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Oral history interview with I.J. (Isaac J.)
Sanger, 1981 November 17

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant
from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with I.J. (Isaac J.) Sanger on November 17, 1981. The interview was conducted at the artist's home in Harrisonburg, VA by Buck Pennington 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: This is Buck Pennington from the Archives of American Art here in the home of Mr. Isaac Sanger, the artist and printmaker, whom I'm interviewing today, November 17, 1981.

Mr. Sanger, let's just start at the beginning of things and talk about where you were born and your first involvement with art. You were born down in Virginia, right?

ISAAC SANGER: Yes. I was born in--here-- Harrisonburg. In Virginia. In Rockingham County in 1899, January 8th.

MR. PENNINGTON: And you were schooled down there?

MR. SANGER: My father moved away when I was about three or four to Oakton, Virginia, which is not far from Washington. And I lived there until I was about 12 years old. And we moved to Spotsylvania County [VA] from there. And I was in Spotsylvania County until I was almost finished grade school. And we moved to Free Union in Albemarle County [VA].

MR. PENNINGTON: Were you, as a little child, were you already interested in art and doing artwork?

MR. SANGER: Yes, it started before I went to school. One of my playmates had a horse that was cut out of a thin board. And I wanted to make one. And I went to my brothers and my dad to see if I could have them draw me the horse on the board to -- so I could cut it out. And they all said they couldn't do it. So I said I'll do it myself. And that was the beginning of my artwork, which was before I ever went to school.

Well, from then on I was drawing horses a lot. And later, I began to draw deer being chased by a dog and jumping over a log in the woods, and Indians in a forest shooting at a deer. And I guess that was about the first beginnings of my artwork.

MR. PENNINGTON: Did you have any art training as a child?

MR. SANGER: No, not until -- really, not until I got in the upper grades, when we moved to Free Union. The principal was very much interested in art, of the high school there. And she found out I was interested in art. So she had me dismissed from the grades to take art with the high school students. And that was really the beginning of any instruction in art, which mostly was copying things in watercolor.

MR. PENNINGTON: And then you went on from there to college, first at Bridgewater College [Bridgewater, VA]; is that right?

MR. SANGER: Yes. Just one thing before that, this principal was interested in taking some work at the University of Virginia [Charlottesville, VA] in the summer sessions. And we lived about 14 miles out in the country from there.

MR. PENNINGTON: From Charlottesville?

MR. SANGER: From Charlottesville, yes. And so she persuaded them to -- she wanted me to go and take some industrial art and manual training. And she -- we drove out with horse and buggy, 14 miles for an 8:30 class. And we were supposed to attend every day of the week, but we were just in it--going for what we could get out of it, not for credit. So they allowed us to attend the classes just twice a week.

MR. PENNINGTON: You and the principal?

MR. SANGER: Yes. And I don't know if I should go -- how much detail do you want me to go into?

MR. PENNINGTON: Oh, tell me everything.

MR. SANGER: Oh, okay. Well, the industrial arts teacher was from Indianapolis, Indiana, a Miss Springer. And she told the principal she thought I had real talent. And the next year, I didn't go for the summer school. But Miss Springer somehow found out where I lived and sent for me to come. And she said there was a lady in Indianapolis that wanted someone to do chores around for board and room, and I could come there and go to the high school and take art. And my dad wasn't too keen about the idea at first, but he finally said that it would be all right. But then the lady got ill and had to have a full-time person with her all the time. So that fell through then.

My next training was after I finished high school, the summer of 1920. One of the supervisors in Albemarle County was going to Columbia University in New York [New York City]. And she said, why don't I come up there and take art? And she said, "You can probably find a job to pay part of your way." So I jumped at the idea right away. And I took two classes in the morning, two -- one in watercolor painting and one in design.

And I had started looking around for jobs, and I was walking along Amsterdam Avenue, and the door was opening at one of the Columbia buildings at one of the carpenter shops. So, I went in. And the man in charge there gave me a job in the afternoon. At first I was just sweeping up around and cleaning up. And then he said, well, I could help Mr. Ryan in the office. And then he had sent me downtown to get estimates, prices on machinery and that sort of thing. So that was my first real training in art.

MR. PENNINGTON: Was at Columbia in the summer of 1920?

MR. SANGER: Yes, the summer of 1920. And then I decided that, well, I wanted to go there later to take more. And so I went to Bridgewater for two years and took most of my academic subjects so that when I could get to go to Columbia, I could take mainly art.

