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Oral history interview with Betty Burroughs Woodhouse, 1977 May 24

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Betty Burroughs Woodhouse on May 24, 1977. The interview took place in Little Compton, Rhode Island, and was conducted by Garnett McCoy for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

GARNETT MCCOY: This is Garnett McCoy, and it is the 24th of May.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: I put 23 on the letters, but I think it's 24.

GARNETT MCCOY: Twenty-fourth of May—Thursday, anyway—1977, and I am talking to Mrs. Woodhouse. Now I—one thing I would like you to do is to say something about the background of your parents.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, I would like—I was thinking how to do this. My family background was that my father and mother were both, as I would say, first-generation artists. They came from families who were not artistic. My father was—his father was a West Pointer, and in the Civil War, and died very young as a major—

GARNETT MCCOY: I see.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: —and in fact, died before my father was born. He was brought up by his grandfather, who was the minister of the Old North Church in Boston, the Reverend Henry Burroughs, a very awe-inspiring person. And that little bronze inkwell used to rest on my great-grandfather's desk. My father said he could never see it without a sensation of awe. It was—he was a very far distinguished old gentleman, and his wife was a Tilden [ph], and this made it very important. But my mother's family came—lived in Riverdale, New York. When she broke away from them, I think the family had already begun to decline in prosperity, but she was very much on her own. [00:02:06] They both went to the league, as very young people, and won scholarships to go abroad, I think before 1900—or quite a lot before. Perhaps in 1895 or something like that. Went to Paris, and studied, and were married abroad, and came back. Then my father taught at the league for a while.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, he did? In the late [18]'90s, say?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: And the early 1900s, I think. I'm very vague about this. By this time, he was painting pictures that could win a prize in the National Academy, and they brought in about, I should think, not much more than [$]1,000 a year. My mother was working as a sculptor, doing things for Tiffany. One of the anecdotes I remember, my very early times, was that they lived on 86th Street, in the top of an old house, which was sort of an attic, and being very poor, divided the attic into two by hanging a curtain down the middle. And John Door [ph] and his wife lived on the other side of the curtain, and we called them by—oh, no, it was Sam Door. John was his cousin. Sam—we called him Daddy Sam, and his wife Auntie Nell, as children. [00:04:04] All brought up together, very young children. The story was that my mother was doing a door-knocker for Tiffany's, and Auntie Nell walked the floor with my brother, Alan, to keep him quiet while this was going on. They spent their holidays together, you see. They—by the time my father—I think he felt really defeated as an artist, at not making a really good living at it. He joined the Metropolitan Museum as an assistant of Roger Fry, who didn't last very long, and then my father became curator. From then on, he kept this place on 86th Street, where we started our careers, as a studio, and he worked there every morning.

GARNETT MCCOY: So that was quite close to the museum?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Within a few steps. And went to the museum in the afternoon, but did, of course, a whale of a good job.

GARNETT MCCOY: Yes. But then you lived out at Flushing, too?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Then, by that time, we had moved to Flushing, and had bought a charming old early 19th-century gabled house, with strange addition of a large room in back that had once been a schoolhouse. My mother built a studio, a beautiful skylight studio, with heat and water. She was extremely dynamic person, and far more successful than my father, as in her art. [00:06:02] I remember the casting of

great pieces that she was doing for—could it have been the Panama Pacific Exposition? She did a courtyard.

GARNETT MCCOY: It could have been. That was in 1915.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. Well, I think maybe there was another one even before that, because I remember that when I came to the point of doing casting, having been a very young child and watching these workmen at work, I knew just what to do, without knowing the reason for it.

GARNETT MCCOY: There was another exposition out there.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Nineteen ten.

GARNETT MCCOY: Well, there was one in 1914, in San Diego.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: This, I think, was the Panama Pacific. The one that she did the courtyard for. This must have been just before her death, because she died in 1916.

GARNETT MCCOY: That would be right, because the Panama Pacific was in 1915, in San Francisco.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, and she was working on it, of course, years before. Maybe she could have been working on it for several years.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, certainly.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, I may have been 10 years old when I watched.

GARNETT MCCOY: She had studied at the league, too?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, yes, and got a scholarship there, you see?

GARNETT MCCOY: Who did she study under, do you know?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: I don't know, but the people she was familiar with were all those people of that generation. McMonies [inaudible] and—

GARNETT MCCOY: Kenyon Cox and all those people.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. I remember she had, of course—well, Karl—Karl Bitter?

