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Oral history interview with DeWolf Perry,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Rev. DeWolf Perry on February 12, 1974. The interview was conducted in Princeton, MA by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview February 12, 1974, Rev. DeWolf Perry in Princeton, Massachusetts; Robert Brown, the interviewer. And what I wanted to ask you today were particularly your memories, your conversations, and what you know of your grandfather John Ferguson Weir. Now, maybe to begin with, if you could tell me, what did he look like? What was he like in just a very general way, as you knew him as a young man? How old were you when he died?

REV. DeWOLF PERRY: He died in around 1926 or '27; I've forgotten which. I was then a schoolboy.

MR. BROWN: So what -- could you kind of reconstruct some of --

REV. PERRY: I was about 18, I guess, or 17, something like that. I only knew him, of course, in the later years of his life. When he died he was in his mid- to high-80s. So I only knew him as an older man. He was very much a gentleman of the old school, sort of an old-fashioned phrase, very courtly, very gracious sort of person, a little goatee and -- I've forgotten whether he had a moustache. I'd have to look at his picture in the other room. But very -- he was a person of great presence. You were conscious of his presence in a room.

MR. BROWN: Was he very big?

REV. PERRY: Not of large stature at all, no, but medium size and average frame. I remember him as very active still. We'd all -- we'd go for walks a lot. He liked the outdoors, liked to go for walks.

MR. BROWN: Well, when people came by, was he jovial, or was he rather reserved?

REV. PERRY: No, no, somewhat on the reserved side. He had very bushy eyebrows, and they'd go up and down, delighted us kids. And he could make them go where he wanted them to, too. He could put on little things for kids with his eyebrows, "thunder and lightning," he called it. And we were intrigued by that.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter] What sort of things did you talk with him about?

REV. PERRY: Well, I'd like to give a little story here that is -- and I plan not to get a little [inaudible]. One cute little story. I don't know how old I was, probably eight or ten, maybe -- I guess this is before I was twelve. He was evidently babysitting on me. My parents must have been elsewhere, and my brother elsewhere. And we had a whole afternoon together.

And we talked and we talked and we talked. And I remember talking. The only thing, however -- the only content of that talk that I remember is his saying at the very end of it, "Remember, these were very important things we have been talking about."

[Laughter]

REV. PERRY: And that's all I can remember in that whole afternoon talking. I am sure, however, that the content was something that was very part of him, very much a part of his life, the reality of the spiritual world, you might call it. I use that phrase for lack of a better phrase. He was a mystic. He was psychic. He was very, very much aware of the inner nature of human beings, and I'm sure that that's what the talk was about. I'm sure it was one of many contributing factors to my vocation as a priest in the Episcopal Church.

My brother is a Jungian analyst. And we both agreed that Grandpa Weir was a pre-Jungian in his understanding of the nature, you know, the inner nature of man, and that his profession, my brother's profession, also derived in part from what we both absorbed from Grandpa Weir. We are both very conscious of this.

I've been told that I could recover that conversation through hypnosis, but I've never quite dared to go there and do that.

[Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Do you remember any other?

REV. PERRY: Well, always -- I grew up very conscious of the reality of the spiritual life through conversations with him and his wife. She also had mystic experience and used to talk about it a great deal. This was in the Teddy Roosevelt era, and I remember a lot of reflections from Teddy Roosevelt and the Great Outdoors and all this that they used to talk about.

MR. BROWN: Was this a field for them?

REV. PERRY: Very much so. They weren't great woodsmen in any sense. But they, and others around in the family, used to have all the windows open and, you know, that sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: Now, you knew him mainly in Providence, Rhode Island?

REV. PERRY: I remember visiting him at his home at 58 Trumbull Street before his retirement in 1917. I'm not up on dates.

MR. BROWN: In New Haven [CT]?

REV. PERRY: In New Haven. That house -- I visited since. It was very much of a mystical home for the family. They used to talk about it a great deal. My mother never went back to it after her parents left, it meant so much to her.

MR. BROWN: What did you mean by "a mystical home"?

REV. PERRY: Well, it was done -- all of them were Romantics. Grandpa and Grandma and my mother, and many others in the family, too. They were true Victorian Romantics. Now, this accounts for a lot of their style of life, a lot of their ideas and morals, and certainly the way they felt about 58 Trumbull Street in New Haven that had been, several generations before, the home of Samuel Morse, the artist. And my grandfather, as a professor at Yale [University, New Haven, CT], Dean of the Fine Arts School at Yale and founder of it -- it was very appropriate that he should be living in that house. He lived there for over 40 years.

