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Oral history interview with Louis Clark Jones,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Louis Clark Jones on August 17, 1984. The interview took place in Cooperstown, New York, and was conducted by Robert F. 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

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —and Fenimore Cooper's house.

ROBERT F. BROWN: We're interviewing Louis Jones in Cooperstown, New York. This is August 17, 1984, Robert Brown the interviewer. And I'd like this to be to an extent, I think, a continuation of interviews you did in 1969, one on discussing preservation, and particularly the work of the Clarks in Cooperstown; and the second, you discussed the Farmers' Museum, discussed furthermore the collecting of folk art in America. About that time of those interviews, uh, here at the his—at the—in Cooperstown, you were beginning at—in 1964 you'd begun a graduate program, and, uh, I wanted to ask why such a thing was undertaken. Why is a graduate program going? What, what kind of program had you had until then? Maybe you can—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, we'd—we had s—we started with a program called Seminars in American Culture, which were a two-week program every July, in adult education, uh, choosing subjects that were related to our own strengths, both in the museum and in the library. Stephen Clark had this possibility in mind as early as—well, before he was on the board, actually, and certainly when I came here for an interview in '46 one of the things he talked to me about was the possibility of developing some kind of adult summer seminars. And his—the—one of his close friends was Carlton J. H. Hayes, the Columbia history professor. [00:02:05] And I think that they had talked pretty much in terms of, perhaps, international affairs as a—as a basic subject. I took it upon myself to suggest that it made more sense for us to deal with aspects of New York history, since it was a state historical association, and this was agreed to, and, uh, I was given carte blanche to go ahead and make, make the plans. And so, uh, we dealt with things in those earliest years, like New York history, historic sites, local museums, and, of course, as a folklorist we began involving people like Harold Thompson and Carl Carmer, so the New York state folklore was a major interest. Then the Farmers' Museum gave us a kind of jumping off place for the outdoor museum and rural life. And we tried to stay within areas where we had some expertise ourselves on the staff, and so that from 1948—uh, actually, it still contin—it's still continuing. I mean, they had their 40—34th or [3]5th year this year. But from then until '64, that was our principal educational project at an adult level. We had a very vigorous junior program, which Mary Cunningham and Cliff Lord had started, and Mary had continued, uh, with something like 3,000 junior members in clubs all over the state. [00:04:10] But I was on the AAM Council, and was increasingly aware that nobody was getting trained for history museums. Uh, the scientists were trained as—the science museum people were trained as scientists, and they didn't really seem to give a damn about, uh, the museum as a teaching instrument. As long as they had good scientists, that's what they were concerned with. The art people were better off in terms of the museum thinking, it seemed to me, that Harvard had a long tradition of training art museum people, and there were other places, but nobody was tackling the problem of training people for history museums. And what happened was that in literally thousands of small country museums, some retired schoolteacher in her 60s, or his 60s, uh, whom everybody liked, would take over. Well, they didn't—they knew their local history very often—they were often good local historians—but they didn't know how to make a museum interesting. And as a teacher, I was profoundly convinced that if you—you can't teach unless you can make it interesting. And so that was certainly one thing that influenced my thinking. Another was that in Norway, in 1960, I'd run across a young man at Lillehammer who was a university faculty member, and was profoundly concerned and interested in the whole world of Norwegian folklife. [00:06:17] And I—I've had trouble determining why it was he influenced my thinking so much, but after I spent a day talking to him, my whole direction changed, that I wanted to see us utilize the Farmers' Museum as a resource for teaching American folklife, and so that gradually there developed, between '60 and '64, the idea that we would link up with one of the colleges so that we could be degree-granting, and have a respectable academic relationship. Uh, and I first approached the State University at Albany, where I had taught for 15 years, but they were just about to start going into a new campus, or developing their new campus, and 70 miles, I think, seemed a long way to them. At any rate, they said no. It happened that the day they had come here and talked to us and made that decision, late in the afternoon the dean of the State College at Oneonta, Jim Frost, came to my office to talk about something. Jim had been one of the authors of our one-volume history, and he and I had done one extension course at Cooperstown, and we were good friends. [00:08:04] And I was a little irked at the Albany refusal, and spit this all out in his hand. And he said, "Would you consider Oneonta?" And I said, "Sure." Well, the next day, President Netzer and he came back to see me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Nesser? Oh—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Netzer, N-E-T-Z-E-R. It just happened that the State University had no chancellor at that point—they were between—and the acting chancellor was the chairman of the board, Lieutenant Governor Moore, who is no longer Lieutenant Governor, but he had been. And very soon I was talking to Henry Moe, who was my president, and the former Guggenheim chairman, director general. And we talked to Frank Moore, and with an unbelievable amount of speed the thing went through. Moore pushed it with the—with his board. He liked Netzer, and trusted him. And before we knew it, the thing was on the track. And about that time, I went down—Aggie and I went down to Montauk Point and spent a Memorial Day weekend, about four days, and sat in a tent and worked out the curriculum for the first year. And we ended up with, at that point, two programs: a folklife—folklife program, and a museum studies program. [00:10:01] They were to be separate, but with interlocking areas, and the ability to take courses in either one, or like two departments.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The emphasis was to be on local history, folk—and folklore.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: It was to—the emphasis in the museum program was really to be on the history museum, with probably special emphasis on the small—the county museum, the town museum—to try to upgrade those rather dowdy institutions. Actually, an awful lot of—even from the very beginning, a lot of our people went into state institutions, and larger institutions, but scores of them have gone into small—small institutions, bringing some professional viewpoint. And I got—first of all, I got Frank Spinney, who had been pre—who had but recently resigned as president of Sturbridge, and was at that point in charge of the Saint-Gaudens Museum for the Park Service. And I got a young PhD from Indiana, whom I had met a few years before when Aggie and I taught out there one summer, Bruce Buckley. Um, and we, we started out with—I guess we had 30 students altogether; that's about what we kept it. It didn't make any sense to get any larger. We couldn't have housed them, among other problems. Also, we didn't want to be a big institution; we wanted to be a small institution, with the emphasis not on bigness but on quality. [00:12:06] And people on our staff began to teach, and another couple years went by, and the trustees agreed that they—we really needed a library building, and we got that. The state was—it was an interesting arrangement: the State of New York—the university had a contract with the State Historical Association, which is a private institution, to house—to have access to the collections, to the expertise of the staff, and the university paid some salaries directly, and some it paid through the association. The director of the association was also the director of the graduate program. And that's how it started, and we—it was a very interesting group of first students that we had, and some of them—well, I mentioned [Henry] Glassie and Trix Rumford, but others in that group have made distinguished careers for themselves. One of them is curator of American glass at Corning, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did the, uh, the museum studies program consist of in the beginning? Was it modeled on a—on any particular ones?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No. There wasn't anything to model it on. [Pauses.] Frank—Frank's course was based on the kinds of problems he'd faced as a museum director, and he had been director of New Hampshire Historical, Sturbridge, and then this historic house in Saint-Gaudens place. [00:14:11] And so he had, a really, a very broad experience, and he and I sat down and talked out the things we thought—we wished we'd known when we started, and—how to get along with trustees, how to develop staff morale, recordkeeping, insurance, personnel management, all those things. And at the same time, we gave—we saw to it that there were courses in American history so that those people that hadn't had history—hadn't had enough history, particularly social history—got some of that. And we gradually added to the faculty, and we had one—a social historian from Oneonta that taught that first year or two. He turned out to be very poor, and later went to an insane asylum, but that was later. [Laughter.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was social history a fairly well- developed discipline in American history then?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It wasn't, was it?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, yeah, and you see, it had always—it had, from the time when Dixon Ryan Fox was our president of the association, it had been a major emphasis here, and so that that was part of our normal bag.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what about the teaching of folk culture itself?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, nobody had done that. [00:15:47] Lots of people had taught folklore in the universities, and some in the colleges, but to go beyond that to folkways and customs, architecture, foodways, farm layout, all those things, to get beyond the—the word, the story and song, to custom and celebration and holidays and costume and all those things, no one had done it. And Bruce was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you had been interested in it for a long time.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —I've always been interested in it, yeah, and while I didn't teach it, I kept my finger in the pie, I guess. Bruce Buckley was interested in it, and did a good deal to develop the whole folklife concept.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But there again, there was no particular model at that point.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Not that we knew of. We were hacking our own way through the forest.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There were the folklorists on one hand, and then there were the American art people over here.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, now you're coming to the other part—to the folk—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, I mean at that time. There were people that were beginning to teach American art, I mean, in which they—in passing.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: American art, yes. No one was teaching American folk art, certainly, and certainly art historians were ignoring it, but American art was beginning to be taught, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But there was still a great gap in the middle there.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Oh, yes, sure. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How long—how—was it a two-year program, the graduate program?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No, it started out as a one-year program. It's now, essentially, two years. It's a year and a half on campus, and then if you've had museum experience, as more and more of our students have before they get to us—real experience, not just a summer job somewhere—then we try to do one or two things: either get them a good internship, where they're going to get a lot of real experience, or a job. [00:18:03] Now, if they haven't had a job, we work on the internship program, to get them six months of—nine months, I guess, of internship. But it took a while to get some of the wrinkles out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the program became very well-known, quite quickly?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes. Partly, I think, because those—some of those early people came up with flying colors very fast, and were awfully good for us. About the same time—uh, the State of New York—again, under Nelson Rockefeller's leadership—was putting money into its historic sites. And at first I was vice chairman, and then chairman of the historic trust, which was in charge of these buildings. And I didn't do anything to discourage their hiring our graduates, and we got more and more money from the legislature. And really, for the first time, there was going into the state system people with some training. The result of this is that the state historic sites now, which is now part of the conservation department, parks & recreation, uh, is dominated by our, our alumni, starting at—with Jim Gold at the top, and the whole leadership—probably too much so, but I'm not telling anybody that. [Laughter.] [00:19:59] Well, there have been times when they needed the kind of expertise that the Winterthur graduate got training in, and so in recent years they've hired more Winterthur people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean in the decorative arts, or—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: In the decorative arts, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that type of thing, yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. As a matter of fact, one of our current faculty is a Winterthur graduate, Gib Vincent and got his PhD at Delaware after that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What effect did your graduates have on the historic sites, would you say?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, in the first place, they tried to find out what they owned. [Laughs.] There was some bookkeeping had to be done.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ah. [Laughs.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: The recordkeeping had been very poor. Any political hack could get a job directing one of those historic sites, and there are 60 of them across the state of New York. What—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Many of them were very neglected, then, were they—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: They were very neglected, both physically and professionally. Some of them were very