MR. PENNINGTON: How did you come to choose Bridgewater?

MR. SANGER: Well, that was a church school that my brother had attended. It's a small college in the Shenandoah Valley. And at that time, they didn't have an art department there. They do now, but they didn't at that time. So I went there for the full two years. And my father had died then. At the end of two years, I wanted to go to -- I decided I wanted to go to Teachers College, where I could take mainly art. Most everyone that guided me said to stay and finish at Bridgewater before I went there. But one of the professors said maybe in my case, the best thing -- that would be the best for me to go there. And so he supported me in that. My sister did, too. So in the fall of 1922, I went to Teachers College at Columbia.

I worked mainly at night at first because I didn't want to lose any school. And I did all kinds of things, from -- my first job, I guess, was with a silkscreen shop, doing mainly posters for cigarette ads and things like that, to put in showcases in windows. At that time, silkscreen was only used commercially, not for fine art.

MR. PENNINGTON: So this was your first exposure to printing techniques, I guess?

MR. SANGER: That's right. That's right. And that was when I was mainly full-time at the day job, and I just went to school at night at Teachers College. And then I had a job at the York Club as doorman. With white gloves and everything. And this is -- Franklin Roosevelt was a member of that club. And there was another -- they had a regular man for the job. It was supposed to be mainly as a doorman. But he had some duties that took him away from the job, so I had to fill in. And Mrs. Roosevelt came out and asked for me to get her a cab, which I did. And then she said, "Oh, I left my galoshes in the cloak room." Would I go and get them? Of course, I didn't know at that time Mrs. Roosevelt was as famous as she was going to be in later years. I think he was governor of the state at that time.

And, let's see. I did -- one year I did -- I was restaurant cashier in the evenings for the Wolcott Hotel on 44th Street. So that was some of my --

MR. PENNINGTON: Your jobs that you held.

MR. SANGER: Right, right. So I had a little money.

MR. PENNINGTON: So you first got to New York then to go to Columbia in 1922?

MR. SANGER: Yes, that's right.

MR. PENNINGTON: And then you just stayed on?

MR. SANGER: Yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: And did you finish up your degree at Columbia?

MR. SANGER: Yes, I got a B.S. with a major in Fine Arts. Well, Fine Arts Education -- I decided I didn't think I wanted to teach. So I really wasn't trained for anything. And at that time, I was working in a chemistry store at Columbia there, just to make money on the side. So I worked there for a little while after I got my degree. And then I got a call from Mr. LaMont Warner who had formerly taught furniture design at Columbia. And he was a designer of furniture for Paul Abrahms [phonetic] on -- I think it was 41st Street. He wanted an assistant. And so I decided that -- I went down to see him. And he wanted me to come on.

So I worked there for awhile. But they didn't -- they had rosters at the Europe at the time they took me on. And I don't know if he was a little bit put out, I guess, that I was taken on while he was away. So he said they didn't really need the job. So Mr. Warner said, "Well, I'll take you over to the YMCA," where he had worked before. "And introduce you over there; I think maybe you might be able to get a job there."

This was the Building Bureau of the YMCA [The Young Men's Christian Association]. They did all of the layouts for Y's and the furnishings, the draperies and the furniture. And they made full-size working drawings for a lot of the furniture. And they put them out in specifications that the different companies would bid on.

And when I went over to see Mr. Dean there, he was quite interested, but he said, "I don't have anything right now. But I think probably in the near future, I will." So in about two weeks, I got a letter from him to come down and see him. And so he took me on. And I was doing mostly furniture sketches and furniture design for the Y, for a number of years, until the Depression came along.

MR. PENNINGTON: In the meantime, had you started making prints yet, yourself?

MR. SANGER: Yes, I had. One of the teachers that taught me, a Mr. Heckman, Albert W. Heckman, went to Europe one summer and took some artwork at Munich in graphic arts. And he got me interested in doing woodcuts. And at first it was just familiar. He was illustrating *Aesop's Fables*. So I started doing out doing linoleum cuts for *Aesop's Fables*. And I got quite interested. And he encouraged me. "Why don't you go on and do work on real wood?" He didn't know too much about it himself, but he gave me the tools, and I got some books on it. And that was the beginning of my engraving.

