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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Sidney E. King,
circa 1980-1983

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Sidney E. King. The interview was conducted in Caroline County, VA by Buck Pennington and Herb Collins for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

BUCK PENNINGTON: [Buck Pennington] – from the Archives of American Art together with Herb Collins from the Museum of American History [National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.] interviewing Mr. Sidney E. King today in Caroline County, Virginia on his life in art as a record for our files.

Where were you born, Mr. King?

SIDNEY E. KING: I was born in Jamaica Plain, Boston, Mass [MA]. The – I moved – my family moved from there to South Boston, South Boston to Dorchester, and that's where I grew up, in Dorchester.

While I was in grammar school, I received a scholarship to study at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston [MA] and was very fortunate to have that, to take advantage of that. And Saturdays, weekends, I would go to the museum and work in the cast exhibit area at the Museum of Fine Arts. And while I was there, John Singer Sergeant – I met up with him on a few occasions, and he gave a few suggestions for my work, but his criticism was chiefly, 'Practice, practice, practice,' which was one of the stepping stones in the profession.

Practice, of course, is a universal word, and he used that emphatically. The instructions were only half the game, the practice was the other portion of the work.

MR. PENNINGTON: This was when Sergeant was working on the murals for the Boston Library [The Boston Public Library, Boston, MA]?

MR. KING: He had finished. He had completed them for the Boston Public Library, those murals. And I also saw quite a bit of his work, and I got to sort of idolize the man, and I at that time, I had a great ambition to become a mural painter. And – years of course, I realized this ambition.

But at that time, of course, the – it was 1928-29, things were very serious. The big Depression hit there, and I had a studio at that time. I set up a studio in [inaudible] district, the bohemian district of Boston, and was able to eke out a fairly good living.

I was – around \$200 a week, wasn't bad, but Boston of course is the center of educational – such as art, especially art. And there must have been – there was 200 artists looking for that one job which was available. That was the percentage. And a lot of them came to the studio there with their portfolios, and it's just something that got very close to me because I was in the same position before that time, searching for work.

And I broke my heart and wore out several pairs of shoes walking the streets looking for a job before then, and I finally was able to get a position with *The Open Road Pioneer Magazine for Boys* [*The Open Road for Boys*]. And eventually I was able to do story illustrations, cover designs and advertising along with the Raymond Whitcomb advertise – I mean travel agency. And I was doing these large window displays for travel.

But the Depression became more intense and, of course, my savings that I had at the time in the bank just went down and out the pipe. And I had salvaged about \$600 out of my savings. A friend of mine who had been to the studio on a number of occasions invited me to go traveling with him throughout the United States, and I took it rather facetiously at the time. I didn't consider it seriously. But the more I thought of it, the more I was inclined to believe that maybe this would be all right, that I did want to see some of the wonderful country.

So we took off in a Model T Ford and were gone for almost a year. We saw all the national parks and had a grand time. We, between the two of us, we spent about \$600. We saw the American Automobile Association, and they gave us advice as to where to go and when. And between the two of us, we spent about \$1,200 dollars, and I think that was the best investment I have ever made in my life as far as investments are concerned.

But I don't know, when I got to Virginia, I was fascinated by the state, the weather, the people and the history as

it was – as it is in Virginia, of course. You might say they – center of American history, right here in Virginia. But somehow or another, I didn't realize at the time, but somehow or another, I decided I'd stop over.

Well, I was footloose and free at that time, and had an invitation to go with a gold prospector out here in Spotsylvania County, and so I went with him for two weeks. And we panned gold in the streams, and I had a great time, but of course, two weeks was just about all that – it's a pretty lonesome existence.

We had a log cabin out there, and I came back to Fredericksburg and I had two small vials of gold dust. And I took it to the jeweler and he smelled it, and come to find out, I had made nine dollars a week. Well, that was pretty good, because before then, I wasn't making anything.

Well, I met up with a sign painter from Buffalo, New York, and between the two of us, we opened up a shop in Fredericksburg, first sign shop. And of course, I had to rely upon sign painting, although that was not my ambition. And for about five years, I worked in the sign shop.