So I remember visiting there in New Haven when I was very small. I can remember certain scenes. But then they moved to Providence in retirement. And that's where I saw them mostly. Also, up here in Princeton. He would come up here, loved it up here in summertime, painted some of the wallpaper in the other room. He and my mother painted three -- each one painted three of six panels there. Those are pictures you'll never be able to take them out of this house. But there they are, and they've survived very well, those Princeton scenes.

MR. BROWN: What did he do when he was up here, aside from paint?

REV. PERRY: Well, he found friends around here who were also in the art world in one way or another. Thomas Allen was on the board of the -- what is it, the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts, Boston, MA]? The art museum of Boston. And they became great friends. Allen was also a painter, and they used to -- well, they had a great deal to talk about.

He'd play with us kids a great deal. We'd build houses of blocks, and we'd always have a plaster man come in, come in to do the final work on it. A phrase that I remember that he was always talking about -- he was a bit of an architect as well as artist and sculptor. And so we used to enjoy building blocks with him when we were very small.

MR. BROWN: Did he ever talk to you and your brother about being an artist, the importance, or the vocation of being an artist?

REV. PERRY: It was always present. We were very conscious of it, he being the son of an artist as well and a professor of art. We were very conscious of it. My mother was a bit of an artist. We have a number of her miniatures here. So we were very conscious of all this. But I don't remember conversations on art technique. No, I don't.

MR. BROWN: Did he seem to be quite a disciplined man? For example, when he was painting?

REV. PERRY: We were never in his studio when he was actually painting. His aloneness was a distinct factor of his life. I know it was very hard on my grandmother. She complains in some of her writings about the extent of time that she was alone because he had to be alone in his studio. And I'm sure, it was meditation and awareness of, you know, wrapped up in the unconscious, as he would call it. That meant a lot to him. And he could only do -- he could only have that being alone in the studio.

I remember being in his studio a little bit in Providence, but not when he was actually painting. He used the upstairs of our house where we lived, which was the house provided for the Bishop of Rhode Island. And he had an added room there where he had many of his paintings. And we still have a lot of his paints and his easel and his --

MR. BROWN: His maulstick?

REV. PERRY: Yes, his maulstick, which we have just in the other room there. And his palette is now exhibited down at Yale in the Garden Collection.

MR. BROWN: You say -- a little earlier you said that -- I think you were in Princeton, but often in Providence he would go out and paint landscapes, too. [inaudible]

REV. PERRY: Yes. Those were the later years of his life, in his retirement. He kept on painting. He would go to -- well, around the neighborhood. He lived up in Wayland Avenue in Providence, 234 Wayland Avenue, near Wayland Square, which is now quite a shopping center. But he painted a picture there, of which my brother is particularly fond. He has it in California now, in San Francisco, a night scene with the light glowing.

Grandpa used to love to paint night scenes, moonlight -- again, his Romanticism coming through here. A study of the use of white paint for light at night -- and we have another one upstairs here, in very poor condition, I'm afraid, from those later years of his life, sort of post-Impressionism.

He and his brother Julian [Julian Alden Weir] studying Impressionism and experimenting in Branchville [CT] a great deal in the early 1900s. They have a great many of those paintings around, too. They're all exactly the same because they're the same themes from different angles around the field. But they're studies in Impressionism.

MR. BROWN: So rather than studio painting in his later years, do you think he may have been going directly to nature?

REV. PERRY: I do. The city -- he loved the river nearby, the Pequonnock River [CT] nearby Wayland Avenue, where he lived. And he would spend a lot of time there and did some painting there. Yes, I imagine it's fair to say that most of his later paintings were outdoors rather than the indoor painting of many of the still lifes and early studio work.

MR. BROWN: When he was outdoors, did he also like to be alone when he was painting?

REV. PERRY: His aloneness meant a great deal to him under all conditions. I remember he'd take forever -- he'd wake up in the morning and he'd take forever to get dressed. I'm sure that was partly meditation and the quietude, the solitude that he was engulfed in. It took him a long, long time in his later years.

[Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Was he fairly chatty, say, at the table or with the family?

REV. PERRY: Yes, but he was on the moderate side. He wasn't a raconteur. He wasn't by any means a showoff in any sense. He was somewhat reserved, but not extremely so.

MR. BROWN: What about your grandmother?

