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Oral history interview with Frederick A.
Sweet, 1976 February 13-14

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Frederick Sweet on February 13 & 14, 1976. The interview took place in Sargentville, Maine, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

February 13, 1976.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you begin, perhaps, by just sketching out a bit of your childhood, and we can pick up from there.

FREDERICK SWEET: I spent most of my early childhood in this house. My father, a doctor and tenth generation Rhode Islander, went out to Bisbee, Arizona, a wild-west copper-mining town, as the chief surgeon under the aegis of the Company. My mother always came East at pregnancy and was in New York visiting relatives when my father died very suddenly of cerebral hemorrhage. My mother was seven months pregnant with me.

Since I was to be a summer baby, she ended up by coming to this house and being a cook and being a cook and a nurse with her there. The local doctor came and said nothing was going to happen for quite a long time and went off in his horse and buggy. I was promptly delivered by the cook and a nurse. So when I say I was "born in the wilds of Maine in the absence of a doctor," it's literally true!

We lived here most of the year around until I was ten. From then on we lived around Boston. Here, I lived with my mother and an older brother and an aunt. Neither my brother nor I went to school until we were 12 years old and went off to St. George's School in Newport, R.I.

My aunt was very well educated, I would say, for a Victorian lady. Her Quaker father had sent her off at the age of 12 to Sacred Heart Convent for two years to learn French, so she spoke perfect French, which started me on my way. She went to Wheaton Seminary, now Wheaton College, she went to Vassar, she then taught in a private girls school in New York for 12 years. So she was far better equipped to be a teacher than any of the local schoolteachers around here. So I may say we had a superb foundation.

ROBERT BROWN: She did set you down and instruct you in things?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, she was virtually our governess until we were 12 years old and we were very well instructed, I assure you. Not only lessons but also deportment. We'd have to walk around the house with three volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica on our head (he laughs) to make sure that we stood up straight.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you particularly like, then, do you think, of your studies?

FREDERICK SWEET: When I was that young?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Did you have any inklings before you were 12?

FREDERICK SWEET: I certainly had no inklings in the art world. I think we lived a rather massive fantasy around here, because we read a great deal and were read to. There was scarcely anyone to play with excepting in the summer, and my brother and I lived in this house with an adoring mother and aunt and adoring maids and only two male elements in the place. I'm sure we were probably outrageously spoiled. At the same time, there was a certain amount of strictness.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you expect this strictness or feel at sea when there wasn't --

FREDERICK SWEET: I don't think I had anything to make comparisons with.

ROBERT BROWN: You were fully isolated here, then. There were people in the town -- weren't there other children?

FREDERICK SWEET: There were people in the town and there were no retired people. This has always been a summer colony but during the winter we had very, very few playmates. We were encouraged, I think, in this sort of half-reality, half-fantasy world -- we never quite knew what the difference was, which I think perhaps made us both very imaginative people, which perhaps was helpful.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you write then or anything of that sort?

FREDERICK SWEET: Not at that early age. So when we went off to boarding school, again we had nothing to make comparisons with. We'd never been to a school, at home nothing was ever discussed about money, we had no idea whether we were rich or poor. We had absolutely no prejudices of any kind (pause) I don't think we had. We had never heard anything about any sort of discrimination and I don't think it was that.

But I loved boarding school, I don't know exactly why. I think my brother found it a bit difficult; but -- I don't know, Newport is such a beautiful place -- on the water, and I loved being on the water. I made wonderful friends, several of whom I still have, have known each other since we were 12 years old.

But in those days there was very little in the way of art in these New England boarding schools. Oh yes: we had drawing from casts and that sort of thing, which I quite enjoyed --

ROBERT BROWN: You had no difficulty, then, in beginning to play and share with a number of other children, who seem to have come easily to you.

FREDERICK SWEET: No, I had no difficulty at all, not really. I was never a very good athlete and I certainly was not a tremendous student. I did all right, but --

ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps the regime of discipline but also kindness --

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I think -- our teachers naturally were all masters, all men, there was discipline but I think a good deal of fairness, no cruelty. But I first became aware of Mary Cassatt because two of her grand-nephews were at school with me, Alexander Cassatt and Tony, who were behind me but of course I knew them both very well. Tony in particular was very helpful to me at times when I was working on my book because he was -- well, so was Alex really, because he lent me a great many letters that Mary Cassatt had written to his mother.

Then when I graduated from St. George's School, the summer between school and entering Harvard my mother took me to Europe. That summer was what changed my whole career.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you describe that summer?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I remember we took a boat which probably took ten days and we went to Scotland. A cousin of my mother's had married a Scotsman and, well, her husband died after a while but she used to go there in the early summer and visit her sisters-in-law. Mother and I stayed with them and that was a wonderful experience, staying in a great mansion in Edinburgh with all these pink-cheeked Scottish maids running around and Scottish high tea which one had at a tiny little table.

Then a more or less conventional trip through the English lakes and England and France and motoring around various parts of France. So obviously my first experience with the great European museums, the museums of London and Paris, bestowed in me a great enthusiasm for art, because I thought I was headed on a medical career following my father. My mother always hoped that one of us would be a doctor. My older brother went into finance I was more or less but Mother never crushed either of us, it really made no vital difference to her.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she push you into museums when you were there, or did she talk --

FREDERICK SWEET: She didn't have to push me. Sometimes as very small children we spent part of the winter in Washington, DC. I can still remember at the age of four going to the Corcoran Gallery. I don't know that I was terribly impressed but I remembered quite a good many of the paintings -- oh, perfectly dreadful late 19th century story-telling paintings. Something called "The Helping Hand," a little girl helping her grandfather row a boat. And years later when I went back to the Corcoran I could still remember all those paintings.

I remember being highly embarrassed on the way out one day -- at that time I had wavy auburn hair, not carrot-red but auburn hair -- and on the front steps of the Corcoran an artist came up to my mother and said, "Madame, I hope you realize that the most beautiful thing here is not the pictures in the museum but your younger son's hair." (laughter) At which I rushed off in terror and excruciating embarrassment.

ROBERT BROWN: By the time you went to Europe with your mother you really wanted to see these museums.

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, I really did. It was a custom from the time I was ten I was constantly at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Fogg Museum and various things one was expected to see around Boston, which among other things meant the glass flowers at the Peabody. Of course there's nothing wrong with the glass flowers.

No, I was early attuned to the idea of visiting museums at a pretty early age. So I didn't have to be dragged to the National Gallery or the Louvre, I went mostly with great enthusiasm.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that the chief memory you have of that summer -- the great museums? What about the architecture, the countryside? Or were these things you took more or less for granted?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I remember that I loved Edinburgh, as I say, and I still do, I've been back there many times and I still keep up with the grandchildren of the people I first met when I was there at the age of 18. I still think Edinburgh is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and I was thrilled with London. We went to the theater a great deal and I started having all my clothes made by & Taylor. No: the whole experience was a very memorable one for me. Then, after all, Paris -- everything from the Folies Bergeres to the Opera, the Comedie Francaise and all the rest of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you expecting to go to college following that summer?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, I was already accepted.

ROBERT BROWN: And possibly to become a doctor.

FREDERICK SWEET: I thought possibly, yes. That maybe the art would just be my relaxation and pleasure. But then -- well, I don't think I actually began taking art courses at Harvard until about my sophomore year and from then on the doctor concept retreated more and more and the art concept gained ground.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you think why, possibly, that happened?

FREDERICK SWEET: (after pause) I think I've always had a strongly developed visual sense, more visual than aural. I could see so much in paintings that I was looking at, so that visual association was so very meaningful. I always had a very good visual memory and I've always had a terrible aural memory -- I have to see things written down, if I see somebody's name written down I'll remember it, otherwise I probably won't.

But then I continued to go to Europe all the time. I went with college friends after my sophomore year. When I graduated from Harvard I went abroad for a whole year with my mother and spent the winter in Italy and two months in Spain and went all over the place.

ROBERT BROWN: The teachers at Harvard -- were they, do you think, important factors in your moving away from the scientific toward the arts?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, I think so because of course the general course of fine arts --

ROBERT BROWN: He was a fine lecturer?

FREDERICK SWEET: He was a brilliant lecturer. And Chase took ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian art. He was not brilliant in the sense that was, he was brilliant intellectually and a splendid teacher. Of course that was a great period at Harvard -- Chandler Post, Paul Sachs. And of course the teacher I revered most of all was when I went back to take my Master's degree in fine arts, Kingsley K , who was such a brilliant teacher and made you feel that your ideas were just as important as his.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of work did you do with him?

FREDERICK SWEET: Mostly medieval art. I think that was considered something very, very new in those days. In fact, the only great art departments in the country then were Harvard and Princeton and both were slanted considerably towards medieval art. However, with Paul Sachs, his French painting course came up through the Impressionists, probably about as far as Cezanne, but we were told nothing about the 20th century, the core of which had already passed.

No: the only reason that I knew something about what was then the contemporary situation was because I had two or three friends who were vitally interested in American art and one or two of them subscribed to The Dial and we gloated over the early Picasso drawings and that sort of thing. So we became aware of Picasso and Matisse and some of the things that were going on at the moment.

ROBERT BROWN: You were very interested in them.

FREDERICK SWEET: I found them absolutely fascinating, something so different from anything we'd ever experienced before.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you ever put to your teachers at Harvard questions about contemporary art, or did you?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I don't recall that we ever did, very much.

ROBERT BROWN: You expected it to be not "modern," the teaching?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I think we simply knew that Professor Sachs's French Painting course didn't go beyond 1900 and that we would have to gain our knowledge of the more contemporary field from magazines and talking to people who knew about those things.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever, when in Europe, go to see exhibitions of contemporary art or go to some of the galleries?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes. One of the most thrilling experiences I've ever had was during that year after college seeing the great Cezanne show in Paris, perhaps the complete Cezanne show there had been up to that time. That was a tremendous revelation.

I was interested not only in art but in music and the dance. I think I must have been a freshman in college and a friend of mine and I went to a special program at Symphony Hall. I recall it was a Saturday afternoon because classmates were outraged with us because we didn't go to the football game, instead of which we went to Symphony Hall to see Isadora Duncan dance. Which was, I assure you, a great experience. And I remember the first time Stravinsky's " de Printemps" [Rite of Spring] was played by the Boston Symphony. I went both Friday afternoon and Saturday evening. The Friday afternoon concert half of the ladies got up and walked out, the Saturday evening concert ended in a standing ovation. And after all those were new and very strange experiences, which are important, I think, along with painting -- music and dance and all the rest of it.

ROBERT BROWN: There were outlets, then, for the contemporary which you could find in Boston then.

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you suppose you were among a small minority of students interested in these things?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, there were quite a small number of us.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there people in Boston and Cambridge you got to know through these interests, beyond the student body?

FREDERICK SWEET: I don't recall knowing people in Boston while I was in college that were vitally interested in contemporary art. Now, of course long after my period so many people came along that really did something about . Lincoln Kirstein, John Walker, both of whom I knew very well and they founded Hound and Horn and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: And these were devoted to contemporary --

FREDERICK SWEET: So I think I had a pretty good start, all in all.

ROBERT BROWN: You finished as an undergraduate in what year?

FREDERICK SWEET: '25.

ROBERT BROWN: Then you went abroad for a year. Was your mother in the same relationship to you as she had always been? Did she share many of your new interests?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, very much so. And encouraged me in mine. Well, we went abroad for that year but the December after we returned my mother died, so from then on of course my trips were alone --well, until I was married in 1928. But my family on both sides had always been great travellers in Europe. I mean, Mother's family had all been going abroad since right after the Civil War. My father used to go abroad during the 90s. So the pattern was very much set in the family all through that foreign travel was just something one took as a matter of course.

ROBERT BROWN: What did your family like about it especially, would you think?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I assure you they were not people that just went abroad and stayed at the Plaze Athenee in Paris and bought . They were people of genuine cultural interests. They all had knowledge and interests of painting and sculpture and fine music and architecture and all the rest of it. So they were not the extremely wealthy who simply went to see the glittering side of Europe.

ROBERT BROWN: But a good many of those things you really couldn't see or even know of here, in those days, could you. It was necessary to -

FREDERICK SWEET: It was necessary to go abroad. To see the really important museums, of course you had to.

ROBERT BROWN: When you came back after that year and before your mother died, you began your graduate

work at Fogg, I guess.

FREDERICK SWEET: No. The summers I went to Europe still more, and alone. (reflecting) Let's see ... Yes, I began my graduate work in 1927 a few months after my mother died; I'd been to Europe that summer of 1927.

ROBERT BROWN: You began studying with Kingsley Porter then.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. And usually he taught only six months of the year because most of the time he was living in Europe. After all, doing his great medieval books -- "The Sculpture of " and all that, so that first a lot of years they were living in Ireland, they bought Castle, which I've been invited to go to many times but I have never seen because it's quite interesting that I have known the three families that owned it. I've known the Ritchie family, Monty Ritchie's grandmother used to live there. They sold it to Kingsley Porter, who of course as you know disappeared in a mysterious way in Ireland, his body was never found. And Lucy Porter eventually sold it to Henry McIlheny, who invited me many times to come there but I still haven't been there. .

So Kingsley Porter in one of his courses gave this fascinating course on early Irish crosses and so forth. So when I went to Ireland a few years ago it was fascinating to me to go around and see all the early Irish things which I had heard of from Kingsley Porter.