fine, dedicated people, but they didn't really know what to do. And so I think it can be said that the Cooperstown graduates brought an insistence on professional standards to the state system. You see, after I left, Peter Welch, who was a—no, he was in the first class at Hagley—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Industrial history.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —yeah—Peter was my successor, and the first thing he did was to fire Fred Rath, who had been my vice director for 15, 20 years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Rath had not—was not a professional.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [00:21:52] Oh, Rath had been in the park service by 1935, and, as a matter of fact, after the war he was the first historian at Hyde Park. And then he was the first director of the National Trust, uh and came to us from there. Yeah, he was as professional as they come.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see. So he—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No, this is a personal matter, and it was a very—it was an act that shocked me, because he had given me no indication of this. But Fred became the deputy commissioner of parks & recreation, in charge of historic sites. The—in the meantime, the historic trust had been dissolved, and that had all become part of the parks department, a subdivision. And Fred went in from here as deputy commissioner in charge, but he brought the same points of view that I'd had, and he also knew the students, and knew where to get good young people. And so he staffed it, and did a wonderful job.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So the sites were better researched, better maintained—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Better looking.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —better presented, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Uh, the idea of an educational program coming out of state historic sites was developed. They're—today they're very lively institutions, a good many of them, with all sorts of programs for young and for adults. And that's much of it Fred Rath's contribution. He lives here in town now. [00:23:55] He's director—he was deputy commissioner for about ten years, and then retired, and is director of the Eastern Monuments Association, which is a group that he helped found back in the '30s as a nonofficial—an unofficial—group, raising money and supplying educational materials for the park service, which the park service can't get money for. And they carry on a very vigorous publications program, and he's in charge. They've got a \$6 million budget.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Great. Hmm. Were you always interested in adult programs as much as—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —children's programs?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. More so, probably. I had taught in New York State College for Teachers, which was—well, we were training people for high school teaching. I was more interested in the training of them than I was in the next step, the children themselves. I just don't know anything about training—teaching children, really. I'm for it, in general principle. [Laughter.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you taught folk art, then, from about 1967, you said.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, about that. I did it alone from '67 to '72, when we left for that year, and then Aggie and I did it together after that. She had, as I guess we said last time you were here, she'd been involved in the field before I was, so it was kind of natural.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:26:02] And you taught it sort of comparative—a fairly broad way, comparing, and even discussing European examples, to an extent?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes, to an extent. I suppose we saw it not so much as an art historian would see it as, but as a social historian would see it, its relationship to the larger pattern of the history of the country, and particularly of its own area. Uh, we were trying never to forget that the—we were training people to go into museums, so they could utilize that approach in Oshkosh, or wherever they ended up, uh, and yet see whatever the local material was in relation to the larger national picture of the nonacademic art. And one of the pleasant results of that is that a lot of our people have found all sorts of great stuff out in the Middle West, some in the Far West.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that, on the other hand, the art historical approach would've concentrated simply on

