



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with William
Woolfenden, 1983 March 17

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with William Woolfenden on March 17, 1983. The interview took place in Pacific Palisades, and was conducted by Ruth Bowman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

RUTH BOWMAN: There are a number of things that have to be done on St. Patrick's Day -- (laughter)

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Aren't you glad we're not in New York, with all the great problems --

RUTH BOWMAN: -- of the parade. Mr. Woolfenden is the Director of Archives of American Art. We're in Pacific Palisades. You started out as an educator, didn't you Bill?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, I started out as a painter, actually, then took some art history courses and became fascinated with art history. But it was the educational side -- my first job was educational work at the Detroit Museum. I've always enjoyed people, I think, more than things and it was a shock to think I might leave a museum because I think museum people pride themselves on their interest in and knowledge of objects; but here was this chance to work with people and objects, which I found very satisfying.

RUTH BOWMAN: As a child did you have museum experience? Were you born in Detroit?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Born in Detroit and get very belligerent about fourth generation. Poor Detroit...it's been so picked upon.

RUTH BOWMAN: Your parents and the rest of your family, were they involved in art in any way?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Deeply interested. I was thinking -- we were at the Holbein show yesterday, and my father, who'd wanted to be a painter at one point, worked for something called "Detroit Photographic," and as you look at art history books printed in the '20s and '30s, a lot of the photographs were done by Detroit Photographic, which evidently had quite an international reputation. We had some very good Holbein prints that were, I think, very popular at that time, and even three-dimensional things, which I think helped. I know that the first present I ever bought my father on my own was a red plaster elephant which I'd fallen madly in love with in the store and then was devastated because the family all thought it was so ghastly and it was such a big joke, I'm surprised that I ever used judgment again after having been so stepped on!

RUTH BOWMAN: How old were you then?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I suppose seven, I would think. You should start buying presents at about that age; maybe a little older. But I also remember in grade school getting to be kind of monitor of all that marvelous paper and pencils -- I think it was almost as much the supplies as the activity that interested me. And then, in high school where they begin to sort you out, I went to the "talented classes" which were given at the Museum. I was in high school from '32 to '36 and the museum in Detroit, as a serious profession, opened its doors in '27. My grandmother lived two blocks away and we went there every Sunday and it was much more fun to go to the Museum and giggle at the nudes than it was to sit at Grandmother's, so I was involved with the Museum really before it opened.

RUTH BOWMAN: Your mother's mother or your father's?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: My father's.

RUTH BOWMAN: Your parents were both born in Detroit too?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes. It's interesting: of my four grandparents, only one was born in Detroit and three of them -- my father's father and all his parents were English; Mother's family were totally Scottish. So it's only Dad's mother that was so American. This was Detroit, and this was the heart of the Depression and there was no chance of going away to college and the family were perfectly willing to let me go ahead with my interest in art as long as I agreed to be a teacher. Mother's idea was that as soon as you had some sort of vocation, you know "my son the lawyer or doctor" or something, "teacher" was all right.

So I gave in and went to Wayne State University as a major in art education and stood it for about six months, then switched over to the art department, convincing them that the more you knew about your subject, the better teacher you'd be -- which I still believe in very strongly. I was there from '36 to '40. And Perry Rathbone,

who had gotten out of Harvard in the fall class not long before, was teaching art history, because all the art history at Wayne then was taught by the Museum staff.

I took a survey course with Perry, still not thinking at all about being an art historian, then Ernst Scheier [phon.sp.], one of the people who'd fled Germany and come to Detroit, brought by Albert Kahn and a group of German Jewish artists and architects -- Kahn being the architect who did the Ford plant, the GM building and all the great factories -- Anyway, Scheier was a very exciting teacher.

The first course I took with him was Northern European Modern Art. It's strange: I knew much more about Munch and the German Expressionists than I did about most French painting at that point. Also, Valentino at the Detroit Museum had built a great collection of German -- well, anyway, I continued, and Perry was made curator of a branch museum, Elger [phon.sp.] House, which is a Renaissance house out on Lake Erie of all places, and he needed someone to do the educational work. He called the University and I was practically the only art history major, so I went out and worked there, and it was at that point, I think, that I began to realize the possibilities of teaching through a museum, and enjoyed it.