REV. PERRY: She was very much of a figure for all of us grandchildren. She had five or six, eight -- we were all -- well, eight in all. Two died in younger years. And we all have a very vivid recollection of her. I think she did a lot of babysitting with all of us at different times. In New Haven part of the time and then up in Providence.

MR. BROWN: Was she more outgoing than your grandfather? I know they both had the similar interests in meditation. Her personality --

REV. PERRY: Yes, I think they were both the same type. Theirs was a real, really wonderful romance, childhood sweethearts in West Point [NY].

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

REV. PERRY: Their fathers were professors at West Point, and they evidently were in love with each other all through their teenage years. And he went off to the Civil War, was stationed in the defense of Washington. And we got the impression that she missed him very much when he was gone. We were very conscious of that. She'd talk about him a great deal. And when he -- after the war, he painted those two famous pictures, *The Gun Foundry* [1867] and *The Forging of the Shaft* [1868] over in Cold Spring [Cold Spring Harbor, NY], across from

West Point, which made his name and enabled him to marry her.

He had been -- incidentally, there's another recollection. He had -- of course, I wasn't there at this time. But his art ability showed up very early in his younger years. And he painted scenes around West Point, particularly at the Hudson River, sold them to the cadets, who wanted a memento of their alma mater. And he did quite a thriving little business in selling his own early oil paintings to the cadets. This is all on record in his -- he kept a little diary of his painting. And this shows up in the early section of that.

We still have one of those. It's in pretty poor condition. It's up in the attic here.

MR. BROWN: Did he ever speak about the Civil War at all?

REV. PERRY: No.

MR. BROWN: Or your grandmother?

REV. PERRY: No. His future father-in-law, the Reverend Robert -- no, the Reverend John William French was a very close friend of Jefferson Davis. And the family had a lot of correspondence, which we've put in public -- I've forgotten whether it was the Library of Congress [Washington, DC] or at Yale -- about the Civil War, the feelings building up to it. So he talked of being part of the French family, you know, as a teenager, around the house, of course, and absorbed a lot of that.

No, we don't -- I don't recall and I don't remember talking of -- or my cousins, who have the same vivid memories -- of him talking much about the Civil War. I think it was totally contrary to his nature. I mean, he grew up in an army post. But I don't think he was by nature a soldier. He was more a man of the spirit and an artist and sensitive.

MR. BROWN: What do you think his father, Robert Walter Weir was like? Did they ever talk about their great-grandfather? Of course, he was at West Point.

REV. PERRY: No. Well, I've learned a great deal about him since. We have been going over his mementos, his papers, and sketchbooks and all [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

REV. PERRY: Microfilming them. But I don't recall much family talk about Robert Weir. Yet Louisa Ferguson comes through as a vivid memory, his first wife. There are many sketches and paintings of her. In fact, that's one right up there on the wall there. So she kind of looms up as a lifelong friend of ours. And, you know, we recognize the features always. But we don't -- I say "we" because the other persons, I think, would share this. We don't seem to have gotten much impression of them as people. That's come in later years.

MR. BROWN: Your grandmother, did she ever talk about life with your grandfather as an artist? Did either of them talk much about Yale, where he [inaudible]?

REV. PERRY: Oh, a great deal about Yale. My goodness, I know more about Yale in the '70s than -- the 1870s, that is.

MR. BROWN: Did they love that?

REV. PERRY: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: Did they settle into that?

REV. PERRY: Oh, they loved that. They took to it very naturally.

MR. BROWN: Why do you think they did? Whereas, his brother, Julian, was more in the New York world, the art world.

REV. PERRY: Uncle Julian, who was John's half-brother, Grandpa's half-brother, actually, was in New York -- I mean, his life was lived in New York in Branchville and Linden, very much in the social life. He was a very popular artist. And it brought him into contact with people of -- interesting people of that day.

John also, my goodness -- you know, the host of friends, there's numerous, vast -- the Pinchots of Pennsylvania, later governor -- many names that come if I gave a little thought to it. But he was a man of intellect. And therefore, being in an academic community, it was just right for him. He's the one who got the Jarvis collections to Yale. Others did, too, but I mean, he was very much instrumental in it.

And he knew what he was doing. He knew the art world. He knew the academic world. His father was a professor, too. So it was -- I would say that's the perfect place for those more than 40 years that he lived in New Haven. And you asked a question a minute ago, I want to answer a little more fully, the last question you asked. It led to Yale.