GARNETT MCCOY: Yes. Yes, indeed.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, that's the name that comes to mind.

GARNETT MCCOY: He was a sculptor.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: And who was it? [00:08:03] Oh, that man who does mobiles, the son of—

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, Calder?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Calder.

GARNETT MCCOY: His father.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, his father.

GARNETT MCCOY: Yes. Alexander Stirling Calder.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, yes. Well, those were the people she knew. In our household, there would be people—Flushing was quite a place where artists lived. It was a rather secluded suburb, with a great deal of open space. I remember the Bensons, who—the man who paints those ducks. Very nice pictures. And William M. Chase. You know, they all lived about. And the thing was, that by the time I was, say, 10 years old and up, I was aware of the lifestyle of these people, which was rather formal. They felt themselves distinguished, and a little bit out of the regular society, but really rather important people.

GARNETT MCCOY: I think that came very much out of the 19th century anyway. The artists of the 19th century felt that a lot.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Felt this. I remember Albert Sterner, in a hat, and Lail Malzina [ph] looking

like Rembrandt. They all had a certain amount of style.

GARNETT MCCOY: But then there was a certain respectability, too.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, tremendous. That's what I felt was different from today. But then all of society accepted respectability, as I don't suppose they do anymore.

GARNETT MCCOY: Not at all now.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: No. But respectability, and—[00:10:00]

GARNETT MCCOY: But at that time, at least up to about 1910, the whole concept of an avant-garde did not exist here.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Exactly. And although we weren't at all aware of it—I went to the league in 1917, I think—I suppose we were the beatniks, but we didn't know it, because—and of course, I was—I felt that, coming to the league from my background, I was at home in the league. It was just a continuation of my family life. The people I knew and became very intimate with, people like Peggy Bacon, and Katherine Schmidt, and—well, there was a girl named Anne Rector, who was extremely important to herself and to the rest of us. And of course Niles Spencer, and Yasuo. Of course, Lloyd was sort of on the periphery of this. He was a little older.

GARNETT MCCOY: He went to the Art Students League, too, did he not?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, before my time. I don't think this should be recorded. Can you—

GARNETT MCCOY: I can turn it off, certainly.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: —turn it off.

[END OF TRACK AAA_woodho79_7885_r.]

GARNETT MCCOY: He came here in the [18]'80s, I believe, and he got—he was a very clever man, apparently, and—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Tremendously.

GARNETT MCCOY: —evidently had some art facility, and became a very successful art director for publications.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: That's it.

GARNETT MCCOY: And then wound up with the—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: He became almost a dealer, didn't he?

GARNETT MCCOY: Well, I don't—in a way, I suppose, he might have. He got connected as the art director for *McClure*'*s*, and had an enormous influence on McClure, apparently. You know the *McClure*'*s* magazines of that period? I think he had been the art director, before that, for *Scribner*'*s* or *Century*. You know, quite good magazines. And through *McClure*'*s*, he evidently made a lot of money, because in the early 20th century, he did have quite a lot of money. Then he left *McClure*'*s* and initiated a very grandiose project, which was to publish an account of major art collections in America. He projected a series of volumes of very, very elaborate, beautiful, luxurious volumes, in which he would get the greatest art historians and authorities to write on the collections of Mrs. Gardner, and Mrs. Havemeyer, and Mr. Jackson, and so forth. Then he would get—he got Kenyon Cox to draw initial letters for the text, and he got the best printing, and the best paper, and the best binding, and it was all to be a fantastic job. Then he would sell each volume for something like $1,500, which was a lot of money in those days. [00:02:05] He would sell them to the collectors, you see, who would then buy more than one copy so they could pass them out to their friends. Well, he almost went broke on this thing. It didn't work out. He finally did get one volume out, and then the war came along and he had to quit. That's really what these papers were about, was this [inaudible]. They're absolutely fascinating.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: You absolutely make clear my vague ideas of what he was doing, because I remember hearing about this.

GARNETT MCCOY: Evidently a man of enormous charm.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, he was beguiling. He showed me a letter that Jack Reed had written him.

GARNETT MCCOY: Is that so?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. He knew everyone. It was his career in life not to miss a distinguished person. He lived at that hotel on the Place de la Concorde, where the peace conferences were held. He had a suite there, you see.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, my God.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: When I was in Paris, to be summoned by Uncle Jack meant to drop everything and go, you know?