Then the war broke out. The Army didn't like my asthma, so I decided that it was just a matter of time -- this was 1940 and the war was heating up, so it was pretty obvious one would go in. I decided that while I was waiting I would take a Master's degree. I had to confront the fact that I have a totally dead ear, and all these language requirements -- so it was obvious I had to do either British or American. The Detroit collection was heavily American, Richardson was there; also Buford Pickens, an architectural historian, was at the University, and by a series of things I worked with Pick on my Master's in American art.

He was very good. First, he said, get a bibliography. So I had a file box, not a very big one, and I really did have a card for practically everything ever published, either an article or a book, on American art, and you could carry it around with you every place you went. That is exciting now to see -- since we published our bibliography, how much the literature has grown. Anyway, he also felt very strongly that you should work with original material and from original sources. Because of his interest in architecture he thought I should do it on Detroit architecture. I think the architectural historians have often done much more with American art than the painting historians.

RUTH BOWMAN: Because of murals and because of commissions or just because they are doing an inventory? What do you think it is?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I think it was almost archeological, it was more factual. They seem to have been a little more solid in what they were doing at that time. Anyway, then the Army didn't come tap me and I went to work in a defense plant. We were called "expeditors," which meant really glorified shipping clerks, and I worked at Vickers, Inc., which made hydraulic equipment, for two and a half years without even -- we had Christmas off.

Finally the war in Europe was over and I decided I wasn't doing much to win the war anyway. I had my Master's in art history but still didn't have my teacher's certificate. I'd written to every museum in the country telling them all the wonderful things I could do for them, and none of them had written back and said, "We want you," so I threw in the sponge, quit Vickers, Inc. in August 1944 and went back to Wayne State University, with a fabulous woman named Jane Welling, who was head of the art ed department.

She decided to run me through in a hurry, so that I got -- one only needed 16 hours in education, so by January I had my teacher's certificate and had accepted a Detroit school; which would have been a disaster -- any school, grade school. There was a job open in the education department of the Museum, so I went there in January 1945 and stayed until May 1960. Just when the Archives was founded in the Museum and I moved from one side of it to the other, I had an ulcer just from the fact that I might be leaving the security of the Museum itself! (laughter) At least -- I don't know if it was the security, but the kind of pattern I'd had there.

RUTH BOWMAN: What kind of classes -- what did you do at the Museum, did you invent your program, did it already exist?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, some of the things were there. I was the first person that had any studio experience, and I felt very strongly that we talk at people much too much, and that both children and adults could understand so much more if they could try. We were very firm in saying, "We're not attempting to train you into artists but we think you'll understand a watercolor better if you can float some watercolor or a wash across paper, or try egg tempera." And we had the usual gallery talks, which was fascinating too because we worked with everybody from the very young child up through the senior citizen, but with the college people too.

And we had the curatorial ranking, so you were taking young art historians coming up from usually just other universities. I always felt that it was very important that they try and get facts across to young people. At first most them thought it was a waste of time, then as they did work with younger people they found that often it was more exciting than working with the adults.

We did several things that were important but one was a series of seminars. We did a seminar in American art which many, many years later Met did and said it was the first seminar in American art ever held and I said to Jimmy Flexner later, who was annoyed because he had been moderator at the one we did in Detroit, then we did one on the conservation of decorative arts, which was again kind of ground-breaking in the sense that there weren't that many people doing decorative arts and practically nobody doing conservation at the time. And we had a very good lecture series, which was very helpful to me later on because in lining up those lectures you met so many people and they came out and spent two or three days with you.