MR. BROWN: Yes, something about Yale. Your grandmother and your grandfather?

REV. PERRY: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: What were they impressed about Yale?

REV. PERRY: Oh, the people. My mother grew up with Yale students all around the house. Billy --William Lyon Phelps, for instance, many names. [inaudible] -- many people who became well-known later were students at Yale, that she was growing up and friends around the family.

Yes, all sorts of anecdotes about different professors. This isn't the place to recall them. I'd have to refresh my memory on them. But yes, they did a lot of talking about Yale in the '70s, '80s, and '90s. And if I really got going on it, I'd give a lot of history.

[Laughter]

REV. PERRY: I don't know how accurate it would be, but --

MR. BROWN: When you were a boy and they were living with you, or then near you in Providence, did people -- do you recall any time when older students or former colleagues would come by? Any of those?

REV. PERRY: I remember a visit from Mr. Plotman [phonetic]. I think it is Junior. Would that be John Plotman?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

REV. PERRY: He painted a little thing -- he came out of war, World War I, and sketched a little scene in our nursery. And I know just where it is. It's been painted over. I told several people, in that house since, that there's a John Plotman underneath that there. But they don't seem to have dug it out yet.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And Plotman was an old friend, was he?

REV. PERRY: Oh, very close -- very, very close friend. And all the famous names of that day, not only from the Hudson River School days, but the [Jervis] McEntee and -- who are some more? You know them. They're microfilmed.

MR. BROWN: [inaudible] would be a little older.

REV. PERRY: Yeah. Well, I wish I'd refresh my memory on this.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

REV. PERRY: But many of the well-known painters. And they would exchange pictures. They used to have some of those there, and pictures of theirs.

MR. BROWN: Well, now, you mentioned that your grandfather and your grandmother were in many ways quite alike. And you say your grandfather was the life of the mind, unlike, say, this half-brother, Julian Alden.

REV. PERRY: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And a good deal of this life of the mind had not anything directly to do with his work, but rather this interest in religion, right?

REV. PERRY: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Was this something that you were quite aware of?

REV. PERRY: I would broaden that out. It was more than just religion in the ecclesiastical sense. In fact, he wasn't much of an -- he wasn't interested ecclesiastically. But very much, as I said before, his awareness and experience of the nature of the spiritual world. He received revelations in the Swedenborgian type and did several of his books: some of them were written anonymously, were on that subject, human destiny, revelation, and the life to come. It wasn't automatic writing, but it was -- I don't know just how you'd describe the form in which he was a receiver of revelation.

He also was a bit of a spiritualist. He studied a great deal of the field in his day. Conan Doyle was another famous Englishman who was interested in this psychic, séances, and that sort of thing. Grandpa became very much aware that there were charlatans in the field and a lot of claptraps. He also became aware of the fact that there are many people who are spiritually sensitive, genuinely so. And he associated with them and did a lot of his writing on this subject. So he was very careful to pick his way through the very difficult, sticky field.

Of course, it's a very popular field now that's coming in in the late '60s and the '70s, the journey to the Vive [phonetic] and all of this Oriental mysticism. I don't recall that he was doing much for the Oriental part of it.

MR. BROWN: But now, did -- one thing he did was Assisi [Italy]. Now, what did that mean to him?

REV. PERRY: Yes. That -- I think in 1915, his trip in Italy in 1913, he visited Assisi and was, obviously from the remains that we have, very, very much wrapped up in the place as the home of St. Francis. St. Francis, of course, is very popular and distinct kind of a -- you know, was a very popular Protestant saint, you might say, with his human concern and all. And for some reason, Grandpa got very, very much wrapped up in the place.

We have in the family several finished portraits -- not portraits, pictures of Assisi, a great many sketches, probably more sketches of Assisi than any of the other -- any other place, originals for these later paintings. He was a great friend of Paul Sabatier, the French biographer of St. Francis. And I understand that there was some sort of a language barrier. They couldn't talk each other's language too well, but they became very, very close.

And Grandpa painted his -- painted an oil on canvas, which is not mounted, not framed. I gave it to Yale recently -- of Sabatier [*Paul Sabatier*, 1902 or 1903] and several other sketches, which showed all of the illustrations of his personal involvement, you might say, and concern. So they were very close in sharing the St. Francis tradition, obviously. So that's the reason, I think, there were so many of these paintings of his of Assisi.

MR. BROWN: Did you ever hear him talk about the --

REV. PERRY: I never heard him talk about it, no. At least, I don't recall that I did. There might have been on those afternoons when I don't remember the content.