artforms, and—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes, and would've spent probably much more time showing relationships between the folk art and the academic art than we did. We were more likely to try to see it in terms of the community growth of national attitudes and so on. For example, no art historian would be likely to spend a day on national emblems, the various motifs that crop up and reoccur—eagles and flags and George Washington and so on. [00:28:06] We—perhaps we would've done more if we'd known more ourselves. Neither of us had had art historical training, and both of us had always been interested in social history.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They're—in your opinion, equally valid approaches, aren't they?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: To my mind.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the social is perhaps more applicable when you're out in the field, isn't it?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I would think so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Especially if you're going to be in a history museum, or—which is where our people were going to be.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were on the New York State Council of the Arts, beginning in 1960.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that—? How'd that come about?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Oh, it was a wonderful experience. How'd it come—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did you happen to get on, and—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: How'd it come about? Nelson had had this idea on a national level, as far back as World War II, when he was assistant secretary of state, I guess, but he couldn't get anybody to listen in Washington. And about 19—the winter of '59, '60, he sent a cousin of his, whose name I can't remember—Aggie probably could—around the state, talking to a variety of people about this, looking to see who might be on it and who might have ideas. And my former curator, Janet MacFarlane, by that time, was director of the Albany Institute of History and Art. And the governor was very interested in the institute—they borrowed pictures from the institute for the—for the, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:30:04] For the governor's mansion.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —governor's mansion, and so on. And so this gentleman went to see Janet, and Janet urged him to come and see me. And we talked at great length about the need for help for the small museums in the state, the ones that had, as I've said before, that had no, no, uh, professional training or understanding. And I was urging that the council set up a system by which a small museum could get help with its displays, with its financing, with its public relations, a sort of pool of specialists that could be drawn on from time to time. And I think it was that, as much as anything. On the other hand, Nelson and Henry Moe, who are old, old friends, during the war, when Nelson was president of the Museum of American Folk Art—of the Museum of Modern Art, Henry Moe and Stephen Clark pretty well ran the institution. And both of them, by this time, were in touch with—the governor was in touch with them about this, and I think both of them—especially Henry, who was more active in it than Stephen Clark was—were recommending me, and this came in along with the young man that had come to see me. Well, I've always assumed that's pretty much what happened. But anyway, it was marvelous fun. It was one of the great educational experiences of my life, to suddenly be sitting with people like Shorty Knox and Helen Hayes and Dorothy Rodgers, Richard Rodgers' wife, and all sorts of people of great sophistication and experience, and—[00:32:14]—it was an eye-opener for this country boy up here in the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] How did the country needs fare against those, say, of the city?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, we did pretty well. We got the things, I think, better than they're doing now, perhaps because there aren't enough loudmouth people from upstate that are willing to—who aren't—we weren't—several of us from upstate were not very much impressed by the New York City people, the—not enough impressed to be quiet. And people like Lew Swyer, from Albany, and there was a wonderful woman from Binghamton who died afterward—and, of course, Shorty Knox himself was from Buffalo. So that we, we had a certain amount of clout, and I—Henry Moe and Shorty Knox and I became the executive committee. Well, that didn't do any harm.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. So you were able—it was—though it was the council on the arts, you were able to steer a good deal toward—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: We were able to insist that the local museum was an—was—whether it was arts in terms of painting, or whether it was the arts of life, was a repository of the culture that needed support. And, you know, if you yell loud enough, long enough, and can chuckle now and then with them, you can get a lot of things done. [00:33:58] But I, I look back on those—especially those first years with, with constant delight. They, they were a dedicated group of people, and we had the governor's support, down to the last minute. The lieutenant governor on one occasion called up and said he wanted a band over in Brooklyn to get some money. Well, we had already sent, sent our evaluators out, and they said the band wasn't any damn good, and they—it was a marching band, hardly a musical—it was not the kind of project that was being supported. And the governor called the lieutenant governor in and bawled hell out of him. I know this because the man is now one of our trustees, and he—he's told me that. [Laughter.] So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think the level of sophistication of its grants and the planning was largely dependent on the people who were on the council? There was—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes, and the staff.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[inaudible]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: There were awfully good staff. John Hightower was a—and Eric Larrabee after him were abs—McFadden—McFadgen, who was the first director, was an architect, he was good, but he wasn't nearly as good as John Hightower. And the next level down, the number two staff, were first-rate young people, full of ideas and dedicated, and not afraid of the unorthodox, which was a great help.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you think of an example of that, the unorthodox?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [00:35:57] Yeah, that greatly criticized show, *Harlem On My Mind*, which everybody got hell for, but, boy, it was a blockbuster in its way. I mean, New York had never looked at Harlem that way before. Everybody got mad, and we were picketed, and all sorts of things, but it wasn't what you would have expected, and that was good. And the whole question of what is art, and what is—what should the society, what should the government be willing to support, we had to keep thinking about this all the time. We had to keep thinking about this all the time. You know, these—after all, the last half of the—well, from the mid-'60s on, we were up against all kinds of problems. There's a painter who paints the American flag upside down with somebody sitting on it. Should he have support from the state? And it got—it got—oh, you never had a chance to be sleepy. I think it was the—perhaps stimulating experiences I ever had. Great. I resigned—when I retired from the association, I retired—I resigned from all those things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], about '72, so—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You think your interest, long-term training in folk culture equipped you to accept, or at least to entertain, new, unexpected things? Do you think because—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Maybe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in folk culture—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —there are all sorts of eccentricities, aren't there?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [Laughs.] I'll say.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And anachronisms?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Starting with the folklorists. [Laughter.] I suppose so. [00:38:00] Actually, I didn't have any training in it. I'm a—I'm self-taught, because there wasn't any place to train. Where were you going to study American folklife?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Except by going out and just observing it.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Just reading the books and observing it, yeah. Somebody like George Campbell, our—the curator at the Farmers' Museum, taught me more than anybody else, I suppose, about folklife in the country, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is that because he'd been around so much, and came—?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: He was a thoughtful farmer. He had no, no museum training at all, but he knew farm implements, and farm life, and what various members—what had various levels of the family—what work was allowable, and what was not, what times of the year were the women allowed in the fields, really only at—in hop-picking and haying, and all that sort of thing, he'd known it from the time of being a child. And it was very helpful to have somebody around who was scornful of the academic. I—[Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that kind of gave you a bit of a distance or a perspective—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that you could apply, say, when something unexpected came along in the 1960s.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I think so, yes. Yeah, I'd never thought of it in those terms, but I guess it's true. Uh—also, I—I suppose I've never been terribly impressed by the establishment, as such, and the established viewpoint. [00:40:00] I—you may have noticed that my doctorate was a book about 18th century rakes clubs, and one of my professors had said to me, "Jones, all right, go ahead and do this if you must, but it'll ruin your career." Well, it didn't. [Laughs.] It didn't turn out to be the career I thought it would be, but—it's the bypaths that are most fun, and if you can get a little pioneering in there, it's, it's good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've been able to do that a lot, haven't you? [Laughs.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I guess a little, yeah. I certainly had a lot of fun doing it. I'm one of those very lucky people who's never had a job he—but what he liked it, and I've been able to do the things I wanted to do. And my 25 years as director I served under two remarkable men who were totally supportive. And not only that, but they both knew a lot more about museums than I did, certainly when I started.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. After your retirement, you and your wife then went on this great trek looking for folk art and photographing it across the United States and Canada. Did that open up—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —all sorts of unexpected things?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, it broadened our understanding and recognition—we came back far less provincial in our viewpoint. [00:41:57] We had seen quite a lot of stuff in the South, and a lot more in the Midwest, and we began to recognize the contribution of the later immigrants, people like Krans, the Norwegian painter, whose—I'm sorry, Swedish painter, out in Illinois, and the black contribution in the South, and the French Canadian and French Louisiana influences, creating great carving traditions. Oh, we came back much, much broader in our view, and better qualified.