Then, also, we were all sitting on the edge of our chairs, as you know very well, thinking what was going to happen when television came in -- here was such a marvelous new medium which was going to be just what we wanted. And then we were so totally frustrated -- there was a station right across the street from the Museum but you couldn't take anything very valuable over there, the lights were horrendous. But what really distressed me most of all was how bad the camera work was. I don't know that it's that much better now (laughter) -- you know, they'd take a long shot, and a closeup, and that was all they could do, they couldn't move around or anything. I was going to a doctor at the time, for my nose, who was an amateur cinema photographer and he got a group of people interested. The Detroit Museum was open until ten every night, so you could work with adults, most museums closing at five just as the average person gets out of work. We used to wait till the Museum closed at ten, then start making these films from ten until two in the morning, which is the best time in a museum -- you're absolutely alone, it's great. I think those were important films. It was an important direction to begin.

RUTH BOWMAN: What kind of films did you make?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We did one on Dutch painting because the Detroit collection was very strong. We did one on Venetian art in general -- textiles, decorative art, prints, paintings. We did two on American. The idea, again, was watching people come into the great baroque tower in the Detroit Museum and stand there -- they'd come miles, and they'd look around and leave in about five minutes, they didn't know how to look. What we were trying to do with the workshops was train people how to use their eyes -- the film would try to take them by the eyeball rather than by the ear, and direct their looking.

The other thing that I think is important about that time that helped me a great deal -- and you knew the period, too -- is that the museum profession was so small, and it was intimate. I remember, practically the first year I was there the Museum meetings were going to be in Washington or some place, and I said to Ted Richardson, the director, that I would like to go. He kind of thought it wasn't -- but he said, "If you go, the important thing is people, stay either in the hallway or in the bar." And I took him very seriously and it was that kind of exchange with people who were doing the same thing. Very often the meetings were at the end of May or early June and you'd be ready to slit your throat, it had been a difficult year and a long winter. I always came back feeling marvelous about our situation after I visited with Toby Rose or some of the people in other museums.

I started to say earlier that the education department in Detroit was unusual in that Richardson, then director, had been head of the department before and he believed very strongly in it. Also, it had always had curatorial rank, we were junior curators to begin with, then assistant, and associate, and it was always nice to get to be a full curator; it sounds like you were full of something. But we had a definite position in the Museum and in museum planning and were not considered docents.

RUTH BOWMAN: When exhibitions happened, did you have any planning role, I mean the educational components?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, very much. This is, I think, one of the ideas that should be worked out, I mean museums are educational in themselves but the discussion of the exhibition schedule included our department, presentation was often discussed with it, and usually one of the people in the department worked along with the senior curator in charge. Later on we had certain responsibilities ourselves. I was very interested in handicrafts and we had one of the few regional exhibitions of crafts. You started by going around talking to the craftsmen, meeting with crafts groups and encouraging them to send their work into the show, and then working with the jury and finally with the exhibition itself.

RUTH BOWMAN: That was considered educational as well as "exhibitional?"

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes. Again, as I say, one of the staff for a long time worked very closely with the head of the print department. It wasn't just because the print department recognized they needed someone with educational outlook, it was also that that person wanted to get special knowledges in that field, and most of our staff did eventually did go on and into curatorial work or became directors, and that experience was good for them.

RUTH BOWMAN: So in the 15 years you were there, you were the head of the department the whole time? Or did you sort of work your way up?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I wiggled around. I went in as a member of the department and then was given a rather interesting job which was really kind of -- they needed somebody to be curator of modern art and work with -- well, we did a series of shows which was really terribly important and had a bad name, and they were called "little shows of work in progress." The idea was that if you went to a big exhibition like the Carnegie National or the Chicago or those big shows, you saw one work by a painter and you might think, "Gee, that's terrific," and it may have been the only good thing the man did. Or you may see something you didn't like, then you'd hear the name and think, "Well, that person isn't very interesting."

