint at all." And he said, "I wanted to see that." So he looked out, and he said, "Oh damn, David." [00:32:04] [Laughs.] But I had started out very—in a very high spot because one day we were driving, and I guess, uh, in a heck [ph] or something here, and in the woods somewhere and it was winter. I said—I'm supposed to have said, "Oh, look at the blue horse. Oh, look at the blue horse." Well, the horse was blue, and that was because there was a blue shadow on it.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: It was a white horse, you understand.

DAVID WOODBURY: It was a white horse, and it was—

ROBERT BROWN: Blue shadow from the snow, yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: The blue shadow, and to have me recognize that, it seemed to build him up a good deal because he was very—

ROBERT BROWN: So he had great hopes for you, didn't he?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah. I didn't turn out very good.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, then you're in a position to—how—to tell us what his critique was like. Did he, on Saturday morning lay into you?

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh yes, he laid into you.

ROBERT BROWN: What would he, uh—

DAVID WOODBURY: As I say, the tears were everywhere, all around. The girls would put up their—and they were mostly girls. There were some men, but mostly art teachers and colleges, [inaudible] university and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: And they were very, uh—

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —crushed by the critique.

DAVID WOODBURY: And they were very intense, particularly the Cabot, Amy Cabot was very, was very sold on everything he did. She just—and she was always tense to get it right, but she got it anything but right, I guess. But anyhow, the, uh—they tried their damndest, and they would get up at 5:00 in the morning and paint the whole day long through. And then they had to figure out what to do if it rained because they couldn't really do much. So they had—he would get them to do the same thing over again indoors or something and see if they could remember enough of the sunlight. Well, I'm just skipping all over the lot, but when there was a—[00:34:00]

ROBERT BROWN: He put a great deal of, uh, emphasis on color and light.

DAVID WOODBURY: And color and light were to him the background for form, and the question of actual geological and physical structure of a scene was told in terms of light, I think, by him.

ROBERT BROWN: I see.

DAVID WOODBURY: That's what I can remember of it, or, anyway. And it's a beastly difficult thing to do because first of all he has a bunch of paint around that's different colors, and he would have no idea what to do when it goes on the canvas whether it'll look like something or won't, and often times he would paint a whole figure with just one daub this way. And it would look like a figure, looks as if the figure was doing what you thought he—it was doing, she. And no, he was an excellent teacher, and he taught in Wellesley and in Dartmouth, both, and was very well-known and liked there, in both those places, by the students. And it was always the same thing, I think, that you had a measure to give, in the way of light [ph]. He finally—I got a job at, uh, in General Electric in Schenectady, finally after tech. And he came out the business, and Coffen [ph], I think it was Coffen, the head of the firm, uh, Dr. Whitney, came to tea one day, and they got into the damndest argument about a light. Here were two physicists, and here was an artist, and they didn't see eye to eye at all. I mean, no, they were all wavelengths, and he was all values, and there is a difference. I don't know what it is, but [laughs] he was perfectly sure he had the secret of getting the effect by the manipulation of color. [00:36:08] I guess I'm right, don't you think?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I think you are.

DAVID WOODBURY: And he was the—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I always think you are

ROBERT BROWN: He was quite a man, quite certain of himself.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, and where did he get it? God knows that his parents didn't know anything about it. They didn't know even what he was doing, could he?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Now perhaps you can turn it off for—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Okay, what about the various books your father wrote?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, I don't know what persuaded or possessed him, as his mother used to say, "What possessed Charles to write a book?" But anyway, he did, and it turned out to be a work of art because I think that—who published that. That—

ROBERT BROWN: I think this was—this is the *Painting and the Personal Equation*, and it's—

DAVID WOODBURY: Houghton Mifflin, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: —1919, Houghton Mifflin, mm-hmm [affirmative].

DAVID WOODBURY: Which is, I'm sure, a first order, I'd say, of this sort. But anyway, he put all his philosophy—there's more in that book about what he was teaching though and how he went at it, I think, don't you?