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ROBERT F. BROWN: —the time, uh, when you went on a three-year grant, the tour, and took all these slides—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: One-year grant.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was a one-year grant.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And it was National Endowment on the Humanities, and we had written the proposal in such a way that we were not tied to any particular itinerary. It was set up so that we could start out either Canada or the United States, and go where we found that there would be materials. And so we were gone 54 weeks, went from Quebec, zigzagging as far west as Kentucky, down to Florida, and then over to Texas, and then north to Wisconsin. Uh—we tried to get into private collections, dealers, as well as small local museums. Oh, an occasional big museum. For example, we wanted to photograph certain paintings that were in the Garbisch Collection at the National Gallery, but by and large we stayed away from the big museums, because that stuff was available, and we were looking to discover the things that weren't.

ROBERT F. BROWN: These would be things—then the slides would be kept here at Cooperstown—that would be available, and—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: There are two drawers of them over there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they could be duplicated, if wished, by [inaudible] searches.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Certainly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: We came up with—we did index slides, index cards, on every—1,500 objects, and Aggie took 5,000 slides. [00:02:01] And the—I did the index cards, which we had—this is a key sort system, and we had devised the schedule of questions about each object. I did that, and she did the photography. And—it worked out very well. It was hectic at first, because it—oh, for a variety of reasons: there was sickness in the family, and difficulties, and we had never lived in a motor home before.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Twenty-one feet, with a reference library, and a dog, and clothes for all kinds of climate. And I am no mechanic. The problems of the machinery baffled me constantly. Aggie is much better—she's more patient with machines than I am, and they like her better. But we were also exhausted when we started. That—say what you will, the giving up of a job—of a job for—that you've had for 25 years is somewhat traumatic, and while I was glad to be out of it, it—what, with Fred Rath's difficulties and these other things, the first six months were wearing, but we got a lot done, and after that it turned out to be lots of fun. We—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you have a number of contacts, or would you get suggestions from people once you were in the field to a great degree?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Both. We had started out by sending—by putting letters in *Museum News*, *History News*, *Antiques* magazine, two or three other things, saying what we were going to do and asking people to write to us. [00:04:02] So we started out with a huge file of contacts, and 24 hours before we would get to some of these—one of these people, we'd call them and make an appointment, and say that we might want a photograph, would it be possible. And then we'd go in and spend what time we had to. The—the cooperation we got was remarkable. People were wonderful, were wonderful to us, and it became that those 5,000 slides became the nucleus for this entire collection of slides, which is what all these are, now about, I think, between 25[,000] and 30,000 slides. And we had a few when we started, but we've added greatly to it. Now, that all belongs to the association. That was—the grant was under their aegis, and this belongs to them and will, within the next year or so, go over to Fenimore House.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Does the so-called grassroots group that's—groups that was spread out, sprung up in the last ten years or so across the country, in various pockets—are they in any measure a result of your interest or—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I don't think so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You said you—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Except for our students may be involved in that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You think it's just another exa—it's somewhat analogous to much earlier, some of the earlier folk art collecting, and general interest in—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: —eccentric art.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And interest in Americana. That whole—it's kind of an aspect to the roots business of part—genealogy is one side of it, but there are a lot of other sides to it. [00:06:02] And this is nothing—it's, it's blooming today, but it's been going on for a long time, certainly ever since 1876 and the centennial.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But out of the—from these—some of these grassroot enthusiasts could come—at least get visual evidence, good records of if they had—if they had a will to them and sort of—it could be—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —folded into your Cooperstown file.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: What you might, well watch for, it seems to me, is tapes of early family records of reminiscences.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They're doing a good deal of that, are they?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: There's quite a lot of that going on, yeah, and a lot of the local historical societies are doing it. And one of the reasons, seminars is given frequently, courses in oral history, with good people have done a lot of the work teaching it. And this, I think, is—because a lot of times the people that really knew and remembered are not people that can write, or will write. They're people that will sit and talk. And while there will be [discrepancies] in their—in what they remember, and just the details—the same thing would be true if it were being written. The older I grow, the less confidence I have in either history or memory. Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You have to weigh one against the other, don't you?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, but I think history can be just as erroneous as memory, because very often it's based on that, or it's based on its own contemporary lies. [00:07:58] The newspaper account can be just as mistaken as a reminiscence.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative], sure. One way is to have slides, have some visual evidence for talking about folk art.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You can pair that with somebody's—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Not only folk art, but also tools and implements and household appliances and decorative arts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or the larger picture of a placement of buildings and—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: —fields that you mentioned earlier.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: That's where Glassie is good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, these—you concentrated in your—you and Mrs. Jones in your tour—of what—any particular thing—you didn't limit yourself to ethnic groups or anything of the lot.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: We tried not to limit ourselves in any way. We tried to—we tried—Aggie was very insistent on this, that all right, maybe you and I don't call it folk art today, but let's record it and see what happens. And she was dead right about that. For example, when we started out, I never would've thought of doing—recording what are now called the Environmentals, where you get, oh, an eccentric fellow that does—he makes great plaster statues and caverns and caves and so on, roadside attractions. Well, she said, we ought to record those. Well, five years later a lot of people were recording them and taking them very seriously. Something like the Watts Tower is, I suppose, the Mona Lisa of the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's another example of it, yeah, yes. But when you began in Quebec there, you were, to some extent, dealing with an ethnic-based—at least a shadow of what had been a peasant—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [00:10:03] Yeah, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —decorative tradition.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —and some very interesting—the fact that the king and the church had sent over trained woodcarvers to teach the boys, uh, so that they could carve little creches and shrines for their houses, and for the churches, has influenced French-Canadian folk art ever since, and those people going to Louisiana started it—or continued it down there. So some of the great carving, folk carving, in this country is in Louisiana.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you do anything to speak of with the Pennsylvania Germans who had been—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —studied quite a lot already?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: That's it. That's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They'd already been—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Uh, we—in Pennsylvania we were primarily concerned with an artist named Linton Park, who did a painting that you may be familiar with called the *Flax Scutching Bee*, about 30 people scutching flax, and some of them dancing, and—it's a kind of Bruegel-esque, in upstate Pennsylvania. And we found—we, we discovered quite a lot of interesting material there. But no, Pennsylvania had been busy with this for 50 years already, and there was no sense in our doing what had already been done better than we could do it. Then we went on into Ohio, where we ran into one collector after another, who were—one would send us on to the next, and we had a great time in Ohio.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were particularly attuned to this already out there.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yes. Yeah. Yes, indeed. And not on a local basis, they were collecting all kinds of things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:12:08] Well, the—in your writing and your research at this time, you mentioned before, and I looked into, in the '70s how there seemed to come to a head various ways of looking at folk culture, and some of the newer people coming along who, as I understand it, felt you must deal with hard evidence, and interview or be with living people, and—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, the folklorists put—they were rather scornful of the folk art of the past, it seems to me, because they can't sit down and ask the artist what it meant to him. I guess that doesn't seem terribly important to me. I wish we could, but, on the other hand, I am also aware that there's a great deal of material that's worth our keeping and understanding as best we can for which that's impossible. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They became very insistent on this point, is that right?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Hmm. They were very liberal—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: This would be John Vlach and, um, uh, Glassie, and to a certain extent Simon Bronner, though less so. But it was the—once the Indiana [University] school of folklorists got involved, through Glassie particularly, they became very doctrinaire. [00:13:59] Curiously enough, the first time anybody ever mentioned folk art, I think, in Indiana—at least, this is what Stith Thompson, who was head of the department, told me at the time—was when Aggie and I spoke out there in 1955. Stith was the great—the leading folklorist in America at that point. He'd done the great *Motif-Index [of Folk Literature]*. And the one place you went to study as a graduate student was Indiana. And he asked us to come out and speak for about a week one summer, and we did. And said, after—he said, "I had no awareness of any of this. I don't think—none of us folklorists know about it." And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were tied to oral and musical.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Tied to oral and musical. He was tied to the tale, and the international implications of the tale, the way one motif goes from country to country. There was a man on the faculty—name escapes me at the moment—who was interested in tools, to a certain extent, partly because he was a very good cabinetmaker himself, I think. But, by and large, the whole emphasis was on the oral.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you find it—found it ironic that out of that—their teaching some years later came these very—when they began to look at art objects—these very literal-minded—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —people. Hmm. What—was there a reason for that? Did they think that the previous generation had been too vague, or—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because, of course, some of them had been artists.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: All of the writings up to that point had been—writing on American folk art had been by people who were art historians, or, like, Jean Lipman, who did the early books. [00:16:06] Jean had a master's degree in history of art at NYU.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what fault did they find with her approach?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, they found that Jean was not scholarly enough to suit them. And, as a matter of fact, Jean has, certainly in the early years, tended to be terribly enthusiastic and not always as thorough as she might have been. On the other hand, I always have a kind of special sympathy for the pioneer who's bound to make