We were trying to do smaller exhibitions and perhaps have three artists represented by ten things. We were trying to arrange to include crafts in those as well as painting and sculpture. Also working with Richardson in the American field was part of that job, and I did it for two or three years, then unfortunately [proper name, unclear] the head of the education department, resigned and I got kind arm-twisted into going back to take the -- I was very ambivalent about it because I really liked what I was doing. But again the educational thing had the appeal, and then I went back and was head of the department. I went to the museum in '45, I must have taken that job in about '46, then went back to the department in '48 and stayed until '60.

RUTH BOWMAN: What was the genesis of your linking up with the Archives, then?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Partially because my field had always been American, since graduate school. Again -- these stories get so complicated -- along the way -- every museum was always trying to get money and they approached the Weber [phon.sp.] family, who owned J. L. Hudson at the time, and young Weber's response was he thought the Museum already had too many pictures and he'd really like to do something that had something to do about people and the people in Detroit. In discussing it further he was talking about chairs and the things people use in everyday life, and involved Alexander Girard, who's later been famous for his work with the folk arts in the international museum in Santa Fe.

Anyway, this big exhibition was called "For Modern Living" and I was the Museum liaison, which was very difficult because S----'s [proper name, unclear] idea was that anything over five years old wasn't any good, wouldn't it be nice if we just got rid of that and just have a modern museum. But along the way during that the publicity director brought in a young man whose father had a retail carpet business in Michigan, and the young man was Lawrence Fleischman. He was very enthusiastic about this exhibition, which was to be good design, carpet design, which is very difficult, because the very best carpet design is the least carpet design.

But we said if we were going to do it, we would have to have really important people on the jury. We talked about Charles Ames, and that was fine, and everybody we wanted he said fine. At any rate, he began coming in as the show was in process. We would go up to the galleries and wander around. We used to have exhibitions for the Friends of Modern Art -- go to New York and bring back pictures hopefully that somebody would buy and eventually give to the Museum.

Larry was interesting: we went all around the show and he came back to one small picture in the corner and said, "Of all the pictures in the show I like this best. Who did it?" And I said, "John Marin," and he said, "Who's he?" and I explained what I thought about Marin. Then he said, "If you wanted a picture like this where would you go?" I tried to explain that each picture in the show was lent by a dealer and this was the DOWNTOWN Gallery, of Edith Halpert. Shortly after that he came in for lunch and announced that he owned three Marins and a Kuniyoshi, and he just took off! It was really very exciting to watch somebody with a very good eye to go ahead and develop a collection. Edith later yelled at me because she'd let him have 30 Marins and he hadn't paid for most of them. And I said -- well after all, that was not my problem.

But the other exciting thing about Larry as this contagious enthusiasm and he got all sorts of young collectors in Detroit interested. But then he began buying 19th century pictures. We disagree on which one it was -- I think it was the Anschutz -- and he couldn't meet the artist. When he was buying Marin, he'd write to him and go down and spend time with Marin at Birchfield and Hartford. He used to go around to artists' studios in Detroit with me and meet the artist, and people were always amazed because he seemed so gruff on the surface but he would almost always zero down on one of the best exhibits ever done.

Anyway, Ted Richardson had had the Anschutz steelworkers out in an exhibition he had done in an exhibition he'd done in Detroit and we wanted it very badly, and he had gone to the steel company saying this was one of the first representations of industry in American painting. None of them were interested -- it cost \$1,200. Then he went to the unions and said this (again) is one of the earliest and most important representations of American labor. And they weren't interested, so finally the picture went back to Victor Spark.

As Larry got more and more enthusiastic about collecting, I said to him one day, "You know, there's a picture you really should have." "What is it?" and I told him, and he said, "Get it for me." By that time Victor had taken in a partner and the picture and gone up to \$1,500. So Larry bought that. Then Richardson had become very much interested and by that time Larry's interest went back, back, back. So he really built one of the most important

private collections of American art that has ever existed. He, partially because of his frustration that he couldn't meet the artist, would go to the library and there weren't any books. And that drove him crazy. He kept saying, "There are too many books on Picasso." I said, "There aren't too many books on Picasso but there aren't enough on Gilbert Stuart or American artists in general."