And during the time that I was there, painting signs, a great deal of work came from the national parks. At that time, the tourist trap was a trickle, a very small amount of people would travel. And the historical guides would take people out into the field and the areas where these famous battles took place, and they narrate, as it would be, for the tourists.

And of course, most tourists when they come there, they have seen trees and fields and they have seen the same thing at home. So, to me, there was a potential, a greater potential in just simply word-of-mouth narrative explaining the battles, although the trickle of tourist trade became the Niagara Falls, you might say, of traffic into the national parks, and it got far beyond their ability to deal with it that way. So they had me do narrative panels, lettering.

MR. PENNINGTON: And this was in the '30s that you began?

MR. KING: That was in '33. That was – I left Boston. See, I left Boston about '31.

And so the work came into the shop there. I had a sign shop there. First sign shop in Fredericksburg, actually. And the work, I hated it. But still, it was a living. And I made these narrative panels for the national parks [National Park Service].

But somehow or another, I felt that maybe an illustration or two on these narrative panels would be of more interest to the tourists. Well, that went on for a while, but of course, fools tread where angels fear to go, and I decided that maybe there was good potential in that field and there was a possibility that we could do – illustrate history on the spot where these events had taken place.

I undertook to experiment with pigments and paints, and I got in touch with most of the big paint laboratories throughout the country, and I undertook tests, paint tests and so forth, for weather conditions and such. And of course, it's known fact that paintings will last for thousands of years indoors under controlled temperature and such. And they – the heart and core of this whole project was to try to reproduce indoor conditions outdoors, which would give some reasonable guarantee of long life of the painting.

And eventually test Rohm and Haas [Company], and the result of the experiments of course proved that there was two factors that was detrimental to the life of a painting, ultraviolet rays of the sun and moisture. The combination of those two destroys the painting, that was definitely proven.

So the idea was to eliminate both of those, which through – by the help of the Rohm and Haas Plexiglas company in New York City, I was able to get them to develop a new type of Plexiglas, UV-10*, which would screen out ultraviolet rays of the sun. And then again, of course, the exhibit case itself was the second factor.

And not only that, but the pigments, paints that were used were of the utmost durability. Epoxy, I developed the use of epoxy in recent years although other paints have been used with the UV compound, which is a powder that is mixed with the pigments, which screens out the ultraviolet rays in the pigments as well as the plex itself, which will do the same.

And so I was able to develop a technique that could make it possible for a painting to stay outdoors for a reasonable length of time. Today, I mean, just last week, I came across two paintings that were done in 1961. And I have any number in the – throughout the eastern states – that were done 25 and 30 years ago, and they're just as bright as the day they were done.

And that, of course, is a fact that I had developed over the years. And I am thankful to say that the National Parks has patronized me. I have paintings all over the eastern states.

MR. PENNINGTON: That you have done for the Park Service? So the work that you were doing in the '30s was

not WPA [Works Progress Administration] work, it was for the National Parks?

MR. KING: Oh yes, yes. The first ones that I had received was from Jamestown, 1955, they started there. And that was the first big opportunity that I had. I got acquainted with some of the parks-men before them, and Paul Hutchins [phonetic] was the first one to contact me.

And so the 1957 celebration of the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of America, you might say, at Jamestown, 15 years before Plymouth was. And so a series of paintings were developed and used on the tour route, a five mile tour route, the only thing like it in the United States. And they are - kept me busy from about the end, from '55 to '57.

The National Parks, of course, furnished me with all the historical reference. I was in contact with the archeologists, the geologists, the historians and Lawrence Kocher who was a historical architect. He was the chief consultant in the reconstruction of Williamsburg [VA].

So I had the advantage of his knowledge as well to reconstruct pictorially some of the places and events that took place down here 385 years ago. So this work was completed before 1957. Paintings are up, and it's on a five mile tour. And the National Parks, of course, showed quite a bit of interest in it, but they were a little skeptical, so they waited about five years before they began to give the orders.