MR. BROWN: I mean, the son-in-law was a priest. Did they ever discuss these things, your father?

REV. PERRY: Well, as I said, Grandpa was not ecclesiastically interested. And I'm sure that they had profound respect for each other's pursuits and vocations. But I don't think there was any great sharing along that line because they had divergent interests in the general field in the lighter sense and the general field of religion he found himself. I sort of assume that.

He was very close, oh, yes. The family was very well knit and everybody good friends. There wasn't any -- nobody was mad at anybody in the Weir family and Perry. And there was a lot of joy in having him around, a lot.

MR. BROWN: Now, who are some of the Weirs? Your Uncle Julian, do you recall him at all?

REV. PERRY: I only recall him occasionally -- on occasional visits. I remember when I was very small, we visited his house in Windham [CT], which was actually his wife's house. I have a very, very vivid recollection of the front door and the porch. And there was a Victorian setting there. But I don't recall visiting in Branchville. I've been to Branchville since. My wife and I visited there because I made a program there. But it's near where our families had schooled in Worcester [MA?], nearby. And so we made a point of going over there.

And we visited one of his daughters whom I had not seen myself. We'd seen a great deal of Julian's daughter Carol, who recently died. Her picture was in the front of the *American Heritage* as a 10-year-old girl and a Christmas tree. Just a few months -- or just a few weeks before she died. We used to visit her a great deal in Old Line, so I saw a lot of the olden Weir tradition through her.

MR. BROWN: But you don't recall --

REV. PERRY: I don't recall.

MR. BROWN: [inaudible]

REV. PERRY: No.

MR. BROWN: His widow, after he died, did come and visit in Providence several times.

REV. PERRY: Yes, because none of us -- we were a clannish crowd. We liked to keep in touch with all of the family and --

MR. BROWN: Was he at all like your grandmother?

REV. PERRY: I don't recall. I don't recall her much as a person, just as a very good [inaudible] and aunt, sort of.

MR. BROWN: Well, now that you've gone particularly over the spiritualist interests of your grandfather and grandmother, I'll rephrase what I asked earlier.

REV. PERRY: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What do you think his work meant to your grandfather?

REV. PERRY: What his work meant to him?

MR. BROWN: Right, his art?

REV. PERRY: Good question. I wish you had asked me this yesterday or before. I could have framed an answer. He was, I would say, not only steeped in art and steeped in -- well, culture in general and was able to express it through his art, but he was every inch the artist as well: not only in his technique and his pursuit and his teaching, but in his -- it's just his whole style of life.

He was an artist and the son of an artist and the brother of an artist. And I suppose you could say the father of an artist because my mother was a miniature painter and many sketches. They went on one trip together [inaudible] went together. And her sketches and his sketches were almost indistinguishable. It's very hard to tell. She fortunately signed hers.

MR. BROWN: [inaudible]

REV. PERRY: I would assume so. Yes, she never went to school. She had to work. She used to say that she went to Grandma's school. Her grandmother taught her. She never went to school. Here she was an officer and all that.

MR. BROWN: So this is a time, you know, when an artist didn't have that distinctive a lifestyle. You say your grandpa earlier was rather reserved. He was very much at home --

REV. PERRY: [inaudible]

MR. BROWN: -- among the academics and the --

REV. PERRY: Courtly, in the best sense of that word.

MR. BROWN: Not exactly a Bohemian.

REV. PERRY: No. My mother later on made the remark -- we had a cousin on the other side of the family who was with us around the house I just identified -- an indigent artist. Oh, broke, always producing pretty good art, but never making it. And she said she's firmly familiar. She said, "I grew up with indigent artists, and I understand the pressures." And she was very hopeful for this particular situation that I described.

MR. BROWN: You mean she was characterizing her because she understood that from her grandfather's --

REV. PERRY: From her own life, her own kin, growing up. No -- well, she made also the remark -- we had all the luxuries, but none of the necessities. You saw a picture, and the family goes -- you know --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

REV. PERRY: Of course, then, I think she was exaggerating a little because I'm sure a professor at Yale, although it was a very small income compared to today, I'm sure it was adequate.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

REV. PERRY: But two daughters -- you know, growing up with two daughters. But she did make that remark one time that showed a style of life, not Bohemian. I don't think any of them went to Paris [France], you know, and joined the art colony there. But, of course, Robert Weir went to Rome [Italy] in the early nineteenth century.