mistakes because he doesn't have time to be thorough yet. That's something the second generation has to do. And—then you get somebody like—what's the name of the fellow that did the catalogue for the Winterthur show? He's very good on furniture and very bad on folk art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Kenneth Ames, yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Ames. Ames, it seemed to me, created men of straw and then killed them. No, he said also a lot of very foolish things about what the people interested in folk art believed, and made a whole list of them that just aren't true.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And he's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the people before him—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: That's right, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see, yeah. But several of the earlier people—enthusiasts for folk art in America were artists, and—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: The very early ones were, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in the arts, and therefore they were primarily interested in trying [ph] with the aesthetic, or—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [00:18:00] People like [Elie] Nadelman, for example, from whom 13 of our great pieces are from his collection.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As well as Charles Sheeler.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And Sheeler. Well, that whole Ogunquit group.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: With Mrs. Halpert shepherding them in two directions, both for their own art and for the folk art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But this—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Their interest is an aesthetic one, and, I think, often a kind of technical one. They saw—well, take, for example, the matter of perspective, which they were dealing with in their own paintings. And here were artists who would—whom they found very attractive, who were either totally ignorant of perspective or were inventing their own ways of solving the problem. And that inventive solution, I think, appealed to a lot of them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So this younger generation—Glassie and Bloch and so forth—felt that the earlier writing and study must have been too broad?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Too broad, too sloppy—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Too—yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —not scholarly enough.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So they—their corrective was to be very scholarly, but what were the limitations of their approach?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I had a feeling with Glassie particularly that his great weakness is that he hasn't looked and thought enough about folk art—that he has perhaps read quite a lot, very critically, but he hasn't—for example, he—to the best of our knowledge, he's never seen the collection at Williamsburg. And actually, when he was here—no, I take that back. I guess—I guess most of our collection, or some of our collection, was out so that he did see it. [00:20:03] There were some years when it wasn't out. But how much he looked, I don't know. But I never get the feeling that he speaks from a broad base of understanding of the field. But by writing with vigor and a kind of dynamism, he has enlightened or confused a lot of people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've seen a shortcoming in these people in the fact that they seem to shy away from ideas and speculation, is that right? They're—?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, I don't know that I would uh, have put it that way. No, I guess I feel that their shortcoming is a lack of experience, a lack of thoughtful consideration of the materials. They've been trying to—they've been so busy trying to develop theories that they haven't thought about the object enough. And you never get any sense that it's—that there is a—that this is a pleasurable experience. If it isn't fun, it isn't worth doing, or if it doesn't feed you in some ways—let me put it that way, more accurately. If it doesn't—the great joy of art is that it's a pleasure. It feeds the mind and the heart and the spirit. And when you ignore that, or pretend it isn't there, it seems to me you're missing the point—a point.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:22:00] But this Winterthur conference in 1977 on perspectives in American folk—on American folk art, where the editor Scott Swank says that—he seems to deplore the bias against theory. He's deploring, really, well, people who looked at the objects and enjoyed them instead of spinning theories. Is that right? I can't quite know which camp he's in, he's merely trying to summarize.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He sees it—he saw that there was an idea-oriented group versus an object-oriented group.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, I guess that's right. And the—it would be, essentially, the Winterthur people who were—or people influenced by the Winterthur philosophy and approach, I suppose, against the old guard, the people who had been collecting and curating, and it's perfectly true that there was very little theorizing. I suppose my problem here is that theorizing is something that comes very late in my order of importance. I'm not one who deals very well with the abstract, and maybe it makes me impatient with people that want to start there and go ahead. I don't want to come to the abstract until I know an awful lot about the concrete, and I guess that's part of the problem here, that I see Glassie wanting to deal with the theory and without having, in my mind, enough basis in the concrete.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:24:10] Yeah. So evidently that conference, the organizers had hoped to hear more theory but instead they got, for the most part, more of the concrete. There were special studies of, well, new areas—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —sort of as you discovered on your trip across country in the early '70s, so they were reporting on somebody in Minnesota that no one had looked at, so—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Another great carver that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A Norwegian, I think.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they had—they railed against the threatened isolation of the intellectual from the object. You're saying you better have a lot of experience with the objects before we—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. I think they've theorized folklore to the point where it's unintelligible. And I find the *Journal of American Folklore* almost impossible to read these days. [Laughs.] Now, I suppose it's just because I'm a lowbrow and they're bright, a lot brighter than I am about this, but uh, that's where I am.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do you see is the great need in studies of folk culture now? You think you try to bridge these two attitudes?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I suppose so. Uh, certainly you've got—for the—for the understanding to move forward, you've got to draw some conclusions about all this material that we've collected, and about which some thinking has been done. [00:26:00] I guess I still don't feel that any theorizing that can come out of it is as important as the material itself and the pleasure it can give, and the stimulus it can give. But, again, this comes back to what I said a few minutes ago, that this is part of the pattern of my own mind, which certainly is going to look second-rate to a great many people who think in theoretical terms. It doesn't bother me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you've seen a lot more, and you're juggling a great many images in your head than they're likely to consider.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, I've been lucky in that. Uh, the—the development of a collection, like the one at Cooperstown, and all the things we didn't get that we had to look at very carefully, some of which I wanted very badly and we couldn't afford, and everything we saw in the year on the road, and all of the images we've seen in shows since and before—yeah, I've seen a fair amount of stuff.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Plus the European examples.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes, indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You stressed, I think, another time, the importance of stepping back, away, and seeing our things, to some extent, in terms of—not in terms of, but look at the European material, as well.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Look at the objects. There's an old tradition for that in Europe, isn't there? I believe.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes. It goes back about 20—about certainly 50, and perhaps 75 years before ours. I forget just what year [Artur] Hazelius founded the Swedish folk museum [Skansen], but it's about the '80s, '70s or '80s. [00:28:05] And then, curiously enough, England has always been way behind. The Irish did a great job of collecting their folklore, of course, quite early, and it's all part of the Irish intellectual movement. The Scots, to a certain extent, but the Germans, the Scandinavians—you want to—you want to—the Germans and Scandinavians were developing museums with—for folklife from the '80s on, and some great museums, and even central Europe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But their basic—their point of departure, then, was the object, the concrete expression, saving them—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And the way of life in which the object—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Occurred.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —was used, why it was made and how it was used, and what its meaning was to the people who used it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the broader context—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —social and traditional context. The theorizing has come later, if at all.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, and quite a lot of theorizing, and as many different points of view as here. I knew [Robert] Wildhaber, the Swiss folk culture authority, very well, and the same kinds of—some of the same kinds of disagreement that we have here were there, and I don't think it does any harm. I mean, it's just—it's—certain kinds of mind are going to go toward one direction, and certain others in another.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do any of the European countries provide a pattern for what may happen here, of accommodation, of a new synthesis, since they began much earlier? Have they—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [00:30:04] I don't know. I don't know enough about the theorizing in Europe to know. I worked with Wildhaber, he and I—the first year we were back from the trip, he was teaching here. He gave a course in European folk art, and I gave one—or maybe Aggie and I gave one, I forget which—in American, and we sat in in each other's classes, which was very useful. You on your way? [Side conversation.]

