



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview of Charles Henry Sawyer,  
1977 January 25**

**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.**

**Contact Information**

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

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Charles H. Sawyer on January 25, 1977. The interview took place in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and was conducted by Cynthia Newman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Charles H. Sawyer and Cynthia Newman have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: This is January 25, 1977. My name is Cynthia Newman. I'm in the University of Michigan Museum of Art with Charles Sawyer. I'm going to interview Mr. Sawyer for the Archives of American Art. To start with, we'll do a little bit of background information. Can you tell me where you were born and a little bit about your family and early childhood and so on.

CHARLES SAWYER: I was born in Andover, Massachusetts in 1906. My father was the treasurer of Phillips Academy, Andover. I was brought up in that community and then went to school there and then taught there, ran the Museum and continued to have some association with Andover until 1940. My family were New England types. We were brought up really in New Hampshire in Durham and Dover. My father's family had a woolen mill there through the nineteenth century. My mother's family were the Frost family to which the poet Robert Frost, among others, belonged in remote Yankee history. So that this was a rather provincial New England family. But I guess I would say in retrospect it was fortunate for me that the woolen business began to deteriorate toward the end of the century. My grandfather, for whom I'm named, had been governor of the State and I always assumed that I would probably return to New Hampshire and be a small town lawyer and politician myself. That's probably why I majored in college in history of government and international relations. And then went to the Harvard Law School. But, during this same period in my undergraduate career at Yale, I got interested in the arts. I took two or three courses in the field. Also one course called Daily Themes, which involved having to write an essay type six times a week. One of the things I discovered in that experience was that I had never really learned to use my eyes so that probably I got more interested in the visual arts than I would have been otherwise in the course of preparing for a law career. Also, I was fortunate in having classmates who were much more sophisticated in art than I was. At the end of my senior year in college I went abroad with eight of them. So when I went to Harvard Law School, I already had a pretty good interest involvement and used to spend a good many free hours in the Boston Museum and the Fogg Museum and felt that that was part of my interest in the milieu. But I had no idea whatever at the time that I was going to make a profession of this. The following fall Phillips Academy had been given a new art gallery by a close friend of my father--a classmate at Andover and Yale....

MS. NEWMAN: Was this Cochrane?

MR. SAWYER: Yes, this was Thomas Cochrane who was a partner in the J. P. Morgan firm. This was called the Addison Gallery after an old friend of his. And he decided for reasons that were not clear to me at the time, and still really aren't entirely clear, that he wanted me to be the first director of this gallery.

MS. NEWMAN: Was this sort of out of the blue? Did he write a letter?

MR. SAWYER: My father had shown him two or three papers I had written in a course at Yale, particularly under Samuel F. B. Morse and he was rather intrigued with them. I think the honest fact was that he was very fond of my father and this rubbed off somewhat on me. But it was about as rational as that sounds. But anyway, this was the famous year 1929-1930 where the bottom had dropped out of the stock market and it was a good time to be offered a job at almost anything. For somebody twenty-four years old obviously this was quite flattering and rather challenging. In the course of three months' time I finished my first year at law school and was just ready to begin the second year when this came about. But I withdrew at the beginning of the second year and transferred for a year to the graduate school with an understanding that I could go back to the law school if I didn't like it or if they didn't like essentially what I was doing. My career changed more or less overnight that way.

MS. NEWMAN: Other than that, were there any particular people at Yale, say, that influenced you? Who did you take art from?

MR. SAWYER: My particular friend and mentor at that time was Professor Theodore Sizer who was director of the Yale Art Gallery at the time. Previously he had been at the Cleveland Museum as curator of prints and drawings there. We established a very good rapport and he was very kind and helpful to me both when I was an undergraduate and subsequently. Interestingly enough, his son is now the headmaster at Andover. There was no real connection between these two events but we had this close relationship over a period of years. I suppose he in his frame of reference and Professor Paul Sachs who ran the Museum Program at Harvard and who very reluctantly allowed a law student into his program, were probably the greatest influences on me in this period. Professor Sachs, again, gave me opportunities to become acquainted both with people and with collections that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

MS. NEWMAN: So you spent how long then connected with Phillips Academy?

MR. SAWYER: I was at Phillips Academy Andover from 1930 to 1940. I became director of the Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts in January 1940.

MS. NEWMAN: At this point we might mention that you were also involved then with the WPA in Massachusetts.

MR. SAWYER: Yes. Again this happened by accident. Francis Taylor, who was then director of the Worcester Art Museum and who I later succeeded as director at Worcester when he went to the Metropolitan Museum, was the director of the WPA Art Program. I served as his assistant both in interviewing artists and in operating the program for the next three years.

MS. NEWMAN: So you went on then to Worcester and spent, let's see...?

MR. SAWYER: I was there for about eight years but I was out in the war and various activities for the better part of three years. So I was active at Worcester for only about five years.

MS. NEWMAN: You spent time with the Arts and Monuments...?

MR. SAWYER: Monuments preservation. First the Army tried unsuccessfully to make a combat military policeman out of me. I did my basic training in the military police at Fort Custer here in Michigan. But after that I was shipped to Europe and I worked first in Arts and Monuments with SHAEF, General Eisenhower's general command office, and in association with the political science

division of that in the Arts and Monuments section. We were a very small little group who were referred to as the "Monuments." At the time I had the exalted rank of private first class but fortunately it was a unit in which very little attention was paid to rank so that you had interesting people to meet and work with from all the different governments at that time in London. Then I came back with O.S.S. for a while, first in London and then in this country, and was made assistant secretary of the Commission in Washington for the last year of the war.

MS. NEWMAN: So you spent that time and then went back to Worcester?

MR. SAWYER: And then went back to Worcester for about a year when I was appointed at Yale.

MS. NEWMAN: So, all along, though, you have been connected, as we might point out, with education not only as an administrator but you have also been concerned with teaching or involved in teaching?

MR. SAWYER: I think that, except for the three years that I was in the war, in the course of forty-five years I've taught about forty years. So I think that I've never really been out of teaching in some form or other.

MS. NEWMAN: You've always been connected with it. I don't know how much we have to talk about Yale, seeing as my emphasis is a little bit on your career in Michigan. But how did you happen to come to the University of Michigan? What sort of precipitated that move?

MR. SAWYER: Well, several things. At Yale I was very much an administrator. I was master of one of the undergraduate colleges and I was dean of what was then called the School of fine Arts and later the School of Architecture and Design, and director of the Division of the Arts. Which meant that I had administrative responsibility for most of the different aspects of the visual arts. I guess I found myself too much of an administrator and temperamentally not ready to use my life forever in perpetuity in that frame of reference. I think I missed the classroom contacts. Although I had human contacts with students, I didn't really have the opportunities for teaching or certainly not for research. This is one of the things you sacrifice in the administrative world. The job of director of the Museum at the University of Michigan at least gave me the opportunity to have a change of pace. It was not without administrative problems and responsibilities but of a much reduced order. The major responsibilities for fund-raising and for major administrative decisions were in the hands of other people so that in itself had attractions for me. And I suppose also that the challenge of taking on a comparatively new museum and trying to do something with it and to create a program both teaching and collections and all... And we were assured fairly generous support, although by no means all that anybody could ask for. The then dean of the Literary College --Charles Odegaard-- who had been a friend of mine... We were then on the board of trustees of the Corning Museum of Glass together and I guess in the process he's the one who lured me to Ann Arbor. He promised me what support he could get. And he was a very persuasive person. He was the kind of authoritative administrator which I probably should have been if I was going to stay an administrator. But temperamentally I think I was not really adapted too well for that world.