Well, at the present time, there is something like 50 million people out through the summer months, Mr. and Mrs. America in the eastern states, to see, to travel and to - you know, on their vacations. So this was an opportunity to make their trip a little more interesting, educational and entertaining as well.

So these paintings, of course, have - the only thing of its kind of the United States where a tourist can come to a historical area and right on in the - in the area right adjacent to the event as it took place, these paintings will show just exactly - it's like an eye into the past. So they could see as well as hear; we had sound effects too. You press a button, and of course, you'd hear the narrative or very often the narrative was used - a sound system, and in other cases just a narrative panel.

So throughout the eastern states, all the national parks east of the Mississippi practically have my work. And I have quite a few west of the Mississippi River that are in park areas there. Of course, further west you go, more natural wonders you have and the less you need of this so-called history that has dug out of books and illustrated and set up for the tourists to see.

So I'm not - I don't consider myself an artist in the true sense of, as an artist would be. My - I am an illustrator. I have been illustrating all my life, and I have been quite busy illustrating history. And some of the - work that I have done on the side, of course, additional work and murals, I have done quite a few murals throughout Virginia. And I have one that is in Salt Lake City, Utah, the largest mural in North America. This is 400 feet long and 75 foot tall; it's in the rotunda of the Mormon Information Center in Salt Lake City, Utah [*Creation*].

MR. PENNINGTON: What is the technique?

MR. KING: This, of course, would be done right on the job. Most - I mean canvas was put on the wall.

MR. PENNINGTON: Oh, it's oil on canvas?

MR. KING: It's oil on canvas. I used acrylic most of the time, but acrylic of course is - it's impossible to blend with acrylics properly. So I used an airbrush and a spray gun to produce these effects, and it was done in nine months, where my competitor artist had estimated it would take from five to eight years to complete.

But I was awarded the contract because of the preliminary sketches that were submitted - were approved by the Mormon Church. And I proceeded with that work, though prior to this time, I had done *The Life of Christ* [1964] for the Mormon Church, and that was 12 scenes, 200 feet long. It was done right here in my garage. And the garage is only 16 feet square, so I had to go twice around that garage with that canvas. I never did see what it looked like until it was put up at the World's Fair in New York City [1964].

And it was put up there in the Mormon Information Center in New York City. And at the conclusion of the fair, I was quite surprised to hear what the attendance was at the [inaudible] exhibit at the World's Fair had received 40 million people. This had received 30 million people.

Well, that was - quite a feather in my hat. I figured that maybe it had done some good because it was - it was the life of Christ from the baptism and there's 12 scenes, to the last one which is the Ascension. And they're all life sized. One scene, the Sermon on the Mount, had 125 figures in it and they were all life sized.

Well, this, of course, was done, and then of course it was shipped to Salt Lake City, and I was - they requested me to come there to install it permanently in what is known as the concourse, which is the back corridor around

this huge rotunda. And then of course when that was completed, I submitted sketches for the proposal to paint the walls of this rotunda.

Now this rotunda is a platform that sits, I guess, all 30 feet from the main floor, and is a spiral winding ramp that runs up to it. And you stand on this platform. There is a statue of Christ, 19 foot tall that is - I think it's one of the most beautiful statues I have ever seen of Christ, but you look up 15 feet from that platform to the wall.

It's a circular wall and a circular dome ceiling. And so this preliminary was to cover these walls with an appropriate background. This was the - finally, it was accepted it was - actually, the sketch was of the universe, the heavens. And the illusion would be that you were a spaceman, looking out into space and you see these stars and the planets. And some of the celestial formations were magnified and brought close to you so that you could see some of the most beautiful formations that only recently had been revealed from these observatories.

I went to the Panama Observatory and got a lot of information about astronomy, and the final outcome of the work was that it was to be - the stars would shine, actually, just like real stars. They had reflectors. They would reflect the lights from the main floor, and it would represent the heavens as it would be seen in the northern hemisphere December the 24th, Christmas Eve, as the stars would appear then, along with the planets of the solar system and all these other celestial formations.

