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**Oral history interview with Humphery Emery,  
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**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Interview

**HE:** HUMPHREY J. EMERY

**RB:** ROBERT BROWN

**RB:** This is an interview, April 25, 1973, with Humphrey Emery at the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston. And perhaps to begin, I'd like to ask you what you've heard about, read about, knew about when you came here, or later, of the early . . . the beginnings of the Society.

**HE:** The Society started when a group of Bostonians, knowing what was being done in England under the influence of William Morris and the craft field, exhibiting the work of craftsmen in England, felt that an exhibition in Boston of good craft work and good manufactured work might help to counteract the poor quality of design and work being shown in our stores in Boston, particularly department stores. Henry Louis Johnston was the instigator of this plan, and he taught C. Howard Walker, who was a notable architect, as to people that might be interested in promoting this idea. I remember talking to Mr. Walker about this years later. He said that he gave Johnston a list of people whom he should talk with, and he said, "I specifically pointed out that he do it on a one, two, three, four basis, etc., and not substitute names that had been given him for later interviews until he had seen the prior ones. Even then, we had to consider the fact that there were warm feelings, and if you hadn't gotten one person before you got to another, you were in deep trouble." So, Mr. Johnston did exactly that.

**RB:** He was the first . . . ?

**HE:** He was the first . . .

**RB:** Head of the Society?

**HE:** He was. The first Secretary, as they called it.

**RB:** Did you know him? Or was he [word not clear]?

**HE:** I knew him. He was a printer, a pathetic sort of a fellow who was never appreciated. But he was the instigator of this whole idea.

**RB:** What was he like? Could you . . . ? What sort of things did he talk about?

**HE:** Very quiet, sort of self-effacing individual, and when I knew him he didn't have any printing establishment. He was then giving jobs to printers like Updike, who was a very confident printer, and would do the kind of things that Johnston wanted. He was very particular about the type face, for example, that was used and created some of his own. However, getting back to the initial plan, a group of Bostonians got together and arranged for an exhibition which was held in the Back Bay where the Sheraton Plaza is now, the Copley Plaza, it's now known, and that was the old Museum. They sent out notices to all known craftsmen and some manufacturers. The response was fair. A

lot of people want to see whether you're going to do things right, whether it's going to be a success, before they make up their minds. However, there were . . . there was a good exhibition of work and it shaped up very well indeed. And the work at that period was shown. And I remember one in particular, Barton P. Jenks. And this takes me back to my own youth because I went to school with his son in Concord, New Hampshire. And we used to go down to the silver shop, where the silvers were being manufactured. And even in those days I was interested to see how things were done. Well, it shows how small the world is. I came into the Society many years later and there was work designed, and he was a designer, at the Durgin Factory in Concord. And he was good; and he was one of the initiators of this Society.

**RB:** So most of them were craftsmen. At least the ones you've talked about now. Were there other Bostonians involved?

**HE:** Well, there was C. Howard Walker, an architect; Ralph Adams Cram; D. B. Updike, E. W. Longfellow; Mrs. Montgomery Sears. Quite a name of . . . quite a group of those charter people, and they incorporated in 1897. Then, two years later they decided to have another exhibition, same place. There they had no trouble getting exhibitord because they knew how well the first show had gone, so there was an avalanche of work, and it was very popular. And another thing to remember is that in those days the good craft work wasn't really available to the public. They couldn't see it. It was in people's houses, to certain extent in the Museum, and that was American work and foreign too. And this was an opportunity for people to see the good work that was being done and, hopefully, it would improve their taste and judgment in buying things, whether craft work or not. The 1899 exhibit was very popular, as I said, very popular, and people came far and wide to see this show. Well, the craftsmen said, "This is fine to exhibit but we have to make a living, and we can't live from exhibitions." So the Society took a space on Somerset Street, in a little, upstairs room, where work was shown and sold. This created somewhat of a cleavage that the Society should be involved with filthy lucre. And Arthur Astor Carey, for one, then President who had anonymously managed the Society, resigned.

**RB:** He wasn't a craftsman, was he?

**HE:** He was not, himself. But he didn't approve of the Society showing these things. However, we did, and it created to a degree a living for the craftsmen. Not that they couldn't sell on their own, too, but they remained there at Somerset Street till 1904, when space was taken on the first floor at 9 Park Street, just around the corner from there, where we were until about 1932.

**RB:** Were you on the ground floor there?

**HE:** On the ground floor. And a time came, in the early Twenties, when we were doing good business there on Park Street. The craftsmen felt that we should have another outlet, and they were very much tempted by New York. Again, Mr. C. Howard Walker suggested that, instead of going to New York, two places: one on Arlington Street on Lane, and the other one at 32 Newbury. This came to my attention years after. Instead of listening to him, they decided to open a shop in New York.

**RB:** He thought they should stay only in Boston?

**HE:** Yeah. They had built up a nest egg. The nest egg was used up in the expenses for New York. It was a conflict between the sales manager in Boston and the one in New York because everything was juried in Boston. And here again was a mistake, because New York didn't want to listen to what was approved by a Boston jury for their place in New York. Another thing was it was

the Society of Arts and Crafts instead of another name. This didn't sit very well with the New Yorkers, so they didn't. While they supported it to a degree, they didn't make it financially good. They moved from that spot to a place on Madison Avenue and took a long-term lease, with a rent higher than we would pay in Boston, and that, again, lost money. It reached a point where they couldn't put any more money into it, so they closed the New York shop.