MS. NEWMAN: So part of the attraction then was, again, that it was sort of an educational context?

MR. SAWYER: Yes.

MS. NEWMAN: That it was very much a museum that was connected with teaching?

MR. SAWYER: And the fact that I could do pretty much what I wanted to do in that way. I could

teach or not teach. At one point they wanted me to take what sounded like an honorific position as director of University Museums. But I said: then I would be back in the same trap that I had just escaped from at Yale and I thought it was much better for me to try to develop one museum well than to be a kind of figurehead head of a whole system of museums. And, as I reflect on it, I'm sure that that was the right decision.

MS. NEWMAN: We might point out here that at this point the Museum itself was only about ten years old when you arrived here.

MR. SAWYER: That's right. It had been re-formed out of a series of other structures. As you know, the university world is always going through...it's like an amoeba; it's changing its form and its dress. And at that time, ten years ago previously when Professor Slusser had been appointed director of the University Art Museum that in turn was a spin-off from the Museum of Archaeology which became the Kelsey Museum, so there were only two museums at that point.

MS. NEWMAN: So Slusser was your immediate predecessor. What sort of things had he done? What was the Museum like at that point?

MR. SAWYER: It had started off in a very modest form, really, in two galleries on the second floor of Alumni Memorial Hall with some remaining collections from previous times, particularly notably the Lewis (Louis) Collection which had been given to the University in 1895 and which still has some very fine nineteenth-century American paintings including Eastman Johnson's *Boyhood of Lincoln* and things of that kind. But, except for a few things of this kind and the classical things that were really put in the other museum, there wasn't too much to begin with. And Professor Slusser with very modest funds--as I recall, he had at most about five thousand dollars a year to spend--did an extraordinary job in putting together the basis of a collection particularly in twentieth-century things. He bought extremely well in German Expressionist prints and drawings and a few very important paintings in that period. And also, when I came here the University Museum had just been given the Margaret Watson Parker Collection of Oriental art which was a very fine collection associated with Charles Freer. They had been close friends. So that in the oriental field there was already a nucleus of a collection. But that was about it.

MS. NEWMAN: At the time when you arrived at the University of Michigan, what was the relationship of the Museum to, say, the art department? And can you give us sort of a picture of what the University of Michigan was like at that point as far as art is concerned?

MR. SAWYER: As I look back on it and now reflect on what it is today, I would say that over-all it was a very small operation. At that point the School of Architecture and Design was rather remote from the History of Art Department. Obviously they were in separate colleges. Dean Odegaard and the then dean of the School of Architecture, Wells Bennett, were familiar with my experience at Yale and they thought it would be a good idea if the Museum became a kind of link and a vehicle of communication between the two colleges. And it was more or less set up that way. We didn't belong to either college but we belonged to both. I was chairman of an executive committee to which I reported as director in which the deans of the colleges and the heads of the departments of history of art, and art, and two rotating members of the faculty were all involved. And it became in a way a kind of a means of communication and, to a certain extent, the only means of communication between these departments. I had a joint appointment in both of them. And in a way I had to initiate and carry out any joint appointments that were made between them in that respect. So that the director of the Museum had an administrative and an educational policy function which wasn't necessarily designated in the Bylaws. But, as a means of getting the faculties in a large institution to communicate with each other, it was a fairly effective device. So that the meetings of the

Museum committee were frequently involved in educational concerns that were not really its primary frame of reference. But it was also a means of encouraging an interest in the administration in the growth of the Museum and its activities and in providing funds for its support.

MS. NEWMAN: What about, say, physical facilities? First, what was the Museum like when you arrived? And then, can you give some idea of what the Art Department was like--the studio art department as well as perhaps the history of art department?

MR. SAWYER: Well, at the time just before I came here there were five different university units--including the History of Art Department--housed in alumni Memorial Hall. The majority of that department had just moved out to Tappan Hall next door. But remaining were: the Alumni Association, the Development Council, the Alumni Records Office--all space now occupied by Museum activities. In that sense the Museum itself was a very small operation. probably using only about a third to at most a half of the building, and with almost non-existent storage and work space in the building. So that the challenge and the problem with the assistance of the University administration was to find alternate space for these other units and then gradually take over that space. And it took roughly ten years to complete that operation. It began with some minor alterations in 1957-58 and we finally completed our major alterations, I mean entire take-over, of the building in 1966.

MS. NEWMAN: Just about ten years then. What about influences? Who were the individuals at that point in any of the departments that we've been talking about who were the major influences?

MR. SAWYER: Well, I've mentioned Dean Odegaard and I think I should just emphasize the fact that, as a strong administrator he was in a sense the coordinator and the man who influenced the University administration to take an affirmative interest in the development of the Museum. President Hatche[?] and the then provost, Vice-president Vias[?], and subsequently Dean Hines. Vice-president Hines--who later became Chancellor at Berkeley...they were all friendly and certainly the Museum owes a great deal to all of them. But, if I had to pick out a certain one person who I'd say was influential over-all who gave the Museum support and encouragement, Dean Odegaard was the one who started us on the way.

MS. NEWMAN: You had been involved in a lot of other places. What was sort of the atmosphere--what was perhaps the impetus at that point--for beginning to expand the art activities on a campus like this?

MR. SAWYER: Well, again, the History of Art Department was beginning to blossom and to grow in size. Professor George Forsyth, who had come to Michigan from Princeton to be chairman of the History of Art Department, had already begun a period of growth so that the department had grown substantially both in size and in stature in the intervening five years before I came here. And it continued to grow and develop quite specifically during the following ten years in the same way. It was a department that was quite strongly Princeton-oriented and I felt almost like an outsider coming from Yale here in this group. But they were very charitable and kind to me in the process. The Art Department and the Architecture Departments in the School of Architecture and Design were entirely separate. But at that time the Art Department was small enough so that you had a chance to know the faculty well. I think they were appreciative of the Museum. We did have a series of faculty exhibitions here in the Museum which brought us quite closely together. And I was a member of that faculty without having to really participate in the day-to-day operations of it. And since they were only two blocks away, in some ways it was easier to maintain that relationship than it is now when they are a mile and a half away on the North Campus.

MS. NEWMAN: Right. They seem to be even more...the separation seems to have become greater.

MR. SAWYER: Yes. So that now that environment is different and the kind of exhibitions they have now are different. But at that time, with the exception of the exhibitions that were held in the Rackham Galleries--and to some extent still are--we were the exhibition center for the entire University.