GARNETT MCCOY: You know, it is sort of odd, too, because he was a great friend of my wife's aunt in New York.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Was he?

GARNETT MCCOY: A very close friend. In fact, he left her money when he died.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: I'll be darned. Well, he married a Bostonian, you know, a very distinguished Bostonian.

GARNETT MCCOY: But it didn't last.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: It didn't last. I think they had a son, who was—

GARNETT MCCOY: They did, yes.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: —yes, I don't know what happened to him. Uncle Jack—for instance, he took me to see Ruth Draper's monologues, and in the middle of them, when she was doing the one about going into the cathedral, first as a German tourist, and then as a French woman, ending up with a French woman who'd gone in to pray, he kept saying, "It's so bad she took my advice." [00:04:07] This is what he always did. For instance, Conrad, he insisted on calling it *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, because Conrad had some title that was no good at all. But when he said this about Ruth Draper, I thought, that is the creeping in, I mean—that really—that ties it. I'll be damned. A few days later, I was summoned to lunch with him, and he tossed me a letter, and it was from Ruth Draper, saying, "Dear Uncle Jack" [they laugh] "I hope you like the way I carried out your suggestion."

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, how funny. Funny.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: He really made a point of collecting distinguished people, and talking to him was a liberal course in modern history.

GARNETT MCCOY: It must have been.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, it was fascinating. It also was scary, because he—oh, dear, he hated to over-tip people. He counted out those coins and gave just the minimum.

GARNETT MCCOY: He was tight.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: And he was very, very demanding. I remember going on a little trip in the South of France with him, in one of those cars which was raised in the back so it could go up and down the mountain. A little boy was running along and clinging to the step, or actually taking a ride, and Uncle Jack told him to get off. And he didn't get off, and he stamped on his fingers.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, my God.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: And I wouldn't speak to him for a couple of days, you see, I mean—[00:06:00] I was just horrified by this behavior. He used to have great rages, and get purple. When he did, all the white bristles stood up. He was scary. But I must say there wasn't anyone who couldn't have—I mean, he was really superb character.

GARNETT MCCOY: How was it that he and Berenson didn't get along? I suppose—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, well, they quarreled about Uncle Jack's honing in on Berenson's expertise, I'm sure. Because, you see, when I was—I went abroad with Reg in '25, for a long time, and we were in Florence. Oh, we had ridden our bicycles from Paris to Carcassonne, and then taken a train across to [Beaumont-la-] Ronce, and stayed with Uncle Jack again, who admired Reggie's drawing enormously.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, is that so?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: This was in 1925. Reg must have been 26 years old. He said, "This is as good as Rembrandt."

GARNETT MCCOY: Really?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, and it was, you know, terrifically good. Reg drew all the time, you see. We went on from there to Florence, and found a note from the Berensons, saying would we come to lunch on Saturday? That their car would come for us. Well, it was a traumatic experience, because Berenson was in a very bad mood at that time. And I was shy. Reg was totally unsocial, a man of no social graces whatever. He was always picking his ear, doing something that was just so awkward and embarrassing. [They laugh.] [00:08:00] We went into I Tatti, and there was a room full of books, a small sort of library, filled with people, very handsome, jet-set types. Oh, Logan Pearsall Smith was one of them, because he was related to Berenson's first wife.

GARNETT MCCOY: He was his wife's brother, I think.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, yes. There were a lot of people there.

GARNETT MCCOY: And then there was Bertrand Russell. Was he there, too [laughs]?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: No. But he and—you see, my father and mother, and Bertrand Russell and Berenson and their wives, had all gone on a long bicycle trip together as young people. They knew each other very, very well.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, I see. And Russell's wife was—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Dora, I think, wasn't it?

GARNETT MCCOY: She was Mrs. Berenson's sister, too.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, that's right. That's right. I went in, not knowing anyone, and wondering which one was Berenson among this group, but there was no mistaking him when he came in. He was very tiny and very impressive, with a dark beard and beady eyes. He went around shaking hands, and when he got to me, instead of saying, "I'm glad to see you," or something, he said, "Oscar gave me these himself." [Laughs.] Set of Oscar Wildes, you know.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, is that so?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Then he sat me on his right, and put me through such an ordeal as you couldn't imagine during lunch. He said, "Does your father still paint?" And I said, rather defensively, "Well, of course he does. He goes to the museum in the afternoon." Berenson said, "Has he learned to draw?" [00:10:00] This absolutely left me speechless. And Mrs. Berenson, who, you know—I had a relationship—I mean, that letter I gave to the archives expressed such affection.