Then at one point, I think it must have been about my senior year at Harvard, after all this medieval art and, well, French 19th century, I took a course in Baroque architecture with Up , so that opened up a completely new world to me. The first time I went to Italy I didn't want to see anything made after 1500. So then the whole glorious Baroque architecture in Rome which I had more or less ignored before -- it didn't mean that I was any the less interested in the medieval period, just expanded my interests and later I was fascinated in going to burg and many Baroque buildings in Germany and, well, for the Tiepolo frescoes too.

ROBERT BROWN: These became something that were of equal interest to the other areas.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, and it's a very good idea. I think one has constantly to expand one's wall, expand one's horizons.

ROBERT BROWN: When you did graduate work, did you work at all in Baroque, or was it mainly in the Medieval, with Kingsley Porter?

FREDERICK SWEET: It was, to a considerable extent and it's still in the Medieval, Chandler Post; medieval Spanish or early Spanish painting, Kingsley Porter. And to some extent, Prints with Paul Sachs, because I really had never known anything much about prints before, prints and drawings. And of course it was a rather interesting circumstance that both Porter and Paul Sachs, and, well, Henry Forbes as far as that goes, were all extremely wealthy men. The Porters, of course, living in the James Russell Lowell House, Elmwood, and the Sachses at Shady Hill. So we were constantly invited to those houses, which was a great experience, and it meant use of Kingsley Porter's library and could study their own private collection and Paul Sachs's personal collection of prints and drawings. So that was a very thrilling experience to have those personal contacts with --

ROBERT BROWN: Were they very demanding as teachers?

FREDERICK SWEET: I would say they were. I think Sachs was literally demanding. Porter was in a very subtle way. When you began to realize what the problem was if you -- of course, we were constantly writing papers, if you got an A on it you thought you'd done awfully well. Well, you soon realized an A wasn't that great in Kingsley Porter. It had to be an A-plus or, better still, "A-plus -- Compliments. "A straight with Kingsley Porter was more like a B with other professors. What you strove for was "A-plus -- Compliments,." which I'm glad to say I had several of. I've saved all those papers too.

ROBERT BROWN: Would these papers involve not only research but interpretation and opinion?

FREDERICK SWEET: Involved research, for Kingsley Porter in his own library had all sorts of rare books which I've never found anywhere else. He had a room at the Fogg Museum where portions of his library were brought down from the house and that we had access to. Yes, they involved a considerable amount of research and it was always extremely fascinating work. The graduate courses' classes were small, and Harvard and Radcliffe of course had classes together at the graduate level, never at the undergraduate level in those days, so Harvard professors had to repeat their courses at Radcliffe.

ROBERT BROWN: How many students were there in your --

FREDERICK SWEET: With somebody like Kingsley Porter, probably 12 at the most.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there a good deal of discussion, or was it mainly lecture and demonstrations?

FREDERICK SWEET: There was a great deal of discussion, constantly asking our opinions, and he always made us feel that our opinions were just as important as his and he gave you a great feeling of self-confidence. Not self-importance but self-confidence. In other words, he respected his students' opinions. The idea was you wouldn't have been there in the first place if you weren't a serious student, and you were expected to do well. I think eventually everyone did. He was such a charming, delightful and at the same time brilliant person that you felt that you must do your very best. It would be an insult to the man to let him down in any way.

ROBERT BROWN: You got to know him beyond their being teachers, didn't you?

FREDERICK SWEET: Very much so. We went to their houses frequently, so of course we knew precepts to rehearse very well, and then to girls' coming-out parties at Shady Hill. Of course the Porters had no children but they had their famous "Sunday afternoons" which I never refused to go to. Mrs. Porter used to have nice little dinners for some of us and some of the Boston debutante

Of course their house was something quite strange to most people in Cambridge. It was the old James Russell Lowell House but the furnishings were entirely Italian -- medieval Italian paintings and four Italian servants who ran it -- there were two Italian manservants in white jacket and white gloves who waited on table. So that was a fascinating atmosphere.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think this was unusual then? In other fields at Harvard was there also, do you suppose, this closeness with some of the teachers and the advanced students?

FREDERICK SWEET: I'm sure on the graduate level there was, although I doubt whether there were many Harvard professors who were sufficiently well off to have such large well-staffed establishments as Elmwood and Shady Hill.

ROBERT BROWN: When you took graduate work, did you have in mind then a career? Were you encouraged toward careers then? There weren't too many then, were there, in the art field? But then there was only one other place teaching art history American --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, it was a question of teaching or museum work. No, I was always inclined toward museum work, although the idea of teaching had some interest for me too. I used to do quite a bit of teaching in Chicago in what you would call, I suppose, university extension courses, which were adult classes held in the evening at the so-called downtown college, a part of the University of Chicago. And I enjoyed that very much. It was very exciting to have students finally come to realize what it was all about.

ROBERT BROWN: In the late '20s you were thinking of a museum career. Did you have particular places in mind or did Sachs, Porter and people like that suggest them to you? How did they develop?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, the first museum I worked in was the Brooklyn Museum. No, that had nothing to do with Sachs or Porter. I'm not sure that Porter hadn't already disappeared; I forget just when that was --

ROBERT BROWN: In the early '30s, I think.

FREDERICK SWEET: Perhaps he was still around but I was sort of the only time in his career that he ever taught the whole year through, it was usually just one semester. I was very fortunate in having him for a whole year. No... (reflecting) I was recommended to the Brooklyn Museum by people quite outside of Harvard, it just happened that way.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you just finished your graduate work at that time?

FREDERICK SWEET: No; there was more time in Europe. In the meantime I was married, there was more time in Europe, which was certainly all to the good. No one could ever have too much of traveling in Europe. So I started as a very humble beginner at the Brooklyn Museum, which was a very good place to work in, I think. The Museum has very varied collections and (he laughs) I seemed to be involved in all sorts of things -- decorative arts as well as paintings. So I enlarged my knowledge in fields that I hadn't very much before.

ROBERT BROWN: You were given a fairly broad mandate, were you?

FREDERICK SWEET: I was given a rather broad mandate and allowed with different curators there. Well, even for a while with pre-Columbian art, with Spindin [phon.sp.], the curator --

ROBERT BROWN: That was a very early instance of that specialty, wasn't it?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, I forget what collection it was, a great collection of pre-Columbian art which had been on loan, I think, to the Natural History Museum in New York and was divided and the Brooklyn Museum acquired a half-interest in it. And Spindin always used to take me over and I did most of the of the objects. He said, "Fred,

after all, I'm supposed to be the pre-Columbian scholar but I have respect for your taste. I want your purely esthetic opinion. You won't know the Maya from the Aztec, probably, or anything else but I just want to know what you think is a truly beautiful and exquisite object with extraordinary artistic merit within itself, regardless of what civilization created it." And strangely enough he almost always adhered to my opinion. Maybe the things I liked also happened to be significant from his point of view. At any rate, that was a rather exciting experience for me.

Of course one of the great pre-Columbian people was George Valliant [phon.sp.] who was a senior at Harvard when I was a freshman. The year I was a freshman, my brother, who had graduated the year before, was working on his Master's and introduced me to George Valliant who was a friend of his but ultimately George became much closer a friend of mine than of my brother. After all we were both in the art field, although certainly different aspects of it.

ROBERT BROWN: In the decorative arts what did you do at Brooklyn?

FREDERICK SWEET: The first person I worked with was a curator named Rueff, [he spells it "though I'm not positive"] a Frenchman, I believe. He taught me a great deal about American furniture as well as American colonial painting. I'd never studied anything particular about American painting at Harvard -- there weren't any courses in American painting. So then I began to merge into the field of interest of American art, both furniture and painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you yourself quite interested in it?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes. Then I also worked very intensively in textiles, I got very much involved with that. And while we were in the Brooklyn Museum, Walter Cook of New York University arranged that any of us who were interested could take graduate courses. They weren't for credit but I took a course in medieval textiles with Reestow. We used to have the meetings at Cooper Union.

Oh, I remember: the man who had been the director of the Brooklyn Museum, a Mr. Fox, retired about that time and his wife had been more or less in charge of the lace. Well, the Foxes were leaving and I was just told "all right, you take over lace." (laughter) Well, I didn't know anything about lace --

ROBERT BROWN: This was not long after you'd come on board, is that right?
In the early '30s or so?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. So I said, "all right, lace, I'll have to learn about lace." So I haunted all the people in New York who were the great lace authorities -- Marian Hague, Frances Morris, Mrs. Stuart Clinton Cohen -- all those people, and by golly I learned about lace. A great deal about it.

ROBERT BROWN: You had quite a good collection at Brooklyn?

FREDERICK SWEET: They had a good collection of lace, and I certainly knew that collection after I'd been put through my paces by these ladies who were the high priestesses of lace! After all, if you want to know about something, you go to the top people.

So it may seem like a very curious mixture of experiences that I had at the Brooklyn Museum but I learned an awful lot about a great many things. Maybe that's dangerous -- to know a little about too many things.

ROBERT BROWN: But you got fairly pretty solid grounding in them.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, this I'm coming to will all have a point in a minute, but also the Brooklyn Museum had a terrific costume collection and I made it my business to learn about costumes. Well, this costume and lace business certainly stood me in great stead, because I knew my periods of costume and I have seen so many paintings so wrongly dated -- I said, "well, that couldn't be such-and-such a date, look at the costume." "I don't know anything about costume." I'd say, "I do. These 19th century."

I recall a certain painting -- there's no point in going into where it is -- which was a Whistler which had always been dated, I don't know, 1870's or something like that. The sitter had a French name, she's wearing leg-o'-mutton sleeves. I said, "Look, that painting couldn't possibly be the 1870's, it obviously was painted in Paris in 1895 when Whistler went back to live in Paris for a year or two. After all, the lady is obviously a French woman." "Well!" he said, "we never thought of that."

But things like that are important in studying paintings, to know costume, and lace too, for different sorts of lace were worn at different periods.

ROBERT BROWN: So this is one of the greater, enduring interests you had in costume and lace was the use in dating works of art.

FREDERICK SWEET: Exactly. That's where it really came

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FREDERICK SWEET: (continuing) came to be helpful to me at later periods. So that all these little odd bits of knowledge I've been acquiring at Brooklyn all had their usefulness.

ROBERT BROWN: You became curator of Renaissance Art there in 1932-36. Was this during this same time, or after you'd been there a little bit?

FREDERICK SWEET: No no, while I was Renaissance it was kind of a overall title.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there Renaissance paintings and other such things to work with?

FREDERICK SWEET: There were a certain number, a little bit of everything in the Museum. A somewhat misleading title but I seemed to --I don't think I was given that title immediately but that's what it ended up being.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the Brooklyn Museum then still actively collecting or had it passed its peak when the Metropolitan sort of took away --

FREDERICK SWEET: No. The Brooklyn Museum, of course, never had a great deal of money, I mean, their collecting was on a fairly modest scale. They had quite a good Egyptian collection but there was a Wilbur fund that more or less brought it there. Funds came their way for collecting pre-Columbian things and they became very important in that -- Peruvian textiles and all these Mayan and Aztec and so forth things, mostly sculpture; again, under Spindin.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have to do any lecturing or teaching or working with the public at all?

FREDERICK SWEET: I did some lecturing, and also I did at any rate a lot of radio work, and that was the very early days of radio. There was a local New York station, I can't remember which now -- well, around 1930 radio was still pretty much in its infancy but we would give these radio talks on some exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, or new acquisitions of art. I got my hand in in that field very early in the game, so later on I was an old pro at that (laughter) when we did so much of it at Chicago; when TV came along we were doing a lot of interviews, fund-raising as well.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you put on exhibitions at Brooklyn?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I did eventually. Perhaps the most important one that I solely did was one on Spanish art. I must say people were wonderfully cooperative -- after all I was completely unknown at that time but there again friends of mine, somewhat older, had positions in other museums, so friendships and connections and one thing or another would often bring forth the loan that I wanted, so I wasn't yet well enough known but supposed to demand things from them. Although I must say the Metropolitan Museum was wonderful, lending me two El Grecos -- both the "View of Toledo" and the Cardinal. I don't know why they did, but they did.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you write catalogues then for each of these?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I did. That was probably my first catalogue, not nearly as extensive as those that followed. But I always liked to write, I did quite a bit of writing when I was at Harvard, so that was always great pleasure for me to write.

ROBERT BROWN: Aside from your work at the Museum, did you have any other special activities during the time you were at Brooklyn? Or were you pretty well caught up in that?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, no special activities but at first we were always going to New York to exhibitions or the galleries and all the exhibitions at the Whitney Museum. I became a very close friend of Juliana Force, at that time director of the Whitney, a fascinating and extraordinary person. Of course ____'s interest at that point was just as a curator. Juliana ruled the roost in no uncertain terms. And I began to meet a lot of artists and would go to the Whitney Museum openings. Of course I've known so many of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this about the first time you'd met artists?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I'd say it was, really. It was that period when I first met Edward Hopper and all sorts of people -- Henry Varnum Poor, all the people of that era in cities.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you become very close friends with some of them?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes indeed. I was a good friend of Hopper, . Yes, I was a good friend of Henry Varnum Poor, Morris Kantor, a lot of those.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these people quite different from any you'd known before?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh I was very good friend of the Speichers. Yes, they were different, as I hadn't known artists before but I found them fascinating as people. Well, there were just as many variations among the artists as there were among any other people. Edward Hopper always looked like a very distinguished banker. So you see you can't --if you didn't know who Edward Hopper was and just saw him at a distance, you'd never think that he was one of the greatest American painters.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he talk a great deal about what he was trying to do?