And actually, the mural portrays the words of Christ in many places throughout. It has to be explained, of course, it's not visible on first sight, but many parallelism or similarities to the words of Christ, for instance, "You must be born again."

The planets were arranged to present his words. The first planet was Sagittarius, and that was many stars being born. See, the birth of the flesh. Then the central formation over the center of the dome was representing the period of tribulation between the first birth and the birth of the Holy Spirit. And this cross was to represent, you know, I mean as you are and I am, that if we are to be born again Christians, the first thing is the birth of the flesh. We're all born of the flesh.

The next thing is that time of tribulation, of searching for a purpose. Well, that was represented by planets, the [inaudible] which was 15 trillion miles across. And it was the depth of a star. And in the center of that was the horse's head, which many astronomers are familiar with, and that represents the sign of the beast that is given in the book of Revelation, the time of tribulation that the world has yet to go through.

And the last one is the nebula in Orion, which of course, if you look at the milky way, you'll see that the outer inch - we are cut off and our solar system is a small fraction, infinitely small fraction of this entire nebula, which we are a part of. And that this was to represent the coming of Christ, the kingdom of Heaven and the ultimate objective for all humanity.

Of course, the time of tribulation comes first. We have yet to see that. The last stages of humanity would be the establishment of each kingdom on Earth, and the birth of the Holy Spirit and all mankind, not just a few countries, but all mankind, with a few exceptions of course. But this was to represent the three stages in the - Noah - and his progeny. Of course, we are descendants of that. That is the birth of the flesh.

The time of tribulation, which is spoken of, which would be when about a third of the population of this Earth would be erased, eradicated. Not all - many say all, but that's not so. The Bible tells us the facts as they really are.

Then, of course, the - after the battle of Armageddon or the times of tribulation, then comes the establishing of our - the utopia for which many dictators throughout the world - Hitler, Kaiser Wilhelm, Napoleon, you name it, all the way down through history, their purpose was to establish a way of life which would be ideal, the utopia. But they all have failed. And of course, they will all fail until Christ takes over and establishes his kingdom on this Earth.

This is all represented in these heavens. There's many other symbolisms that's involved in this, but it all takes a lot of explanation, and I have booklets, been sent to the Mormon Church and they have that on hand.

So there, that would - I am best known by that, but I think that the two things which I considered that I was most fortunate in being able to take part in was of course the illustrating of American history, the colonial period, the revolutionary period and the Civil War period. I have hundreds of paintings that have been done on these three periods. And of course, this mural, which is - I have been told is the largest mural in North America.

And that of course is about the - well, at the present time, of course, I am involved in miscellaneous type of painting. The National Parks have reached somewhat of a point of saturation for this sort of thing. They have got all they need, and that's it.

So I have been very fortunate in obtaining employment in many different phases of art. I mean, you know, corporate painting, landscape painting, exhibit. I have exhibited locally most of the time. I haven't exhibited nationally, and I'm not interested really in doing that.

But the work has been very - I have been very fortunate to get this work, and it has kept me busy. I have - actually, I am always about two or three months ahead of it. And I am always trying to catch up.

These envelopes you see on my file cabinet there are all - have yet to be built. And -

MR. PENNINGTON: So we're here now in your studio, which is on your farm place, and I'm wondering. How did you come to this particular place where we are now?

MR. KING: Well, actually, when I reached Fredericksburg, you may laugh when I tell you this, but I was just a youngster there and looking for a mate, and just like most normal youngsters would be. And I saw quite a number of beautiful girls, very attractive and very intelligent looking girls in Fredericksburg, and I couldn't understand why. But I found out it was because the Mary Washington College [University of Mary Washington], at that time, of course.

And I said, 'Well, I'm going to have to look me up a girlfriend.' And well, I - while I was out panning gold, at the end of the second week, I came back and stopped in a restaurant and saw a quite attractive young lady there at the counter. And I asked her if she would care to go to the shore with me after work, after hours. I went out there and, about - I think it was about 6:30 or 7:00 where I was supposed to meet her.