**RB:** Was this in the late 1920's?

**HE:** Yeah. And, perhaps, around '24 or so. And the Society returned to its one outlet at 9 Park Street. Then, there were exhibitions we had a part in, sometimes the craftsmen, sometimes with backing from the Society. St. Louis [pronounced "St. Louie"], was one. A very good show, it was.

**RB:** St. Louis?

**HE:** Yeah. And there were honors handed out to our members, and Mr. Macomber, who was then operating the Society, was on the committee of that St. Louis exhibition. Moving on.

**RB:** What was the structure of the Society? Could you briefly indicate what that was? You've mentioned it began with the two exhibitions. You've mentioned the selection process there. Once they acquired the Somerset Street place and then down on Park Street, did the organization's structure change, or could you describe how it actually did operate?

**HE:** Actually, it operated pretty consistently from the beginning with a council elected by the members. It was a national organization.

**RB:** It was the first in the country, wasn't it?

**HE:** Yes, and it was called the National Co-operative of Craftsmen, and its purpose was to develop and encourage the highest artistic standards in the handicrafts. That's always been our purpose. We never had any axe to grind as to whether work be contemporary or traditional. We wanted the best work of its kind; and, to insure that, the council set up a jury and this was made up of people who were knowledgeable, not necessarily craftsmen themselves, but who had good taste and understood what good design was. C. Howard Walker was from the beginning on that and he was a critique . . . critic, jury. The work was not arbitrarily turned down without a reason. Craftsmen could even come in and talk it over with him, or with somebody else on the jury. Where there were distant craftsmen, it was done by letter. But we had from the outset an educational charter from the Commonwealth, so we -- the jury -- while we didn't have formal courses, became our educational facet. The craftsmen grew with this influence of the jury to improve what they were doing both technically and design-wise. The jury has always been a part of the Society. True, they couldn't see the special orders that were put through because they had to be delivered when the jury wasn't necessarily in session, but in the special orders, where people wanted something made, we'll say, in jewelry and silverware, something of that sort, the juror's judgment was considered so that it couldn't be said by somebody, "You don't mean to say you got that at the Society of Arts and Crafts! That jury'd never have approved it." Well, it's true the jury hadn't specifically approved it.

**RB:** You did sell things on special order that weren't necessarily craftsmen who had gone through the jury?

**HE:** Oh, they . . . .

**RB:** . . . process.

**HE:** They'd been juried as craftsmen.

**RB:** Oh.

**HE:** But this particular item that was made to order hadn't been seen by the jury.

**RB:** Perhaps you'd better explain what they're jurying. They're not just jurying objects for one time and then have to do it each time. Aren't they also jurying the craftsman as to his potential?

**HE:** Initially, yes. To see whether their work is at a level that we should accept, and then, in the process of doing that, they were naturally approving work that could be sold. However, duplicates didn't have to be juried, or anything close to it. And then the jury also would give a gold star. In other words, commending a given piece of work. It could even commend the whole collection that the craftsman had submitted at that time. We've had all kinds of juries over the years in the Society. Some of them were . . . had a preponderance of craftsmen. And that didn't work out well for us. If a given type of work came in and there was nobody representing that craft, the other craftsmen were so easy-going in approving it, whereas with their own craft they were super-critical, and it didn't work fairly for the craftsman.

**RB:** What kind of people then, other than craftsmen, were selected?

**HE:** So we got to a point where we had people of good taste who recognized good design. And there was always at least a craftsman who knew the techniques involved who could say, "This isn't good enough to be in here," and even though it looked well and was attractive and was in good taste. But, there were, of course, some things that, if we needed a technician in this respect, we could always call one in to re-judge. The jury, as I said, would commend certain items and this was important to craftsmen because it . . . . We had different degrees. Everybody who joined the Society as a craftsman, joined as a craftsman.

**RB:** A man had to join in order to exhibit?

**HE:** Right. Then, in the course of time, there was what was known as a Crafts Advisory Board, composed entirely of craftsmen who annually selected a group of craftsmen -- to be advanced the degree of master craftsmen. This was, you know, an honor that they really appreciated. And in the course of time it was something they'd put on their letterhead: Master Craftsman of the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston. It gave them an immediate stature that was recognized throughout the country.

**RB:** Did it work well, generally, aside from their feelings of prestige?

**HE:** Well, it did and it didn't. We found that people who had been given that degree of mastership, once they got it, they felt that was the limit of their attainment and they slid back. So, as time went on, we held that award back, even though we knew they were that level, in order to keep them on their toes.

**RB:** They didn't have to be juried once they were master craftsmen?

**HE:** Oh, they all had to be juried, but we knew that it took something away from them. So, in later years, we purposely withheld that award, even though we felt to a degree they'd earned it, because we didn't want them to go back. There was one further step taken. That was the degree of Medalist, and we couldn't award more than three a year. Sometimes we didn't award any. But these were master craftsmen who were going to be graduated with the degree of Medalist. While it

wasn't written in the by-laws, it was an unwritten law that a Medalist didn't have to be juried. He had reached the level where his judgment was considered good. On the other hand, some of those Medalists wanted to be juried because they wanted to get gold stars.