FREDERICK SWEET: No indeed, he didn't --

ROBERT BROWN: There was very little of that sort of thing?

FREDERICK SWEET: Edward Hopper had very little to say on . I used to go to his studio, met his wife, who was a fascinating person, a lovely apartment and studio down in Washington Square. No: (reflecting) I used to go to Morris Kantor's studio and .

ROBERT BROWN: These new sorts of friends were an important aspect of your life?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, because I think it made art much more vital to know the people who were creating it. After all --

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think this perhaps gave you greater confidence as you collected for the Museum in other areas in past art? Did you deal a great deal with the galleries?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. I think it always adds another dimension when you know the artist who created something. It isn't essential but I think it's very important if things work out that way. You can't expect to know all of them. Later on, in Chicago, we were always having juried shows and of course there were always prominent artists that came out to be on juries, so I got to know many more in that way.

ROBERT BROWN: At Brooklyn were you given fairly free rein? With the limitation of funds, I guess you didn't have as much as you wanted.

FREDERICK SWEET: I wasn't able to do anything much or very little in the way of purchasing. No, we were very limited in our funds but I think later on they acquired a few more, but it's never been a wealthy museum of course.

ROBERT BROWN: Did quite a few people come to see things there? Was that your impression?

FREDERICK SWEET: The openings there?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, the openings and just generally -- scholars and other --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, the attendance at Brooklyn of course was never anything like the Metropolitan or, say, the Museum of Modern Art. But considering how "remote" the Brooklyn Museum is, really I think the attendance was very good. Of course, obviously a great many Brooklyn people came there because it was easier to get to than going all the way over to the Metropolitan. It's appeal was more perhaps to its local people than those from Manhattan.

ROBERT BROWN: Aside from money, were you sensible that this was the Depression? Did this affect the Museum's operations?

FREDERICK SWEET: We were all aware of the Depression, I can assure you. Not only the amount of money I lost personally, having inherited a rather sizable amount. Oh yes, that was . We were all very badly paid. On the other hand, things were terribly cheap whether it was hiring a maid or restaurants in New York. We all had less money but everything cost less, so everybody seemed to make out all right. I can't say that we ever suffered any hardships, nobody that I knew did, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you leave Brooklyn for Portland, Oregon, for the West Coast in 1936?

FREDERICK SWEET: I was offered the directorship of -- well, another thing I did at Brooklyn, at least for a time, I was Registrar, so I got to know how records and that sort of thing. That I was later told in Portland was one of the reasons I got the job there because they not only wanted somebody with Harvard training and all that sort of

thing but that I knew how to keep the records and other things they seemed to think was very important.

At that time I don't think I had ever been west of the Hudson River, more or less. New England, New York, Philadelphia, Washington. I'd been to Europe many times but I'd never been anywhere in this country. So that was a very broadening experience, to go all the way across the country to a delightful town and an interesting small museum, which had been designed by Pietro Belewsky a young local architect who became quite noted later head of the architectural department at Yale. Portland: "The City of Roses."

ROBERT BROWN: What did they have by way of collections? Was there much to work with?

FREDERICK SWEET: Not a great deal at that time. There were a certain number of American paintings, again a mixture. There were some Greek vases, and textiles, a bit of lace. (laughter) So this was a small collection with fairly good -- I was able to make quite a number of purchases there, as I also was able to have perhaps more important exhibitions than they had ever had. While I was there, about 1938 maybe, there was an important Cezanne exhibition, I believe in San Francisco. By that time of course a large number of museum directors and curators were my friends and I was able to get them to extend the exhibition to Portland; which was unheard of, they had never seen a Cezanne.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it worth doing?

FREDERICK SWEET: It certainly was worth doing. It was a very thrilling exhibition. There was one fascinating woman in Portland, Sally Lewis, who had studied in Paris years before and had studied art in New York, especially with Arthur B. Davies, whose mistress she was -- now that the dear lady is dead; I knew that, we all knew that. But she had paintings by Braque, and Brancusi's sculpture; nobody else in Portland had anything of that sort. She naturally became a great friend, and also she was very generous in loaning things.

Then I found two or three people in Portland who had extremely fine Georgian silver. Largely English but some American silver. I had quite a lot myself, so I put on quite an extraordinary exhibition of silver, where they had never done anything like that before. In fact, a curator from the Museum in San Francisco came up and she was so thrilled by it that a year or two later she assembled one in San Francisco and drew on the important Portland collectors about whom she'd known nothing before.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they, then, an easy community in which to be gregarious and to get to know the important collectors and people?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, the only trouble with Portland was that I think it was a bit too small. Well, 300,000 people, that's not terribly small but when I arrived in Portland the president of my board said, "Well, you'd best know that Portland doesn't have a 400." I thought, well, that's fine, we can live with it. He said, "There are only 300 people in Portland you should know." (laughter) And that was just about the way it worked out, except for one major and saving exception, Reed College. (hiatus in dialogue, resuming shortly)

ROBERT BROWN: We were talking about Portland and its people, and Reed College as a saving grace.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when Esther and I went out there with our two young children, we really wanted a house to rent, we didn't want to buy one, because secretly I didn't think I was going to stay there too long, we looked at a lot of picturesque little sort of cottages and things we thought each more dreadful than the last. Finally this real estate woman in despair said, "Well, I have one place, I don't think you'd like it. It's Bishop's Croft, it's the residence for the Episcopal Bishop of Oregon and our present Bishop is a bachelor and uses the club, so the house is for rent."

So we looked at it. It was a large house, exactly what we wanted -- five fireplaces, large rooms, plenty of bathrooms. So we immediately took it up and paid the enormous rent of \$85 a month -- you must remember this was the depths of the Depression. We always wondered what the really rich people in Portland did with their money, because we lived as well as anybody there. We had two cars, we had two maids, the children had an English governess -- we lived the way everybody else in Portland lived. So I don't know how anybody could possibly have spent over \$10,000 a year. In fact, live as well on assets.

Well, we found ourselves being invited out to dinner four and five nights a week, which of course were always black-tie dinners. We soon realized it was the same round of people. We'd go to a dinner of 12 and there would be two we'd met last night at dinner and two or three others we'd met the night before that somewhere else. So it was just constant musical chairs among this small group. That's why I say Reed College was a godsend.

ROBERT BROWN: That brought in new people?

FREDERICK SWEET: That brought in interesting lively people. Some of them were quite social, some were in an elite. And fairly often we would run down to San Francisco, which was very exciting. Even then they had

marvelous roads on the West Coast, much better than we ever had in New England. And there was nothing between Portland and San Francisco -- a few ranches and things, a few there, a mountain or two perhaps like Mount Shasta. So that was always a pleasant relief.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you wife share your interest in art?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh very much so. She was a Radcliffe graduate and had majored in art. After graduation she worked with the Fogg Museum and then later at the Metropolitan in New York. Oh no, she was keenly interested in art, and had also traveled in Europe before we were married. We shared the same interests to a great extent.

The social life of Portland, as I say, was very ingrown but there were a lot of interesting people there. I must say it was rather different from the social life of Brooklyn Heights where we had lived when I was at the Brooklyn Museum, because we were pretty young then and I think perhaps all the old guard living in Brooklyn Heights I think ranged between 65 and 96. (laughter)

We belonged to something called the 20th Century Club and I've never seen anything more mis-named. It was a completely 19th century affair which met in the great Brooklyn Heights townhouses which had never been changed since the late 19th century. And about nine o'clock the old black limousines would start rolling up to the door and all these old ladies would get out in their 1904 Worth ballgowns. (laughter) My wife felt terribly out of place with evening gowns that were maybe only five years old. She tried to pick out the oldest ones she could find. Well, that was an interesting period piece to observe. My mother's family had lived in Brooklyn and after all these old people had known my mother's family, that's why we knew all these people.

And then there was something called the Rembrandt Club in Brooklyn and that was pretty interesting because that also met in private houses. It was a men's group . We had a meeting in our house once -- we had a beautiful house with 14 to 16-foot ceilings, eight fireplaces. But they had very interesting lecturers at this Rembrandt Club.

We used to get some pretty interesting lecturers when I was in Portland. They weren't necessarily people that I, so to speak, went after. It was the usual thing of people who would go on a lecture circuit and the lecture bureaus or whatever they're called would write and say such-and-such people will be on the West Coast during such-and-such period, and so on. Somebody pretty interesting would tend to be in San Francisco on such a day and we'd get them up to Portland a couple of days later. So in that way there were some pretty stimulating people.

ROBERT BROWN: Would these be artists, art historians, travelers?

FREDERICK SWEET: More likely art historians. Otherwise Portland was rather limited culturally. They had a symphony but I'm afraid it was rather third-rate, and third-rate road companies would the theater once in a while. Still everybody supported what there were.

ROBERT BROWN: Much of the life of these 300 families centered among themselves, then? That was their chief interest, the socializing?

FREDERICK SWEET: It centered among themselves. They were mostly professional people -- lawyers, bankers, that sort of thing. Well, then of course there were the four great families that ran the town -- the Corbetts, the Sings, the Lewises and the Ladds -- I've mentioned Sally Lewis already, the paintings by Braque and Brancusi sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she paint then?

FREDERICK SWEET: No, she wasn't doing it any more, she was a woman already about 70, lived very delightfully with all these things around her in her apartment; well taken care of, I guess; chauffeur and limousine. She was a dynamic, stimulating person, much more so than some of these other people.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there other artists or younger artists there then?

FREDERICK SWEET: There were some very interesting local artists, yes indeed. And the local exhibitions we had at the Museum I think were pretty good. People like Louis B and were not particularly nationally known but still they were very competent painters. After all, there was an art school, an active museum, good teachers there, it was really an excellent school. Of course there were painters in the Seattle who attained much greater prominence. That's when I first met Morris Graves and Mark Tobey, who I suppose are the two most famous painters to come out of the Northwest. At that time they were not nationally known in the way that they became subsequently.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they stand out at that time in the region?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh very much so, yes. There was a good deal of going back and forth between the museums when Dick Fuller was both the owner and director of the Seattle Museum. It was mostly his Oriental collection but they also had local exhibitions; juried shows, I'd go up there sometimes and be on a jury, and meet some of the artists, as I say, Morris Graves and Mark Tobey.

ROBERT BROWN: As director, did you have fairly free rein? Was it quite different from being curator, as in Brooklyn?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, of course it's a different point of view because you have to be an administrator, which I had not been before, really. It's something that I think I'm a pretty well organized individual and I just didn't find any difficulty about it. I've always wanted things in order and everything in place, and I love fussy details, it doesn't bother me in the least. Of course it was good experience for me to get better in a given area simply by working within that frame.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have curators under you at Portland?

FREDERICK SWEET: No, I was "it", more or less. I had people in the educational department. Well, actually there was one woman there I suppose thought of herself as a curator, but for the most part I was kind of "the works."

But I could see this wasn't going to last too long. The country is beautiful out there. I'd never lived in mountainous country. Portland is in the Willamette Valley but I'd always Mt. , Mt. Ranier, Mt. St. Helens. In Portland you could only see the mountains about two days a year because it rains all the time. So when there was a clear day, everything stops and everybody would go out and look at the beautiful mountains. (laughter) And we always had our tennis final on the Fourth of July. Spring started in January and it was just spring, spring, spring, you'd wonder if summer would ever come --.

ROBERT BROWN: And sometimes it never did!

FREDERICK SWEET: -- never did. My wife once had a fur jacket stolen at a Fourth of July picnic. We had two cars and they were both convertible, which may not have been the wisest thing in that climate, but at any rate we'd gone on a picnic with several people and the top of the Buick was down and Esther had left her fur jacket, a cape, then we went off somewhere to find a nice rock or place to start a picnic, when we came back they'd taken everything in the car that was worth taking.

ROBERT BROWN: When did you begin thinking about moving? Fairly soon? You said you had in mind not staying too long. Did you feel you'd go to another museum?

FREDERICK SWEET: I was trying to think what the first contact was with Chicago.. I think the connection was through Harry , who for years was the curator of paintings and the curator of prints. He was a year ahead of me at Harvard. I had known Harry very well there, not so much through classes but because we went to all the same debutante parties in Boston.

And somehow he knew that Chicago was looking for somebody else. Robert Harshi [phon.sps.] died and that meant that Daniel Catton Lynch's assistant became co-director of . They wanted somebody else and somehow Harry heard about it. Also, they wanted someone who had lived somewhere but New England. Chicago at that time regarded all of us here as "the effete East." They wanted somebody with a Harvard education but the fact that I'd lived on the West Coast for three years, they thought maybe some of the taint of the effete East had been rubbed off me.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this an inferiority complex or did they think they had some reason in it?

FREDERICK SWEET: Chicago in those days still had a slight form of inferiority complex. In addition, in all the years I've lived there I would see them get over that because I assure you in later years they were only too to find curators from Harvard or New York University or whatever it might be whether they'd ever been west of the Hudson or not. But in 1939 their thinking was still a bit provincial.

So I went east, I think over some holiday I flew east in what at that time we regarded as the biggest airplane that could ever be made, which were at and they carried 18 passengers. (laughter) Well: I went east and was interviewed by Potter Palmer and various people in Chicago and was offered the job.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find Palmer reasonably amicable? They expected you might be moving on?