She never showed up. She stood me up. And two years later, I was introduced to the same girl and didn't know it. And a year later, we were married. And at that - after we were married, then I began to put things together, you know, to figure out just what had happened in the past. And the more I looked in, the more I was convinced that that was the girl. And I spoke to her about it.

I said, 'Did you ever work at Nick's Restaurant?' She says, 'Yes, why?' 'Oh,' I said. 'You're the one that stood me up.' [Laughs.]

So, well, I recently - she has passed away at - it has taken me back a great deal. But her niece, Mary - at that time, was married, and of course, she was very close to Mary - Peggy. And we had broken up one time, but Mary brought us back together again. And on another occasion, Peggy and I engineered her marriage to Paul [inaudible.] And of course, Mary and Peggy were very close, and she came down and visited us very often.

And while Peggy was in the hospital, she came with me. We went to see her practically every day. And she passed away with brain cancer, a slow, very tortured death. But that is the way it happened, and Mary and I, we both felt it very deeply. She - I think she took her death as - almost as much as I did.

But two years later, Mary and I were married. Now she is living with me, good housekeeper, good cook and good looking. What more can a man ask?

And I have been very fortunate over the years, but that's how I came into Virginia. History was the last thought in my mind at that time. Matter of fact, I never do get good marks in school, but I just got into the - right into the vertex of history, American history, and I have been there ever since, and I have been kept busy over the years.

And even now, every so often, I am doing a historical subject. Now this one you see right here on the easel is for the Yorktown [VA] celebration. I have just completed one for the driving of the golden spike - silver spike, I would say, that was - it's going to be dedicated the sixteenth of October, the same day that the big Yorktown day is. And that - the governor and Ronald Reagan will be there, and the mayor of Newport News will be there.

But these three paintings, let's see, I'm curious. There they are here. Now this is a - this is the way I work. First of all, I am requested to submit ideas on a given subject. In this case, of course, they wanted something on the revolutionary period. And this is going into the courthouse at Yorktown.

MR. PENNINGTON: And it's a picture of the battle of the British and French at Yorktown.

MR. KING: - the land. Now this one here is the meeting of the French and the British navy over - off Cape Henry. And that, of course, will be put on this canvas here, which is four feet by eight feet.

And the next one is the land - this is the surrender scene, the view, an aerial view of Yorktown, the York River and the British marching in a full dress formation down this - and on the right are the French, well-dressed, and on the left are the Americans, not so well-dressed.

MR. PENNINGTON: But they march down in perfect formation and lay down their arms. And that I think was the

last bit of war and chivalry. This took place right here at Yorktown as a surrender ceremony. Now you see the guns already laid down in some formation, and the others have marched in full formation over here.

There's about 12,000 men in this picture, but this is not an original. This is actually done from a painting that was done shortly after the Revolutionary War by an artist. And this painting itself is only about 24 inches long, but it has tremendous amount of detail in it. But I have added a few things to dramatize it, the sky and the land effects, made a few mistakes in the battlements here, but I have the advantage of knowing the facts as they really were by keeping close contact with the historians at Yorktown.

So I have made a few corrections. Otherwise, it is an out and out copy. This will be on the second one. See, there's two of them here. They will be ready for the big celebration. They'll be put up there in Yorktown.

MR. PENNINGTON: And when is that due by?

MR. KING: Beg your pardon?

MR. PENNINGTON: When are these paintings due by?

MR. KING: That's due by the sixteenth. I'll have it by the twelfth possibly.

MR. PENNINGTON: What happens to these?

MR. KING: These - the historian has actually spoken for them already, and he's getting them for me. I usually get something for them, \$95 apiece, but that doesn't pay for the time that's put in on them, the amount of research and everything.

Now these here are sketches that - see now, actually, these sketches, when they are submitted, if they are approved, then I take them back and blow them up. These sketches are made two inches to a foot, and then this - one foot squares on that one there, and - in other words, this is the brains and that big one is the brawn.