MS. NEWMAN: You mentioned that you were still involved in teaching, that you were a member of that faculty. When you came to the University obviously you were hired as director of the Museum.

MR. SAWYER: Right.

MS. NEWMAN: But even at that point were you involved in teaching?

MR. SAWYER: I think it's fair to say that I was hired as director and told to do what other things I thought I could do. So that almost anything else I did was left to my discretion and I suppose you could say it was more or less self-motivated. But I did teach over the period of years. The second year I was here I was asked to invent a course for the college honors program which would be a kind of bridge course between the History of Art and American Culture. And out of that grew a course called The Arts in American Life which is still being taught by five different people and pretty much around the academic clock. Having taught a somewhat parallel course at Yale in my activities there, I found this an interesting and rather challenging thing to do. And also at the same time I began to give museum seminars to graduate students in the History of Art to provide them with some kind of orientation and experience in museum activities. And that course grew within five years into the Museum Practice Program which is still a graduate program in the curriculum.

MS. NEWMAN: You would say perhaps that would maybe have been one of your goals when you arrived? Even as early as 1946 you had been involved in a conference on Museum Practices, and did you come here with the idea of making a sort of workshop for this kind of...?

MR. SAWYER: Yes. Certainly I felt that was part of the challenge. Although I felt that my activities and responsibilities at Yale were quite different, I had never abandoned my museum interest and activities in the process and I felt some confidence that I had a background to make a bridge between the academic world and that part of a graduate student's training and the pragmatic world of operating a museum or becoming a curator in a museum department.

MS. NEWMAN: Did your own background influence your ideas about the need for those kinds of training? I mean obviously you sort of had to learn by the seat of your pants, you know, you had your own....

MR. SAWYER: Yes. I think there's no question that that influenced me a good deal, that feeling that, although I'd had a very good basic liberal arts training, which I didn't in any sense discount, I still felt that the visual world was important. And, from the time I was teaching at Andover right up to the present time, I felt that I was a kind of missionary to bring this different world--well, not to the heathen but to the people who were so intellectually oriented, verbally oriented, if you will, that they needed a kind of counterpoint in their environment. Of course this doesn't apply to the graduate world of History of Art or in the world of the Practice of Art. But in general education I think it still does apply very much.

MS. NEWMAN: But I think it even applies to the extent that...what is your feeling about the fact that we don't really teach our students to do anything in the arts? We still so often just teach them

history.

MR. SAWYER: Personally I regret the complete separation between the two disciplines. In a big university it's very hard to bring these together. And, as I discovered to my sorrow at Yale, it's very hard administratively to get people to communicate with each other at that level in any constructive and coherent way. I took some very elementary courses at Harvard just involved in the making of things and in learning the techniques but getting a sense of the nature of materials. And I think that this is one thing that separates museum-oriented people from art historians in a teaching sense is that that concern for the artifact or the work of art is absolutely essential to the whole background. And I suppose that's one thing I've tried to convince my students--sometimes successfully, sometimes not successfully.

MS. NEWMAN: Right. But that's been a concern. What was Ann Arbor like when you arrived? You had just come from Massachusetts. You know, we here in the Midwest always think of the East as being a little bit more culturally advanced than we are. What was the community like?

MR. SAWYER: Well, of course, thinking of that cultural difference in a way, I had spent a year between school and college on a sheep ranch in Utah which I supposed is the one thing that kept me from being a totally provincial New England Yankee. In that sense I used to joke when I came here and say, this is not the Midwest; this is the middle East. And I still think of it a little bit that way because certainly the orientation is closer to the Atlantic coast than it is to the Far West. On the other hand, I found that there were things that were strange enough to me so that it was a kind of challenge to learn a little bit more about the environment. Since I have always been interested in American culture and the visual aspects of it, I found in a way I was living with a rather blurred image here and that the world of Ann Arbor or the world of Detroit is something that you had to discover for yourself, and that it took a considerable amount of time, particularly if you were trying to teach in that environment. It was much easier for me to deal, say, with Marshall, Michigan, which I loved and still do love as a kind of total community, but to teach that in historical perspective is much easier than dealing with Ann Arbor or Detroit as a kind of entity in that same respect. But these are things that I found on the whole stimulating and I've never really regretted moving from New England in that sense. In one way, culturally speaking, I should say that Ann Arbor was a relatively small community; even Detroit was a relatively small community culturally speaking, in that if you knew two or three hundred people you knew the people who were the action people in the visual arts or in music or you name it. And that was true in Ann Arbor and I think it was pretty true in Detroit too at that time. It has grown a lot since; it's much more cosmopolitan than it was. But I suppose you could call that provincial but it was just that it was not obviously the dominant interest in this community or in Detroit in the beginning and that, if it hadn't been for this nucleus of patrons and founders, either the Detroit Institute of Arts or this Museum or anything that happened in the cultural world would have had a very hard time.

MS. NEWMAN: How sophisticated was that core group? How aware were they, say, of what was going on?

MR. SAWYER: Well, they were dedicated in their interest. I think it is fair to say that they were fairly conservative in their interest. Just at that particular time, in the late 1940s and 1950s, I would say that the Detroit Institute of Arts was a fairly conservative institution as far as its frame of reference, as far as the nature of the exhibitions, the artists that were included. Dr. Valentiner's day, maybe in retrospect, in some bits, may have been more cosmopolitan but not as far as the contemporary artist is concerned I don't think particularly.

MS. NEWMAN: True. What about looking back? We've mentioned that you were thinking of the



Museum Practices Program and making a bridge between the two branches--that kind of educational bridge between the Museums and the educational process. What do you feel have been the most important things that you have accomplished in those...?

MR. SAWYER: Well, I suppose on reflection two rather different things: the fact that we were able to create the structure and nucleus of a teaching collection with financial assistance and logistic support from both faculty in History of Art and funds from some private donors as well as from the University as a whole. That development of the collection was something which I was given considerable freedom to develop with constant consultation with the executive committee and with my colleagues. That's one aspect. I suppose the other aspect is the fact that we now have I guess somewhere between sixty-five and seventy-five people who have graduated from this institution who are involved in museum activities. This is a matter of real personal professional satisfaction to me as I reflect on it.

MS. NEWMAN: And it was something that was very much needed.

MR. SAWYER: I felt that specifically in this particular part of the world that there was a kind of vacuum here, that people were filtering almost entirely from the East coast institutions and that there was a lack of--well, of people who were trained in museum activities and potentially involved in it. And I think that that situation has changed; of course now there are almost too many institutions that are teaching in this area.

MS. NEWMAN: I was going to say there are others now, other institutions. Michigan State University now has a museum....