**RB:** On the particular work that they were exhibiting?

**HE:** On the particular work that they were doing.

**RB:** Was this definitely tied to sales?

**HE:** No.

**RB:** If a craftsman were a Medalist, is it quite likely that, do you think that people looked first at his work?

**HE:** Well, there again, customers would ask, "Who's your best craftsman?" So they'd have to be good to be here in the first place. But so-and-so is a Medalist, which is our highest award. On the other hand, there were craftsmen who were talented in a given style or technique. Not to say that somebody else who was just a plain craftsman wasn't doing something else better than that Medalist was doing, which was out of his particular interest or range. But we tried to give everybody as fair a showing as we could. We did not promote them as individuals, except where a customer would say, "I'd like to see Ochs jewelry." We'd show them Ochs jewelry. Or Stone silver. But we didn't show their names against their work. The idea was that this is good craft work. We never had way-out work. We didn't have anything that wasn't sound and while, admittedly, over the years the style changed tremendously and the type of display did, on the other hand, we didn't feel that the individual is as important as the fact that somebody liked the work well enough to buy it. It didn't make too much difference who made it.

**RB:** You said that you occasionally encouraged some of the craftsmen to open their own shops. Did you?

**HE:** Well, there was a group of craftsmen known as the Handicraft Shop. Geblein [sp], Lingnan, Miss Winlock, an enamelist; Miss Katherine Pratt, a silversmith; had a shop downtown, a workshop where they used some tools in common, some were individually owned; and it was a good arrangement. And they could sell directly, or sell through the Society. We had their work in our own gallery, but we tried to persuade them of the importance of not underselling the Society. You realize that a craftsman is only interested in what he gets, and sometimes it scared them to feel that we had to add a commission, and then, of course, it wouldn't sell, they'd feel. We said, "That's not your problem. That's our problem, and we have to charge an overhead because we have a paid staff; we're paying rent." So we did encourage them to establish a selling price, which would protect us, with more commission than they might normally charge themselves. This has always been a battle and never completely resolved. Some craftsmen insist on setting their selling prices even though sometimes that does not allow an adequate commission for the Society. We went along with them and didn't dispute it; but we encouraged that point of view that they establish a selling price with a discount for the Society. There was a time when . . . Well, I came in, in June, 1930, as secretary-treasurer of the Society. I hadn't known of it before, though curiously enough I discovered years later that one of my distant cousins, living in Newburyport, had exhibited in our first exhibition and . . .

**RB:** Were you called in by the Society?

**HE:** I was in banking at the time, and one of those strange situations where we had a friend who was coming to tea at our house in Cambridge on a Sunday afternoon and she asked if she could bring somebody with her. Of course, she could. And, some time later, I met this friend of mine, Mrs. Folsom, and said Miss Sayres, who was chairman of the jury at the time, of the Society, said, "What about Humphrey Emery to operate the Society?"

**RB:** There was no one there at the time?

**HE:** They had recently had an election and the only time in the history of the Society where there were two officers, two groups, fighting one another. C. Howard Walker was opposing Frank Gardner Hale, the jeweler. Mr. Walker was elected, and Grant Cove, who was then the director, was not to Mr. Walker's liking, so he resigned. I've met Cove in the interim and he was a hard worker, but I think he had an idea of big business for the Society beyond what they could properly finance, and even though they were selling very well indeed . . . .

**RB:** They might repeat the New York shop mistake, you thought.

**HE:** Yeah. So there was nobody at the head of the Society in an executive capacity, and Mrs. Folsom said, "Well, he's got a job and the Society's in a bad way financially as a result of this New York fiasco and you'd be foolish to consider shifting gears."

**RB:** This was in the beginning of the Depression, was it?

**HE:** It was. And, you know, I said to Mrs. Folsom, "I don't know anything about the Society but I wouldn't turn anything down without looking into it." So I did, and I met with the Committee, and I remember one in particular who was on the Committee, Mr. Templeman Coolidge, who was so disappointed that my name was spelled E-m-e-r-y instead of A-m-o-r-y. [laughter] I could see his face fall.

**RB:** Not a Boston man?

**HE:** Not a Boston man. And it was important then to be able to place you in their own minds. We became fast friends because of that, and they appointed me as secretary-treasurer at a nominal salary. And I came into 9 Park Street June 16, 1930.

**RB:** You gave up your job at the bank?

**HE:** I gave up my job at the bank. There was at the time a Sales Manager, Mrs. Ropes, who was good, and had built up the sales of the Society to a substantial degree. She, immediately I arrived, took off for a three month trip to Europe. And while she was gone I discovered things that were going on that I didn't approve. One, that weekly payments to the staff, so far as the sales staff was concerned, were withheld at Mrs. Ropes' discretion by her; and they had to borrow money from the bookkeeping office to carry them because they might have to wait two or three weeks for that pay because of some failing. Mrs. Ropes felt that they had not done their job properly. When she returned, I told her that this couldn't go on any longer. That she either had authority from me to distribute that to each person and we had to see they got it when it was due. This became a major bone of contention between the two of us, and it came before the Board and I was backed. Shortly afterward, she resigned so she was never there, actually, as Sales Manager from then on. Then, I felt the Depression was coming on then and I had to cut expenses. We had a substantial staff. We were on two floors with the offices on the second floor and we were paying a high rent. And, in the course of two years, I cut the expenses by sixty percent. It was difficult for people to live on what

we could afford to pay them. We tried to stagger the staff so that everybody that we were holding onto makes something, even though not as much as they were before.