GARNETT MCCOY: It was a warm letter.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Very warm letter, and I've never heard anything from my parents except warmth towards them. I'd expected a welcome, or at least a recognition. But Mrs. Berenson didn't come to lunch that day, and I was taken upstairs to see her. She was having her lunch in her quarters, on a tray. But I did say, "Look, I feel I've betrayed my father by not responding to that remark." [Laughs.] She said, "Oh, BB is deplorable." But I was asked back—Reg and I were asked back, every weekend, to spend the weekend with him, for all the time we were in Florence, which meant that I was all ready to mow him down if he said another rude word. And then he would be utterly charming, and terribly informative about painting, you know.

GARNETT MCCOY: So you went several times?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, went over and over again, about six times—five times. And [laughs] we used to take walks with Berenson, in which you were taken to the top of a hill, and strolled down and met the motor at the bottom of the hill. I must say, it was a bit of an ordeal. Of course, none of the pictures in his house were labeled. [They laugh.] You could lose your art.

GARNETT MCCOY: Formidable experience.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Formidable experience. You know? Really. Logan Pearsall Smith, whom I looked to as—also a familiar name in my background—I looked to him for sort of support. [00:12:04] He was unspeakably indrawn and cold. He looked like an old toad, heady and lethargic, and emitting little words.

GARNETT MCCOY: Were the Berensons getting along well while you were there, the two of them?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: I doubt they did, because Mrs. Berenson, seldom being in on these seances. There was—Nicky was there, you see. Nicky was the—

GARNETT MCCOY: She was there in '25?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: I think so. I think so. Of course, I did go back to Florence later and may have seen her again. But that was the time when I really got the fidgets. Well, and then, of course, I introduced Jacassi's [ph] name, knowing that Jacassi didn't like Berenson, and that's when Berenson said, "His name used to be Jack-assi [ph]." Which was so clever that it floored me, and I couldn't go on about that. I mean, that was it. But Jacassi is a great—was a great figure in my—

GARNETT MCCOY: He would be a fun person to write up, you know, write a biography on or something.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, it would be marvelous if you could—

GARNETT MCCOY: Not that significant a person, but such an interesting—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: No, he was on the fringes, but made such a thing of it. I think there's a European type who battens on the notoriety and distinction.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, absolutely.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: And of course, he loved my father in an embarrassing way. You see? Oh, and of course Roger Fry.

GARNETT MCCOY: He was close to Roger Fry.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Very close to Roger Fry.

GARNETT MCCOY: Many letters from Roger Fry to him.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, yes.

GARNETT MCCOY: And many letters from prominent English artists, too. [00:14:03] I've forgotten who they were, but it's a wonderful collection of papers.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Well, that Bloomsbury group was all friends with my parents.

GARNETT MCCOY: There's even a letter to Jacassi from Edith Wharton.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, yes.

GARNETT MCCOY: And letters from Mary Cassatt, and any number of people.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Of course. He knew who they were. When I was—before I married—I was about 20—I went to see Roger Fry in London. I had stayed at his house there when I was 10, I think. We had a reunion, and we went to Dotage [ph], to see the collection. I had a passion for Poussin that's never faded. There was this great picture of Father Time playing on his harp, and the hours, or the muses going around on a rather substantial cloud. I was looking at it with utter rapture, and Roger Fry stood there, laughing his head off, as well he might. I mean, it's preposterous. [They laugh.] It's a responda/ent concept, you know, a classical translation into the 17th century. But he was very informative. He, too, had great enthusiasm for painting. We went to galleries quite often together.

GARNETT MCCOY: I'll have to turn that off.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Is that the end?

[Audio Break.]

GARNETT MCCOY: [They laugh.] One thing I'm interested in is, beginning with *The Eight* show, and then there was the first Independence show, and then there was Stieglitz's Gallery, and then there was the Armory show. [00:16:04] Then Montross began picking up on more modernist sort of painters, and—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: My father was in Montross, wasn't he?

GARNETT MCCOY: I think so. Then there was the Daniel Gallery, and then—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. I knew it very well. I knew—you know. What was his name?

GARNETT MCCOY: Charles Daniel.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: I know, but his assistant.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, I know who you mean. His assistant.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. What—

GARNETT MCCOY: Via [ph], you mean?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Via, yes.