MR. SAWYER: Well, they have an undergraduate program. Their graduate students in the museum world generally come here. Of course Minnesota has parallel program and has had for some time. Case Western has one. But, again, these have all developed over recent years. I suppose as far as collections were concerned, when I came here I looked first to Oberlin College because it seemed to me that in the previous fifteen years had put together a remarkably fine college museum, and I had great respect for the quality of their instruction in the arts, and still have. And then there were Eastern institutions like Smith College and Williams College and Amherst. I had been on the Smith College committee and Amherst committee for a good many years so I knew those museums quite well. And I suppose we were really looking at that scale of museum rather than at Harvard or Yale or the big ones in that way for what we could create here.

MS. NEWMAN: That would be something that we might explore--University of Michigan versus other comparable museums. In that time span that we're talking about, say, roughly twenty years that you were involved, do you feel that U. of M. made great gains? I would think that....

MR. SAWYER: I think we've made considerable strides. It's an interesting fact that in the Big Ten institutions--which are of relatively large size--that when I came here there were literally no university museums. And since that time of course, beginning with the Kresge Art Center at Michigan State University, the universities at Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin have all built major buildings. So that, in a way, I would say that what was in the beginning a small interest has now become a major interest through this whole area.

MS. NEWMAN: Knowing that you were involved with the Ford Foundation studies in the 1950's, what sort of impetus has that had on that growth?

MR. SAWYER: Well, I think in a way it has encouraged it. I can't say that the Ford Foundation as

such provided much support in terms of funds, but it certainly encouraged a dialogue which I think stimulated an interest and concern and a kind of self-examination within the institutions themselves. So that in that sense it was a real influence. Of course, the recent developments of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts--the Federal funding--has been a profound influence in all these institutions and a very important additional incentive both to have a program and to be good too. I think we were fortunate in being in on the beginning of all that.

MS. NEWMAN: Still speaking definitely about the Museum and--oh--the different exhibitions and things that were put on, you mentioned that you were the prime location for exhibitions. But they did do things at the Rackham Galleries and then you did do things where you set up sort of inter-community loan type things.

MR. SAWYER: Yes.

MS. NEWMAN: Was that your idea? Or...?

MR. SAWYER: We did that with the University offices and buildings. It became almost too much of a thing. But in the beginning years of this Museum I think it had an important public relations factor. You had the president of the University and the dean of the Law School and the other administrators all coming here to the building to pick their own thing and, in a rather subtle way, it got them involved. And while they were here you had a chance to propagandize them a bit in the process of all this. And then we did make some effort to change these things around so that they didn't become things on the wall; they became things that they were interested in and involved in. We did that with the President's House too. I would say that this is nothing that you could do in perpetuity. But I think it was an important factor in the development of a place for art in the community as a whole and certainly with the University structure.

MS. NEWMAN: It seems to me that there were exhibits that were done in the undergraduate library too?

MR. SAWYER: Yes.

MS. NEWMAN: You did use other...?

MR. SAWYER: That again was done because we didn't feel that this building was communicating adequately with the undergraduates. I think it still doesn't. But we felt that those exhibitions were an important factor in that there were six or eight thousand visitors in there every day and that that was an important audience for us to reach. In quite a different way the Rackham Galleries proved an outlet for the local artists, for the members of the art faculty and so forth, to have exhibition space. We work quite closely with them.

MS. NEWMAN: Because originally quite a number of the faculty exhibits were done here?

MR. SAWYER: Yes.

MS. NEWMAN: And now they are done primarily in the Rackham...?

MR. SAWYER: In the Rackham Galleries or in the new Art School--in the Slusser Gallery. So that situation has changed a great deal. I think there were real values for the Museum in having some of those exhibitions here because it brought in those students quite specifically to look at the work of their instructors and in the course of that to look at other things as well. I still think that, if you are

going to reach a varied audience, you have to have a good many different devices and different frames of reference. I remember that we did a William Blake exhibition with the English Department which, again, brought in every graduate student in English who normally wouldn't have even scarcely known that the Museum existed. Later we did an exhibition on the World of Voltaire with history and with Romance languages. And those were enormously successful exhibitions as far as bringing a new clientele into the Museum.

MS. NEWMAN: Let me see, I have something else to ask about another show that was done. I don't know if this is the time--I'm getting a little bit ahead of my outline--but you did do some cooperative things. There was a series of prints in Michigan collections.

MR. SAWYER: Yes.

MS. NEWMAN: That was sort of an attempt to foster...?

MR. SAWYER: This, again, was something that Professor Slusser had really started in a way. There was an informal museum--I don't know that it ever had a name--but it was effectively the Michigan Museums Association and included all the smaller museums under the general umbrella of Detroit. At that time Bill Woolfenden was curator of education at the Detroit Institute of Arts and he was more or less the coordinator of this program. But this was something that Professor Slusser had been active in and that I inherited. And we maintained I should say a good neighbor relationship with, for example, Albion College, which has been maintained over the years, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Flint--many of the institutions with which the Museum Program now has an affiliate relationship in its internship program. And I think that was good public relations for the University within the State. It also gave a good relationship with your colleagues in the other institutions. These were small exhibitions but some of them were very good ones.

MS. NEWMAN: Right. Another thing I wanted to ask about is something that seems to me to be a continuing concern and that is with craftsmen and design. And I notice that in another area--it must be the College of Architecture and Design--that they had a design internship at some time. Were you at all involved in that particular...?

MR. SAWYER: No, I wasn't--I was involved to some degree along with the Extension Service in arts and crafts particularly in the Upper Peninsula. I had had some continuing interest in arts and crafts when I came here. I had been on the jury of the Annual National Crafts Exhibition, and I had spoken a good deal on the crafts, and, again, had some affiliation with the New Hampshire Arts and Crafts which is one of the good state art institutions. So that, through that interest, I took part in a number of conferences and also sponsored a couple of exhibitions in the Upper Peninsula of crafts--a field that I had always been interested in, and still am.

MS. NEWMAN: There were other regional conferences held here, but most of those were not held here?

MR. SAWYER: No. Most of those were in Detroit. The Upper Peninsula ones were rather special situations sponsored by the National Crafts Council and also by our Extension Service as a cooperative effort with Michigan State University and with the whole Upper Peninsula group.

MS. NEWMAN: Okay. I don't know if I have...I haven't really finished.... We've sort of been leading up to this: do you view yourself primarily as an educator or as an administrator? I think we've sort of talked about this.

MR. SAWYER: I like to think of myself first as an educator. I suppose that's my first love. I enjoy teaching. I always have, and I still do. It's the creative stimulus. I'm not a scholar per se, or a producing scholar so I guess a great deal of my association with the arts I get out of the satisfaction of teaching, plus organizing exhibitions and that kind of activity. To me administration is not an end in itself; it's only a means to an end. And I would say I look back on it with tolerance but not with great satisfaction.

MS. NEWMAN: Okay. And maybe just again--I think we've talked about this but we might want to review it again: what have been your major concerns as an educator?