FREDERICK SWEET: I suppose they might have; yes. I don't suppose it was too much a surprise. But we took a long time getting there because we drove from Portland all the way to Los Angeles and then across the Mojave Desert and Grand Canyon and all that sort of thing; eventually wound up in Chicago after about two weeks.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know a good deal about Chicago artists before you went there?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh, I had visited it two or three times but I certainly didn't know a great deal about it. Well, I knew that they had a fabulous collection of French impressionists, and "Le Grand Jatte." But I knew it was a very exciting, big museum, in a very dynamic city -- a city which at that time still had a -- but still -

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by that?

FREDERICK SWEET: There were always apologizing a little bit at not being east, at the same time resented the East. Which is a curious sort of inferiority complex because I assure you nobody anywhere on the West Coast had any doubts in the world but what they were the greatest people in the greatest country in the greatest place in the world.

ROBERT BROWN: But the Midwest was different .

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, at that time they still seemed to feel the same way as now, not quite in the swing of things that have been. But Chicago grew fast and was certainly a very dynamic city.

ROBERT BROWN: You came in under Daniel Catton Lynch who was by then director?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, he was called the "director of Fine Arts." There was another man who was called director of Finance and Operations, an older man and they thought they needed someone with more experience in that line so that business rather than .

ROBERT BROWN: You were an associate curator when you came in.

FREDERICK SWEET: First an assistant for a year --

ROBERT BROWN: And this was to whom?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, Dan Lynch was also curator of Painting. So, being assistant curator of Painting, well, all right; he was the curator and that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you known him sometime before that?

FREDERICK SWEET: No, never had met him before.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like to work with in those early years?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I would say this: he gave me a complete free hand as far as -- I hadn't yet had an exhibition to do, never had appeared at all, it was one of the first major exhibitions I did was the Hudson River school, which perhaps was very much of a pioneer show in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: That certainly was very early.

FREDERICK SWEET: And a fascinating show to do.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in the late 30s, early 40s?

FREDERICK SWEET: I think about '41.

ROBERT BROWN: These paintings, would it be the Mellon where many of them were then, or did you largely draw from public collections?

FREDERICK SWEET: I just travelled a tremendous amount and would write ahead to museums and say "I want to go through your basement." You go the basements whether it be the Cleveland or the Metropolitan Museum and all that. (inaudible phrase)

ROBERT BROWN: What gave you the idea to have this exhibition?

FREDERICK SWEET: I don't know, I was just sort of fascinated by this Romantic phase of American painting.

ROBERT BROWN: The Hudson River school: had other people talked to you about it at all? Was Ted Richardson working in that area at all then, or Lloyd Goodrich?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, Dan Lynch I think sort of cooked up the idea of a tryout -- was it worth it, an impossible idea and wasn't worth trying and maybe it would be. So Dan "you go ahead and do it." He said "take a couple of years to work on it. Go around and see what you find." Of course they were very liberal about travel expenses and expense accounts.

Oh, I can't remember how many places I went to, an incredible number of museums, and would drag out all sorts of fascinating things in all these tunnels, halls and and all sorts of things for the most part were in basements. There was no artist in the whole exhibition that was in a category with Winslow Homer or something like that but most people had heard of Thomas Cole but a great many of the artists most people had never heard of at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Church and Kensett had had their day long before.

FREDERICK SWEET: And some of them I found in private homes -- quite a good many, in fact. I would go to a museum and the director would often say, "Well, you know, old Mrs. So-and-So over here has a couple of paintings by Kensett" or something of that. So in that way I would often find local private collectors who had the things that would be known only by the local museum director.

ROBERT BROWN: What guided you in your selection, apart from availability?

FREDERICK SWEET: I wanted to cover a wide period. I sort of considered the Hudson River school began about 1825 with Cole's going up to Tapsco on the Hudson but I started with those rather obscure late 18th century artists -- [two proper names, unclear]; really the earliest American landscape paintings. There were very, very few landscape paintings earlier than that. Ralph Earl had done two, I think, and [proper name] --

ROBERT BROWN: And the Birches --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, there were the sort of topographical things, gentlemen's estates and that were at the time to the after 1800.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you as interested in the -- particularly in the case of Cole, with the literary preoccupations and theorizing?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh, very much so. I did the most intensive amount of reading in the whole Romantic field. I read all the gothic novels, starting with Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" and all of Mrs. Redcliffe. I had a great deal of the gothic novel and Charles Brockden Brown who wrote near the end of the 18th century and early 19th and certain things, and Fenimore Cooper. I got very much immersed in the whole spirit and environment of Swedenborgianism and even the German philosophers was reflected

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FREDERICK SWEET: So I writing almost a book on the subject. Nothing had ever been written about it before. For a long time the universities around Chicago used it as a textbook.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this book, which came out about 1945 I think, based mainly on your research for the exhibition? Or did you continue working on it, research after the exhibition?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, when I say "book" I'm talking about the catalogue of the exhibition which had a rather extensive introduction.

ROBERT BROWN: Of the exhibition itself, did you have a good, supervise the installation?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, I did everything, wrote the catalogue, did the installation. But the amazing thing was the exhibition was an enormous success in terms that it had a very large attendance. We didn't know whether anyone would come to see it -- why would anybody come see an exhibition when they'd never heard of any of the artists? Well, it took the public's fancy. It was something new and different and fascinating, it was American. And it turned out to be quite a landmark.

ROBERT BROWN: About this time or not too long after that you became a curator, didn't you?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I became associate curator. And then Hal Schultz came in as research curator, Katherine Kuh came in after a while dealing with contemporary theory. We were all called "associates" in those years. [inaudible sentence]

ROBERT BROWN: Were there other notable exhibitions you did in the 40s?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh dear, I should have prepared a --

ROBERT BROWN: Well, I know there are some, I've noted the exhibition of American Painting, Silver and Architecture. That was in '49.

FREDERICK SWEET: I have all my catalogues around here somewhere. Yes, we did an exhibition ... but I think I

did George Bellows before that.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, about '46.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. I did a show of Bellows's paintings; Carl Stevens did the lithographs and drawings. That was quite interesting because Nora Bellows was still alive then and I was the first person that she had allowed to see George Bellows's notes and notebooks, because he made a little sketch in his notebook of every painting he did, exactly dated to the month. If I could find the catalogue I could give the exact day of every painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Was she difficult to deal with?

FREDERICK SWEET: No, I found her very cooperative. I don't know, somehow I gained her confidence and after a very short time she opened up. A great many of Bellows's paintings she still had in storage. At first she thought I shouldn't use the little landscapes but I insisted exhibition because I wanted something to break up the monotony of just figure piece after figure piece, and he did beautiful landscapes and .

ROBERT BROWN: Bellows himself, unlike the Hudson River school, was quite well-known then, wasn't he? And very popular --

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, Bellows was a very popular artist and his lithographs were very . Although not a member of the associated with it. Well, I went first to Columbus where he lived and found a number of people who had known him and people whose portraits he'd painted there. I got a great deal of background information on Bellows.

ROBERT BROWN: Were most of your exhibits at that time with Americans?

FREDERICK SWEET: I would say that all my exhibitions were that.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, I meant the " Nation" in 1849 through the War of 1812 --

FREDERICK SWEET: (overlapping voices) I did the " . Hal Schutz [phon.sp.] worked on that together. He was the research curator, we travelled to a great many places getting that together, saw some very unusual things. And M Rogers did an exhibition of colonial silver in connection with it, and there was also a gallery of early American architecture from photographs. So it made quite a well-rounded exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this as innovative as the Hudson River school exhibition?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, not that perhaps as much because actually most of the colonial portrait painters were pretty well known --

ROBERT BROWN: And there had been exhibitions in the 30s -- Century of Progress, the World's Fair in New York -

FREDERICK SWEET: many of those exhibitions included lots of those people. I think we found a number of things by less prominent artists that were interesting material and some sort of semi- s; painters some of which are now known but weren't at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: But you still have the problem here that you had in the 30s, the fact that there were a number of European paintings that had been sold here in the 'teens and 20s. Were they floating around as American ? (overlapping voices)

FREDERICK SWEET: We know all about those.

ROBERT BROWN: That had pretty much sleuthed out, hadn't it? were on guard.

FREDERICK SWEET: That I think had been fully sleuthed out. Well, [proper name] whom first we know as a silversmith English portrait . Oh no, after all I had good friends who could give good advice in the field, especially Louisa Dresser at Worcester, who is the high priestess of . Well, others as well.

ROBERT BROWN: Your catalogue, was it quite extensive?

FREDERICK SWEET: For " Nation?"

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. What were trying to emphasize in it?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, good painting and interesting people. major thing of very and beautiful paintings by

Copley and also good paintings by all the lesser people of that group. That's all, and all that .

ROBERT BROWN: Was your aim, these shows and exhibitions that Louisa Dresser had written up at Worcester, for example, in the 30s, and the other shows of --

FREDERICK SWEET: (overlapping) Of course she had a notable exhibition of 17th century English paintings which was so variable to X-ray and to study. That was a great contribution to the field.

ROBERT BROWN: In doing a catalogue or in planning an exhibition, were you trying to think of things that hadn't been done before? To be able to say new things in the catalogue? Was innovation the major drive?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I wanted to dig out some of the lesser knowns but I had good representations of the major figures. Of Copley, as I say, and [proper name] and so forth. And I think I did find some quite unusual things... than thoughts -- and I don't mean that's something else again. I found a beautiful painting at Dartmouth College of the Phillips who founded the Phillips Academy and Phillips Exeter. That's when I learned to differentiate the names of the two schools. It's not Phillips Andover, it is Phillips Academy at Andover; it is Phillips Exeter Academy.

Well, enough of that. A portrait rather in the Ralph Earl tradition. I found a marvelous Ralph Earl full-length portrait in, I guess it was the Masonic Lodge in Barrington, Vermont. My trustees were outraged at the thought of paying \$10,000 for a Ralph Earl --

ROBERT BROWN: This would be in the 1950's?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: In the 40s did you make quite a few acquisitions?

FREDERICK SWEET: Not , because there again our limited funds expensive funds for the purchase of French paintings but not very much for American, unfortunately.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you able to buy in a pinch? Sale prices?

FREDERICK SWEET: I bought some pretty good things, a couple of very good portraits by black men. Some French, yes; a beautiful Boudin is the one I can think of. Well, it's very hard to say "did I buy." I would see things and recommend from photographs and have it sent out, or maybe we got it as a redundancy I was the one that found them and recommended them.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they then subjected to fairly scrutiny and discussion? I mean, it was a discussion of funds more than anything else once you had passed your approval on something?

FREDERICK SWEET: A question of funds, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And whether -- did you ever do any fund-raising there?

FREDERICK SWEET: Not , no. I was very much frowned upon. What fund-raising was done was supposed to be done by the president of the board. Well, of course, for a number of years there have been annual fund-raising programs which some places have, whether it be colleges, schools or anything else.

ROBERT BROWN: You never had to get involved in that to any extent. By the early 50s were you beginning to look into Mary Cassatt? You put on the exhibition of Sargent and Whistler and Cassatt in 1954.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I started working on that exhibition in early 1950, I think, and that's when I began to focus my interest really on Mary Cassatt. In the course of doing that exhibition I learned so much about her I hadn't known before and I had access, anything I wanted, because I'd gone to school with two of them, so I very soon got to know all the family; most of them not named Cassatt but all of them nieces and nephews and grandnieces and -nephews and cousins and all the rest of it, all of whom were extremely cooperative.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this joint exhibition of Sargent and Whistler one of the first large exhibitions of Mary Cassatt in this country?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, after 1926 there were several memorial shows. One of them was particularly large . She certainly didn't have the prominence she should have had. Sargent, of course, had gone way down in public regard --

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose that was?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh, I don't know --

ROBERT BROWN: Was he thought to be facile?

FREDERICK SWEET: I think he was considered too facile. Perhaps it was more that, oh, the feeling that we want things that are really and truly and rugged. I think that having Homer and Eakins rise so high that inevitably Sargent got crushed down and they got pushed up above him.

ROBERT BROWN: Surely Whistler was even in worse shape, wasn't he?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, people, I think, had a higher opinion of Whistler than they did of Sargent but they'd start to about him. They thought, "Oh well, Whistler's just great but, you know, nobody's interested in etching. and after all we're tired of looking at Whistler's mother." It's funny the way public taste grows.

ROBERT BROWN: Otherwise, he got lost among the Impressionists, didn't he, in the public mind?

FREDERICK SWEET: To a considerable -- well, he was an Impressionist of sorts with his own special kind of Impressionism. Of course I had "Whistler's Mother" in that show but it actually didn't attract very much attention. It had been in Chicago since 1933 at the time of the Century of Progress .

ROBERT BROWN: So you had to do with two declining reputations, and then Mary Cassatt, who was not even known to that extent.

FREDERICK SWEET: No; never had been in this country. So in a way that was quite a revelation. I think that people will realize Mary Cassatt was a terrific painter, and I guess Sargent is a lot better than we'd remembered; and forgotten about Whistler. So that turned out very well.

ROBERT BROWN: This was a very exciting enterprise wasn't it, then, for you?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, quite a number of these things were sort of different from the usual run. Well: I was able to get so many things in Europe that had not been shown here.

ROBERT BROWN: Particularly the Cassatts?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, let me see now... Yes, one of the greatest Cassatts in the world from Marcel and . It's now in a private collection over here. And the "Girl in the ," which is one of her truly great paintings. I found some marvelous Sargents in Paris -- a on Children

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FREDERICK SWEET: Well, reading, what magazine articles were available; not too many, only a certain number.