GARNETT MCCOY: I didn't know he worked for Daniel.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes.

GARNETT MCCOY: I didn't know that. Anyway, then there was the other Independence show of 1917, and then there was the Penguin Club. Did you ever hear of the Penguin Club? Wood Gaylor was part of that.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Was he?

GARNETT MCCOY: And so was Louie Bouché. It was something that Walt Kuhn dreamed up. Anyway, there was a sort of ferment going on at that period.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. Oh, certainly was. What about—

GARNETT MCCOY: Part of it was Henri, and part of it was Stieglitz, and part of it was Kenneth Hayes Miller, and part of it was Arthur B. Davies. I just wondered if you recalled any sort of particular aspect of all that going on?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Well, I sort of was deep in the Mrs. Force's business at the Whitney Studio Club.

GARNETT MCCOY: At the Whitney Studio Club. It was Alex Brook ran that, did he not?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Well, I didn't know who ran it, but I know we were all there all the time.

GARNETT MCCOY: You don't remember Davies yourself, do you?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Arthur B.?

GARNETT MCCOY: Yes.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Why, I do remember him, vaguely as a very distinguished person. He was a great friend of my father's.

GARNETT MCCOY: Uh-huh [affirmative]. He had that strange domestic arrangement.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: I never did.

GARNETT MCCOY: He had a wife up in upstate New York, and a wife down in New York City. [They laugh.] [00:18:02]

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Well, convenient. [They laugh.] No. I'm afraid I'm a little vague about those. I should have been uh—

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, I know what I wanted to ask you about. Adelaide Lawson was the wife—was the sister of John Howard Lawson.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes.

GARNETT MCCOY: Yes, did you ever know him?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, indeed. I insulted them beyond measure by walking out of a play of his, which was full of the goofiest symbolism, I thought. [They laugh.] Yes, I knew them here in New York, and then I went and made a brief excursion to Los Angeles, and he was out there.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, he was? Writing in Hollywood?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. And very unhappy about it, of course.

GARNETT MCCOY: Wasn't he called up by the Un-American Activities Commission?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. We were all pretty much suspect. I mean, without being aware at all that we were anti-social, or ultra-independent, shall I say. We dressed like beatniks, and we acted like beatniks. [Laughs.]

GARNETT MCCOY: Before your time.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Without knowing it.

GARNETT MCCOY: Did you know Dezius [ph]?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: No.

GARNETT MCCOY: A man named Dezius, who was a cartoonist, or a caricaturist?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: No.

GARNETT MCCOY: He also ran a gallery in New York.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: No, I didn't know him. I wonder why not.

GARNETT MCCOY: Various [ph] Dezius, I think his name was.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: The name is sort of familiar, but I haven't any picture of him, I'm sorry.

GARNETT MCCOY: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you were close to the Spencers?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Very. Betty and Niles.

GARNETT MCCOY: Yes. He had studied under Henri at one point. [00:20:00]

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes.

GARNETT MCCOY: Briefly, I think.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: There's a picture by him in that Kennedy [ph] Gallery.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, is there?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: By Niles. A very early one. Twenty-nine, I think it said. It's a funny picture.

GARNETT MCCOY: Did you ever go to the Stieglitz Gallery, the 291?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, and I do remember Stieglitz as—[they laugh].

GARNETT MCCOY: Never stopped talking, did he? [They laugh.] Uh-huh [affirmative]. I know what I wanted to ask you about. Your—Reginald Morris was a great friend of the Poesses [ph].

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, so was I, and that's important. Of Lou Ellen [ph] Poess, by Reg—over by the door, an etching. Just a beautiful etching. Look at it.

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, there?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes. You must look at it. I knew the Poesses extremely well. In fact, that whole boiling of them. There were—Reg and I went and stayed with them in England when we were there once. Tom used to say, "All I knew of England was the Poess family." They spread out all over.

GARNETT MCCOY: There were two brothers, weren't there?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, eight.

GARNETT MCCOY: Eight?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, and they were all terrific. There was one who wrote—John Cooper Poess wrote gloomy novels, and Theodore Poess wrote novels, and Bertie Poess was the head of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings. Mercifully, he died before the war, or he wouldn't—would have been too much

for him. Oh, and there were—

GARNETT MCCOY: Lou Ellen had wrote novels?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Lou Ellen wrote lots of novels. At Lou Ellen's place, on Passion Place, is where I met all those—where I met Dreiser, and Ford, Madox Ford. [00:22:07]

GARNETT MCCOY: Oh, did you?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, yes, and all that crowd.