MR. SAWYER: Well, I think that I'd say probably twofold. One is the specific orientation both of a general liberal arts student, and more specifically possibly the art historian or the American culture student, preparation for museum activities and museum career, or as a minimum an understanding of what a museum is about as a social institution. And there I have had some involvement with undergraduate as well as with graduate students. And I have enjoyed that part of it. The other part I guess is the development of a museum as an entity in itself and as an influence of some significance in the University community. And that I don't think is easy because there are so many distractions in a large and complex institution of this kind. But I think it's possible to maintain a kind of intimacy within the Museum environment in relation to its teaching units and still make a community contribution. This Museum has also become the Ann Arbor community museum, which gives me a good deal of satisfaction. Although it's a development that you have to watch because you can serve so many audiences and so many masters effectively. And this is not the Detroit Institute of Arts or the Metropolitan Museum and we have to remember that. But on the other hand, I think to have a community involvement is good for the Museum and good for the University too.

MS. NEWMAN: We could move on and ask my next question and that would be: how has the U. of M. Museum become involved with local artists, say, not only faculty but even with other...?

MR. SAWYER: Well, probably not as much with artists as with art-involved people. I would say that if we have fought the course in the sense that I'm looking at my own period now and not at the Museum today primarily is that our relation to artists, to practicing artists, has been probably won through the Art Department and the faculty and students, particularly with graduate students. For quite a few years before the Slusser Gallery existed, we did have an annual show of graduate students. We never got into bigger shows at that time. Our feeling about the local artist was that this was the problem, or should be the problem, of the Ann Arbor Art Association rather than of the Museum. But for a number of years I acted as a consultant to the Ann Arbor Art Association, as Professor Slusser had done for many years before me. So that this was not a competitive relationship. We tried to do a complementary relationship. We did sponsor certain exhibitions together. For example, every five years I think we had on three occasions the Michigan Water Color society exhibition at the Museum as a co-sponsored event. But my attitude was to encourage them to do everything they could on their own and to give them any logistic assistance and support we could. And I was also on the coordinating committee for the Rackham Galleries to assure them their appropriate use of space over there. So I would say that our influence on that was comparatively small probably, but I think that at least we had a collaborative feeling and so far as I could see considerable good will on the part of many local artists, a good many of whom belong to the Museum now. Which is probably the best test.

MS. NEWMAN: So there was definitely cooperation and steering sort of in the right direction as to what was the proper kind of...?

MR. SAWYER: Yes--as to what was possible. I think that one of the problems was that the Ann Arbor Art Association had a hard time deciding what its real mission was. They would try--let's say, some of the members wanted to establish collections and they wanted to establish a community museum. Well, it wasn't the desire to stifle competition but we didn't really feel that they could get the resources and sustain that afterwards and they finally turned over to our Museum what collections they had had historically. And I think that in itself helped give them a kind of specific frame of reference and dedication to the fact that their real job was to be an artists' cooperative, to give classes and to have exhibitions and all in support of local art. And that left us free to work more as we did in collaborative exhibitions with state-wide exhibitions. There again I'd say that that has been a comparatively minor part of our activity as compared with what they have done, say, in Flint and some of the other galleries in that way.

MS. NEWMAN: I think you've sort of answered the question about how important do you feel such involvement is. It probably varies then from institution to institution?

MR. SAWYER: I think it varies a good deal from institution to institution. It seems to me that this is a matter of selection of what a museum can do and do well. And I would hope that the Art Association or even the Art School could do this maybe better than we can. And I'd say frankly I don't think we do it as well as Flint does or probably as well as Kalamazoo or Grand Rapids does. On the other hand, we've done a good deal of what I call Extension-oriented activity. We have helped support with advice, exhibitions, and so forth, some of the newer museums as they have come along. For instance, in the case of Midland we did quite a little, as did other institutions in that connection. And as smaller ones come along I think that is part of our state-wide responsibility to do that kind of thing.

MS. NEWMAN: And you said that you think the artists in this area probably have a good attitude or a good feeling about...?

MR. SAWYER: It's awfully hard for me to judge. They usually say nice things to me which I'm grateful for but of course it's awfully hard to know whether they feel that way. I don't think they feel that we have sustained them. But on the other hand, I think Ann Arbor is also fortunate in having some pretty good commercial galleries that have not, let us say, necessarily been fabulously successful economically but have sustained themselves, and that have an audience not only in this community but from Toledo or Flint or from the whole region. And that's good I think for the artists too. And of course the Extension Service, again, and Mike Church, particularly during his years here, was very active with local artists in what you might call the advanced amateur level. And that again is something that we did not in any sense try to compete with. We regarded that really as their function.

MS. NEWMAN: What is the state of communication between--oh--this institution and, say, the Hackley in Muskegon? I mean is it a constant ongoing thing? Or is it...?

MR. SAWYER: No, this I guess varies a great deal. I think that the institutions here, whether we're looking at the museums or the academic institutions, in this still very personal place, so much depends on your kind of rapport. For example, during the time when Mary Lee Read was director at the Hackley she was here a good deal and I used to go there. My feeling is that in my last years I had very little contact with the Hackley. But one reason we have more with Grand Rapids obviously is because of this internship program that we have with that which more or less requires us to go back and forth. I was on the Cranbook committee for fifteen years but, in terms of day-to-day contact, having staff members and having interns up there was much more concretely helpful in developing some communication between the institutions.

MS. NEWMAN: Is the Michigan Museums Association still at all...?

MR. SAWYER: A lot of the function of that I should say has been taken over by the Michigan State Council for the Arts. I was a member of that when it was first formed before it had any money. Governor Williams formed that just before he went out of office. And during the next ten years I was a member but it was largely a means of communication; it had no money to spend at that point. There was no legislative appropriation. So I think we did learn a good deal by communicating with each other--the Society of Arts and Crafts as it then was, and people that you didn't see on a day-to-day operation--you at least had a chance to meet with on the state committees. So I think they had a function. Both Mr. and Mrs. Walter Reuther were active in those days. I probably wouldn't have met either one of them if it hadn't been for that commission and I found that both an enlightening and a stimulating experience and the people in the theater and music world as well.

MS. NEWMAN: Speaking of people like, say, the Walter Reuthers or whoever, what is your sort of assessment of the support system for the arts? Say, in Ann Arbor, is there local support?

MR. SAWYER: In terms of, say, potential patronage of people who can give substantially, I think it's fairly generous. There isn't the community-wide support here or in the other communities that I'm acquainted with that I think realize its full potential. I think it still could be developed. But if you compare that with what has existed traditionally in the East, I'd say probably it's substantially less. There is less community, well, responsibility and involvement. Maybe that's natural in a State-supported community, a State-supported institution as the University of Michigan is. But on the other hand, this has grown substantially in the twenty years that I've been here. There's no doubt about that. Just as support for the Detroit Institute of Arts--both the public support and private support--have grown enormously.

MS. NEWMAN: Sure. Now this is a question and I don't know if you can really address yourself to it or not. But what about the Michigan Artists Show and the Michigan Craftsmen Show at the Detroit Institute of Arts? What sort of feeling do you get from people in Ann Arbor? Do they go to that show? Is that viewed as an important thing?