[Audio Break.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: But again, I haven't been very interested in the theory in Europe. I've been interested in the object, and its relation to our objects, and their interpretation of the use and the meaning.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Have you been interested in the—looking at the—some of the sophisticated art sources for our folk art here? I know you've done some studies, but—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, I—by and large, I would say the sources were more likely to be popular things: cartoons, magazine illustrations. I'm thinking, for example, in the patriotic. Very often, those go—those rely on ideas that come out of the cartoons: *Miss Liberty*, *The Indian*, all those things that Mack Fleming studied so very thoroughly. Closely related to the cartoons of the time. By the mid-19th century, magazines were playing an important part. [00:32:03] Somebody sometime is going to do a very interesting book on the popular sources in folk art. Nobody has denied this: every once in a while one of the folklorist people comes popping along as though we were just discovering it, as though we're kind of a disgrace, but actually it's been there all the time, and everybody who knew the field knew it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're saying, then, that some folklorists have sought to find things way back, sort of in European tradition, to try to explain certain things, or European motifs, and I suppose that is the case in respect to some things, isn't it?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Certainly it is, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But many others—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Especially when you—when you're dealing with, say, Ukrainian folk art in this country, or one of our former students, Joanne Bach [ph], got interested in a man named Pop Wiener, who grew up in a shtetl in Romania, and whose work reflected, many years later—he came here at 17, and when he was 60 and his wife died he began doing paintings, as a kind of release. Well, over and over again he was—he was reflecting, in his paintings, things that he had known as a child in Romania.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. I read a bit about him in your article you did for Albany.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

[Audio Break.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —sort of thing, very—[00:34:03]—that business of the trees and the garden, which crops up over and over, is related to the rugs that he—they knew—he knew in Romania, the Turkish rugs that were brought over from the East. And she has spent—she's been in Romania, oh, four or five years, collecting an understanding of Romanian folk art to see what effect it had—not on Wiener anymore, but on Romanians who came to this country and did other things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So this would be the endurance of memory, of images remembered from—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —from the old country. In the case of those Quebec woodcarvers, it sort of ultimately goes back to sophisticated, say, liturgical art that was—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —brought over as a model for them—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —their ancestors to use.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And, again, this is the kind of thing that does interest me very much. When you come to theorize about it, uh—I'll leave that to others. We've got about six or eight of Wiener's paintings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So this is the kind of study you like to foster in your students.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I'd like to see more understanding of the artist and the thing he created. This is what I think would be most useful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you want to know—some of these conferences, the people have talked about intention. And is that—the intention of the artist, is that, therefore, in your mind, too, a pretty important thing to get at?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [00:36:00] Yeah. I think it's a very interesting thing to know. One of the things you have to remember is that if you're dealing with a contemporary folk artist, he is not likely to be very articulate. Uh—and this can be confusing, especially to the academic mind, the academically-trained mind, which is used to dealing with fairly precise use of words. I mean, they're always startled when one of these chaps says "Well, I never thought of it as art." Well, as a matter of experience, I don't think it's an important statement, except it does mean that he has not thought in art terms, he's thought in creative terms. His thinking all went through his hands, not through his vocabulary. He's been brought up to think of art as something apart, and something that the upper classes are interested in, but don't have anything to do with him. If you say that his wife's apple pie is a kind of art, uh he doesn't know what you're talking about.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. So if you simply take his statements, which may not be very explicit, you could be confused.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: You sure can.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you have to also, therefore, analyze on your own, using your abilities, the work he produced, come to your own—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —deductions from it.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. [00:37:59] The—we had some interesting experiences with two or three contemporary folk artists on that year, particularly Queena Stovall.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. About whom you wrote—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. We did that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in 1975.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: We did that booklet about—that catalogue—it was a catalogue for the show. One of our students is doing her dissertation on Stovall. Under John Vlach, what did these paintings mean to the people who were in them, and who owned them? Two different groups. I mean, she has been, for example, interviewing a lot of the black people in Queena's paintings, and not only what did they think of Queena but what did they think of the paintings? And she's getting some very interesting results. And this, to my mind, is great. This is just the right direction.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You've always been concerned, then, with being as—gathering as broad a range of things, and—but believing the evidence of what you hear or see, being as concrete—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —as rooted in the concrete as possible.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And do you think the study of folklore has through—in this fashion, at its best, has filled a tremendous gap in our understanding of—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Of the whole culture, and of folklore and folk art both, and folklife, which is sort of neither one or the other—well, includes both of the other two, but goes beyond it to folkways and customs and beliefs, all those things. [00:40:00] To think that you understand American culture because you understand the world of the university, or the world that the university reflects, is only a small fraction of the total story.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is the university too isolated, you think, or is it of necessity?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Maybe of necessity. But it—there's no reason why the university can't include in its thinking and its teaching—the broader story, which is what we tried to do here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You feel you did quite well here, didn't you? I mean, you've—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I'm very proud of the graduate program, yeah. I—some years after I retired, they eliminated the folk culture program. I called it folk culture, they later called it folklife. This was, I think, a tragedy. It was the result of personality conflicts, and profound ignorance on the part of certain trustees, and powerful ones, people who—to whom the word "folklore" was an anathema. But it's been an anathema to certain kinds of people for a long time, in part—