ROBERT BROWN: There weren't published surveys -- the Armory Show, and so forth at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: No. I simply had to dig into whatever I could find and look at as many things of the earlier period as I could find. And draw my own conclusions. Yes: it took quite a good deal of digging to get at material. But we felt it was important to give a background. For after all nothing in the exhibition had been done more than five years previously. Well, that didn't arrive full-blown from nothing, I mean there was a lot of a certain background even in this country. Small as it was it was important and we felt it was worth tracing that development.

ROBERT BROWN: And you balanced that against the even stronger European influences.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You mention both in your essay. The collectors you also mention of such American art prior to this time, were they fairly well known? You mention Eddy in Chicago, Arensberg, John Quinn you mention, and the Cone sisters, and Gertrude Stein, her brother.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, of course they were all very outstanding. Dr. Jerome Eddy was a Chicago lawyer and the best things in his collection came to the including three superb early Kandinskys and so forth. He had been in Paris, traveled a great deal, collected.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know him?

FREDERICK SWEET: No, he died long before my time. But incidentally when he was in Paris in 1895 his portrait

was painted by Whistler . And John Quinn had died long before that, too. I never knew the Cohn sisters, I think Miss Etta Cohn was probably still alive at that time. Dr. died . But of course they were the great exceptions and . After all, Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo were living in Paris and Picasso and all the rest of them were personal friends.

ROBERT BROWN: This you could learn from reading and talking with people in a position to know.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But, again, it took a good deal of digging, getting this together and trying to see patterns and correspondences

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes indeed.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you put Surrealism in along with the abstractions? Because it was still a very strong tendency?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, it was a fairly strong tendency although not as strong as the abstract in a sense but we felt that there again it was something very different from the traditional trend of American painting, and as something unusual that it was worth paying attention to and bringing forward for what it was worth. than the abstract movement but nevertheless at least for a while quite significant.

ROBERT BROWN: You don't go into any involved interpretations of it, as sometimes is the case.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I think you can get awfully mixed up and project a lot of your own theories which might not be relevant at all trying to figure what the artist had in mind --maybe he had something quite different. I mean, it's dangerous to try to project yourself too much into situations trying to interpret the artist's inner consciousness. After all, to let the painting speak for itself and derive from it what you can, which might be something very different for each person that looks at it.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Katherine Kuh's particular interest? In her own essay, "The Present," of she says that it's hers and your personal taste is obviously reflected in selection, she seems to treat many of the artists geographically. She also categorizes works, it seems, along tactile lines --those who are muddier, those who are more impressionistic, those who are what we like to call today "hard edge." It seems quite different from the factors you bring out in your essay.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. Perhaps you are a little more technical about it; going to style more than feeling, perhaps. But of course Katherine had an excellent background in this since she had run a gallery in Chicago for several years before she came to the Art Institute as a curator. Oh, she had exhibitions, well, perhaps mostly European artists. It might be watercolors by Paul Klee or whatever and which she was selling for what would seem today fantastically modest prices. It took people a long time to come to take an interest in -- and suddenly the whole thing went over with a bang.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean it went over honestly, people really were taken by this work, or -- ?

FREDERICK SWEET: There are various reasons. I think some of it was honest, a lot of it, as is always true in contemporary collectors, they think it's "the thing to do," it's the fashionable thing, they think it's a good investment; often there are very coldblooded reasons behind it. I suppose that's always been true. I can't be too contentious with people who just have an ulterior motive of its being a good investment. At least they're buying the things and perhaps that's hanging around a while really begin to appreciate it. And many collectors of course had a genuine appreciation and bought because they really liked them. There are always various motivations for people buying things but that has always been true. Because they really love them, and because it's the fashion.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you think, as Mrs. Kuh's essay may suggest, that there were distinctive geographical schools of abstract painting in America? Could you see this as also a factor of isolation then compared with now? She mentions those of Boston, New York, the Northwest Coast, many isolated people in Mexico --

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. I think there was bound to be a certain regionalism there. Mark Tobey was a great personality in the Northwest, Seattle area --

ROBERT BROWN: And you'd known him and Graves since your time in Portland?

FREDERICK SWEET: I'd known him and Morris Graves when I was in Portland in the 30s. And there was a group in San Francisco, and a group in Santa Fe and . Yes, there were rather isolated islands, there was a certain regional flavor about it but I think when it became really a national movement the regional aspect tended to disappear, larger concept.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel that many of those artists before the regionalism disappeared had a strong personal strength in their work? Or were they always looking over their shoulder to Europe?

FREDERICK SWEET: No, I think most of them were quite on their own, I don't think they were looking over their shoulder at Europe in most cases. If anything, I expect Mark Tobey was looking over his shoulder at the Far East. We always think of their being a certain Oriental flavor in his things and perhaps a little bit in some of Morris Graves' things. There's an Orientalness to them; perhaps we read too much of that into it.

ROBERT BROWN: The calligraphic quality of --

FREDERICK SWEET: (overlapping voices) all the orientals who were in San Francisco and other places on the West Coast.

ROBERT BROWN: As a result, did the Art Institute begin acquiring more contemporary works? You'd mentioned there were not tremendous funds for this sort of thing but --

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes it did. We began gradually to acquire more and more.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you and Katherine Kuh have a large say in what was acquired?

FREDERICK SWEET: We tried to say as much as we could; yes, I suppose we did.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, could we move for a bit from special projects, exhibitions and writing to some of the ongoing or the annual things you were involved in -- painting and sculpture at the Chicago Art Institute. We might take first the watercolor exhibitions, which you told me were almost annual and --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, the watercolor exhibitions were annual but that was discontinued after a while because it didn't seem to us that was so much a major expression any more.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the premise of them when you did hold them, as far as selection and chronology?

FREDERICK SWEET: The watercolor show as I recall was largely invited, perhaps there was a small section of its period. Then within the exhibition there were always a couple of small one-man shows. We always gave one small gallery to European watercolor -- you know, some English, some French and so forth -- and then we would have a one-man show of a particular painter. I recall quite early in the game having a gallery of watercolors of Andrew Wyeth, who was then a young guy coming along; you could buy all you wanted for \$300 apiece. At times maybe we did buy a little at that time.

And that was always a popular exhibition. I think there's a freshness about watercolors' informality. And it's always fun to get together -- well, I not only went to a lot of galleries and a lot of artists' studios; especially in Chicago; except I knew all the Chicago artists that were of any consequence.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they mainly representational works then? Fairly conservative?

FREDERICK SWEET: Fairly. I suppose the major watercolorist in Chicago at that time was Francis Cha a brilliant painter. I don't know exactly how you would categorize him today. He painted with a good deal of bravura, and very colorful. He'd been one of the major students of Boris Annisfeld, who was Russian-born and had been to France with the Ballet Russe in Russia. He became a major painting teacher at the Art Institute school, and being very colorful, his students quite naturally followed that kind of picture being very colorful, which was very fine. Because so much painting before that tended not to be too colorful -- the colors were rather muted and often rather dull, I fear.

ROBERT BROWN: When did it occur to you that watercolor wasn't a major form of expression and you phased out this show? In the 50s or so?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I would think some time in the 50s; I think that year. And even then exhibitions were becoming more and more expensive. Well, at that time there were three annual shows -- the watercolor, a local Chicago exhibition every year which you know about, and then there was an annual Amer

ROBERT BROWN: Would you comment on the latter two?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, just to follow up your previous question. By that time the Art Institute was becoming more and more interested, I think, in having more major exhibitions of all sorts. There were three annual exhibitions that took up so much of the exhibition schedule, so then we decided to drop the watercolor exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: It took a great deal of your time, too.

FREDERICK SWEET: It took an awful lot of time. So that gave us another slot for some really major exhibition. For the annual American exhibition, which had previously been partially invited and also partially juried, it became more and more expensive for artists to ship paintings to be juried, and then if they were turned down and they had to be shipped back. So to a large extent the major artists simply weren't sending. They knew they'd probably be invited anyway.

So we gave up the juried part of it and it became an "all invited" show, and after a while it became a biennial. It was just too expensive to do every year. And also we felt that there probably weren't enough changes from year to year. By the end of two years, a number of innovations and various things had come in.

ROBERT BROWN: Did having a jury add an element of prestige to these shows? By inviting -- I suppose they were fairly illustrious names?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, we'd always have leading artists on our juries. Usually there were three on a jury. Very often, in fact quite usefully it would be two artists and probably one museum person. Yes, I think the juries gave them prestige.

ROBERT BROWN: The artists had to go through a screening process, didn't they.

FREDERICK SWEET: And of course there was a lot of prize money to give out. The jury gave out the Logan prize. I don't know what it is now but when I left it was at the time I left something like \$5,000 a year, which was a rather neat little prize. However, \$5,000 won't buy now what it used to.

ROBERT BROWN: But there were pitfalls to a jury system too, weren't there? Sometimes there were accusations of bias --

FREDERICK SWEET: In choosing the jury?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. The whole action . But on the other hand that gave some notoriety to the show.

FREDERICK SWEET: I remember on one occasion we had Hans Hofmann. He went through the show (pause) by that time it may have been all invited, I think it probably was, but he went through the show and simply picked out his own students to award prizes to. I think he spent 20 minutes there and then went back to the Ambassador Hotel. (laughter) It was a rather expensive 20 minutes for the Art Institute, it was the hotel's bill and plane fare; we thought that was a bit much, not to look at any but his own students. I don't think that sort of thing happened very often, though.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you expected that of Hofmann? Had you known him well enough to think he might do that?

FREDERICK SWEET: I don't think we had thought about about that much. That's really the only major instance of that that I recall.

ROBERT BROWN: With the jurors always, at least when Hofmann was awarding prizes, did the curators work fairly closely with them? What was the arrangement when the jurors were there to see, ethically and --

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh no, we kept completely out of the way. Then as far as their awarding prizes, when the jury was also selecting part of the show from things submitted, we usually sat in the background. Oh, there were sometimes questions that they had, or maybe one of the room men would show an abstract painting upside down and would tell them . We didn't interfere but we were in the background to correct little irregularities like that.

ROBERT BROWN: The annual Chicago show was juried, was it not?

FREDERICK SWEET: That was completely juried, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But there the dangers of an expensive jury weren't so great, I suppose.

FREDERICK SWEET: No, local was not Of course there was a good deal of feeling among the artists, it meant a great deal to them, naturally, to get in (overlapping voices)
After all, in a juried show you take 10% of what is submitted, that's probably a pretty good average. Of course an awful lot of stuff that's sent in is absolutely terrible. A lot of good things get turned down and maybe the next year they'll be . In the long run I think there also were , well, they didn't get in every year but over a period of years --

ROBERT BROWN: They'd get in fairly regularly. You had pretty divergent teaching in art in Chicago the, didn't you? The Art Institute school, the School of Design, Moholy Nagy's must have produced a rather different

approach. You had quite a range probably, didn't you?

FREDERICK SWEET: the School of Design wasn't doing very much painting. I recall one winter I think they spent all winter deciding designing one chair. I went up one day to the School of Design to talk to Moholy Nagy. I said, "Moholy, I think your chair has rather fine lines, it's well designed, but I don't think it's very practical." He said, [imitating Moholy's accent] "We do not aimmm to be praaac-ti-cal." (laughter)

ROBERT BROWN: Was his School of Design a fairly important influence in Chicago?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well yes, I think it was, because it was supposed to be an extension of the Bauhaus. I think it was. It was quite something to have Moholy Nagy in Chicago and Mies van der Rohe. All of that great in museum and contemporary art was found in Chicago but that was not until well along in the 60s.

Of course a very important influence in Chicago I think was the Arts Club. I'm sure you're familiar with it. All sorts of people belonged to it but the was primarily artists, musicians, and writers perhaps. In the beginning they simply had a small gallery at the Art Institute where they showed their acquisitions; ultimately they acquired their own quarters. The Arts Club exhibitions have always had great prestige, and although I was just a cub I had great borrowing power -- all the New York galleries and so forth knew about them and were always willing to lend to their exhibitions.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they ever act as sort of a rival to you?

FREDERICK SWEET: No, they really didn't, I don't think there was any rivalry there.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they attempt to supplement what you were doing or did you go your separate ways?

FREDERICK SWEET: We went our separate ways but I don't think there was ever any conflict then. I think they merely augmented what we were doing, and a very good job they did. First Mrs. John Alden Carpenter, and then Bobsy [phon.sp.] Goodspeed, then and Shaw, very distinguished women who were the heads of the Arts Club.

ROBERT BROWN: And it wasn't a genteel kind of art appreciation thing at all, these were women who were active collectors and patrons.

FREDERICK SWEET: And very knowledgeable in what they were doing.

ROBERT BROWN: You also had in the Art Institute at that time a gallery of Chicago works, didn't you, by invitation?

FREDERICK SWEET: For a period we did, because we thought it would be good to have something to augment the Chicago Annual Show which was of course all juried. We felt that the more important artists should be seen in greater depth by having small one-man shows. I think that worked out very well, and occasionally Katherine Kuh came in much later to visit artists' studios perhaps even more than we had before and really to look at their work with great care and hopefully select a really significant group.

ROBERT BROWN: There you were acting more as curators, weren't you -- trying to show the public something of a range of the quality of the best work seen in Chicago.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you recall any of the artists you did show, say in the 40s in the Art Institute in that gallery?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, as far as I recall we showed all the people that were well-known at that time -- Franklin Chapin and Eleanor Kahn, Max Kahn --

ROBERT BROWN: Ivan Albright?