Richardson was trying to write his book, *Four Hundred Fifty Years: The Story of American Painting*, and he was being frustrated because he was already director of an under-funded museum, a very complicated museum because it had a city board and a private board, and was editor of the *Art Quarterly*, which never had enough money and was always having to pass the hat. He realized there were so many things that we didn't know that if he only had the time he'd get out and do research in New Orleans or out here in California, get around the country. His frustration at the size of this continent was tremendous.

So he kept saying that what we needed was a center where the scholar could go and really study American art. Larry said, "Let's do it." The two of them were a perfect combination. This idea had been tried before by Lloyd Goodrich, who was going to have an American art research council, but there wasn't a Larry Fleischman with the drive there and it was true of Carl Zigrosser, who actually had something called The Archives of American Art in Philadelphia at the museum. It still exists.

But I think in both cases it was not only that there wasn't a strong business fundraising person there but also they were too restrictive. Aline Saarinen always pointed out that one of the great things about the Archives was that it didn't attempt to say "These are the ten best, or the 50 best, artists," and Lloyd always took that approach vis-a-vis the great artists, and I think if we look at his list now it probably isn't as solid as it looked then.

RUTH BOWMAN: You don't take every artist --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No, we don't take every artist. One of the reasons we succeed is that the poor artist, the Sunday-painter amateur, doesn't generate papers. It's that which really saves us. It takes somebody really very thoughtful -- it's a very difficult thing to do. I've been working with Paul Karlstrom out here this week with each of the area directors. We have what we call priority lists and we have a list of painters, of sculptors, of craftsmen, of curators, critics, dealers, collectors, editors. We then identify the papers we want and go after them. The trouble is sometimes with a Robert Motherwell, who finds it difficult to think about archives because somehow to him that means the end of a career; or Lee Krasner with Jackson Pollock's papers. I think they'll eventually come to us but it takes a long time.

Then there's also the thing that Schnakenberg's papers are extremely valuable because he knew everybody, he was evidently an extremely nice person and rather well-to-do. He wrote to people, he entertained them, and they all wrote to him.

RUTH BOWMAN: I met his widow.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: They're really good. The problem for the Archives staff is to figure out what collections have what we want.

RUTH BOWMAN: Was this policy in place in the very beginning?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No. I think at the beginning the idea was much more to centralize; the emphasis was on microfilming. The idea was to have a field chain that would go into an area like Philadelphia, which was used as a pilot project, and Charles Coleman S and Frances Lichten [sp?] were hired and they made lists and researched all the Philadelphia art institutions and microfilmed. The idea was then we move on to Boston and New York. It was kind of a vacuum cleaner point of view. Bartlett Cowdrey did a marvelous job for us in New York at the time.

But very early on they were confronted with this great wealth of material that nobody had saved and was taking care of. They'd either find people with tears in their eyes because they'd had the great responsibility of saving these papers and as their houses got smaller, they didn't know what to do with them, but there were also the people that put tears in my eyes: when you get them they tell you with great pleasure, "Oh, we burned those last week."

RUTH BOWMAN: I guess we've all had that experience. When you were at the Archives in Detroit, you started out as just working with Larry Fleischman and Richardson?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No. The Archives was founded in 1954. I was involved simply because I was in the Museum in the American field and was constantly with these two men that were doing it but I had no official capacity. They knew they had a good idea and they were so convinced that some foundation would come along and say, "Here's ten million dollars," or whatever, and it didn't work that way. But actually with the help of Anne Ford working on Henry Ford -- the Ford family had made a great effort not to influence the Ford Foundation in

any way but some request was put in to help this struggling young institution, but the Foundation didn't give money that way and they gave the Archives \$250,000 to conduct part of a survey they were doing of the role of the arts in American civilization.

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WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Anyway, they were given \$250,000 to conduct this survey of the role of the creative arts in American civilization. The idea was that the first two years would be spent in identifying people who should be involved -- it was a very good idea to get inter-disciplinary actions going, because it's still true that the art historian is much too isolated, as is the anthropologist or the general historian. And also to try and identify some of the major areas in the history of American cultural life that needed investigation.