And I liked it very much from the first, because I'd always liked working in wood -- carpentry and that sort of thing. Even as a child, I liked to do things in wood. So this combined both the artistic side and the skills, cutting in wood. And that was the beginning of my engraving. And at first I did -- the first couple of engraving I used only linoleum tools on in-grain maple. But of course, that was kind of -- they are not sharp enough, really, and I had quite a little difficulty with it. But then I began to use engraving tools, and that became much more interesting from then on.

MR. PENNINGTON: So it was one aspect of art that did appeal to you a great deal?

MR. SANGER: Yes, very much so. Yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: What had you been working on primarily, in oil and watercolor, up to that point?

MR. SANGER: Yes. And oil and watercolor. And they had a course at Columbia that everyone took, an art course. It was called "Art Structure." It was based on Arthur Dow's work. And in fact, my first year in 1922, I took Professor Dow's course in Art Appreciation. And I took a half-a-year's work with him. And in January, when I came for class one day, they said that the professor died of a heart attack. So the other art teachers finished up the course. But I was always sort of grateful that I had had that first half-a-year with him.

MR. PENNINGTON: Yes. So then you were working at the YMCA. And you must have worked there for quite awhile, from the time you graduated then, right up until the Depression started?

MR. SANGER: Yes, because the Depression came along. And, well, people that had been working there longer than I had were there before. But finally the only -- only two or three of the top people were left because the Depression came. And they had to cut down on all expenses. And -- but even after I was let out, they would call me back for freelance work sometimes, for two weeks at a time, doing furniture design and sketches for them. The book -- they would have to make sketches for their -- for the specifications they gave to the furniture dealer. I did the full-size working drawings, and a sketch of the finished product. And they ran a blueprint of them and gave them to the furniture designers. But they were on the job -- could you excuse me just a minute? I'll get some water.

MR. SANGER: Well, during the Depression, I did all kinds of things -- book jackets and playing cards and wallpaper design, just to make a few dollars.

MR. PENNINGTON: So you were really out scrambling around.

MR. SANGER: Yes. And --

MR. PENNINGTON: Did you have a portfolio you took about from place to place?

MR. SANGER: Oh, yes, yes. When I was out to get book jackets and that sort of thing. And my sister had come to New York. I finished at Bridgewater. And she was working in the library. And my niece, so that the three of us had an apartment together, first up on 130th Street, just south of the convent. And then we moved over onto Claremont Avenue, right near the International House.

So I didn't really suffer, because they -- both my niece and sister had a regular job. And I could borrow a little money from them if I got really pinched, which I did quite a bit, which I paid all back afterwards, when I got four or five jobs. And one summer, working for the Petershams, who did illustrations for a book -- children's book up at Woodstock, New York. And I went up there during the summer. And this teacher, Albert Heckman, that had always helped me out in different things, he said that that they were organizing an art project known as WPA [Works Progress Administration], and Mr. Von Groschwitz was in charge there, and for me to take my graphic arts work down and show it to him. He thought I'd get a job.

MR. PENNINGTON: Was this 1934?

MR. SANGER: Somewhere along there, about at that time. It was the beginning of the Art Project, whenever that was. I think it was around '34. And I took my work down, and Mr. Von Groschwitz said he wanted me. And at that time, all you had to do was just say you needed a job. And so I was -- I worked doing -- I couldn't believe that this was actually true, that you could work at whatever you wanted and get paid for it.

It wasn't very much. I think at first it was only fifteen dollars a week or something like that for three days. But it was something. In those days, everything was much cheaper. You could get a meal at a cafeteria for twenty-five or thirty cents.

And as time went on, they needed someone to do the printing of the woodcuts and wood engraving. They had printers for etching. I think there was a printer for etching. And then they had several printers that were printing for the lithographers. But they had no one to do the wood engraving, the woodcuts. So as you say, if I can print half time, do printing half time, and I could use the other time to continue to the blocks for myself.

And then they said that they had had an excuse to keep me on. Later, they got anybody that -- they charged anyone that wasn't on the lease, unless they were very essential. They said they had no one to do the wood engraving, the printing. So they kept me on there until the end of the project, practically, it was. And later I even had someone to help me with the printing.

And I think we did all the printing -- the first -- in any big scale, the first colored woodcuts that were being done around, very much, the way we worked it, the artist would come in and work with me until we got a proof in which the colors were just like he wanted, or she wanted, whatever the case was. And then I would print the edition, which was twenty-five prints, plus three for the artist. We were allowed to keep three to exhibit. We weren't supposed to sell them.