FREDERICK SWEET: As far as I know, we did not have a show of his in that gallery, his major show came along a little later.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you less involved, as a curator, in expertizing, in giving opinion?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, we had to do that all the time, and of course 99% of what was brought in was completely out. It used to be a frightful nuisance, because for a long time people could just wander in any time and we would be called away from installing an exhibition or whatever we were doing, where to be just a Tuesday. I think now they've cut it down, only Museum members can have . Also, often the things were simply reproductions. Some of the earlier reproductions in the early 19th century are quite tricky, as I'm sure you know; the reproduction would be pasted on canvas, could be varnished, nicely framed. Well, all you had to do was look

at it with a magnifying glass. You'd probably know what it was anyway.

I remember the time we did a Corot exhibition, we had thousands of things brought in. They were all either fakes or reproductions. I remember one woman, she showed me this, I told her it was a reproduction, she said, "Well, it can't be, it's painted on canvas and all that." I said, "This is a reproduction of a famous Corot which is in the Louvre, it's a reproduction printed on paper which is pasted on the canvas. After you look at it through my magnifying glass you'll see all these little dots."

ROBERT BROWN: Were they usually satisfied after you'd gone through that?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I think most people were. In the long run I had the feeling the people were very grateful for this service, they could bring things there. Occasionally things were a little better even than they had thought. You know, "this is a painting we found in Grandma's attic."

ROBERT BROWN: But by and large Grandma's attic didn't produce any very fine things.

FREDERICK SWEET: No. I'm afraid Grandma's attic didn't produce anything particularly --

ROBERT BROWN: Certainly in terms of building up your collection you didn't put much faith in what might come across the street to your --

FREDERICK SWEET: We were always hopeful that something might turn up but I'm afraid that none did, nothing very significant.

ROBERT BROWN: In Chicago, you had close friends among the patrons and trustees. You also have indicated that you had many friends at the University. At one time you lived near the University of Chicago.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, we lived in near the University of Chicago, so of course we knew a great many of the Chicago professors and others, professional people living in the area, doctors and lawyers and so forth. Well, of course, the Chicago patrons and others whom we knew --

ROBERT BROWN: Could you mention some of them, describe about some of those you worked most closely with?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, of course the earlier great patrons had all died by my time, such as Mrs. Potter Palmer I suppose. I knew the next generation, Potter Palmer, Jr., he was the president of our board at one time, and Mrs. Pauline Palmer, a charming woman. Potter, or "Mim" as he was known, was rather conservative in his tastes but Pauline, oh she had a couple of early Picassos and one thing and another. She had to hang them in her bathroom because her husband just wouldn't have them hanging around in the great triplex apartment that they lived in with eight servants.

Of course another great collector was Martin Ryerson. Charles Wooster who collected mostly Renaissance painting, some Baroque painting, and also some German___, which was a phase that we really had very little of and added to. And perhaps Charles particularly tried to collect in fields that would augment the Art Institute, and that was very fine.

ROBERT BROWN: Did some of these collectors work pretty closely with you, call you in to give them advice?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, they used to do that from time to time, yes indeed.

ROBERT BROWN: You've also mentioned to me, well, particularly Bostonians' branches of families that fell in Chicago and from whom you were able to get some early American things.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, the Barrett Windles were Boston imports. Barbara Windle was Barbara Higginson, the daughter of Francis P. Higginson and Lee Higginson of Boston, which was the financial downfall of my family along with many others. But anyway Barrett was the son of the first of Barrett Windle, he came out to head the Chicago branch of Lee Higginson and they lived in Chicago I guess 40 years or so. He was not had been away from Beacon Street for more than 24 hours. Always had a long summer in their great place at Hamilton on the North Shore.

But they had several family portraits, actually three Copleys and but I was able to induce them to give the Art Institute a beautiful Copley pastel and also the [same as name on preceding line]. The pair of Copley portraits that the family still has -- as far as I know there were two sons, I don't know whether each one got one, or how they divided it. So the Barrett Windle apartment on Lake Shore Drive could just as well have been a Chestnut Street drawing room, with the Copleys and the family antiques.

ROBERT BROWN: That must have been an accomplishment on your part to persuade a family which you're suggesting kept its roots in Boston, to give such things to the Art Institute.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I was always quite close to them as being a New Englander and I felt I had [inaudible, said laughingly]. I think they perhaps felt more at ease with me as one of their own sort, so to speak. And then there was a cousin, the Barretts who also lived in Chicago, a Mrs. Ella Barrett, and she had another one of the family Copley portrait. I asked her if she would leave it here and she said yes that she would.

When she got older she moved back to Boston. Then she died, she had not put it in her Will, it was a Copley but she had told her two sisters that "Fred Sweet wants this Copley for the Art Institute and I want him to have it." So the two sisters gave it to us -- they had no legal obligations to do so since she had never put it in her Will as she had intended to do. So many people live as if they'll live forever and, you know, "I'll get around to this some time." So we thought it was very magnanimous on the part of the two sisters that adhere to Ella's wishes although it was not so designated in her Will.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this rather unusual, that they did out?

FREDERICK SWEET: Most unusual because, well, a good number of years ago I asked Marian McCormick of McCormick if she would leave to the Art Institute the [a title] which he painted in Egypt at the time he was doing research for the Boston Public Library . So Mrs. McCormick did not leave it to the Art Institute. But I can't complain too much because her sons, almost every year, would come along with another Monet or another something, so there's not very much of a family collection still held by the family. I imagine everything will come eventually.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you tell of any important European acquisitions you made? Or were you mainly in the American field?

FREDERICK SWEET: Most of our acquisitions were in the American field.

ROBERT BROWN: By the end of your time there you were called the "curator of American painting.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: -- till that point you were --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, there were three of us eventually and we got called "associate curator of painting" because Dan Rich at that time was both director and curator of paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he fairly actively curate the paintings? Make acquisitions himself?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. He was pretty active in having things sent out and was more likely to push for purchases of things that he had selected more than the things that some of the rest of us had. As long as we had his things was the main thing. Of course the Art Institute think did not have very large purchase funds. It had more for French painting than anything else. The Cleveland Museum, for instance, has always been much richer. And Montana they got another city mayor .

ROBERT BROWN: Was this partly because, you mentioned to me, a number of the rich in Chicago did not have access to the major part of a family fortune? Or do you think they just didn't think in terms of giving lavish --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, when I Chicago families like this, Potter families and Marshall Field were all subject to what went on as the famous "Chicago Will." You couldn't write Wills that way now but money was entailed down to the third and fourth generations, so that lots of these families although very rich, by and large they had outside income. Potter Palmer, Jr. even though he had been president of the Art Institute left nothing to the Art Institute because he had only \$4,000,000 in his own right; the other hundred million was entailed.

Of course the first Mrs. Potter Palmer was a very shrewd businesswoman as far as having extraordinary taste in art and buying French Impressionist paintings very early. Her husband, the first Potter Palmer, was considerably older and died when she was scarcely a middle-aged woman, but through her own astute financial management she's supposed to have tripled the Potter Palmer fortune in her lifetime.

ROBERT BROWN: But so far as the Art Institute was concerned this was of no matter because of the nature of these Wills.

FREDERICK SWEET: The Potter Palmer estate could not be distributed until Honorary Palmer, the father of Potter Palmer, Jr., died. By that time all of his children were dead and so the fortune was divided among the heirs of Potter Palmer, Jr., Potter Palmer, III, and Gordon IV. I think Gordon Palmer had already died -- well, there were two sisters, Mrs. and Corinne Woods.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there a comparatively small circle of support for the Art Institute? I mean, whose really large support had been given?

FREDERICK SWEET: It was rather small to begin with but then it kept expanding and has expanded to a pretty large area now. Of course as the years went on more and more fortunes were accumulated. A great deal of the support actually came more from the new money than from the old money. The Potter family and the Potter so forth grandchildren couldn't care less about art. Grandma had collected all these things, all right, we've had our collector in the family, we don't need any more. That wasn't always true but it was to some extent the tendency and it was the newer monied people that became the new collectors and were collecting much more in the 20th century field -- 20th century French art and American too. They not only made important gifts from the 20th century field but they also came across with a fair amount of money; which was all very good.

ROBERT BROWN: Why then was eventually the Museum of Contemporary Art created if money for contemporary and near-contemporary works and gifts for same were coming to the Art Institute?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, with the interest for contemporary art became greater and greater and greater --

ROBERT BROWN: And you couldn't accommodate --

FREDERICK SWEET: -- and besides in the earlier period of the Art Institute there were very few galleries in Chicago. Gradually more and more galleries started up and more galleries aroused more interest, this created it and it was felt there was a place for a small museum of contemporary art in addition to the Art Institute. They tended to do very "way out" things, which the Art Institute perhaps just wouldn't have the space to do. It was in no sense in competition, it was simply augmenting what the Art Institute was doing, and after all the place for that was the continuing exhibitions at the Arts Club and an ever-increasing number of galleries. There was the Hardin Gallery and a lot of others.

ROBERT BROWN: In line with perhaps contemporary work but going back a long time to your acquaintance and awareness of Ivan Albright, which led to the exhibition in '64 and '65 at the Art Institute, were you...

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BEGINNING SIDE A, TAPE 3

ROBERT BROWN: (continuing) on the for that?

FREDERICK SWEET: No. We had known Albright I think from the time we first went to Chicago in '39 and Esther and I and our two young daughters and I quite often on a Sunday would go out to ville where the Albrights then had a studio in an abandoned old church, and their father, Adam Emery Albright, was still alive, painted very sentimental little pictures of the twin boys and friends' tents and a stick and string and a bent pin fishing at the side of a brook or something. Of course the twins were thoroughly fed up with that. And they had twin studios because the church was really supposed to be papa's studio although the twins used it to some extent.

So we'd go out there on a Sunday afternoon. He had just started the famous "Door" about that time. It took him 10 years to paint. And there were all sorts of other things around. They'd bring out a nice bottle of French wine and we'd sit around sipping a little wine and looking at pictures. So we became very close friends Ivan Albright submitted regularly to the Art Institute. I don't believe he ever had a painting turned down because after all he was completely unique and original. I mean, no one before or since has ever painted like that -- well, since: he's still painting. (pause) Well, let me see, he's 76 or 77 at this point.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you quite fascinated by what he was doing from the beginning?

FREDERICK SWEET: Utterly fascinated by it.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you think it was -- being with him as well as looking at his works?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, being with him, because he's such an extraordinary personality. He's a fascinating person. He's a little gnome of a man, a little sort of pixie, who says exactly what he thinks and takes no nonsense from anyone. He's a very creative and amazing person with this extraordinary technique of just detail. His paintings are often quite maudlin.

He used to have a girl to pose for him who was quite an attractive woman but by the time Ivan Albright had finished with her -- his famous painting "Ida" -- of course she looked like almost a decaying -- one has the feeling of decay in Ivan Albright's paintings. Things are disintegrating and falling apart and decaying, as if it were a preoccupation with death, which sometimes it was, as "The Door" after all was the door of a house where a funeral was in process or at least where a body was laid out. And through the keyhole of the door there's a little puff of smoke, which he said was the smoke of death; and the funeral wreath on the door and the doorstep is a gravestone -- the whole thing is rather a symbol of death.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this streak in him come out in conversation at all? Of was there something particular in the

family that had occurred?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, no, because actually he was not a maudlin person, he was a very cheerful person and very witty and could be very cutting.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you give any examples of that?

FREDERICK SWEET: He could be absolutely devastating. Well, later -- of course the Albrights had houses all over the place. Well, I later Ivan married a girl Josephine Patterson, the daughter of the great newspaper editor, and they acquired a great ranch in Wyoming where they spent part of the time, they had a place in Georgia, they had a house in Chicago, they acquired a house in Woodstock, Vermont and that's where they have spent the greater part of their time recently, on the edge of this little river, really just a brook.

On the other side of the brook is the great Laurance Rockefeller estate, up on the hill this great mansion, but just across the brook there's a little Rockefeller guest house. At one point, I think it was Rudolf Serkin -- I'm not sure but it was was some famous pianist who was there practicing when Ivan was trying to paint in his studio and went out and said, "What the hell's going on here? I can't paint with all this racket." The poor man came out and introduced himself and he said, "I don't care who you are, I'm Ivan Albright and I can't stand all this interruption to my painting." (laughter)

ROBERT BROWN: Was the brother very much like Ivan?

FREDERICK SWEET: No. They were -- I'm not sure if they were identical twins or not but they were of similar stature and so forth. He was [two proper names] Albright but he got tired of having the two names next to each other in catalogues when they got in exhibitions, so he took the made-up name of , so Ivan would be at the head of the catalogue and would be at the end so they'd be widely separated.

ROBERT BROWN: And he had to win as well.

FREDERICK SWEET: He had to win as well. He was a very good painter but not in a category with Ivan. I think he probably bettered Ivan's tremendous fame, if you want to call it that. Well, he wanted to do everything that Ivan did and he didn't quite succeed, and after Ivan married Jo Patterson he looked around for a rich wife himself. He found one who was fairly rich but not as rich. I think he spends most of his time in Florida, although they have a summer place down the coast of Maine here.

(tape disconnects, then resumes)

ROBERT BROWN: You wanted to say something about Ivan Albright's title to his.. .