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ROBERT F. BROWN: The anathema arises from what?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: It arose uh, I think, about the early part of the century, when local historians and journalists were not collecting folklore at all, but were sort of making up stories, which got called folklore, and which the more earnest historians, including many of the good local historians, abhorred, and with some reason. What was really journalism was being passed off as tradition. For example, across this country there are literally hundreds of Indian princesses' leaps, where they got in the canoe after their love affair—their lover was killed, and they go down this—the waterfall and die, and they then haunt the—haunt that waterfall for all time. Well, this—the poets used it, and then the journalists put it in prose, and it became part of the local story, without having gone through the normal processes that an older piece of folklore would have. And so people who went to the university—did you see it [side conversation]—were told that folklore was bad. Well, this was before there was any really folklore scholarship in this country at all. [00:02:00] Well, we got caught in that trap, and, plus that,

plus the fact that there were personality conflicts, which just encouraged this fire. It was very unfortunate.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did this mean that—what was left in the curriculum? Museum studies?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Museum studies, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And the—and the, uh—what had developed about 1970 was the program under the [Sheldon and Caroline] Kecks of art conservation. Now that's going to Buffalo and leaving us with just the—just the history museum program.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So in a way the—one of—perhaps the primary reason for the graduate program being rooted in the New York State Farmers' Museum is now—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —absent. They could do museum studies anywhere—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —except that you have a library, so—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, we've got Fenimore House.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Sure.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [Laughs.] We've got Fenimore House, and the Farmers' Museum, so that for the history—for the training program, you've got most of the problems that they're going to face.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But—right, the general problems, for general training, but they're not—on the other hand, there's no formal training in what's right in front of them—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: In folklife—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —materials to work with folklife. Or perhaps there's some.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: There's some, but not a great deal. My—the folk, folk art course will continue. We've got a young man who was one of our students who has now been appointed assistant curator with special responsibility for the folk art collection, who was working on a catalogue of the collection, and he will be teaching it. So that goes on, to our great pleasure. A boy named [Paul] D'Ambrosio.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:04:02] If you'd had your choice, you had to eliminate one or the other, would you have eliminated museum studies rather than the folk life?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No. No, because the need is—

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, because—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: The need is greater.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I'm more interested in the folklife than I am in the technicalities of the museum, but in terms—as an administrator, I would've—as a matter of fact, I fought very hard to save the museum program when that was in danger, because at one point they wanted to eliminate the whole thing. No, I uh—I hated to see the folklife go, but if one had to go, that was the more imp—the less important, in the long run, in terms of what kind of a contribution we can make to the country as a whole.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's always been of interest and concern to you, hasn't it?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes, yeah

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've been a—I don't know what the word is—a populist, or a—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. And you were able to work with Mr. Clark, to convince him to—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I didn't have to convince him. He was convinced. The great thing about Stephen Clark was that he saw it the same way, from—in terms of he and I working together as a team. And the same was true with Henry Moe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. As long as you have an active part there, the what was called years ago elitism did not creep in to any extent, did it? [Laughs.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Not much.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Cultural elitism.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: We were—the whole idea of the Farmers' Museum was anti-elitist. [00:06:00] You notice there's no big house. All the other—most of the other museums in the early—of the early period had a great house, a big house. Our house is a little farmhouse, and that was very deliberate. We weren't telling the upper class story, we were telling the dirty hands story. And, and Stephen Clark, who was one of the richest men in the country, I suppose, was just as much in favor of this as I was. So it was a remarkable accident that [laughter] brought this, uh—schoolteacher's son and this great man together, and that they should've seen so many things the same way. And it wasn't a matter of my giving in to his point of view, or my having to try to persuade him of mine. It was that we just, by the sheerest accident, were perfectly simpatico on the first morning when we sat and talked.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. And you told him you were a New Deal democrat and so forth.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. What do you aim to do now? What is your—what are some of your unfinished—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —agenda?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I've got to get these things, these slides in shape to turn over to the office. I'm going through—a good deal of my correspondence and trimming it down, and getting rid of a lot of it. And, I don't know, I don't seem to have any ideas. I—one thing after another comes along. [00:08:00] I've just, just completed another introduction to another book by another man. But I don't have any real plans for the moment. I think I'm lying fallow for a while, maybe forever. I don't know. I'm finding writing more and more difficult. The—I got out those three books two years ago, and by the time it was done I was dried out [laughs]. And something may come along, but I've got lots of—I'd just as soon do a lot of reading, which I'm enjoying very much. Of all kinds of things. I'm, at the moment, reading three books: the Case's life of Owen D. Young, Graves's two-volume Greek myths, and a book called *It All Started At Sumer*. [Laughter.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The thing we talk about so much, or discuss, the kind of tensions within folklore as a—would you have any interest in playing the role of breaching this, of healing—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I doubt it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or do you think it's just going to take time?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Just takes time, and I'm not—I'm not keeping up with what they're saying.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Has it become sort of more just an in-house thing for them, really?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: It seems so to me. It doesn't seem terribly important to me. And I don't think I have anything to add. I've said—whatever I've said is said, and it's either in words or in the museum as a fact, and at 76 I figure I—if I want to read, I'm going to read.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about in the quality of museums? You've seen that improve, I'm sure.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: [00:10:00] Oh, boy. Have we not?