MR. PENNINGTON: What happened to the twenty-five?

MR. SANGER: They were allocated to tax-paying institutions -- hospitals, schools, and different things like -- public buildings like that.

MR. PENNINGTON: And where were you working? Where was the actual place you were printing?

MR. SANGER: The first work -- I've got it in there -- was on 41st Street, I think. Then they moved over to 43rd Street on the East Side. And from there, downtown to -- I think it was 23rd Street, I'm not sure. But they moved several times during the time I was working as printer.

And I made a woodcut for the first exhibit, cut the announcement in wood that we printed and set out for announcing the exhibition. And Olin Dows from the Washington -- one of the head ones down at the Art Project there in Washington [D.C.] -- came up and he saw my work in the first show we had there. And he wanted to meet me. And he came up one time. And then later, he bought one of my prints.

MR. PENNINGTON: Oh. And, had you shown before you started working at the WPA? Had you had many shows before then?

MR. SANGER: Yes, I'd had -- the first recognition I had gotten was -- I think it was around '28 or '29, the American Institute of Graphic Arts [New York City] put on a show they called the "50 Prints of the Year," which was not necessarily the fifty best prints of the year, but showing the different trends that art was -- graphic art was moving in during that year.

And that was -- I had one selected for that. I think Rockwell was the one that was selected. And at first they ran it -- they had twenty-five modern prints and twenty-five conservatives. And they began to kind of overlap, so later they just had one juror to select. And then for four years, each year I had a print selected for the "50 Prints of the Year." Lewis Mumford was the juror one time; and I've forgotten who the others were. But then the Depression came along. And I think they disbanded it for awhile.

In the Weiss Galleries [phonetic] on Lexington Avenue carried some of my work. And so Mr. Zigrosser [phonetic, probably Carl Zigrosser] selected one of mine for -- he put out their fifty best prints from the art gallery. And the one he selected of mine, Clare Leighton selected for a book she was writing on woodcuts in the '30s. And it was a full page illustration at that. So I guess that was about the first of any kind of recognition that I got for my work.

And then -- but then on the project, they had someone to allocate the prints to -- that went around to the different places that -- they could get them very cheap, just the cost of the material. Mr. Talbot had been a newspaper man. And he liked my work very much. He was an Englishman. And he had sent some of my work and some of the others, who were on the project to -- for the fine prints that was put up in London, the studio, I think, or something -- put that out. And one of mine was selected for that. In fact, two -- one in 1936 and one in 1937, I think, were in the fine prints of the year.

And one other thing that I did while I was on the project printing, that was when they were having the New York World Fair. In the Contemporary Arts Building, they wanted -- a couple of afternoons in the week, they wanted to demonstrate how prints were made. And so they had a press sent out there for woodcuts and one for etching and one for lithography. And so they wanted me to go out and do the printing for the woodcuts. Well, the guides would bring people around and explain what we were doing. And that lasted for -- I think it was the last year of the fair.

MR. PENNINGTON: So that's right up to 1939?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: So then you were working with the WPA project up until --

MR. SANGER: Up until it really closed down. Let's see. Warren Gavitz (phonetic) was the supervisor when it closed, and they were trying to -- we were studying for commercial art or something then, just the last -- and I never knew what really happened to a lot of the work that wasn't allocated. I know Mr. Thomas said that most of mine had been allocated, most of the twenty-five. And so that brought me up to the --

MR. PENNINGTON: To right before World War II?

MR. SANGER: Yes. Yes. And then World War II came out, and at first they were taking people up to forty-five. And I registered. Somebody said my numbers had gone way down the list or something like that. But after a little while, I got the greetings to come for induction.

MR. PENNINGTON: You were still living in New York with your sister and your niece?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes. That's right. So I was sent to Fort Dix [New Jersey] and was there three days, I think. And from there I was sent to Florida, to Miami Beach, for basic training. I was in the Air Force. At that time we were expanding the Air Force a lot. And so I had about -- I think I was about sixteen days or more at basic training, practically none -- five or six days drilling. And we didn't even have rifles. The first four men in the column would have a wooden rifle.

[They Laugh.]

MR. SANGER: So from there I was sent out to Madison, Wisconsin. And one of my friends told me to take some of my artwork when I went into the service. And I took some of my photographs and some of the artwork that I had done. And at Madison we were in the radio school, the -- and I memorized the code, but I wasn't keen at distinguishing. So I washed out of that, and I was sent as permanent party to Camp Kearns in Utah.