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, we were speaking of "The Door," which is so aptly named. His actual title was "That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do." At the side of the door there is the hand of an old lady with a black lace cuff and she's holding a lace handkerchief, so "that which I should have done I did not do" -- presumably she is a relative of the deceased who arrived too late to make up for her past neglect or something of that sort. Another painting which we usually just refer to as "The Window," which he spent 15 years painting, is actually looking through a window which set in a brick wall to a room which is in great disarray, which he called "Poor Room There is No Time No End No Today No Yesterday No Tomorrow All Things Are Forever and Forever and Forever Without End."

When I had the exhibition I not only had the original "Door" with gravestone, doorstep and funeral wreath, and he had a plaster cast of the old lady's hand because the old lady couldn't pose all the time, and the lace handkerchief and the whole works. And the room, we had the whole brick wall sent down to the Art Institute and the whole room was set up just as it is in the picture. That was fascinating to people to see.

ROBERT BROWN: This obviously never had been exhibited in whole.

FREDERICK SWEET: No, never, it never had.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you arrange to have Jean Dubuffet's commentary -- translated by Mrs. Albright, I note -- put in the catalogue?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes I did indeed because I thought it was fascinating what Dubuffet had said. And Jo is a good French scholar and made a beautiful translation of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Had Dubuffet become quite a friend of Albright's?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I don't know that they were very close friends but at one time he had been in Chicago, had viewed Albright's -- some of Albright's paintings had been shown in Paris, so he went to Albright's studio and was struck dumb by this fantastic studio and this extraordinary man (laughter) and wrote a very perceptive and

almost eery comment, especially about the room, the room.

ROBERT BROWN: And he referred to the work as a "mirage" and he talks about the hostility that surrounded him. Your own essay in the catalogue was titled, "The Tradition of Craftsmanship" and you set down not merely the biographical but even genealogical data on Albright. Why did you do this?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, the Albrights German family name was originally "Albrecht" and they were famous German gunsmiths and they came to Pennsylvania in, I don't know, early 18th century, I believe, and continued to be great gunsmiths there making well, what is popularly called today "the Kentucky rifle," which isn't Kentucky at all, it's Pennsylvania. It's a particular type of rifle which was really developed in this country and was in the 18th century the most accurate rifle in the world. It's supposed to have been far superior to anything the British were using during the Revolution, and it's possibly due to the Pennsylvania rifle that the American troops did well at Saratoga and one or two other battles during the Revolution.

ROBERT BROWN: You thought this was necessary to point out as a background to Albright's work?

FREDERICK SWEET: I thought it was interesting to point out that there was a tradition there of craftsmanship, though it had nothing to do with painting. That fine craftsmanship -- Ivan's grandfather was the last one to be a gunsmith, he wasn't doing too much better, he ended up mostly making farm tools and that sort of thing. I bought a rifle that he did make and that Ivan had in the exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: And Adam Emery, the father, was he painter?

FREDERICK SWEET: Adam Emery broke away from the family tradition and became a painter but the family took to it too kindly at first [sic] but they finally went along with it. But his painting was pretty romantic and sentimental.

ROBERT BROWN: Did Albright and his brother react against their father's painting, or --

FREDERICK SWEET: I don't think they were reacting -- I mean, they let their father do what he wanted to do. I think their reaction was more that they got so bored posing for their father, as children.

ROBERT BROWN: You also emphasized craftsmanship because this is an element evident in Ivan Albright's own work, isn't it.

FREDERICK SWEET: Who is a fantastic carpenter, the eventual length of time he took to do paintings. Well, not all of them as much as 10 or 15 years but still many things he did took some years.

ROBERT BROWN: While he was doing "The Door and "The Window," was he also beginning and finishing other minor works?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. In fact he was a fairly prolific watercolorist. Of course they didn't require nearly as much time. For a long time they spent summers on the coast of Maine. They were on Deer Isle at one time. That, however, would have been after the time that John Marin was painting -- I don't think John Marin painted on Deer Island after about the beginning of World War I.

Then later the Albrights were painting in Korea, which of course is the place where Marsden Hartley spent his late years, supposedly almost in hiding, he never wanted anyone to know where he lived. Well, I used to run into Marsden Hartley occasionally in New York when he was having an exhibition and because I had Maine connections he would talk to me. He used to embarrass me to tears because he was very, very deaf and he would yell at you, not realizing he was doing it.

ROBERT BROWN: He was very sensitive about that too, wasn't he.

FREDERICK SWEET: He could be a little trying at times. Well: Norman Albright still has a summer place in Korea but Ivan hasn't been this way for a long time, he sticks to Vermont.

ROBERT BROWN: At this time you've kept a great many friends among artists over a number of years, then --

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: -- but you also, leading from your research, say, on Cassatt and Sargent and Whistler, you kept in touch with, say, the Cassatt family. What time were you beginning to work up the book, which was published in '66, called "Miss Mary Cassatt"?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I thought she was very much a spinster, and very much the lady, so it should be Miss Mary Cassatt, impressionist from Pennsylvania. Well, first the Sargent-Whistler-Cassatt exhibition, which was in -

ROBERT BROWN: '53-'54.

FREDERICK SWEET: -- and I had been working on that for a couple of years or so. So my particular interest in Mary Cassatt I suppose you could say really developed from about 1950 on and with continuing intensity. I had been meeting all the ambassadors of the Cassatt family, of which there were many, most of them not named Cassatt. Their names tend to rhyme -- the Hares and the Thayers and the Wares, and since I'd gone to school with and Tommy Cassatt, I was soon able to get to know all the rest of the family and see what they had. So I used to haunt Philadelphia rather frequently, running up and down the Main Line.

ROBERT BROWN: When did you first have the idea of greatly extending your research and catalogue of '54 into a book?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, not until after the exhibition, I would say. Shortly after that I thought, well, I've done so much research it should be extended and I thought that after all David McKibben, who was doing Sargent, and Andrew McLaren Young had Whistler more or less sewed up, and to be sure Adelyn Breeskin had published a book on Cassatt prints and I knew was doing a catalogue raisonnee, I didn't feel there was any conflict there.

Again, because Adelyn Breeskin was a good friend of mine, she said "I should give up my work on Cassatt and let you carry on from here." I said, "Not at all, Adelyn, you're doing the catalogue raisonnee, you go right ahead with that, my book is not a catalogue raisonnee, it's a what I consider Mary Cassatt an analysis and evaluation of her painting and her prints and Cassatt has been a tremendous influence on collecting in this country, notably of course the Havemyers, also Mrs. J. Montgomery Thayer, and those other people. So we continued on and I produced my book and then Adelyn produced her fantastic catalogue raisonnee.

ROBERT BROWN: She was depending mainly on, well, finding the data from published sources and the like and then technical descriptions, right?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes but she traveled all over the place and dug up all sorts of paintings in Paris -- of course I had up some too and she found even more. And then I think she redid her book on the prints. There were a certain number of errors in it. Her chronology of Mary Cassatt at that point was all wrong because she had not had access to the family letters.

ROBERT BROWN: That was your particular strength, wasn't it.

FREDERICK SWEET: She was the first to know that and she realized -- well yes, because there were so many vague sort of gray areas in Mary Cassatt's life; just a question of where she was, when, and so forth. It used to be said that she'd gone to the Pennsylvania Academy for a year. I checked on the records there and found she'd gone there for the full four years. I asked Joe Frazer, "Joe, how come people said she only studied at the Academy for a year?" He said, "Fred, you're the first person who ever bothered to ask us." And it was always said she was born in 1845. She wasn't, she was born in 1844. I had the family record written by her father in which he indicates the hour and minute, day, month and year that she was born. I went to Pittsburgh and found her baptismal records in Trinity Church.

So, the whole thing is there, it's just that you have to dig into it, you can't just assume things because somebody else has said it incorrectly. I took no one's word for anything.

ROBERT BROWN: You double-checked everything.

FREDERICK SWEET: I remember the first time I went to see Mrs. Thayer, she was Lois Cassatt, a granddaughter of Alexander Cassatt, she had one painting of Mrs. Alexander Cassatt, who was rather a sour-faced person. I was rather disappointed, I thought she might have some more things, and I said, "By any chance do you have any letters?" "Oh!" she said, "letters, wait a minute." So she produced a whole suitcaseful.

When the old Alexander Cassatt mansion on Rittenhouse Square was being broken up, the family was tossing out everything, and Wallace Thayer grabbed all the family letters, bless his heart, and because they are a source of a tremendous amount of valuable material.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have them before you put the exhibition on?

FREDERICK SWEET: (reflectively) Let me see now ... I had the opportunity of looking through quite a number -- yes, because I quote from at least a couple of the letters, in the catalogue.

ROBERT BROWN: These letters were to and from whom that Lois spared?

FREDERICK SWEET: They were letters from Mary Cassatt's mother and from her father, written home to

Philadelphia to the two sons, Alexander Cassatt and Gardner Cassatt, and there were many of Mary Cassatt's own letters written to the family and other members of the family here and there; but all in all it was an absolute wealth of information.

ROBERT BROWN: From these letters alone were you able to derive a bit more data? We've mentioned that, but also a feeling for Mary Cassatt's personality?

FREDERICK SWEET: Very much so, because you had a realization of the conditions under which she lived. Of course she'd been in Paris alone for a while but her father and mother and her sister Lydia came to Paris to live - this was 1877 -- and Mary Cassatt lived with the family and all this invalidism. Her sister Lydia posed for her in many of the paintings of the 1870s. She died in the early 80s of Bright's disease. The parents were more or less invalids -- Mrs. Cassatt had heart trouble and they were always having to take her to the Riviera and the Coast of Spain. I mean, Mary Cassatt had to spend so much of her time worrying about her invalid family, taking valuable time from painting to go on trips with them or to run around the outskirts of Paris looking for a suitable summer home to rent. Which they did, until finally in the early 90s she acquired Chateau de Beaufresne.

ROBERT BROWN: They could all more or less continually live there, couldn't they. Which they did.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, the father had already died by that time but she and her mother lived there until her mother died; which was also in the 90s. So you realize that she produced really a tremendous amount of work under often very difficult circumstances, due to her family's problems.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you learn through the letters of the frequency or infrequency with which she was with her fellow impressionists? Did she talk much about them at all, would you say?

FREDERICK SWEET: Only as she mentions the -- yes, she of course mentions Degas quite frequently. "Degas was here for dinner and said such-and-such" painting, or something. Oh yes, you gather that she was very close to Pissarro. She didn't care very much for Manet, she thought he was very stupid, and she didn't care very much for Renoir either, she thought he was too sensual. So, she knew them all and she was thrilled to be asked to exhibit with them, as Degas did of course.

ROBERT BROWN: Degas, she might have felt, was of a similar social --

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. Degas came from a very aristocratic background, although of course the family had had financial reverses; in his mature life he no longer lived that way any more. But still he was a French aristocrat, and he realized that Mary Cassatt was a cultivated lady, so that they in a sense had a similarity of background although their life style was certainly very different.

ROBERT BROWN: Supplementing these letters, you had conversations then with a number of people who had known her, both relatives and younger artists.

FREDERICK SWEET: I spent hours of conversation with various members of the family, particularly with Mrs. Thayer and Mrs. Hare, who was Ellen Mary Cassatt, Gardner Cassatt's daughter. And of course he was the youngest of that generation and married much later, so that you get confusion of generations here because Mrs. Thayer is a granddaughter of Alexander Cassatt, whereas Mary Ellen [sic] Hare was a daughter, only, of Gardner Cassatt, and Lois Thayer and Mary Ellen Hare were approximately the same age. One was the granddaughter of a brother, the other only a daughter. And Mrs. Percy Casera [phon.sp.] who's the only one of the Gardner Cassatt children still living, Ellen Mary (confused overlap) Jr. who died several years ago.

ROBERT BROWN: These people had all met Mary Cassatt at one time or another?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes. Ellen Mary was the favorite niece and she's the one that had spent the greatest amount of time in Paris and the Chateau de Beaufresne. Well, all the Cassatts went abroad a great deal from the 1880s on but Gardner Cassatt seemed to be the closest. And Ellen Mary was the favorite niece. Lois Thayer, to be sure, knew her quite well, but Ellen Mary, I felt, was the one that really had a true feeling with what her aunt's life -- and had a very close and devoted relationship with her aunt.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she characterize her aunt pretty acutely, you felt, in her conversations with you?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, she certainly told me a tremendous lot about her, because I spent hours and hours talking about her. I'd go out and spend the day at the house in Radnor and Ellen Mary would drive me around to various other houses where the Cassatt family had lived. The great 73-room mansion that had been their house, she said she couldn't run it with less 17 servants; so she gave it up and is now in a nursing home. And various other places she took me to.

ROBERT BROWN: What did her attitude toward her aunt seem to be?

FREDERICK SWEET: One of great devotion, and great admiration, and I think true appreciation of her as a great artist, and as an extraordinary person. A person who was very dynamic, very opinionated, very prejudiced about a great many things, but one who was dedicated to her work. Of course Ellen Mary inherited Chateau de Beaufresne, which she finally gave as sort of a children's home, which I think was quite appropriate. And I went - the place was quite rundown, it was sort of a secondrate kind of boarding house, and when I came back I didn't want to say anything about it to Ellen Mary, I was afraid she'd be upset. Well then later we got into it and I found that she knew all about it. I said, "I hadn't told you how rundown the place is, I was afraid you didn't know and would be terribly upset." "Well," she said, "I'm not very pleased about it, I know about it."