ROBERT BROWN: Than?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I think so, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DAVID WOODBURY: So that this would be his philosophy and what painting meant to him. Now you probably have that in another form in your notes.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, and you've discussed it as well.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But why did he—did he ever tell you why he wrote? Went to the trouble of writing books?

DAVID WOODBURY: No, uh, things—he was a great humorist, for a strange reason. We had a streak of humor in the family, not participated in by my grandfather, who took everything very seriously and was always being hurt with something that he just couldn't understand and so forth. But Father, well, you can see these. These are characters. These are—

ROBERT BROWN: These little—

DAVID WOODBURY: —cartoons.

ROBERT BROWN: —wooden carvings. They're caricatures, yes.

DAVID WOODBURY: This looked all hell like this old bum, and so this one here, the main story about him is he runs the riverside, and one day—that's almost [ph] lined with stables. [00:38:09] And long before you got there, I guess, and one day one of the waitresses came banging in from the kitchen with a soup terrine of stew, stepped on the doorsill and went flat on her belly, and the stew went right on through in the dining hall. And Moes Lyman [ph] came right up behind, puffing bad blowing and saying, "Now get a rag and get that up, and get back in the terrine so we can sell it to them just the same, you see." And they did that. I don't know the condition of the floor, the condition of the, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, but your dad made caricatures of these people, yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: But this was the kind of thing that expresses itself and to some extent, and then you know there are a whole lot of crayon drawings. There's any quantity of those things. I don't know where they are, I really don't. There's one in this room somewhere.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did he, uh—he made a lot of drawings, as you say, he made a lot of watercolors.

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, he—that was going to school. He called that going to school, and every time he took me out to lunch or dinner or something or other he would have that out the minute he sat down at the table, and he'd look around the dining room, and there'd be a sketch already made, somebody putting on his, the act of putting on a coat is really funny, if you make it funny.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was not his paintings, which have no figures in them, but these—

DAVID WOODBURY: No, but he—

ROBERT BROWN: —he called going to school. He loved to do—to write some sort of a—draw some kind of a—a humorous commentary on the foibles of humanity, I suppose, although he was not unkind about it at all. He was very reasonable and thought it was just a weakness in humanity, I think. [00:40:05] But those drawings go on, and they went on through the days when they all had dogs. I brought—from the navy I brought home somebody's puppy. I don't know how I got it. I was paid a week's pay for it, anyway, and my grandmother blew up like mad. She didn't have—want a dog in the house. And the dog did all the things that dogs do in the house, and my father simply sat there and sketched. And that one was named—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Imp.

DAVID WOODBURY: —Imp, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And your father didn't care one way or another. It was a subject for drawing.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, no, but Imp was named by him, and he named him all right.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your father by and large sort of imperturbable? I mean, he was—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't get very angry or, uh—

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't think he ever got angry, and no, I don't remember. The only person he ever got angry with was Hamilton Easter Field who deserved it.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? Now this was the patron of artists who came up her to Ogunquit. What—why did he, uh—

DAVID WOODBURY: Is that what he was called, the patron of art?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, was he? What was he, as far as your father was concerned?

DAVID WOODBURY: A damned fairy, that's all I know about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh.

DAVID WOODBURY: And, uh, he turned the natives blue, green, and red when he was found—when he was discovered behind a rock with some girl or whatever. He had quite a harem around here, and these—our natives were all very straight laced.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes?

DAVID WOODBURY: I dare say they had their fun too, but they didn't exploit it in public at all.

ROBERT BROWN: And then what happened between your father and, uh, him?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, they came to be, well, first of all, Father had two very close friends here. One of them was John Kendrick Bangs, the humorist. He lived right over the hill here. [00:42:00] And the other one was Nathan Haskell Dole, who had translated the *Rubaiyat*. He was a literary man from Boston. I think one of Dole's brothers was a preacher somewhere in Boston too. But anyway, that trio, I think he started the OBIA, for that matter. You think?