There -- and I don't know if you want to go into all this detail.

MR. PENNINGTON: No -- yes, do. No, please do.

MR. SANGER: Well, I was put in the guard squadron to guard the prisoners as they cleaned up the post. So, this is where my work portfolio of art was seeming good. I went around to Sergeant Francis of the guard squadron and took my artwork with me. And he said -- I said maybe there's other work around there that I could do that might be more valuable for them. He was looking at it, and he had it spread out on his desk. And some of the MPs were standing around him. I didn't notice, but they picked up a couple of the pieces and took them back to

Major Flynn, who had an office in the back of the building. And Major Flynn sent out to Sergeant Francis to bring me back there.

Well, I went back, and he had this similar work. He said, "You do beautiful work." I said, "Thank you." He said, "What did they send you up here for?" I said, "Be a prison chaser." He said, "Do you think you wouldn't like that?" Well, I said I thought there were other things maybe I could be worth more for, doing. He said, "Hell, I wouldn't like it either." He said, "You won't have to do that," said, "I want to fix up the day room. And you can help decide some of the furniture for them to make in the carpenter shop and help to fix things up."

And so he said I wouldn't need to go out. And he told Francis, Sergeant Francis, that he didn't want me to have to go out, be a guard.

Well, I guess Sergeant Francis forgot about it. So Monday morning, he called my name out. And I said, "Major Flynn said I wasn't to do this." "Oh, yes, that's right." So then later, Captain Cassidy -- he was in charge of landscaping the buildings. These were all new buildings out at Camp Kearns, which is about 15 miles out of Salt Lake City. And so he said he would like to have me to come and make buildings -- make drawings of the main buildings on the post, showing how the shrubbery and the trees would look after they had grown up a little. And he said if I wanted to go out to Salt Lake City to look in the library about trees or something, he would let me have his chauffeur and all that. Well, that was something.

MR. PENNINGTON: High times.

MR. SANGER: Yeah, that was high times then. Well, I made drawings of the main buildings. And this Major Flynn of the provost marshal, he called me in one day and said he wanted to take me over the post headquarters to measure the -- Colonel Lewis's windows for blackout curtains. And he took me over there and introduced me to him. And I think he was just trying to be nice.

So then later -- I'm kind of skipping some here -- they posted in the barracks that all men over 38, if they've got a job in some essential industry, they would be transferred as civilians to the enlisted Reserves. So a friend of mine, McRoberts, who was a school superintendent, said, "Let's go out to Salt Lake, see if we can't get a job, since we're not really doing much here in the way of helping out." So we went out to unit's employment, and he did most of the talking.

And the man then turned to me, and he said, what line of work did I do? I told him I had done drafting and furniture design, that sort of thing. And so he said, "Maybe I can help you." So he sent me around to a civilian outfit that was making drawings for airfields, that sort of thing. He said he wanted to take me on. And then I waited and waited, and nothing came through. So McRoberts had one of his friends look -- trace it back, and said I was being held for important reasons or something, making drawings of the shrubbery. [Laughs.]

So, I finally finished up those, and this time it went through. After I'd gotten transferred, I got a job at Fruehauf Trailers, repairing these truck trailers, in Salt Lake City. And I worked there for two or three months, I think it was. And I wanted to get back to New York. So I asked the boss there if he could give me a letter of introduction to the Fruehauf Trailer Company in New York. He said he couldn't transfer me, but said they were needing help everywhere. He was sure I'd get a job.

So I got back to New York and worked for Fruehauf Trailer there for a month or so. And friends of mine from the WPA days had a silkscreen shop. And they were doing some work for the government. They wanted me to come and work for them. So I got transferred to Creative Printmakers.

MR. PENNINGTON: A private concern?

MR. SANGER: That's right. But they were -- they did quite a bit of work for the government, different things. So I worked there until almost -- I did my honorable discharge just a little before the war ended. And I worked on, and after the war ended at Creative Printmakers for a number of years. And this friend that has -- Mr. Talbot that was out here for the prints, he told me, says, "Go up and" -- he says, "Why don't you take your -- use your GI experience in going to school and doing artwork?" So I did -- I couldn't think that I'd have my way paid. I'd have to pay it myself, before.