And of course Mary Cassatt's old chauffeur, Emil Delatour, and one of her housemaids were still alive when I went there in '53. Of course they, especially Emil Delatour, were a wonderful source of information. Well, the close intimate things that a servant in the household can tell you about the day-to-day life of the persons for whom they're working.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you learn things that you hadn't expected or hadn't anticipated from these two servants?

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh yes, I'm sure I did. I learned a lot more about her day-to-day life and how the house was organized, who was responsible for what. No: it was of tremendous value. And also he gave me some wonderful photographs of Mary Cassatt -- some snapshots that I had run off; the finest photographs around, probably, came from Provence.

ROBERT BROWN: They went in 1912 to St. Trophimes and Arles.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I had an enlargement made, I sent one to Ellen Mary, I have one up here on my desk. Everybody thinks it's my grandmother! I can remember as a very small boy my mother being dressed almost the same way -- the same covered skirt, the furpiece cut that way, great velvet hat piled high with plumes, and the lorgnette. That was fairly standard dress in those days for a lady.

ROBERT BROWN: Did it seem when she was doing her work that she shed some of this "ladyhood?"

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, as far as her dress went, when she was working, well, I have pictures of her and I thought she seemed to wear just a probably black skirt and a white blouse.

ROBERT BROWN: In your book you don't play down the years of blindness setting in and then the bitterness which came upon her.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, that of course was the great tragedy of her life. Again, it's remarkable that she produced as much as she did because her years of activity were scarcely more than 30, because Mary Cassatt was a rather late bloomer, she really didn't paint anything really worthy of recognition until she was in her late 20s. And then there was a long struggle until she got to the point of being a painter.

Then of course blindness slowed her down in later years. She had to give up printmaking, of course, first of all, and then painted less and less as the years went on. Well, even by 1914 her colors seem more crude. Well, Alex and Tommy Cassatt visited her at Chateau de Beaufresne the summer of 1914, I guess they must have been over there when the War broke out, and she did pastels of them that summer which seem to me a little crude in color and a coarsening of technique; which was of course when blindness was coming on. She really didn't do very much after that although she lived until 1926.

Yes, also in my book are wonderful photographs of her as an old lady, blind, from what elegant, erect woman, she sits sort of a crumpled --

ROBERT BROWN: With something like a mob cap on her head --

FREDERICK SWEET: It's a tragic picture in a way but a very poignant one and I thought it very important to show that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did Delatour and the relatives who knew her through the last years comment on the change that came over her? Aside from the obvious thing of blindness but the accompanying bitterness or withdrawal or whatever it was?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, Emil Delatour commented on that. Well, she insisted on having a drive every day in the Renault limousine -- Mrs. Havemeyer had given her a -- well, it was not really a limousine, it was a landolet. Mrs. Hare said, "I congratulate you that you did not call it a limousine, it was really a landolet," which was part of the then. She always wanted to go a certain way, and if he changed the route even though she didn't see she knew instinctively that he wasn't taking her the way that she wanted to go and would be very critical about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Despite this despair and bitterness that seemed to come upon her, she also with her favorite

niece Ellen and with children generally continued to be rather warm, didn't she? And gentle?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I think she always was, and even though she could scarcely see, she hated to give up the idea of writing her own letters. And of course her late letters are almost indecipherable -- I finally got to the point I couldn't read them. Oh occasionally she'd sort of dictate to Mathilde, the maid who was with her for many, many years. She was the sort of housekeeper -- well, had been with her parents; she was the sort of housekeeper and maid and acted as lady's maid. Mary Cassatt always took Mathilde with her when she went on trips; after all, she didn't have a lady's maid.

ROBERT BROWN: And later she was grateful to have people she knew pretty well when she herself was helpless.

FREDERICK SWEET: Oh of course that made a difference. Mathilde had come to them as a young girl from Alsace- Lorraine, she was interned after World War I and problems then, because she was regarded as German then.

ROBERT BROWN: By the time you published the book, was this sort of an act of devotion on your part?

FREDERICK SWEET: It was an act of great devotion, I assure you; yes indeed. And I'm so glad I had the opportunity of talking to so many people, because almost of them have died now -- all sorts of people in Paris that knew her that I saw have died, and the servants who died, and all sorts of people in this country. George Duval (overlapping voices in short phrase) Any number of people who had fascinating things to say about her. Of course none of those people are around any more.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel this to be the strength of your book, these recollections of relatives and younger ?

FREDERICK SWEET: I don't think so, because I thought that it was all first-hand information. Naturally I read everything that had been written about Mary Cassatt but after all her letters were first-hand information, and peoples' recollections; because some people could recollect almost the same thing differently from someone else. Still, it is not third-hand information, it was quite some impression of people as they knew her, talked to her. So for that reason I felt that I was really dealing with prime sources.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you aware at all in some of those interviews that people were trying to cover up or establish a certain cleaned-up tradition or were less than quite frank with you?

FREDERICK SWEET: I decided they were very frank. No, I did not have the impression that anyone was trying to cover up anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you pleased with the reception your book had? Was it what you expected?

FREDERICK SWEET: It certainly was, I think. Rinehart ten or twelve thousand copies. No: I think the University of Oklahoma Press did a regular job of designing it and were very careful about the reproductions and I think they did a first-rate job.

ROBERT BROWN: This was toward the end of your time at the Art Institute.

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. It was really only a couple of years before I retired.

ROBERT BROWN: But you did, just before you retired, mount this major Whistler exhibition, in 1968.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, there was then a discussion about some very important exhibitions to have and some of the suggestions to have an exhibition called, "Masterpieces of American Landscape Painting." But I said, "There are no masterpieces of American landscape painting." I said that was a pretentious word. Or you could have an exhibition of "masterpieces of Italian painting," or "masterpieces of French painting" but "masterpieces of American landscape painting," no, I said that I think I did American landscape painting thoroughly, and a totally new thing was the Hudson River School. So was that. So with trustees' or not trustees' approval, let me think about this a while. I said now, this must be some really major artist.

So I thought well after a while I'd do Whistler, even though I did Whistler in depth. And as I think I've said somewhere, nobody looks at etchings any more so it was high time people did look at Whistler etchings as well as his paintings. Well, the Art Institute has a most extensive holding in the print department of Whistler etchings and Whistler lithographs, which were never even fairly well-known in his day. So I made a great point of bringing all of them up, and again, got

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BEGINNING SIDE B, TAPE 3

FREDERICK SWEET: (beginning mid-sentence) some great things. Well, some things I'd had before, to be sure.

ROBERT BROWN: And the effect was to enhance --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I was so enchanted to get from the Tate Gallery the Alexander, which I hadn't had before and which I think is one of the truly great Whistler paintings; and we had the little "white girl" again too. I wanted the big "white girl" from the National Gallery and everybody said "you won't get it." I went to the Gallery, talking to one or two of the curators who said, "you'll never get it." I said, "you wait and see."

So I went into a huddle with John Walker, whom I have known since I was in college, and I got it. They said, "how did you do it?" I said, "never mind." One thing: I asked for only that one picture. I said, "John, I know you have many Whistlers that everyone wants, and this is the last exhibition I'll ever do." So he let me have it.

Oh, and by that time the University of Glasgow had a Whistler that could be lent, because Whistler made his sister-in-law executrix, and of course she had everything that was in his studio. She had given a certain number of things to University of Glasgow with the provision that nothing could be lent. But then when she died, she left a lot of other things, and some of her china in the exhibition --one was absolutely fascinating because it was a full-scale, full-color design, you might call it, for the Peacock Room. Since one can't obviously move the Peacock Room -- well, you can't get anything out of the Freer anyway, (laughter) of course you may risk the statute of limitations, because of course the Frick can't lend, the Freer can't lend, and the collection at the Museum can't lend. But the Glasgow and the Tate Gallery and so forth were very generous.

ROBERT BROWN: And then you had Andrew McLaren Young's cooperation, didn't you?

FREDERICK SWEET: I had his cooperation. Well, I think he'd been lecturing in Canada or something, anyway we acquired him at Chicago for about five days. I made a deal. I said, "Andrew, we'll give you a daily fee of what your lecture fee would be," and his lecture fee was fairly high. So anyway he was very happy with that situation.

ROBERT BROWN: In the catalogue, it's quite different from the one of '54 for the trio Cassatt-Sargent-Whistler, because it seems to be very precise on entries, bibliography, , references, with a very tippy and fairly dry descriptions.

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I thought that doing a one-man show, I should do the bibliography and the exhibition and the whole works, because after all a catalogue like this was something that we want for years as a reference, and I think you can go overboard on too much of that sort of thing. I felt it was probably a good idea to get it all down. Yes: I always like to bring in things about the paintings in the Museum.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you happy with the show?

FREDERICK SWEET: Very happy, yes. I thought it went over very well, and the people were delighted to look at the etchings.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you yourself learned a good deal more about Whistler than you had known earlier?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. I learned a lot from Andrew McLaren Young. Oh yes, I feel that I greatly enlarged my knowledge. The lithographs so beautiful, some of them around. Well, we have a lot of Whistleriana at the Art Institute. For instance, Walter Greeves' portrait of Whistler. Walter and his brother were boatmen, as you probably know, who rowed Whistler around the Thames. It's a nice little sort of studied painting a little bit with Whistler in sort of desultory fashion. Walter Greeves was certainly no great painter but he was the better of the two brothers, and the portrait is rather fascinating in a way.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this, then, your last major exhibition just before you did retire?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, just about --

ROBERT BROWN: Then did you retire just because it was a statutory time?

FREDERICK SWEET: I retired because it was the statutory time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have in mind, then, "keeping your hand in" exhibitions, and writing and the like?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, to a certain extent. I mean, after... I kept into things. I lectured from time to time at the Riverside Group at the Museum of Fine Arts -- no --

ROBERT BROWN: The Ladies Committee?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes. I'd lecture to them. Once on Andrew Wyeth, I think, and then the last time, a couple of years ago, I lectured on Mary Cassatt.

ROBERT BROWN: Andrew Wyeth is someone you've known since virtually the beginning of his career, haven't you?

FREDERICK SWEET: Yes, I've known him for a long time. At the time of the Cassatt -- I forget the year but I went down to the Wyeth show I think Ted Richardson, I think he wrote the catalogue; I went to the opening at the Pennsylvania Academy. I also I didn't care for the way it was hung. And we had it in Chicago. I hung the exhibition and Andrew and Betsy were very pleased.

The result of that was something I was not really happy about. Some years after that the Museum of Fine Arts wanted to have a Wyeth exhibition. Andy said "yes, we'll all do it on one condition: that you let Fred Sweet choose the show and hang it." Which I agreed to do, and then I was sorry that I did. The situation was this: I mean, I don't like the idea of outside people coming into the Museum to do an exhibition. If anybody suggested doing that in Chicago I would say, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, I'm resigning tomorrow morning." (laughter)

ROBERT BROWN: You did it, but it wasn't a very happy thing for you?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, I tried to persuade Betsy Wyeth one or two things I preferred not to have. It wasn't the flexibility that I'd had in Chicago; I would have liked certain different colors. Well, anyway, .

ROBERT BROWN: Are the Wyeths people you see fairly regularly today?

FREDERICK SWEET: I haven't seen them just in the last couple of years but usually I go over to Cushing in the summer, sometimes with one of my girls. I have also visited them in Chadds Ford; I know both the boys very well. Nicholas I see once in a while, and Jamie.

ROBERT BROWN: Has Andrew's work fulfilled the potential you saw it had when you first were aware of it? Has his been a very fertile career?

FREDERICK SWEET: Well yes, he's certainly had a fertile career but I think that perhaps he's been shown a little too much. By the time I'd finished hanging the Boston show I was a little fed up. I finally finished at noon, I think, the day before the exhibition opened and I decided I wanted something quite different, so I had lunch at one of my favorite Boston restaurants, Athens and then went to the W Theater to see "Hair." (laughter) If you can imagine a greater contrast.

Well, anyway, of course at that time the nude still couldn't be shown. Well, there was one small picture of a girl in a bikini but that was part of actual to get some that were not to be shown until a certain time; I guess they are being shown now.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, they've been shown at . Do you rank him as an important figure in American art?

FREDERICK SWEET: I think Andy is an important figure, yes. Not because he's a realistic painter. Of course in one sense I think he's very abstract. Andrew and I have had long, long talks about this, because everything is simplified and reduced to its essence. The painting of a Pennsylvania farm that's called "Brown Swiss" and you wonder why, because there are no cows there; in the original sketches there were brown Swiss cows, and then gradually he eliminated all the cows, and he began eliminating windows from the house. Everything is greatly simplified, and the painting had a room, which is owned over here at the Museum in Boston, is of course the end of their living room in the house down at Cushing, which Andy always thinks of as essentially Betsy's room because she was responsible for the way it was fixed up.

Well, in the painting it's all very stark and as architectural as an Edward Hopper -- who, incidentally, was the painter Andy admires more than anybody else of that generation. But the geometric shapes of the two windows, and the door and the panels in the door, and all that introduces itself essentially as an abstract but actually the room has a lot more in it. It is not cluttered -- the Wyeth house is cluttered but still there are lots of things hanging around here and there on the walls. And that aspect of him interests me.

ROBERT BROWN: You're able now to follow those things which most interest you, you're not, in retirement, so apt to be cornered or thrust into things you might have had to do when you were part of --

FREDERICK SWEET: Well, to me do just what we're doing now.

ROBERT BROWN: -- range and rove as you please.

END OF INTERVIEW

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