**RB:** How large was the staff then?

**HE:** Oh, I suppose there were a dozen or fifteen people, and it was a difficult place to handle from that point of view because the rooms were broken up, so you had to have good coverage in the sales room. We had three bookkeepers, for example, and I felt that in that area the bookkeeping was too costly. There was a lot of hand work being done, though we did have a bookkeeping machine of ancient vintage. So I talked with various manufacturers of machines. We had a complicated system, admittedly; everything was on consignment. Records had to be very carefully kept. The craftsmen paid monthly for sales that were made. So, in the end, I settled on the Burroughs people. They made a very careful survey. There was a Mr. Fletcher that was responsible with an assistant he had, and they worked in a very conscientious fashion to develop a system suitable for the Society. They were way ahead of their time. This involved buying a machine made to order to fit our particular purposes. And Mr. Fletcher said, "You know, your bookkeeper, your head bookkeeper, is not going to adjust to this and neither is her assistant, but you have a third girl here, Miss McDonald, who is very much of an underling in the office. I'm sure she could adjust to it, and we can train her to operate this new setup." So Miss McDonald took charge of the office and our saving of salaries was enough to pay for the machine. Then, our next step was the question of whether 9 Park Street was a suitable place for the future. We had sold a great deal there. It had been a very satisfactory arrangement, but people complained about parking, even in the early Thirties, down there. I realized that the Back Bay ought to be searched as an area for the Society. So I made it my business to come up to the Back Bay to talk with shopkeepers all around the area. I told them frankly what we had in mind. "How'd they feel about our coming up to the Back Bay?" "We'd be delighted." "Wouldn't you feel we were competitors?" "One day they'll come to you, the next day they'll come to us; but the more reason people have for coming to the Back Bay, the better." They even told me where we should be. And curiously enough, it was the same place that C. Howard Walker had recommended when the Society opened a shop in New York -- 32 Newbury -- was then vacant. There had been a glass and china shop there, Briggs, and it was a double store. We could get it for the same rent we were paying at 9 Park Street, \$4,000.

**RB:** Why was that? Was the Back Bay not doing so well during the Depression?

**HE:** It was not doing well. I remember talking to Augustus Loring, who was on our Board and Vice President, as to the wisdom of making such a move in the Depression. He said, "Everything's either going to pot or it's going up. I think it's worth taking a chance." I talked to the Board about this. I had a lease in my pocket, and Mr. Walker was then President, and he'd been the one who had suggested 32 Newbury years before. He said, "I don't want you to talk to the owners about a lease. We've got to consider this further." As I say, I had a lease in my pocket. I went back to the owners and said, "You understand, I have different committees to deal with. Could we make these changes in the lease? And then I think we can get everything straightened out." We were planning on a meeting very shortly afterwards so I had various people work on Mr. Walker, prior to the meeting, to bring him around to the idea of moving.

**RB:** Although he'd originally been for it?

**HE:** He'd originally been for it, but the Depression scared people. And that was a wicked experience to go through. You literally didn't know whether you could keep your head above water or not. He did approve the lease. On the Board we had Charles Ewing, a retired New York architect who had come to Milton with his family to live, a brother-in-law of Templeman Coolidge, also on the Board.



And Mr. Ewing worked out plans that were essential to adapt the place to our purposes. We moved on a shoestring. And it was an ideal spot. It was a shame that in the course of time when they tried to persuade the Board to buy the building, knowing it was for sale, they said they didn't want to go into the real estate business. But we would have saved a great deal of money in forced moves that we had to do after that.

**RB:** What did you do in the Thirties there that made it a success?

**HE:** Well, it was a good location. It was convenient to the Ritz, and in those days, the people that stayed in a place like that, walked around the streets at night, window shopping, and we got some very good customers out of it. For one, Lily Pons was staying at the Ritz, and she was one that saw us at night, came in, ordered her flat silver from us. Another interesting one was a Mr. Dickman [sp?], then President of the American Locomotive Company. I got to know him, and he said, "We have a Board of Directors, of course, and they are shown confidential papers that we'd like them to leave behind instead of stuffing them into their pockets after the meetings. That they're entitled to do that, but I'd like to discourage that practice as much as possible. And it occurs to me that if we had a portfolio in front of each director, with their name on it, and the insignia of the American Locomotive, that they'd be more likely to leave those papers in the portfolio than take them along with them. We had a good means of dealing with that and we made those portfolios. And each time a new director was appointed, we'd have an order for a new portfolio with the name of the new one on it.

**RB:** This was a special order for certain craftsmen?

**HE:** A special order. And I asked him how well the plan was working. And he said, "Beautifully. Exactly what I'd hoped. They're not taking these papers with them."

**RB:** Did you, in the Thirties, have as many craftsmen, or was there a falling off in numbers of craftsmen? Or, on the other hand, were there a great many beating at your doors?

**HE:** The craftsmen were thankful, actually, even though they hadn't been members, to join up with us if they had any talent as a craftsman. So there was no falling off in that respect. And we had all kinds to choose from.