So I went up and took a year of work at Columbia School in the Drawing and Painting at Columbia University. And then about the time that then finished -- in the meantime, I've gotten married. My wife was teaching here in Washington. So I'd heard that they had graphic shops here in the government. So I came down to Washington then, and I got a job at Andrews field doing airplanes and all kinds of work for airplanes, covers, designs, maps and charts, and that sort of thing.

And I worked there then for a year or so until -- when President Eisenhower was elected president, they -- the military air transport service, where I was working for at Andrews field, was being moved out to St. Louis,

Missouri, up to Scott Field in Illinois about 14 miles out from St. Louis on the Illinois side of the river. So at my age and everything -- I thought if I --

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

MR. SANGER: At that time there was a freeze on taking on any new people for this -- it was hard to get -- I tried to get a job here, transferred, but they weren't taking on anybody. So I thought, rather than to resign, maybe I'd better, at my age, go along out to St. Louis. My wife was teaching here at the junior high. She taught English for the ninth grade. So she stayed here. And I went out and rented a room out there so I could get transferred back to Washington. I was out there, I guess, about six months.

And I had a chance to do a graphic work at HEW [the Department of Health, Education and Welfare] for the public health service under Myron Jennings [phonetic]. So I was transferred then back to Washington, and doing very much the same kind of work that -- well, it was a little different. One, doing it at Andrews Field, two it was covers for booklets and illustrations and maps and charts, that sort of thing.

So I worked there then until I retired in 1956, I guess it was.

MR. PENNINGTON: You worked at HEW until 1956?

MR. SANGER: Yes. But all this time, I was -- all this time when I was working at the -- for the government in different jobs, I kept up my printmaking all along.

MR. PENNINGTON: Your own private artwork?

MR. SANGER: Yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: All through the war?

MR. SANGER: Yes. Again -- in fact, Jacob Pins gave an exhibit when he was located in the Castle, I think they called it.

MR. PENNINGTON: Yes.

MR. SANGER: He gave an exhibit of my prints there.

MR. PENNINGTON: How had you met him?

MR. SANGER: Well, I had done some of his prints on the project.

MR. PENNINGTON: Oh, his -- for the WPA?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes. Some of the black and whites -- he did some black and white woodcuts and some color woodcuts. And that's where I learned to know him.

MR. PENNINGTON: And who else did you meet when you were on the WPA, and work with?

MR. SANGER: Oh, I worked with a number of fellows. Amos Dansville. And Lynd Ward -- and he was a supervisor for awhile. And Werner Drewes and Louis Schanker. Ira Morrisager [phonetic] and -- oh, there were more -- Fritz Eichenberg. I printed several editions with his. Stuart Davis's brother was on that project; I met him and printed some of his things with him. And Harry Shokler, Elizabeth Olds, Harry Gottlieb. I didn't do any printing for them, but I learned to know them and they came into the shop when they were doing lithographs, so I learned to know them.

And -- oh, let's see. I can't think of his name now. He died not too long ago, and he had a show down at -- of lithographs.

MR. PENNINGTON: And so you continued your artwork all along the time that you were working?

MR. SANGER: Oh, yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: But then in '56 you retired?

MR. SANGER: Yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: And you could work full-time on your art.

MR. SANGER: While I was working on the art project -- I might just -- I forgot a little something there. So to go

back -- the Chicago International, we could send the three prints that we were allowed to keep, and exhibit. So I counted on the Chicago International, oh, I think about 20 people that were there from my art clubs, which was -

MR. PENNINGTON: Very good.

MR. SANGER: Someone -- I've forgotten her name, too -- that said she had had a chance to observe -- work with these artists that had been on the project, and your own work, and she thought that the work they had done on the project was as good, if not better, than some of their own work, you know.

MR. PENNINGTON: So after you retired, then you had plenty of time to work on your own work?

MR. SANGER: Yes. Yes. Then I devoted most of my time to doing prints and some painting, watercolors and oils. I never -- I just did the paintings mainly just because I liked to do it. I never really tried to show them very much.

MR. PENNINGTON: I noticed when we met before and talked about your artwork that you have a great interest in the landscape. When did you start coming up into New England and sketching these things?

MR. SANGER: Oh, that was during the Depression years. I joined the Youth Hostel. And you either hiked or went by bicycle. You took your sleeping bag out, sleeping pack, which was just sheets. And the hostel furnished the blankets, as they were, and you cooked your own meals. And at that time it was, you spent 25 cents a night and cooked your own meals. And so that's the way I went around to New England, carrying a sketch pad and a camera. So I got to see a lot of New England really mainly on foot or bicycle.