I do most of my - everything here on this one. And that's the way all my work has been done in the past.

Now these are paintings that were done. There's twelve of them; I only have three here. And there's twelve of them all told that were done for the museum in Nebraska, the Mariner's Museum. Now this one here is the halfway stop in the Midwest where - they called it Deep Well Camp. And the covered wagons would go through here to the West Coast.

The Mormons came through there, and it was built by this man right after the Civil War. He dug a well 65 feet deep, and they had a tunnel underneath this sod house where they could escape in case they were attacked by enemies, but you can see the covered wagons, great numbers of them, in the distance on the hillside there, stopping overnight.

This is a barn here made of sod grass, and that holds 60 horses. And there's a stagecoach going through. This one here, of course, is the covered wagons.

While I was in Nebraska, they showed me the tracks, the wagon tracks that were made by these covered wagons. And that one there on the right here of course, the horses are pulling this covered wagon up the hill. There's over 100 covered wagons in this particular scene.

And here we have the burial mounds by the Nebraska Indians. There - this occurred in history, so I illustrated it, as you see, with on the right, of course, the burial mounds for the Indians, set above the ground so that the animals would - dogs could not get to them, and with all their keepsakes with them, even their horse you see, was there on the ground.

And this one here is the mountain men in Nebraska. They have earned a reputation for being traders, quite capable traders with the Indians and also they have their wives, which were mostly Indian women. And it shows how they came down out of the mountains and traded with the Indians.

There's twelve of them all together. The others have all been done. It's the last three of that series, the buffalo hunt, the buffalos and the men, of course, would be life sized.

And quite a number of things have been done otherwise for different museums throughout here. I - over the past 10 years, occasionally I go up to Wilmington, Delaware for this Daniel Hadley who is a diorama man. He has done a lot of work for the National Parks and so forth, and I was engaged in doing backgrounds and making preliminaries for these dioramas. And that - quite a bit of my time involved in that too, over the years.

MR. PENNINGTON: Now you work in a very traditional means of painting. You paint history scenes, and you paint

what we would call representational paintings, so I sort of wonder what do you think about modern art, a lot of the modern art that you see?

MR. KING: I teach evenings at the community college here in Warsaw, and I have students that want to do acrylics, I have students that want to do oils, and I have students that want to do abstract paintings. I teach all four.

And I believe that abstract painting has its proper place. It's new, and people usually are very hesitant to accept something that's different than tradition says, but I think abstract painting has a good place in posterity, although there's a lot of imitators and a lot of them that will fall by the wayside, that will never get beyond just today. Tomorrow will never come for them, I believe that.

But I think along with that, then there's others that have produced something that has stimulated modern man into enjoying the beauty of man's creativeness. I believe that this - that in the book of Genesis it says that God had created man in his own image, which means what? That if we are in his likeness, not necessarily visible likeness, but in his likeness, he has dominion over the whole world and everything here, and he also is a creator, right?

So if we are in his likeness, we too are to create, see? That's the theme for my teaching in school, although most of the students that I have had are seniors, elderly women most of them, that have families grown up and got away from home and so they just want to occupy their time with something of some use. So that is the - you might say, the point to the wisdom, to create interest in the work, and it's surprising how fast and how quick they take interest in it when they begin to see its place in our lives, that we too create, we got that born in all of us.

The jails are full of people that create trouble, so - create - always create, we want to create. It's only trouble.

MR. PENNINGTON: [Inaudible.]

MR. KING: Yeah, that's right. Sure.

MR. PENNINGTON: What do you - do you do any abstract painting yourself?

MR. KING: I have done a few, and they sold, to my consternation, faster than the other kind, but I still don't profess to be one who does that sort of painting. Mine is mostly illustrating life as I see it, things that I can illustrate, I am all right. But as far as creating something in the field of art, very few paintings that I have done have been totally creative.

MR. PENNINGTON: The painting of George Washington that you are working on?