**RB:** There were no real rival groups elsewhere?

**HE:** There were others that developed.

**RB:** There was one in Detroit, wasn't there?

**HE:** Well, that was not a rival. I should say that we encouraged all this, wherever we could, and oftentimes were consulted as to our experience where they could use it to develop a craft shop of their own. We were used as a yardstick. And they'd see the kind of work they had compared to what we had, and I'm absolutely certain we up-graded the quality of the work they had along the line. Detroit was a good outlet for craftsmen, and particularly in silver and jewelry. And there were members of ours that were members there too. And it was a pity that they went out of the picture, but there was a situation where it was based on two people that were operating it. I got to know them and, when they retired or died, then Detroit gave up. A number of years later we were asked to send an exhibit for selling purposes to the parents of Planned Parenthood in Detroit. They were taking over an area and handing out spaces to different outfits. And we were invited to join in this, and I went out myself, with a friend of mine who helped in selling. This was long after the Detroit

Society had closed down. And I knew that Detroit was a good area for work, and I took certain things there that I knew would ring a bell with them. And they just loved it, to see these old friends of theirs that they'd known before. And we've always had customers from Detroit. I remember one in particular who came to us in Boston and said, "We came East to New York to buy things that we wanted, but we've flown to Boston just to come to the Society and get things from you." That loyalty we appreciated.

**RB:** What do you think explains this loyalty that you've just been talking about?

**HE:** Well, we were unique. You can't find the things we carry everywhere. They knew it was good work. They trusted what we showed them. I said, we never had way-out things. It was all sound work. And they became very much attached to us. There had been over the years people who came to the Society because they didn't trust their own judgment to go to another store, or they weren't sure whether it was good or not. And it might be once a year they would come in for a special present, knowing that they were safe with us. And they also felt a build-up on our label in the thing they were giving. But I remember, two of our friends on the Board, Mrs. Henry Lyman and Mrs. John Ames, who belonged to the Chilton Club and they would go over our list. And I could overhear them talking to one another, "I don't know this person, do you?" "No, never heard of her." Well, I was amused. They had hoped that we would, when we had to move in '32, move up near the Chilton Club. I said, "You know, we would lose our shirt if we depended on your friends to support us." I'm sorry but it's a fact. Our customers are John Q. Public. They may be working in offices as secretary, and we had made it a point, at least in my day, to have good work in every price range. It might be selling for \$2.00, but it was a good example of its kind.

**RB:** Mrs. Lyman and Mrs. Ames, had they thought that their well-to-do friends could carry the Society?

**HE:** Yeah, but it was a fact, they didn't.

**RB:** Were these well-to-do people quite prominent on your Board in the Thirties and later?

**HE:** We always had, in my day, an equal division between craftsmen and associates.

**RB:** The associates were something you created?

**HE:** No, I didn't create them, but there were people interested in the craft movement. But there we specifically decided to be equally divided. Now some of those associates were well-to-do people, and they were very reliable and responsible about coming to meetings, moreso than the craftsmen were. On the other hand they were very particular that they should vote something that they doubted the craftsmen would want. So they really did yeoman's work in supporting the craftsmen, both financially and by their attendance at meetings. There was a time when . . . I've spoken of our New York fiasco, we had a tenant there, because our lease hadn't run out. And in the Depression he decided he had to go out of business.

**RB:** You still held the lease? [Laughter]

**HE:** We had the lease. This was a blow because the lease was worth \$50,000, and we were on our uppers. I remember going to New York to talk to the owners. And they laughed at me when I said we can't take it over. We can't pay you anything. You can put us out of business if you want to, but you won't get ten cents on a dollar. You'd get the satisfaction of putting us out of business, in depriving craftsmen of an outlet, which is important in their lives. As I say, they laughed at me.

"Didn't John D. Rockefeller support you when you had a shop in New York?" I said, "We wouldn't even think of going to Mr. Rockefeller; he has nothing to do with us now. It's true he put up \$5,000 to finance the opening of a New York shop. And he was a brother-in-law of William T. Aldrich who was then President. And it was through him Mr. Rockefeller became interested, but we wouldn't approach him for one moment on this situation." Mr. Ewing, knowing his way around New York as he did, went down to talk with them, and worked out, ultimately, a payment of \$1,000 a year for five years, which would clean up the problem. And they accepted that. We didn't have that thousand dollars a year, but we had to make good on it. Then, another interesting aspect developed that we had always been a consignment business. As time went on, you found that if you didn't have a buying account, you couldn't always get the best work available. Mrs. Lyman and Mrs. Ames were aware of this.

**RB:** You mean the craftsmen were . . . tended to hold back some of their best work? Tried to sell it on their own?

**HE:** Or to another shop.

**RB:** Yeah.

**HE:** So we were handicapped, and we knew it. Out of that came what became known as the craftsmen -- Lyman-Ames fund, where people, such as they, put up money for the purchase of work not literally limited to craft work. It could include some manufactured work, was still approved by the jury. We paid them 5% interest, annually. And others joined them in this undertaking. It was a godsend. It developed into a substantial account. And the majority of sales were developed in that Lyman-Ames fund.

**RB:** This was in the 1930's it started?

**HE:** Yes.

**RB:** These overshadowed your other sales at the time?

**HE:** They did. Then later on, craftsmen, realizing how helpful that fund had been, worked out a plan whereby member craftsmen would contribute a piece of their work to the Society. When it was sold, that money went into the savings account. And when, for example, a thousand dollars was in the account, we asked to borrow it. And used that for the purchase of, literally, craft work. There could be no manufactured work in that. I was afraid that we might be handicapped in the sales on that fund.