MR. PENNINGTON: And the landscape really appealed to you then?

MR. SANGER: Oh, yes, very much so. During my stay in New York, though, I used to carry a pad in my pocket and sketch on the subway. Unfortunately, I lost a lot of my sketches of people. I still have a few of them around.

MR. PENNINGTON: Did you have some interesting experiences sketching people on the subway?

MR. SANGER: Quite. Sometimes I could get in a corner seat and do it, and they wouldn't notice. But I have had people to get up and move. Other times they don't notice you at all, and you can do it rather as if you're not paying much attention. But a few of them would get up and move.

MR. PENNINGTON: But most of your trips you would go up to New England and sketch?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: And out into Canada, too, right?

MR. SANGER: Yes. I went with my sister and a friend of hers who later became my wife. This was before we were married. We took a trip by car around the Gaspé Peninsula [Quebec, CA]. And I made photographs and sketches of that trip up in Canada. My sister wrote and said, did I want to go to Florida with them? I said I wasn't especially interested in Florida, but if they wanted to go to New England, I said -- to Canada, then I'd be very much interested. So we decided to go to Canada. And I got some good sketches on that trip.

That was when the Gaspé was really primitive. A lot of the road wasn't even paved. See, up until 1928 or '9, a lot of these villages around the Gaspé were only -- you could only reach them by, oh, there was an old road. And then for a long time it was just gravel roads. And that's the way it was on our first trip. Much of the way it was gravel.

MR. PENNINGTON: But that appealed to you?

MR. SANGER: Yes. Roughing it, I didn't mind that.

MR. PENNINGTON: I've noticed that so many of your works are farm scenes or country scenes or landscapes. What is it about those kinds of scenes that appeal to you, that you want to draw and make prints of those?

MR. SANGER: I guess I just have a natural liking for it. I like living in the country. I don't like farming. When I was working on the farm, why, I'd take books on art out when I was working and read while I was letting the horses rest a little. And I didn't want to overwork them. So I guess it's just -- barns especially -- because the forms are almost abstract art, with almost Cubist style -- the round cones, or silos with the cones on the top, and the way they were added onto here and there, not planned, but making rather interesting designs, a lot of it, I thought.

And they weren't trying in their barns -- they weren't trying to be too pretty or too -- it was -- utilitarian, I guess, but at the same time, not bad art, too. So I guess that was it. And I don't know. Maybe if I would have done more figures, I might have liked it. I had a little life class drawing at the Art Students League [New York City], a private class down in the village during the Depression years, too.

MR. PENNINGTON: Did you spend much time at the Art Student League?

MR. SANGER: Not a lot. I took lithography with Eugene Pitt at night. And interesting -- he was in my class, but he came in one evening -- was Aaron Bohrod. And it so happened that he and I both had prints that took the print of the year that year. I didn't know then, at that time, how famous an artist he was, really. But I found out later that he was quite well known.

MR. PENNINGTON: So then it is the barns, the abstract quality that appealed to you and that sort of thing?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: And the landscapes. You've traveled quite a bit, haven't you?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes.

MR. PENNINGTON: So did you start traveling much more after you retired?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes. I guess I agree with Henry van Dyke's quotation from one of his books. He said, "What's a world for if it isn't to wander in?"

MR. PENNINGTON: Yes.

MR. SANGER: Well, one of our first trips after -- see, my wife retired a year, I think, before I did. So we took a Greyhound bus trip, a conducted tour, through Mexico. And then I guess the next big trip by car was to Alaska. We drove all the way up the ALCAN Highway [Alaska-Canadian Highway] to Fairbanks, and came back on the -- put our car on the ferry that brought us back to Prince Rupert, which is in Canada. And then we drove back from there.

And then -- oh, I guess this was before I retired. We had the first trip to Europe, my wife and I, in 1960. We had about a month in England, and 27 days on the Continent, with a tour. That was an overall trip of Europe. And then later, after retirement, my wife and I had a trip to -- called the Alpine Tour. It was mainly the Alpine countries -- France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany. And then we had a little day or so in London, too, on the way back.

And then later, I had -- after my wife died, I had a trip with American Express to Spain, Portugal, and Morocco, which I liked very much.

MR. PENNINGTON: And you would take photographs and sketches on all these trips?

MR. SANGER: Yes. Well, some of them, they were moving too fast for much sketching. But I did get sketches quite a bit -- I mean, photographs quite a lot, of most of it.