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you were on the board, weren't you, on the American Association of Museums.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: For a good many years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you—what were some of—were your roles there ones that you got certain things done? Did you get, for example, attention to small museums, you—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes, I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —presumably were interested in those.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: But there were a whole group of us. There were a lot of us that were thinking in the same way, so that it was a matter of moving forward with, oh, a whole group of other people, that—there was a chap out at Detroit, Brown, with the Detroit Historical, and some of the fellows that were directors of state museums, state historical societies that were responsible for a whole panoply of smaller museums, uh, we're all on the same side. And Christ—when I first went on the board, which must have been about '51 or [5]2, I guess, it was dominated by a few big art museums—Boston, the Met, Chicago—and those men had a tendency to ride roughshod over the rest of us. And Charlie Parkhurst, whom I was talking about before and couldn't think of his name at lunch, Chuck Parkhurst and I—I remember a violent evening when he was—I guess I was a little drunk, but we—I used to get furious with the museum dire—the Art Museum Directors Association, which—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where was he at that time? Parkhurst.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: At the time he and I had this happy row—and this is a man I'm very fond of, and—he was probably still at Baltimore, because he went from there to the National Gallery. [00:12:03] But they did try to dominate the association, and they did try to lord it over us, and they were elegant men, and some of us peasants thought to hell with that, you know, and [laughs] didn't take kindly to it. But it's been—the democratization of the AAM was an interesting process, and learned a lot that way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It took time, though, to achieve that.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Took a lot of time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And uh, things like the awards, their whole awards program, I was chairman of that for a good many years, and there was another way of getting recognition for the small institutions, and encouraging them to do things that were imaginative, and then recognizing it. So they got recognition at home, as well as in the profession. Very often they were lonely people, fighting a kind of a lonely battle, and if they could say to their local paper, "Look what we got from the Washington group," it helped.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there a tendency, though, throughout some of the art museums—there were many new ones being founded—to sort of take their cue from the big museums? Because they sometimes seemed to duplicate each other. Wherever you'd go—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —across the country, they all—the newer ones in the South and the West are now spending vast sums to eventually be like uh, well, Rochester or Utica or Baltimore, if not Boston or New York.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. I think that's probably true.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There was nothing the association itself could do on that score—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No, except in their publication, and in their annual meetings they were constantly setting new standards. [00:14:02] They were pointing out successful devices for upgrading the institutions. I enjoyed the museum profession, very much. It was a different kind of teaching, and I guess I've never gotten the chalk out of my system. I grew up in a teaching family, and it's still a teaching family. Not only my own group, my own clan, but my nephews. Two of my nephews have been very distinguished teachers, one at—well, in the last years in University of Massachusetts, and Chuck was at Michigan, one in English and one an anthropologist. And they have children who were teachers. My sister taught for 50 years. My father was a schoolteacher and principal, and superintendent. My stepmother had been a principal. My grandmother was a teacher. I think I figured up once something like six or seven generations of us in the classroom. But you don't get that out of your blood all of a sudden. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, no, no. [Laughs.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: We had a treasurer named Paul Kerr. Paul and I, here at the association—Paul worked very closely with Mr. Clark in New York. [00:16:03] Paul and I came to respect each other, but it took a while to—one time Mr. Clark said to me, "You don't like Paul Kerr, do you?" And I said, "Yeah, I like Paul all right, but every time I want to do something Paul says he can't afford it, or it can't be done, or something of that sort." "Well," Mr. Clark said, "Look. If you've got a car, you want it to have two things: you want it to have an accelerator, with a motor that responds to it; and brakes. Paul's the brakes. You're the accelerator." [Laughter.] And I guess it made the—saying it that way, I saw it differently. But Paul, when we were first talking about the graduate

program, Paul wasn't very [laughs] enthusiastic about it. But he looked across the room at me, and he said, "Looking at you, I think I see an old fire horse hearing the gong go off." [Laughter.] And I suppose that's true. [Phone rings.] Excuse me.

[Audio Break.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —find. I keep awful busy just answering the phone and doing the little things that come out of it. [Laughter.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, the book on Cooperstown you did—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —was that an accumulation of notes you'd made for—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No, that was a—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —an intention you had—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: I had done a—Mr. Clark had asked me to do a book of that sort in 1949, which I did. And about half of that is the original text, and then so much had happened that we—I opened up almost all to—either rewrote them completely, and in one instance I got somebody else to do a chapter that—Dr. Han's chapter on the hospital. And the baseball chapter had been an awful problem for me from the first place, because some of the people of influence were so dedicated to the idea that Abner Graves had in—Abner Doubleday had invented baseball here, which already in '49 had been completely discredited. [00:18:11] But it was touchy. It isn't touchy anymore. Nobody in their right mind thinks that Abner Doubleday invented the game, or that anybody invented it. It was a growth, like cancer or any other disease. [Phone rings.] [Laughter.]

[Audio Break.]

LOUIS CLARK JONES: You met Ms. Close, did you?

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, the—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: One of the opera singers.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —doing of that history, then, was a—some—a popular—a democratic kind of thing.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: It was for the tourist, really.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Tourist.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: It was—still there would be—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But a good scholar, you're saying, informative—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Informative, basically sound, and attractive. And a lot of the photography, especially the new photography, is by my colleague Milo Stewart, who's the number two man at the association, the assistant director.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. But Clark had wanted, from the beginning, that—he was interested in his activities providing for the economy here, too, and all. He wasn't interested in creating an elite little—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Oh, no. No, he—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —cultural thing.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: —he saw it as a—he saw the museums as a way of upgrading the economy in a town that the Clark family had really supported, and he knew that the time was coming very soon when—between inheritance taxes and the general changes in the economy, it couldn't do it anymore. Well, what he set out to do he accomplished, because between the hospital and the three museums, all of which he was responsible for, in any qualitative sense, it's given the village lifeblood.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:20:10] Is Cooperstown for you now a home, really?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. We'll be here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were from the Albany area, but—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah. No, this is my home. I love this house, and my wife does—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is where you blossomed and so forth, and—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: And we've got—you know, we've got our friends here, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, your wife was a New Yorker, wasn't she?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But she's come to adapt to village—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah, we're both—it's a good town to live in. It's—it's a cowardly town to live in, because it escapes most of the problems that the rest of the world suffers from, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm. You mean because there's a great deal provided for, and you—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Well, I was thinking of the conflicts the rest of the world faces, which we don't face, the uh—there's no—there's lots of poverty out in the hills, out—but the village itself doesn't suffer much in terms of serious poverty. There's a—there are almost no blacks, but there's practically everything else. I mean, we've got—once we went through the telephone book and found people of whom we knew from something like 40 different racial and cultural backgrounds. So it's a good mix in that sense. I wish there were more blacks here. I think it would be better for the town to have the input of that culture. On the other hand, I suppose we do escape certain problems by that lack. [00:22:00] [Side conversation.] That's outside, I guess. But there's a lot going on. There's a lot of people—the hospital is a great advantage, in that it brings very interesting, well-educated, concerned people, and the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is it a—partly a teaching hospital?

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yes. It's part of—part of uh, Columbia—Columbia. And always a group of interns and residents, and a good deal of research going on. Some of the early and most important basic research on leukemia was done here. And the whole business of getting the patient up out of bed after surgery, I don't know that it was actually started here, but certainly John Powers back in the '30s was promulgating that and publishing about it. He was very interested in farm accidents, and these farmers would tip their tractors over on themselves, and he'd operate and have them up in two days. There was an article in 1946, while I was still in the Virgin Islands, in *Saturday Evening Post*, on that whole phase of his career—actually, that phase of medical history and his contribution to it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So Cooperstown's been a pretty special place for—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: It always has been.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a very long time.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: There have always been writers here. There have almost always been writers in this house. And with the—we've got a lot of music now, with the opera—between the opera and a winter series of concerts, and with the two colleges in Oneonta there's—a certain amount of that keeps the pot boiling good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:24:18] I think it's, in a way, better that the colleges aren't right here, but they are—

LOUIS CLARK JONES: Just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —some miles away. Yeah.

LOUIS CLARK JONES: No harm in it. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. Hmm. Well—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]