MR. SAWYER: It used to be a very important part of the State cultural milieu, I should say. It was at a time when it was all pretty well centralized in Detroit, at least when I first came here. Now that Flint has done so much more than it used to do, or Grand Rapids has done more, I'd say frankly it's no longer center stage to quite the degree that it was. And nothing against the exhibitions or the way they are run, but I doubt if the artists or the craftsmen would regard this as their prime frame of reference. Or course also they tend to look to national exhibitions as well. Economically in terms of sales and all, there was a time I think when the Annual Crafts Show was an important adjunct. It's very hard for me to judge it now because we have our Street Fair here in Ann Arbor which is too much of a success in one way and I wouldn't say a cultural failure.

MS. NEWMAN: It grew into an octopus.

MR. SAWYER: Yes, it has become an octopus. But this has been true in many other places. I regard it over-all as a healthy thing. In addition to the crafts people here who on the whole are relatively prosperous and all, of course we have the Potters Guild which is an enormously successful operation. So that in a way I think the craftsmen regionally and locally are not as dependent on Detroit as they were. In fact, maybe it's turning the other way, particularly in fields like glass and all that we don't specialize in here. The craftsmen from Toledo or Detroit tend to come here to sell their work.

MS. NEWMAN: Just in passing, speaking of the Street Fair, when that began with the Merchants Association and things like that, were you ever called on in an advisory capacity?

MR. SAWYER: Yes, in the beginning, again partly through the same connection with the Art Association because the Art Association and the University were sort of co-sponsors in the early years with the South University Merchants Association. At that time, of course, there was only one exhibition and it was a fairly restricted and limited one. It was successful within its limits but I'm afraid that's the reason that it extended itself and got out of bounds. No longer did anybody have any quality control over the whole operation. So that you have it now segmented into about four independent fairs and it's very difficult to have any real quality control on that. From the standpoint of the artists, the best artists don't need it if they've got good commercial outlets too. So that in a way I guess it's either the student or the advanced amateur who tends to profit by it.

MS. NEWMAN: What about relationships with museums in other neighboring states? Have you anything of that kind?

MR. SAWYER: Well, of course one of the things that has grown with the museum program here is that last year, for example, I think there were fourteen institutions that we had interns in from this program here. That has developed a strong relationship. Traditionally from the time I started here our relationships with the Toledo Museum were close because Mr. Wittmann, who has just retired as director, and I were at Harvard together and we've known each other well over many years. So it was the easy museum for us to establish a kind of immediate program and rapport with, and that's been maintained traditionally over the years. Sometimes I think of Toledo almost as part of the State of Michigan, or they think of the University of Michigan as their university. Which is a kind of strange relationship but it's understandable.

MS. NEWMAN: Well, they've always been very close to the Detroit scene really, the critics and everyone.

MR. SAWYER: Yes. They get around so that there is a very good triangular relationship there I think.

MS. NEWMAN: Can you tell me what you think have been the major changes in the twenty years in the University of Michigan's artistic scene? What have been the big changes and the big influences?

MR. SAWYER: Well, one obvious change is the size--it's beginning to contract a little bit now--but when I came here, for example, I would guess that there were probably fifteen graduate students in History of Art against about, oh, fifty or sixty within recent years. And the Art School in one way or another of course has now become an entity in itself and that has grown from maybe one hundred or two hundred possibly to three or four hundred. So there has been a tendency for growth in size. I suppose the question could be asked whether that's been equally true in effectiveness? That's much harder to evaluate. I should say that there are certain fields--take Oriental Art as a single example--we've probably done as well here as any institution in the country in arousing an interest and maintaining credible programs in the arts of not only China but of Japan, Thailand, India, Iran and so forth. As I look back on it, that's been a considerable achievement. And within the limits of our scale, we have tried to keep the collections growing for teaching purposes, and those collections are significant collections today even if you look at them on a national-international perspective. There is a lot more to be done. But I think that the general cultural environment.... And the other thing which I think is good is that it is spread out more away from just certain limited cultural centers. I think there is much more awareness of the arts--for example, things like the Art

Train. Incidentally, two or three of our students were actively involved in certain phases of that. This is good experience for them. I believe in spreading this actively rather than waiting for people to come to you--in other towns like Jackson and some of the other towns around. [END OF SIDE 1]  
[SIDE 2]

MS. NEWMAN: The beginning of Side 2.

MR. SAWYER: Okay. Shall I start...?

MS. NEWMAN: Yes, why don't you just...?

MR. SAWYER: In regard to the development of the collections, let me cite just by way of specific example the growth and development of the oriental collections--China, Japan, Iran, India and Thailand--in relation to the University's interest in teaching culture from this whole area. I think that this has been probably one of the things that this University has established an international reputation for. And, again, the University art collections are recognized as being one of the smaller but still one of the major collections in this area in the country. So if I were to pick out a kind of hallmark of our collections I'd say that this area in quite a different direction and in more modest degree the collection of graphic arts, particularly of drawings--old master drawings, nineteenth-century drawings, twentieth-century drawings, and comparable prints are, from the teaching standpoint, fine collections. So we have areas of strength in that way that have developed over the years. Shall I go on to the...?

MS. NEWMAN: Yes. Well, I just might mention that we were talking of course about the major accomplishments of the University of Michigan Museum specifically. We might talk about some of the things that have changed in the State in that time. And you mentioned that you were involved with the Michigan Council for the Arts at the very beginning.

MR. SAWYER: Well, in the very beginning--this was when Governor Williams was just leaving office--he appointed a State arts council, or established the basis for it by executive order without any funds. When Governor Swainson came into office he appointed a council of, I think, about twelve members, of whom I was one of the members at the time. In the years that immediately followed, this group had no funding whatsoever. At the same time I think it did provide a kind of structure for the present Arts Council to develop its program when the funds were in fact available and, as a means of communication not only between different art museums or different college art departments but also between people involved in music and the theater and the museum world who normally didn't see each other on any day-to-day or even year-to-year basis. This became I think a valuable instrument in communication, also a means of meeting some of the potential supporters and patrons of arts in different forms throughout the State. And, again, people from different activities, not only from the industrial world--Mr. and Mrs. Walter Reuther both of whom were very active and involved in that early stage, Mrs. Reuther particularly interested in and concerned with the developments of the theater--Mrs. Neil Stabler, again, in Ann Arbor, and her husband both active in that same group. But this was essentially non-partisan; I think there were as many Republicans as Democrats involved in it.

MS. NEWMAN: What sorts of things did you do? I mean you had meetings or conferences? Or...?

MR. SAWYER: Meetings and conferences sometimes with a prescribed agenda. The idea was to set forth what needed to be done with State support, when and if available, and how the existing agencies could carry themselves more effectively in that respect. While it centered in Detroit, it was still pretty well diffused throughout the State.



MS. NEWMAN: Did this group ultimately make a recommendation that a State Arts Council should become a permanent agency?