ROBERT BROWN: What is this? You mean the Ogunquit?

DAVID WOODBURY: Village Improvement Association, this would be in about 1915 or '16, and—

ROBERT BROWN: So these were very civic-minded men when they were up here?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, I think so. He never would be on a board of trustees or anything.

ROBERT BROWN: But he was interested, and he helped—

DAVID WOODBURY: He was very much interested.

ROBERT BROWN: —and he encouraged it?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, and there were a lot of hotels strewing up, and then there was still the influence of the Howitz [ph], and they were quite straight-laced. And then there was old lady Kanarow [ph], husband had

been the head of the, I don't know, some steel company out in the west and given us the library, and that was another influence of shreeting [ph] rectitude, and, uh—

ROBERT BROWN: And then Field [ph] came in in the midst of this?

DAVID WOODBURY: Field, well, I might as well tell the story. Field came over from—he was a Brookline, Brooklyn man. And he had a pontifical mother, always all dressed up in black lace, and extremely straight laced, and he had just been driven off the reservation by his mother, I'm sure, because he was out for crime at all costs, and he—so he brought home from France one time a young man who was known as Robert. And he was Robert Laurent. [00:44:01] And didn't take long to cut a schism between the two art colonies wide open.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

DAVID WOODBURY: And they finally wound up with people waiving guns at each other.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? When was this? You remember this?

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh gee, I remember very well at night there—somebody knocks at the door, and the guy stood there with a revolver, and he just said get out and go, and he went. Nothing ever happened, but there was definitely bad feeling between these two types of artists, not that they—Robert Laurent crowd were being driven out or anything like that, but just, it was the beginning of modern art, I guess. And this is sort of a number of times that they—he unfortunately lived in the—at the very crack of the—in the earthquake shake where the art standards was changing, and he was a—oh, what the devil do they call it?

ROBERT BROWN: You mean your father or—

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, my father, uh, impressionist.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, American impressionist, yeah, okay.

DAVID WOODBURY: But here were the guys who'd—who went to the carnival [ph] [inaudible] threw paint at the campus.

ROBERT BROWN: Practically, yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: Practically, but they didn't do that right away, but—

ROBERT BROWN: But there were strong feeling here then, was there?

DAVID WOODBURY: I remember the day that Father went somewhere and visited an insane asylum and brought home a picture of one of those people painted, and it hung in the house over there for years. It was perfectly meaningless thing, and uh—

ROBERT BROWN: And yet it was these years or shortly after Field died that your father helped found the Ogunquit Art Association. [00:46:05] That was 1928, I believe.

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't even know when Field did die.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he died in the early '20s, so you're—

DAVID WOODBURY: Did somebody shoot him or?

ROBERT BROWN: Did your father eventually then—I mean, he must have—he was the principle man to found it.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes.

DAVID WOODBURY: No, he was—

ROBERT BROWN: But did that include both groups? Did that include?

DAVID WOODBURY: No, no.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: No, that was a place for students to exhibit their work.

ROBERT BROWN: I see.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: And it was down at the beach.

ROBERT BROWN: It wasn't affected by the schism between the—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: No.

DAVID WOODBURY: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —moderns and the more traditional artists.

DAVID WOODBURY: I guess the schism didn't go much beyond my mother and my father and me and Field and Robert Laurent.

ROBERT BROWN: I see.

DAVID WOODBURY: We—later Laurent and we got to be fairly good friends, but it was a total different atmosphere, and then there were Banks [ph]. I don't know if you ever knew John Kenney Banks.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

DAVID WOODBURY: He's big, wide-faced, and he couldn't even speak without making everybody laugh. Everybody was—he cracked wise so much that I guess you'd say he was a nuisance to be around because you never got any serious talk.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

DAVID WOODBURY: Although he was—well, he sent us a manuscript of one of his books, and in the front of it he hadn't written, "For use in the new furnace," you see.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah, but he was one of your father's close—

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —friends.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah, he was, oh, the two Banks boys were little bastards of the worst kind. But John Kennedy was a dear old guy.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did he—as far as you can know, this was a good—your father, as he got older, did he come here more and more, or did he always just spend part of the summer?