**RB:** This was called the "Craftsmen's Fund?"

**HE:** Craftsmen's Fund. And all that work was juried. It had to be literally hand craft work, but that again, even though it never grew as large as the Lyman-Ames Fund, worked out very well indeed. So we had those two buying accounts and we literally discouraged consignment. We tried to . . . Of course some things were too expensive and too risky to buy where a craftsman was willing to consign them to us.

**RB:** Where did this leave many of your member craftsmen then, if they couldn't put things on consignment?

**HE:** Oh, they could, if they wanted to. Oh, yes.

**RB:** You simply discouraged them. There was no policy...

**HE:** Oh, no.

**RB:** . . . against it, really?

**HE:** Oh, no.

**RB:** You pointed out that they weren't selling well. Is that right?

**HE:** No, I didn't mean that exactly, but we couldn't get the best of the work we wanted . . .

**RB:** I see.

**HE:** . . . on consignment basis. Not that we couldn't sell their work; which they submitted, but you didn't have as much freedom of action unless you had money to buy these things. On that score, it became necessary for me to by-pass the jury to an extent. If I was on a trip, I had to accept work from a craftsman if I felt it was within our range and pay for it. I would show it to the jury when it arrived. I did this in two ways. If I was certain of that . . . in other words, comparable to what we had, I'd place a substantial order. If I was dubious about it, because it was, perhaps, in a new area we hadn't . . . the jury hadn't considered, I'd place a token order, and the jury would examine all this work when it arrived in Boston. There were times when it arrived and I said to the jury, "I made a mistake. It was the best work I saw, but now it's here I realize my judgment was not right. I'm sorry we bought it. And we won't take any more of it, if you disapprove of it." But there again, I'd run into problems, and my own number one craftsman I was supposed to see, who was renowned . . . I went down to his basement workshop. My heart sank because I just couldn't virtually see anything that I could take. I knew I had to . . . I pulled myself together and made a selection. I told the jury my experience. "We don't see anything wrong with this work; keep it." "But if you'd seen what I'd chose from, you'd realize what a problem I had."

**RB:** Now you'd come to this from . . . with no background in the crafts. How did you develop this to the point where you were making the selections?

**HE:** Well, I had good teachers on the jury.

**RB:** Who were some you worked closely with? Could you describe this?

**HE:** C. Howard Walker.

**RB:** How did he work with you? Could you describe that?

**HE:** Well, he was a delightful person. He, in just one sentence, could say exactly . . . could put his finger on the whole thing. Mrs. Skinner, who became later chairman of the jury and she worked closely with her husband who was manager . . . [words not clear] stained glass. She made it her business to study each craft technically so that she knew the problem of the craftsmen in creating these pieces. Then the others, like Mrs. Lyman and Mrs. Ames, who weren't . . . were a great help, and they were so generous with their knowledge and experience, and so easy to work with. Some of it was bound to filter through.

**RB:** What about your meeting the craftsmen? Could you describe that? Were there any particular craftsmen you got quite close to?

**HE:** Oh, some we never saw, and others would drop in to see us here, or who lived far from Boston but would turn up, perhaps, in the summertime on a trip to the East. And it was always interesting to meet up with somebody you'd corresponded with, and get to know them far better than you could just by mail. I remember one in particular who did gesso picture frames. She'd lived in New York and she . . . we'd never seen her, but she was getting checks all the time for the sale of her frames. And one summer she showed up. She had to introduce herself. Mignon Reuther.

**RB:** What was her name?

**HE:** Mignon Reuther. She's now living down the Cape and still doing this gesso work. And when she's gone there'll be nobody to take her place. She wouldn't ever accept an apprentice. She worked alone, and it's a dying craft. It's an Italian craft, actually. But it was wonderful to be able to talk with her after knowing her through correspondence.

**RB:** What did they like to talk about with you?

**HE:** Their own work. Basically craftsmen are loners. They don't join together enough. It would be healthy if they did, but they . . . Sometimes they were embarrassed to bring their work in to us, and they might ask a friend or relative to bring it in and see what we thought of it and, of course, at times you'd meet up with the craftsman himself. But they didn't . . . weren't always judges of their work. Sometimes they would send in work that wasn't acceptable, or we felt could be improved upon. And if by chance I should get to see them in their own bailiwick, I'd say, "Well, why did you send these pieces to us? This is much more to our liking than what you're doing . . . what you sent us." "Oh, I didn't think you'd approve that work." Well, again, I remember one craftsman who did enamels and she was the wife of one of the officials on the Reader's Digest, Mrs. Acheson, and she'd done the enamels for the Reader's Digest, meeting the color schemes of their different rooms. The enamels she submitted were perfect; in fact, too perfect. They looked as if they were manufactured. I said, "Mrs. Acheson, don't you ever make a mistake?" "Of course I do, but I wouldn't think of sending them to the Society." "You know, I think we'd be interested in your mistakes." But in those days people used a gas kiln and one side would get a little more burned than another, a little uneven. Technically, it was all right, and much more interesting. So, periodically, after that, we'd get a shipment from Mrs. Acheson, included in it was a package, "Here are Mr. Emery's mistakes." [Laughter] And they were much more to our liking than the others were. Other times, craftsmen would bring work in to us, somebody who was new to us, and I'd lay the work out in front of me. One group here, another one in the middle, another group over there. The craftsman would be a little puzzled as to my separation. "What's that group over there" "Those are rejected pieces." "Why? They're my best sellers." "Yes, I know they are, but you've burned the sharp corners and you've worked for a price. If you don't do it that way, we would . . . yes, we would approve. We would pay you a premium for it." "Well, that's what I'd like to do but I have to do it this other way because they insist I work to a given price."