MR. SAWYER: In terms of the funding it was clearly the desire of the membership from the beginning. But at that point there wasn't much political backing in the State. It started under Governor Romney to get some modest support, but still very modest support. But I think it's fair to say that the real development not only of structure but of financial support to make the whole thing worthwhile began with Governor Milliken.

MS. NEWMAN: Was there anybody else? Wasn't there a senator involved in the quest to get that funded permanently?

MR. SAWYER: Well, I think of Senator Jack Faxon as being active but he really comes into the picture later than the period we're talking about, I think. I honestly don't know--my impression is that Mrs. Milliken had as much to do with pushing things.... And of course with the involvement of the Art Train that became a substantial investment of which I'll say candidly some of us were quite skeptical. At the time when it was first put together we thought it might be a royal boondoggle.

MS. NEWMAN: And it's really been rather successful.

MR. SAWYER: But I think you have to say it has been a successful operation.

MS. NEWMAN: It's been around how long now?

MR. SAWYER: I'd say probably four years.

MS. NEWMAN: Just about. And what other organizations that you know of or have been involved with would you say have been important in the State? Or even isolated individuals that have been, to your way of thinking, important?

MR. SAWYER: Well, looking back to the time when I first came here--and this was a time when I think individuals rather than organizations were important--there was Professor Church who was then chairman of the Art Department at Michigan State University. He was also director of the Art Gallery. He was really the man who created the whole concept of the Kresge Art Center there and was influential in its start. I don't think you can exaggerate his influence there any more than you can that of Professor Slusser here. And again, Professor Bobbitt at Albion College was a one-man art department who really created a very fine art center complex out of a very modest beginnings. In Grand Rapids Walter McBride and a whole group in the public museum were providing at least the nucleus of a group where the University of Michigan had its own Extension operation at that time which ran all of the art courses in the Grand Rapids Art Museum. Gerald Mast was, again, influential in that part of the State. And there were younger men who taught there for a year or two or three years. And, as I look back on that, that was a significant accomplishment at that time in that part of the State. I was somewhat involved at moments in the Kalamazoo Art Association, again as a consultant, when they were first making their program before they had their new building, both in the selection of directors and in suggesting to them ways they could develop their program there. And it's a matter of gratification the way that that institution has grown into, I'd say, a really major...I regard it as one of the prototype art centers of its kind, not only in the State but in the country.

MS. NEWMAN: It has had some very interesting people involved with it at various points.

MR. SAWYER: Yes.

MS. NEWMAN: Even long before you arrived in Michigan there was Evergood, at one point George Rickey.

MR. SAWYER: George Rickey. Yes, I've talked to George about this and his contact there. Of course he was on the faculty of Olivet College too so that he had a very interesting phase in Michigan. And, again, the development of the art department at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo...Charles Mayer who is a person I have known for many years and admire very much. He did his graduate work here at U. of M., but he went to Wayne State University. He was a member of the faculty at Michigan State University for a good many years; he was assistant curator of education in Detroit; he was a potter and all; so he has had a kind of state-wide influence through his professional career. There are people in our own faculty here at the University again whose interests go back a good many years now. Emil Weddige who was involved in the Art Train occurs to me in that connection. Michael Church in Extension. Mike has called himself "the Billy Sunday of the art world"--an appropriate title but I wouldn't belittle that influence of what he has contributed. Dick Wilt, Gerry Kamrowski among the artists here who have been brought up and involved themselves in the arts in the community for a good many years. There are obviously many others of an earlier period. In sculpture I should say that Tom McClure as a product of Cranbrook and, as a liaison between the Cranbrook tradition and the University of Michigan, was one of several influences in the world of art education in this context. Mildred Braden of the Detroit Children's Museum who lived here in Ann Arbor. There are a number of people who have been part of the Ann Arbor community even while they were working in other institution in Eastern Michigan or in Detroit, as it might be.

MS. NEWMAN: We've just mentioned Cranbrook in passing, but you were at one point involved with Cranbrook. Can you tell us what that involvement was?

MR. SAWYER: In addition to the Cranbrook Foundation, which is the over-all operation for all the Cranbrook institutions, during my early years here, there were the trustees of the Cranbrook Academy of Art. And then there was an advisory committee of which I was a member--one of six members who were really advisors to the administration and the trustees specifically in the operations of the Art Gallery. And over the years we had many sessions as to what the function of the Cranbrook Gallery should be, both in relation to the Academy of Art and to the whole community and the whole environment. And again I should say that I learned more in the experience than I really contributed to the solutions of these problems. As happens in so many boards--of which I've been on too many in my career--you present the problems and you explore solutions for them but you never quite reach the point of really resolving them or solving them. And I think this was true in the case of the Cranbrook Gallery for many years. We could never really determine whether its primary function was exclusively to serve the student body and the immediate community, or whether it had a larger significance as a major cultural center. I think that you could say that the decision was finally reached to limit its sphere of interest to the immediate community and to sell the collections, which I think have been regarded by people in the immediate environment, and by people on the faculty as well, as of minor significance. Actually the collections at Cranbrook were very fine but they weren't being exploited; they weren't being used. Frankly I didn't agree with the decision to sell the collections, but if they were not going to be used as a community museum or as part of the cultural assets of the whole region, maybe it was better to take a new tack. Which has now been taken. There were obviously--as there always are in a privately-supported institution--major financial concerns and considerations of priority; how do you spend what money you have? And I think that the Cranbrook Academy trustees quite properly felt that their primary responsibility was to run as good a school as they could, and that the Museum or the Gallery, of which we were the advocates, if you will, had to take second place to that function.

On the other hand, one of the things that I learned through that Cranbrook experience over the years was that the problems of maintaining a regional community cultural center on a national basis on one hand, and for the benefit of the region and the immediate community on the other hand, are never simple and, as a privately-supported institution, you have to really decide which direction you're really going to seek...take.

MS. NEWMAN: Cranbrook has been "accused"...I don't know if that's the proper word. But it has been pointed out that Cranbrook has really been very isolated in some ways from the rest of the community, even isolated from Detroit proper, from southeastern Michigan, and that that was an intentional philosophy. Did that possibly have something to do with their...?

MR. SAWYER: Well, it's a very interesting thing. That's something we heard a great deal about on this committee from the people in the community. And they were fervent in their expressions of opinion about this. And I think that on the whole it is true that traditionally Cranbrook has been a kind of cloister and maybe that's been part of its quality. On the other hand, when the community itself was invited, let's say, to take a more active participation or I suppose more specifically to pay the bills, it wasn't so easy to persuade them to do that. And then also you ran the danger of impinging on the clientele of the Detroit Institute of Arts and other cultural institutions already in the market for funds and needing funds. So it was a matter of some delicacy whether Cranbrook should really seek that market; and if they did, it was perfectly clear that the community itself would have to sustain it. The trustees of the Cranbrook Foundation couldn't sustain it and also run an art school. I think if I can be Olympian in the matter and say what I would have done, I probably would have tried to separate the Art Gallery as a financial unit from the Academy of Art and set it up as an entity so that it could be funded separately and it could raise its own funds. But there was always that feeling that then the Academy couldn't go to the same people and raise money because the Gallery was the best front porch they had to raise it. So in a sense we never achieved that decision, although on two or three occasions we came quite close to doing it. And I suppose the sale of the collection was really the alternative answer to that question.