MR. KING: The painting on the wall there, this one here has quite interesting story connected with it. It's my favorite picture of George Washington, but actually the history back of that painting was that at the time the - George Washington was a young man, and his people, of course, his ancestors come from Scotland, and they wrote to him and asked him if he would be willing to submit to posing for a portrait for a Scottish artist, and he did.

And he came over - a square rigger and painted the portrait of Washington and went back. And it was resided in a Scottish castle for many years, finally ended up in a loft somewhere and one of the servants or somebody came across it, not knowing who it was, tore it in half.

And later of course, it found its way to London at an auction sale, and the National Parks people went there to this auction and amongst the paintings was this one here of an "unknown naval officer." So they bought it and started the chemistry detectives to work on it. And they analyzed the chemicals, the paint, and they come to find out it was none other than the - two cameos of George Washington and his wife at Mt. Vernon and the same pigments, so this was one way of confirming its authenticity as being painted by the same artist.

And of course, the records had turned up some very interesting information. There is a letter written by George to his people saying that this portrait does the artist great credit. And it's a painting which I have - I had it in my hands, and I made an exact copy of it. This is not the original. The original was donated to Sulgrave Manor by the Daughters of the American Revolution. It hangs over the - a grand piano there in the main dining room.

And this actually is my favorite picture of George Washington. It shows him with his natural hair and before he had his false teeth, and so this, I think, is the most truthful picture of George Washington ever was known, in my opinion.

MR. PENNINGTON: So you - have you spent some time in England yourself, then?

MR. KING: Oh yes, I did. Before the '50s, 1957 festival, I went to England to do a little research on architecture, see.

MR. PENNINGTON: The festival of Jamestown in '57?

MR. KING: That's right, for the Jamestown project, and I was able to get quite a bit of information - sketching, painting and so forth, on that sketching tour for about four weeks in the town of [inaudible], the people there. Of course, many of them were - those that were on board the three ships that came over here to Jamestown, so - and I had found all sorts of furniture that - similar furniture that was recorded in the logs of the ships.

So I was able to do a little research on my own there, and these pictures that you see in this Jamestown story, that one in particular, the family gathered around the fireplace, all - it was over 200 articles in that, dug out of the ground, that iron and porcelain ware, sgraffito, and earthenware that we were able to piece together. Even the wheel lock back in his -

[END SIDE A]

MR. PENNINGTON: You're going to tell us anything about your teaching here in the county at the community college [Rappahannock Community College] and the work you have been doing locally?

MR. KING: Well, the - at one time, some while ago, of course, I had been teaching once a week in the afternoon here in Bowling Green and in Tappahannock in the afternoon. These classes, of course, were held for about 15 years.

Then, of course, I was requested to come to the community college, the north campus there in Warsaw to consider the possibility of teaching there, which I eventually did pick up class - teaching evening classes. And the classes started off very poorly, at least there was just a few who came in.

But the next semester they doubled and tripled, quadrupled. And right now - I thought that this would be - had spent itself, that it had reached the peak of popularity, but evidently it's still going strong because there's more students this year than I have ever had before. I have had to break it down into two classes instead of one, and we had a maximum of 15, but we raised it to 25 each class, so we have actually 50 students.

In regards to protégés, I have had several that were promising young artists, and five of them actually have taken up teaching themselves. And I teach what I have learned in several universities in Massachusetts and what I had developed in my own way, you know, of things that I had perfected over the years, of methods and manners of painting.

But this - these schools, of course, were the School of Practical Art [Boston, MA], the Museum School of Fine Arts [School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA] in - the School of Normal Arts [Massachusetts Normal Art School, Boston, MA], the Copa [phonetic] Society, and the vast majority of evening arts and [inaudible.] And what I had gained there of course, I tried to transmit, in a boiled down to the salt sort of way, to my students because the time that they have there is nowhere as near what would be required if they were going to go into it professionally although there's several that have gone into the work professionally.

But what I can give them in that short time is hardly adequate for what they might use in profession or - a desire is one thing, but experience is something else, and that's where I try to give them the wherewith so that they, with experience, with the right amount of practice, which of course, one semester is not enough, I had a lot of my students come back five, six, seven semesters.