MR. PENNINGTON: And do you -- those have shown up in some of the artworks, then, too?

MR. SANGER: Yes, some of them are done from the artworks. And I had things I'll show you later, which I used things for my sketching. I would use -- put together three or four different sketches into one picture, to one - wood engraving.

MR. PENNINGTON: Ah.

MR. SANGER: During the Depression when I was out of work a lot, I used to go down to Fulton Street Fish Market in New York, and did lots of sketching of the folks that came to -- the fishing boats came in there, and made all kinds of sketches of the boats and the people around there. And sometimes a bum would come to me and say, "Hey, have you got a nickel for a cup of coffee?" I'd say, "Sorry, Brother, I'm out of work myself."

MR. PENNINGTON: [Laughs.]

MR. SANGER: And then they'd begin to apologize, "Oh, I'm sorry."

MR. PENNINGTON: Oh, dear. Those were hard times.

[They Laugh.]

MR. SANGER: That's right. Now, a nickel for a cup of coffee, you wouldn't say that anymore.

MR. PENNINGTON: No. That's right. You'd say, "Can I have a dollar for a cup of coffee?" now, these days.

[They Laugh.]

MR. SANGER: That's right.

MR. PENNINGTON: So in Washington [D.C.], did you say Jacob Kenning gave you some of your artwork, and you've shown your artwork several times since then in Washington?

MR. SANGER: Yes. When I was working for HEW, Lawrence Deck [phonetic] was a member of the Arts Club. And he invited me to show -- along with him -- at the Arts Club. So, the two of us had a show there.

MR. PENNINGTON: And you had joined the Washington Print Society?

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes. Prentiss Taylor -- he was president of it at that time. I was able to submit prints with the Society.

MR. PENNINGTON: Now, as we were saying earlier, you did retire in 1966. And you've had several trips since then. And since that time of being retired, you've had more time to devote for your artwork. And I sort of wondered, in closing out this portion of the interview, if you'd just make a few comments on your artwork, and what is it you've enjoyed about being an artist and doing the prints that you've done, and how special it has been to you?

MR. SANGER: Well, as I said in the beginning, I enjoyed drawing from a way, way back, before I went to school. And always tried to keep it up, even though I had to work at other things, just because I liked to do it. And I like to paint. And I like the printmaking, especially wood engraving and woodcuts, because I've always liked working in wood. I've done simple furniture and built a boat when I was a child, just a teenager, that I actually used. I dammed up a stream and used it.

And so I guess it's a combination of the two that -- and after taking the course in "Art Structure" at Columbia, I began to appreciate all kinds of design much better -- textile design, wallpaper design. I was interested in industrial design -- in fact I took a course a year -- one at night in industrial design, because I was always interested in it.

And I was interested in architecture. I never -- furniture design, I did, during the Depression, quite a lot of sketches for Virginia Craftsmen and for Old Colony Furniture Company. I guess I didn't -- I'd kind of forgotten about that. But Virginia Craftsmen got the job of furnishing for Ford's Colonial Village at Dearborn [MI]. He built a number of cottages for visitors to stay in, and he called it -- they were supposed to be copies of historical places like Poe's cottage, Barbara Fritchie's house up in Frederick, and--historical places. And they wanted furniture as near like what was in those houses as they could get. In some cases, like the spool bed, they'd just have the top of the bed and not have you design the rest of it, that went with it.

And so I guess I got interested in furniture design, too, just from working at it.

MR. PENNINGTON: So you like the making of things?

MR. SANGER: Yes. And I always liked painting. I like watercolor, I like oils. Well, while I was still working at HEW, I took a workshop with Donald Kingman in Mexico for -- let's see. Was it a week, two weeks, a week or more? I studied with him at Columbia in one of the- the School of Drawing and Painting there.

MR. PENNINGTON: And so, but what is it about printmaking that you like? Because you've done so much of that.

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes. Well, it's again working in wood, I guess. And the designing and then seeing how it comes out. It's always -- when you work on it, that first print proof, it's always exciting to see what's coming out. Sometimes it's disappointing, sometimes it's a little better than you had visualized even. So you never know just quite how it would be until you actually laid the proof.

MR. PENNINGTON: Until you got finished.

MR. SANGER: Yes, yes, that's right.

MR. PENNINGTON: Well, thank you very much.

MR. SANGER: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...June 11, 2009