DAVID WOODBURY: No, it was always just the same. He lived in Boston in his studio in the wintertime after his wife died, and I suppose he had a lot to do with the Richards [ph] family. [00:48:07] And because it's right over the hill, and no, he—that was—then that period began when he began to go to the Caribbean. And he had, uh—he has left us a tremendous number of beautiful things of that area. Most people like that watercolor work about as well as anything he did, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, and you were saying, I think, when, uh, a little earlier that he—once he'd done something he just put it aside. He didn't—and he would move on to the next thing.

DAVID WOODBURY: I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't have great veneration for the value and all of what he'd done.

DAVID WOODBURY: I have a—

ROBERT BROWN: Just sort of put it aside?

DAVID WOODBURY: —a silly, funny story that I always tell. I was writing plays about that time, and, um, Boston from—I went to Selma Play, and they said—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Binka [ph], Binka Playhouse.

DAVID WOODBURY: Binka Play Company, yeah, and there was a man named Johnson. Well, he said, "I don't like your play, and I won't buy it, but if you'll go and go up to New Hampshire and paint a picture of Chicharo Mountain, I'll buy that." So we got together, and we went up there. And I painted all day long, not that I could paint, but still. And when we got through we came back down here to Ogunquit, but on the way we detoured through Boston and took the picture into his studio. And he sat—stood there. He had a way of standing, looking, then he'd back off a little bit.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this your father you're talking about now?

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah. And finally pounded [ph] up his palate, and he got a brush and one daub of paint, and he walked up, and he daubed one thing in that picture, and he said, "Now I think you can sell it." [They laugh.] [00:50:12] And I did sell it for \$50.

ROBERT BROWN: Very good.

DAVID WOODBURY: So I mean—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: We never told Mr. Johnson there it had a Woodbury touch on hit.

DAVID WOODBURY: —it's in between—

ROBERT BROWN: So you don't know whether he thought it was a great painting or he thought it wasn't worth—

DAVID WOODBURY: I know damn well he didn't think it was a great painting but—

ROBERT BROWN: No, but he said go ahead and sell it to this man.

DAVID WOODBURY: —the best you could ever get out of him for me was competent.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah, ah. Were you pretty close to him, regardless of this—

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh, we were very close to each other, particularly as a kid when he used to carry me around on his shoulder and things like—uh, he was, I don't know if there was something about the marriage that kept mother and me in one compartment and him and his people, his pupils in another. They were doing different things. Mother was teaching me to write and to, uh, read, and things of that kind.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: And to play cello.

DAVID WOODBURY: Yeah—plays. That's why I turned into a writer, primarily by—because by that time she'd trained me so well that I could start in doing it, I hoped. But, um, he was—no, he was very complacent, and on the trips we would take down south on the—those three-week tours, you know, around among the islands and back through usually Jamaica and Puerto Rico and whatnot, he was very busy, but he was very humorous. I don't know that it should be mentioned here, but I finally, long, long after he died and after this all happened, I started in writing all these things up. [00:52:04] And I wrote several of them for *The Reader's Digest*, and I wrote quite a series. It went to the *Down East* magazine up here in where it is. And—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Camden [ph].