MS. NEWMAN: Because if, in a sense, it had become a community institution, the School would have lost the benefit that it was receiving. As you say, it was their drawing card.

MR. SAWYER: Exactly. Yes. Well, I could well understand the attitude of the Academy itself and in that way I'd say we were always in minor conflict with the administration of the Academy on that particular issue. We were special pleaders. That's why we were appointed to be special pleaders in a way, to make as good a gallery as we could out of what was available at the time.

MS. NEWMAN: What about other institutions or organizations that you have been involved in? You have been involved with a great many national things? How have they sort of impinged on your Michigan experience? Or have they?

MR. SAWYER: Well, of course some of this antedates my Michigan experience a good deal. I suppose I have been a kind of compulsive trustee; why, I don't know. I haven't the slightest idea. But I have served on advisory committees at Harvard, Amherst, Smith, Andover. I have just completed twenty-five years, have just retired as trustee of the Corning Museum of Glass. I have been on the National collection of Fine Arts commission since 1952 and served briefly as chairman of that. So I have had a variety of that kind of experience. And I was also consultant to the humanities program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology for two years. I suppose if I have learned anything out of this it is that you do get some perspective on your own problems by involving yourself in the problems and considerations of other institutions. And now today I am a member of the arts council at Notre Dame University at South Bend. Which I find another facet of interest. It's interesting to

compare their problems with those of the University of Michigan--the problems of a privately-supported Catholic institution in relation to a State-supported institution. I can give them some help and perspective on their problems in my experience, and they can give me quite little on mine. I think that's the value of doing it. Also, I have to admit it's a great distraction. You spend your time on that activity. You don't publish; your scholarship and other things suffer in the process of all this activity. But from the standpoint of operating a museum program and from the standpoint of giving students a perspective on the institutions as a whole, I think it has value to extent your activities outside the State boundaries and within the State as well. And I think it's almost required to contribute to the body politic as a whole if you're going to work in a State-supported institution. And since the museum world is still a comparatively small profession, there are advantages in knowing through these various channels and facets people all over the country who are involved in it.

MS. NEWMAN: You were involved--you mentioned the M.I.T. study. As I understand it, that was a study of sort of...they are educating people in a scientific way and it was to sort of broaden their program so that they could include that sort of thing.

MR. SAWYER: That's true. I found it a very challenging sort of frame of reference which we were given in that. Julius Stratton who was then the provost at M.I.T., who was later the chancellor, said in effect, "about a quarter of our total curriculum which used to be basically a kind of drawing--drafting--and also shop practice is no longer valid in our opinion for the purposes for which it was originally prescribed; if you have anything to offer in the visual arts that is a valid substitute for that, we're ready to consider it." And this in relation to the whole humanities program was something which Professor Kepes who has now been there for quite a few years, of course, developed in his experimental Institute of Design. You would have thought that this all would have headed up in the department of architecture, but the architects didn't want to take on a great problem of general education so it became a sort of introduction to the whole world of visual communication in a totally different context. That was when I was still at Yale and I found it very educational to see an institution with this strong scientific background really prepared to go into the arts at that level and with that intensity. And I thought they did very well with it, and I still think they do.

MS. NEWMAN: So it was really another instance of sort of bridge building. they needed a....

MR. SAWYER: Yes, they needed a stimulus. Mr. Stratton, again, was quite frank in giving us the motivation for this. He said that a survey of their own alumni had shown that the majority of them were sending their offspring to Yale and Harvard rather than to M.I.T. and it had taught them that the need for a liberal education in some form or context as important, but they didn't want to duplicate what Harvard and Yale were already doing. They wanted to go off in a rather different frame of reference in something that they felt intuitively might be supportive of their own field or provide a kind of counterpoint to what they were doing.

MS. NEWMAN: Another thing that I had a question about when I was going through the papers--a design in industry conference. I had mentioned before that there was a design internship program here at U. of M. and I just wondered what your interest was. Had you always been interested in that particular...?

MR. SAWYER: Well, this again was a program that at one point I was quite interested in developing at Yale. At one point there was a suggestion that we might take over the industrial design program that was then operated at Pratt Institute under Professor Costello. And the design people at General Motors Corporation--and specifically Harley Earl who was then Vice-president for design--were interested in this possibility, among others. This involved me in a design conference at Aspen, Colorado, in which the U. of M. was one of the participants. I think this was in 1951. I was responsible

at that conference for the educational aspects. On the industrial side the co-sponsors were Egbert Jacobson who was director of design for the Container Corporation in Chicago and under the general aegis of Walter Paepcke who was chairman of the board of that committee. They were the ones who were hosts and sponsors because Paepcke had sort of developed the whole Aspen conference. So that in that particular period and for about the next five years I was quite active in these various sessions on industrial design. But I can't say that I never had any expertise. It was more an instrument of communication. We had the various...well, Frank Stanton of Columbia Broadcasting System was involved in the early initiation of this project. And the people then involved in the time-Life organization--several of them were active in this too. Dan Longwell who was then publisher of Life, and Francis Brennan who was later head of the arts and crafts school were two people who were active in that too.

MS. NEWMAN: But that didn't necessarily carry over? Was that...?

MR. SAWYER: It didn't carry over into my Michigan experience at all. Not at all, interestingly enough. I suppose that psychologically one of the things that you do when you move is you drop a certain amount of the baggage you have accumulated over the years off the board or out of your mind. It isn't that I wasn't interested in it. But, strangely enough, I maintained a more \_\_\_\_\_ activity in the craft movement than I did in industrial design. And, again, I never really felt that they both belonged in totally separate worlds; I thought they belonged more together. Of course, I was influenced a good deal, again, by my Yale experience and my association with Joseph Albers. And I had known Walter Gropius quite well in his association with Harvard. So I wouldn't say I was a total Bauhaus disciple but at least I had that feeling that this whole concept of the integration of the arts in a visual sense was important. And I guess I've always carried that.

MS. NEWMAN: Okay. Well, I don't know about you but my concentration is beginning to wander. So maybe we'll cut it off for today.

MR. SAWYER: Yes. Okay. Well, if you find that you find great, great holes or lacks of things that you want, you can either send me a list of things you don't think are there when you're editing this; or if you want to run another one at any time, let me know and I'll be glad to do it.

MS. NEWMAN: Okay.

MR. SAWYER: As I say, I find this business of rambling on.... I don't envy you your process. I've read quite a few of these tapes myself. I know they're not easy. In fact, in that Aspen conference I had to read something like fifty of those tapes and I thought it was the world's worst experience but I think if you do them one at a time it's all right.

MS. NEWMAN: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

MR. SAWYER: Not a bit.

[END OF SIDE 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Last updated...October 3, 2005