But, no, theirs was not a Bohemian home. Theirs was a settled professor's home, as his father's home had been before him, and as Mary, my grandma -- hers had been a professor's house, too, at West Point. So they -- that was their style of life. [inaudible] looked like, of course, West Point isn't exactly college.

MR. BROWN: She carried on pretty well, then, as a daughter?

REV. PERRY: Yes. My aunt, Louise, Louise who made them -- Louise there who later married Joe Sargent, doesn't seem to have inherited much of the artistic tradition. She married a Sargent, a Sargent in company there in New Haven. They were more practical people. They didn't associate themselves in later years with the art world the way my mother did. Of the two daughters, my mother inherited the art tradition much more than her sister did.

MR. BROWN: Did your grandfather seem to keep up with just the art world down into the '20s when he was very old?

REV. PERRY: Oh, very much so, oh, yeah. And he [inaudible] shows there. And his lifetime friendships, well, were, as I said, very wide.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

REV. PERRY: My grandmother -- Jerome -- Jenny Jerome [Lady Randolph Churchill, nee Jeanette Jerome], who later married Randolph Churchill [Lord Randolph Henry Spencer-Churchill] and is Winston Churchill's mother, was a friend of hers as she grew up. And a little bit of New York, yes, as they'd go down there occasionally. But they weren't socialites. They didn't go in too much for the social, you know, society as it was called then. But they felt at home in it, belonged in it, but didn't follow it up too much. It was more the New Haven academic life.

MR. BROWN: Your grandfather's eyes began failing when he got very old?

REV. PERRY: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And yet he continued to paint.

REV. PERRY: Yes, he painted. And those were colorful pictures. But I do remember very well that during his later years, my mother had a terrible time keeping him out of his studio because he would go in there and think that his pictures and paintings that he had painted -- and he'd get in there with bright-yellow paint and try to clear them up a bit, which made them very garish.

And she got his -- well, the man who did his very fine sketch of, which we have in the other room, I showed you this morning -- Mr. Duffany [phonetic], Wilford Duffany of Providence, who removed -- after his death, who removed some of that yellow paint. And he said it was a very thrilling experience to take this garish color off and find this beautiful coloring underneath, trying to restore some of these pictures.

One particularly is the one that hangs out in the hall here under the stairs, the life-sized picture of my mother, painting of my mother, just as a model. He called it *Lady with the Violin*. It exhibited in many places. But to us, it's a portrait of my mother, very much in the John Singer Sargent style.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

REV. PERRY: He did a great many portraits at Yale of faculty people, and others. But this is a unique picture we have, full-length. And we cherish it very much, in the family.

MR. BROWN: A former student of his, years later found it working at your home.

REV. PERRY: Yes, I wish I'd recall his name. He came up to Waterbury [CT] when we were living there at the St. Margaret's School, when we had, I think, a granddaughter graduating or something. He had done a portrait of a former wrestler, John Louis. John [inaudible] Waterbury and got to talking about. And I said, "Well, would you like to come down and see it again?" And which he did.

But we also got to talking about Yale art, and I spoke with my grandfather. And he said, "Oh, yes. I was one of his students for a short period of time." And I said, "Wouldn't you like to go over and see his pictures?" And we took him over to [inaudible] Street at 21 Fifth Street in Waterbury. And he took one look at them, and his first remark was, "Oh, they've lost their brilliance." This would have been the Impressionist coloring, you know, that he would be referring to.

I was very sorry to hear that, because, sorry to feel that so many of these pictures had lost what he had originally put into them by way of the color. Because I like color. This is a day when people have neutral color, and, you know, I sort of sensed that he liked color. So I was very glad to hear that comment because it meant that so much of that had been lost. These were the Branchville pictures, particularly.

MR. BROWN: [inaudible]

REV. PERRY: Yes. Experiments in Impressionism.

MR. BROWN: How long did your grandmother live after --

REV. PERRY: She only lived a year.

MR. BROWN: Oh, a year.

REV. PERRY: Yeah. Right there in our house. They both had moved into our house right here in Providence on Brown Street. Those last maybe four years. Before that he had an apartment on 64 Leland Avenue, then an apartment on Benefit Street near us. But they became more and more -- less able to function independently. So the family made a little apartment for them in our house.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Was your mother very much of one mind with them? She told you she was grandma's pupil or something?

REV. PERRY: Yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: She went to the School of Grandma.