DAVID WOODBURY: And this was called *Inventor* in the family. Well, I never got it sold as a book because just about then the agent I had come along and marked up most of the interest in that particular kind of—

ROBERT BROWN: Trying to think, life with father and stuff like—

DAVID WOODBURY: —personal thing, yeah, life with father, but, uh, *The Digest* bought them all, and, uh, these other magazines. I sold a good part of the book that way, and I still have it, and I still want to sell it. I think it's really late [inaudible], but anyhow, I wrote into that the story of a little boy who is about 10 years old and who—whose grandfather takes him over, and they're in a family that's all artists and don't want to bother with him. And, uh, the way that the old man and the father and the mother, particularly the mother, behave is, well, possibly humorous, I don't know, but one of the things *The Digest* liked very much was the story about him when I was only three or something, four, and they were digging that foundation for that house over there. There was an old geezer called Ben, I think, who was getting ready to blow a hole in this ledge. So he had a drill and a hammer, and he was working the hole down so he could get the dynamite stick into, you see. [00:54:06] Well, when it was all done, uh, the dynamite stick was too big, and so he had to whittle the dynamite down. If you've ever associated with dynamite, uh, one of the things you take care about is don't mishandle the piece, uh, stick of dynamite. It's got a role of, uh—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Wax paper.

DAVID WOODBURY: —plastic, wax paper, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

DAVID WOODBURY: And you can strip that off, and you get it down. He did. But when he got these—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Shavings.

DAVID WOODBURY: —shavings of, uh, dynamite off, he, well, no. Well, he said, "Well, I shouldn't, chewing tobacco is pretty expensive anyway, and dynamite tastes just as good." Well, just as he said that my mother turned up. And she said, "What are you putting in that child's mouth?" Because he had said to me—dynamite, he called it. Well, that was the big moment in that week all right because it was obvious that Grandpa couldn't be trusted to do the right thing by the little boy, you see. That theme goes all the way through.

ROBERT BROWN: Right, and of course it's modeled more or less on your family? Right.

DAVID WOODBURY: Oh no, very much so, yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh, that was his experience, yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: And the story of the wedding where after he had married her in her mother's home, uh, his father turned up and got hold of the driver who was to drive the wedding carriage off for their honeymoon and got into swapped so that he'd go instead. [00:56:01]

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

DAVID WOODBURY: [Laughs.] So they started out from South Berwick and went, they were going to try to get to Ogunquit. None of them had any idea where it was except Mother, I guess she did. But anyhow, they got up on top of the mountain, and they lost their way, and it became dark, and it rained, and the thunderstorm came up, and hell broke loose generally. And, uh, finally grandpa turned around. He said, "Charlie, it's me." [Laughs.] Well, uh, Dwayne Doolittle who ran the magazine thought well of that, and so that went into the book and—

ROBERT BROWN: A lot of good things, because actually it's quite—you've made quite a lot of documentation of your father.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: That [inaudible].

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you see his, uh, I mean, as you look back, how do you see his reputation among American painters, and what are you—or you—what do you think will happen?

DAVID WOODBURY: I'm terribly, um, mixed up about this. The whole—you can't really talk about anything in modern day except through politics now, it seems to me. I mean, there's so much going on that doesn't belong anywhere, and another—well, the hell raising that goes on in this art field is terrific. I mean—

ROBERT BROWN: But do you see your father—more and more interest in your father's work?

DAVID WOODBURY: Well, not yet. I don't believe—I don't think we could possibly sell them all now.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

DAVID WOODBURY: We've got far more pictures than we could ever sell.

ROBERT BROWN: But don't you feel that, uh, with Homer, who saw his work when he was a teenager that, uh—

DAVID WOODBURY: I don't know how I feel about that.

ROBERT BROWN: —he's a very fine painter.

DAVID WOODBURY: The—they all say to us, there was a lot—don't worry, you'll be able to sell them because they'll get enough of this crazy stuff, and then you can sell the pictures, but it doesn't happen. [00:58:02] And it hasn't happened yet. Oh, we sell three, four a year, he gets more or less.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: We're not terribly anxious to sell, actually.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, sure.

DAVID WOODBURY: No, we don't want to sell.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: But I've always—

ROBERT BROWN: I'm going to take this off now. I'll take—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]