**RB:** So, in this way you pretty effectively discouraged poor work?

**HE:** Yeah, we did. And they knew the reason, and they preferred working for us in this fashion. There was a time, at 9 Park Street, where we got to know a man, a Mr. Ball, who was the head of Conant-Ball [sp], a furniture and garden outfit. He came to know the Society through a friend of his who came to Boston periodically, and said, "I always go to the Society of Arts and Crafts when I'm in Boston. Come in with me." Which he did. And, the time came when he said, "You know, this place interests me. I'd like to have some of our maple furniture that you would approve here for prestige." No question, he had good judgment in what he was making up there. And he picked excellent designs, and he said, "I know you can't sell enough to account for anything in our total business, but

the fact that your jury has approved certain of these pieces would be helpful." So we had a very pleasant relationship with him over the years.

**RB:** He did in fact send you his furniture?

**HE:** Oh, yes. Yes. We carried it for some years. Not all of it, but certain pieces. He understood that. But we did have a healthy influence in the craft movement, and I hope we'll continue to have that. And, as I say, we did encourage craftsmen in shops where they asked our help. There was a time when some craftsmen felt that they would like to have their own operation, and didn't like the idea of the Society's operation particularly. And Miss Eva Whiting White, who was then President of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, and I worked very closely together with a committee to try to create a craftsmen's organization, literally craftsmen, no associates or anything of that nature. And there were then in Massachusetts, a number of craft outlets that were hard put to make ends meet with volunteers and we were determined not to take anything away from those outlets by refusing individual memberships. They had to be a member of a group. No other could join it. The Society provided the major financing for that, even though we knew we had nothing to gain from it, but tried to get something off the ground. But it took years and years and years to make any headway because craftsmen basically are not leaders in that way.

**RB:** When was this attempted?

**HE:** Oh, this would have been the Thirties. And that, ultimately, became Massachusetts Association of Craftsmen, but there was a lot of groundwork that had to be laid. Now, groups are not involved in that, except quite incidentally; but I think our thinking was right at the time, not to detract anything from these small groups that were trying to get their heads above water.

**RB:** Could we pick up on the craftsmens' groups in Massachusetts, particularly the Massachusetts Association of Craftsmen. Could you talk about the Society and your involvement with them in the Thirties?

**HE:** Eva Whiting White, who was then President of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, was the basic supporter of this idea, and I backed her up. And we knew that there were craft groups, very small ones, throughout the state. And Northhampton, particularly, was one, and they were fighting for their own life and trying to develop in their own fashion, and we wanted to encourage them in that. Not to superimpose anything that would be . . . take away anything from what they were doing, and that was basically why we refused to accept individual craftsmen who were not members of a group. But there was a Mr. Barras [?], who was a legislator whose sister ran a place in Northhampton, and he tried to bring things about in a fashion where the state would finance these different groups.

**RB:** About when was this?

**HE:** This would be in the . . . oh, late Thirties, or early Forties, I'd say; but there was about this time an advisory board in the State Board of Education that was created, and I was a member of that, a number of other people. George Greenough, Bart Hayes . . . of the Addison Gallery. I think Louisa Dresser was in on that. And we used to meet up at Newbury Street at their building.

**RB:** The Department of Education building?

**HE:** Yeah. Perhaps, twice a year, Miss Klos and Mrs. Walker were responsible for that program and we almost felt like students in school.

**RB:** Why was that?

**HE:** Oh, because of the way they treated us, and they were teachers. And it was a curious situation. We could only be an advisory committee, and advise them. We were competent people in our own field, and I can remember some of them just doodling while they were sitting there at these meetings. There was at that time, probably still is, a situation where, if a town had a vote that allowed people, adults, we'll say, basically, to get instruction in a given craft and there were enough people that wanted it, that they were obliged to find a teacher for the program. And schools were used for this purpose, basically, at night.

**RB:** There were state funds for these special teachers?

**HE:** There were state funds for this. And so the program continued, more or less effectively in different parts of the state depending on the quality of their teaching or the type of courses they could give. It was a good idea, but it would have no part in this Massachusetts Association of Craftsmen. There, things would be sold and that Department would have no part in selling craft work.

**RB:** Oh, you mean the Department of Education would have nothing to do with the Massachusetts Association of Craftsmen?

**HE:** Right.

**RB:** Did they ever say why?

**HE:** Well, for the reason that basically, it was for selling their work rather than educating the people for it. So there was that separation. Now, in New Hampshire the state board did provide funds for education, it's true. And some of those funds I'm sure were used to help finance some of the shops but in Massachusetts there was a separate status, and there could be no conflict on that score.

**RB:** Well, did the state education program in the crafts extend up into art school level, or was it mainly for very young children?

**HE:** No, not young children. These were adults.

**RB:** Oh.

**HE:** And people that were looking for a chance to learn a craft. They might have some competence in it already, but they were adults.

**RB:** Well, some of these people who went to these classes at the schools in various towns, did a number of them then join the Massachusetts Association of Craftsmen?

**HE:** Some did. It's true but it wasn't a prolific supply of people for that purpose, and I won't say that . . . There were lots of things about it that were wrong, and perhaps in the future they'll be corrected, but the idea basically was a good one. It may be still operating, for all I know.