REV. PERRY: Yes. She inherited a great deal of the spiritual insight, quite remarkable, as a matter of fact. She could make remarks over the years that were very profound in spiritual insight. And was very partial to the Weir traditions. That shows up in her letters. I haven't yet really read those through. I'd like to start that sometime. I remember receiving letters over the years, saying, "Well, we Weirs see it this way," whatever it might be. And it was always from this point of view that we've been [inaudible]. She was very much a Weir, very much a Weir, talented, and very able.

MR. BROWN: Do there remain any of [inaudible]?

REV. PERRY: I hope not. I just don't know how others saw it all. I know there's a host of friends who are very devoted. Why did no one go to practice with [inaudible] or some of the intellectual -- you know, pointy-headed professors --

[Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Whenever she would say, "We Weirs see it this way" --

REV. PERRY: This was in letters to the family. I'm sure that she wouldn't have been blatant about this at the time.

MR. BROWN: Right.

REV. PERRY: I just don't know what George Wallace would have thought, you know, pointy-headed professors -- quite a load of them there.

[Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Well, how do you -- looking back, you've done so much work with the Weir material now in the last few years with various scholars and institutions. What do you see as the place of your grandfather, your great-grandfather as painters?

REV. PERRY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What do you see as their --

REV. PERRY: I see that these professions all regard -- we called him Uncle Julian, Alden Weir -- Uncle Julian as the -- of the three of them, the most finished and the most competent, from the spiritual artistic point of view. He was able to give his whole life to that. He was not a teacher. Robert Weir, my great-grandfather, was a teacher at West Point.

John Weir, my grandfather, was the founder of the first university-related art school in this country. To publicize, they used to say he brought art into America. Instead of students going to Europe to study art, as they all thought they had to do, Yale was the first place in this country where they could study art in a proper, full, complete fashion on our native soil. And this was very significant.

But it took many years of administration. Whether he was a good administrator, I'm not quite sure. I think he was more of the artist than the administrator. But it did sap a lot of his energy and all the rest that would go to make him a more finished artist. So I'm not saying this defensively. I'm just saying what the rest of -- show, that of the three of them, he was the more finished with art.

So it was a combination of administration and teaching. Weir Hall at Yale, for instance, is named after him, and students remember that [inaudible].

Bob, you ask again.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

REV. PERRY: Those three -- I'd like to answer that question more fully. How did you put it?

MR. BROWN: What do you see as your job? Or the question is not really that. But what do you see as significant of the Weirs?

REV. PERRY: Yeah. Certainly my job. I would like to just comment on that.

MR. BROWN: [inaudible]

REV. PERRY: Because they were all squirrels. They kept everything. They stored everything [inaudible]. A lot of time we'd pitch out a lot of stuff, you know, as we'd go along. But for some reason or another, for a long time, not only the Weirs, but the Princes and other parts of family, too, that will kiss everything. And so we've been getting it all out in recent years. I've known for a long time that this was the great inheritance that we had, that it was important. And I've never had the time before to get to it in the past few years. And now I've been given a great deal of time for it.

And I see the value of keeping records and the things that -- say, for instance, letters are left. And so I've been doing a lot on that. First of all comes the choice of the family, anybody in the family who wants some of these things. But then, otherwise we try to market them, although there isn't any marketing going on. You know, there isn't any market value for it. But we are putting a lot of this material in what we consider proper places.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

REV. PERRY: Various museums and other places that are [inaudible]. I'm glad you've been [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: Is this a longstanding interest of yours, one that you now have more time for?

REV. PERRY: That's the reason I've set up my life the way it is now. This is the sort of first priority that I am doing now. I'm doing other things I've wanted to do, too. I've specialized in them and giving a lot of time to this at this time. That's why we're here now is because I've been reaching out to see what's the best way.

We're very vulnerable here in this house. And I don't think the attic in an old New England house is a proper permanent place for these things. They ought to be out where the public can get and art students can see them. And we've been glad to have curators and all sorts of people coming to help us to make decisions.

MR. BROWN: Do you think in doing this you are somewhat in the spirit of your grandparents, who kept down every revelation they got in great detail? And in the case of your grandmother, who then wrote biographies?

REV. PERRY: I grew up with a great receptivity for that. But it never came my way. I kind of expressed it with words when I was a little kid. I was trying to tell them, "Now, this is what happened."

MR. BROWN: Do you think they were [inaudible]?

REV. PERRY: [inaudible]

MR. BROWN: But what you're doing now, collecting these things and making sure they can be looked at closely?