I had one that was 84 years of age, and she is past professional artist, and she comes regularly. I have several that are around, you know, 55-60, and - senior people.

MR. COLLINS: [Inaudible] have any of them created any folk art of their own?

MR. KING: Well, the creativeness that I find there, of course, is minimal. Most of them that I have that come into that class have never taken a brush in their hands before in their life. But after they get involved in it, they find that they want to keep it up. I have some who have done any number of paintings.

I did one right here locally, Elizabeth Pitts, she has got her house covered with them. She is giving them away to people, sold a lot. A lot of my students sold and won prizes in exhibits and so forth.

MR. COLLINS: [Inaudible.]

MR. KING: It's really rewarding. There is not much profit involved. The cost of living today is such that it's just touch and go, you know, to make it pay. But most of the students that I have had have been very enthusiastic, and they - as they go along, they become more and more interested in it, and they just come back again and

again.

MR. PENNINGTON: What did [inaudible]?

MR. KING: Well, I don't take any younger than the high school age because younger than that, first thing you know, you've got - changed from an instructor to a babysitter. And it gets very hectic, so I have given up a long while ago, although previously I had the adults and the children, the minors, but I had to give that up because it got too involved.

MR. COLLINS: You did have as young as nine years old at one time 'cause I remember [inaudible.]

MR. KING: Sure. Right.

MR. PENNINGTON: Now you mentioned earlier about the role of the artist being to create, and you mentioned the passage from Genesis where we are created in the likeness of God, and you mentioned that role. So do you see your own role as an artist as being a creator and making things and just - discuss something about your feeling -

MR. KING: Yeah, of course. It's unavoidable, the fact that one must create in coordination with any given project, see. These historical stuffs, of course, is - a great extent of that is based upon research done by the historians, and they give me the facts. But I have to do my own research too from costumes and architecture and such.

Is that somebody coming in?

There - always a good margin of play for creativeness in this work, everything I have ever done I have - been based upon, at least I have tried to incorporate, but that - all that I have learned, you know, as much as I know, a good composition.

Most of the schools today are here in this America. There was a time when you have to go to Europe, see. But now these instructors and schools have made a very thorough study of the European masters and the paintings and evolved from that certain principles that can be employed as instruction. And those are the principles which, of course, I try to convey to my students as well, that they're based upon tradition and long-lasting, sacred laws of art, what really comprises, what makes a beautiful painting, what is pleasing to the eye and what is original, with of course, a certain amount of mystery involved in it too.

So those are the things that I try to incorporate into these paintings, and there is no painting that I have done yet that had to be, first of all, composed, you know, to get composition, to balance, to have it based upon the sacred laws of good composition. And if that is called 'art,' then maybe it is art, but I don't claim it to be, you know, in the higher echelons of what might be considered art.

MR. PENNINGTON: I wanted to ask you what sort of future do you see for the arts in America, especially in these hard times with cutbacks and whatever. Do you think that the arts are going to continue to prosper and grow in this culture?

MR. KING: Well, the word 'art' itself can be employed in many of the branches, the countless branches that might be classified as art, commercial art for instance, and that you can go into a store and package there. I was in the package-designing business in Boston for a while. And everything on those shelves was - those labels are all designed by an artist, the packages. And in every bit of product that ever was marketed, if it's wrapped up, it's packaged and designed by an artist.

The clothes you wear are designed by an artist. Your car is designed by an artist. And you can go right on through, the hardware. Knives and forks and spoons and the decorations on that, the chandeliers and everything that we - that we're surrounded by is - originally is designed by some sort of an artist.

Even a building, you know. An architect is an artist in one sense of the word. And they have to study the - you know, at the academies. The principles of art and the principles of design are all very vital, of course, to just about every profession. So when you say, 'Is the future of art secured or guaranteed?' I say yes, and it's used more and more every day if you want to go into the many categories of what might be classified as art.

MR. PENNINGTON: All right. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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