**RB:** Who were the teachers?

**HE:** Various craftsmen. They would call on me for teachers. Obviously they had to be not too far afield from where they were going to teach because there were transportation problems, but they were not first rate. We must say that, but they were teaching in a given craft or a different

technique, a special technique . . . . There was one, and, to a degree, it was helpful. I'd be curious to know what came out of it, but I don't know.

**RB:** Did the State Department of Education lay down guidelines?

**HE:** Oh, very definite ones.

**RB:** Oh, did they . . . ? You think that hindered or helped the teaching?

**HE:** Well, to a degree it did hinder it because they had the course set up by the State Board and they weren't always the type of people who could adapt to that kind of situation. So there was conflict there too, and you can realize that the people who were running the course didn't always know the difference between a person teaching English, for example, and one teaching the crafts, and their background was different. But they had to pass that course before they were approved for instruction.

**RB:** Did your advisory people have something to do with the setting up of the course?

**HE:** We really had nothing to do. We were asked questions and asked to recommend craftsmen to teach, but we knew that there were lots of things about the whole situation that we couldn't really accept or even the craftsmen couldn't accept or adjust to, where, to a degree, it floundered.

**RB:** What was the Massachusetts Association of Craftsmen doing then? Was that attempting education of craftsmen?

**HE:** Not basically. It was trying to sell their work. They had their own shops in Northhampton and Springfield, Worcester, name it, and they were trying to sell the work of their local craft people that were more or less good.

**RB:** They did not have standards for admission as the Society has had?

**HE:** They couldn't. They did their best, and I hope, to a degree, the Society had an influence over them and the kind of work they sold. On the other hand, there were many crafts that we did not carry at the Society, which they carried, which were normal for that situation, but they were very much on their own.

**RB:** What do you . . . ? Looking back forty odd years, what do you think is a proper education for a craftsman? You discussed this schooling, under the Department of Education, but I sense you didn't quite approve of the way they went about that. What would you think is, in general, if you could generalize, a good way of . . . method of teaching?

**HE:** A method that difficult . . . . Some craftsmen we've had went though a school like the Museum of Fine Arts. In the old days, they had high standards there, and they had good teachers, and they were trained fundamentally in the basics that were needed, and in design. And the results we still see. Massachusetts School of Art, now the College of Art, was another one, but they were basically training teachers for . . . that were going to teach, themselves, later on. That was a different problem. Then, of course, we had housewives who'd had some instruction in the crafts, and had enough help to really produce commendable things. This was a part-time basis. There were others, of course. There were apprentice craftsmen like Stone and Gardner and they became first-rate craftsmen. These are all problems that I still question that we found good solid answers. We had one craftsman, years ago, a fellow by the name of Sprague, lived in North Andover, and he came to us at one point and said that he was planning to retire and would like to make carvings of birds. We



had on our jury Mrs. Skinner, who was very competent in that field, and she worked closely with him in developing this idea of carving birds. The two of them accomplished a great deal. He did not retire when he'd planned because of the war coming up. He was an engineer and that delayed his retirement. But there's a case of a man who plans to retire, who planned it well ahead of time. On the other hand, I've had men come in who have retired and wanted to learn a craft, and I said, "I'm sorry, it's too late. You should have planned this a long time ago." I would help them where I could if they had an experience or competence, but this fellow Sprague had planned it ahead of time so that when the time came, he did retire, he had a nice little business going and was competent to do the work.

**RB:** Many of our craftsmen certainly in your earlier years here had gone through an apprentice system, hadn't they? Could you comment on that as a system of education of craftsmen?

**HE:** Well, it was a good system and it's unfortunate in recent years, craftsmen do not feel they can afford to take on an apprentice. Basically, nowadays they're working alone. They're not about to give their time to training somebody else in the field. But it's a good system and that's where Stone learned the system in Sheffield, England.

**RB:** Did you have better designers, generally?

**HE:** What's that?

**RB:** Would they be better designers, generally, because they would have had longer experience with the materials, wouldn't they?

**HE:** That is true. Now one case in point is Edward Oakes who worked under two craftsmen. One under a man . . . . Just a moment, let me see if I can remember who he worked under. And then there was a woman he worked under whose name I can't recall at the moment. She was good. I never knew her . . . .

**RB:** What had he apprenticed as?

**HE:** In jewelry. And they were both good jewelers. And then he went out on his own and he was neither one nor the other; but he had gotten the best of both of those two people. And he improved on what they could do. That, to my mind, is an awfully good method for a craftsman to work with more than one teacher in that sense. And they're neither one nor the other but out of it they get something that is their own. I can't make any comparison with any other craftsmen who have had that opportunity. But he certainly made the most of it. The time did come, in much later years, when they wanted to go modern. And I said, "You know, Eddie, it's a mistake. You are doing this kind of styling [word not clear]. Stick to it and don't try to be modern." Because he couldn't. Didn't know how.

**RB:** What would he have had to do, do you think, to have changed his style?

**HE:** Take 20 years off his life, maybe.

**RB:** You mean, it would have been such a struggle?

**HE:** It would have been, but he just did not have the touch that he needed to do that contemporary style. I never could bring him to that point of view. But he did some marvelous work. And there was a time when Julia Marlow . . . .

**RB:** Marlow?

**HE:** Yeah. The actress. And when we were at 32 Newbury some of the people that lived there used to window-shop at night, and next day come in to look. . . [END OF SIDE]