REV. PERRY: As I said before, they were Romantics and sentimentalists. These were very distinct characteristics. [inaudible] And I'm sure that Grandpa would get a great kick out of the fact that I'm sitting in the chair in which he wrote his memoirs when I was a little kid. I remember it vividly. His [inaudible] chair, those went to Joe Barlow [phonetic] and Washington for the family. And in the other room, several pictures of his -- the Franklin stove in there was -- they were very fond of that as an object. And that fire is going in there right at this moment in the other room. And many of his things are around. I grew up with a feeling that that's important, and it's still important for me.

I hope we don't have a backward look. I'm sure my real view is forward-looking. But I -- in the history of art and the antiquarian and all that kind of thing -- and I'm not an archeologist. But [inaudible] grew up, learned a lot, too. So I am very much at home in doing this. And I'm glad to see any interest that comes along in the next generations of the family that shows a recognition and interest in this, because I do see it as a highly unique and valuable heritage.

MR. BROWN: Well, it sounds to me like your grandparents were interested in things not necessarily in [inaudible] are you are, but in a spiritualist one. But they too analyzed and studied closely people and circumstances.

REV. PERRY: Yes, yes. And they enjoyed life. They enjoyed life very much. They enjoyed -- well, it was very good to them, in a very modest kind of way. Very full for them all. My mother's life took her all around the world with my father and she was very much at home in the world, with all this background that she seems to have grown on.

MR. BROWN: The Romanticism your grandparents -- could you detail that a little more, their personalities.

REV. PERRY: Well, there was always typical Victorian touch. I suppose -- well, I'll say this. Someday, I want to go through the books that are on the shelves there that were my mother's favorite books when she was young. In other words, what a girl growing up in the '90s [1890's] would have been reading. And I haven't really studied them carefully. In fact I unloaded a few of them two years ago -- and I'm sorry now I did. But they were Victorian Romanticism, a lot of Walter Scott and chivalry and the Medieval -- you know, the neo-Gothic sort of thing was in there.

And a whole approach to life, sentimental. Some of Grandpa's pictures were outrageously romantic. We have one upstairs which is just a print. It's on the wall. It's a *Plymouth Magazine* cover. But it was a belfry in the moonlight with a lot of little fairies up and down the bell rope, flying around there [*Christmas Eve* or *Christmas Bell*, c.1865]. I grew up thinking, "Boy, that's great." But I have found many people that are quite repulsed by that -- by that picture.

[inaudible] happens to have the original oil of one of ours. But that was what I mean by Victorian Romanticism as it appears in art, or to an artist. So it's a way of life and a view of life, as well as a very specific subject for some of his painting.

MR. BROWN: And yet, outwardly, to the casual acquaintance, he was just a genteel, reserved, Victorian gentleman?

REV. PERRY: Yes. Yeah, gentlemanly, "old school" is the phrase that fits him beautifully, very courtly.

One other thing we didn't touch on -- and the reason -- no, no, not the reason. When Robert Weir, my great-grandfather, went to West Point, it was in the days of mechanical drawing. And I understand that's recently been phased out at West Point. But that was the chief pitch in those days. Photography hadn't gone very far. And they used it in the military manuals and all of that, and that was part of his function.

So he was an expert mechanical drawer, as was Grandpa, John Weir. And I have in my hand here a part of a Romantic, as well as part of the mechanical pictures that we're talking of here. This is his girls' house. This was then Quarter Four out of Quarters 105, Professor Weir, West Point. It is his girls' house. And the minuteness of this drawing, had a little color in it -- but the sentimentality comes in because he did his [inaudible] girls with all their dates recorded. And the roots of the tree and up to the trunk of the tree and into the branches. They all had dates with different words about it, I suppose, leading to their marriage.

Now that is -- that's about as sentimental as you could get. Beautiful -- I mean, I respect that kind of sentimentality. But also, it's a masterpiece of mechanical drawing. The detail of that house -- my wife and I went to find that house. And then in West Point last year, took us a Polaroid picture, which I have on the other side of it. It's changed a little bit. But the thrust of that picture [inaudible] both the practicality of the mechanical drawing and the sentimentality of his day -- now, you're seeing sentimentality there in the best sense -- sentiment, I guess we should say. Other dates and their relationships -- is just a beautiful thing. And I'm glad just to keep a record.

MR. BROWN: [inaudible] present endeavors and [inaudible].

REV. PERRY: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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