GARNETT MCCOY: How did you meet the Poesses? How did that connection come up?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Oh, I knew them through a wonderful old gentleman named Robert T. Nickel. Did you ever hear of Mr. Nickel?

GARNETT MCCOY: No.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: He was a—he knew—he had a position at the Metropolitan Museum. You couldn't stump him on a question of history or literary association. He used to—he was a great admirer of my mother and father. Of course, my mother died in 1916, so goes way back. He was a very catholic old gentleman, and in his house on Washington Square South, in his apartment, in the corner, was a rather ominous coffin, draped over, with a bust of Dante on top. This was for him. And unfortunately—

GARNETT MCCOY: [Laughs.] It was?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: —[laughs] before he died, he shrank, and became a little crooked. I don't know how he fitted into it at the end, because it was a tall, straight coffin. But here, Scofield Thayer and the Poesses—

GARNETT MCCOY: That's the *Dial* man?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: At the *Dial*. Oh, and Henry McBride. We haven't mentioned him. What an absolute love of a man.

GARNETT MCCOY: You must have known him well.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Very, very well. Uncle Henry. Too dear a person. He's having a little resurrection, isn't he, right now?

GARNETT MCCOY: Well, he is. Somebody just published a book of his letters, I think, at Yale.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, and they were charming. He came to our house every Sunday, I think. He was part of that.

GARNETT MCCOY: See, I know what I wanted to show you.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: What?

GARNETT MCCOY: You won't remember this, but this is something that came out when your father was the curator at the Metropolitan. [00:24:05] It's sort of a—well, I guess they were quite serious about it, but it's quite funny to see now.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: [Laughs.] Who signs it? Oh, the committee. They were [inaudible].

GARNETT MCCOY: They won't sign it. It's about 1922.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: He—poor darling. If he hadn't been so awful hungry, he'd have quit that job tonight.

GARNETT MCCOY: I wonder—

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Do you remember he bought *Madame Charpentier and Her Children* by Renoir, against a storm of protest.

GARNETT MCCOY: He did?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: That utterly beautiful picture. And that dreadful picture, called—by a man

named—I think called Renald, of a very toothsome, lush, almost harem-ish-like lady dressed in spangles and baggy pants. Somebody bought it because they thought it was by Renoir. He'd asked for them to buy Renoir. [They laugh.] I don't believe it's on view anymore. But he bought, of course, you know, the first Cézanne that was ever—

GARNETT MCCOY: That's right. That's right.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: He really—

GARNETT MCCOY: How did he ever get that through?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Well, he fought, bled, and died. Living with him was as good as a play, because every day there was a drama, you know, about what happened at the museum. He was against a mass of people, people who felt that modern art was wicked.

GARNETT MCCOY: Or degenerate.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Degenerate and subversive. Probably—

GARNETT MCCOY: Because this relates it to the Bolsheviks. [00:26:00]

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, that's right. That's right. And of course—

GARNETT MCCOY: The first paragraph there, they talk about the Bolshevist influence. [They laugh.] It's a wonderful document.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: [Laughs.] Beautifully printed.

GARNETT MCCOY: Yes. Not too well-written, though.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: [Laughs.] Worldwide Bolshevik propaganda. Oh!

GARNETT MCCOY: Of course, that kind of thing was picked up later, you know. Do you remember Congressman Don Barrow?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Indeed. Indeed, I do.

GARNETT MCCOY: Same kind of thing, 20 years later.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, yes, yes. Yes. I'm just now reading a book, or an essay, by a man named Laurel Martinez, who's very learned in the High Renaissance. It's about the sources of civil strife. He's made a remark that I actually made a note of. They even resorted to hiring assassins to kill their enemies who had left the country. What about the Shah of Persia and Khamenei? This is supposed to have been looking back on the Dark Ages.

GARNETT MCCOY: What about the government in Chile and the murder of the man in Washington, D.C.?

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: Yes, yes. But just think of it. I mean, say, he's writing about 1280, as if he were writing about an unenlightened moment in history. Well, look, it's been great fun.

GARNETT MCCOY: Thank you so much.

BETTY BURROUGHS WOODHOUSE: And I hope that it's been of some use to you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]