It wasn't an easy job to fill, and they looked for over a year. Finally Larry Fleischman was with me one day and he said, "You know, this is crazy, we're going all over the country looking for someone to run this and here you are doing seminars anyway." So we talked about it and he said, "Will you take the job?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Let's not take this lightly. If I go to Richardson and you say you will, don't back out." I said, "I won't back out." And as soon as he went out of the office I thought, "My gosh, what have I done!" Again, there was this deep-seated kind of security about the Museum, it was the only place I'd ever worked. Richardson was kind of pleasantly surprised, because here was a solution. I think I was anxious to do it in part because Richardson was approaching the time he was going to be leaving and he didn't know what the future of the Museum was. And I thought, too, that this was a five-year appointment and I thought gee, if after five years of working on this level with these conferences, with all these exciting people and moving around the country, if I can't get something better than I have now, then I shouldn't do it anyway.

So that's how I happened to work for them. I was doing the survey and we had some very exciting conferences. You were really being paid to go around to talk to the most interesting people in the United States. But in the meantime -- I was the first fulltime Archives employee, the first time they had somebody; Richardson's job was more and more complicated, he was delighted to have somebody at least to run the Archives. But I finally said, "Look, I can run the Archives or I can run the Ford grant but I can't do both." So they said okay, run the Archives.

By that time we had identified the area we wanted and felt needed to be studied as what happened in the '30s when the government funded the arts -- this great outpouring of energy that had happened in the WPA and FSA and all those things. The war had almost totally stamped out the memory of the good that it had done. In 1962 we found that there were these people who'd been sitting since 1933 just dying to tell. The British Arts Council was really founded on the experiences America had had with these government projects but we'd made no use at all of what we'd learned through them at all. So we were concentrating on that, and we had teams going around interviewing, we were collecting on that basis.

I was then looking for someone to handle that project and talked to Bernard Carpell at the Museum of Modern Art. Bernard was at an opening called "Every Young Man" and said, "You ought to do William Agee, he'd be ideal for you." So I hired Bill; it was his first job. Just as we ran out of money, which was not too much later, Lloyd Goodrich called and said, "I want to steal one of your staff." I very jocosely said, "Which one?" and he said it was Bill. That was fine. Incidentally, he's just come back to work for us now on a special fellowship. Just at the time I retire, it's kind of interesting that he should come back into the picture.
(pause) Did we get where we were going?

RUTH BOWMAN: Absolutely. We got at least to 1962.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, then I was assistant director. Ted kept saying, "This isn't fair, you're doing the work, you should have the title." I didn't care what I was called. Also, I thought it was extremely important that he keep his connection with this young institution because he was kind of the dean of American art historians at that point. And then, to kind of quiet that down I was made executive director, which has always confused a great many people who said to me at times, "What did you do to get demoted because at one point you were executive director?" But that was really so that Ted could stay as director. Well, then he went to Winterthur and really said he didn't have the energy or time. So I was -- I forget in what year I was made director --

RUTH BOWMAN: It will turn up in the papers. So then did the Archives change in any way when you had it as your responsibility from the top?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: It had been changing. We were becoming much more concerned with the original things. It was interesting that the idea took off as fast as it did. It was obviously a need. I think it was partially the time, that it was just after the war, there was a great deal of interest in American art, there was the great excitement with the New York School and Abstract Expressionism, universities were beginning to get into the American studies field if not the American history field. The acceptance we found was amazing. Everybody seemed to welcome the idea, and it was one of the great things that the Ford Foundation grant did for us

because it allowed me to go around the country and to meet with all these people and get them involved -- not only their interest but also then they talked about us and papers began to come in to us more.

We had had Bartlett Cowdrey working for the Archives in the very beginning. Bart was a very well established thorough researcher, had done some very important work at the National Academy of Design, worked with Herman Williams on the "American Panorama" show. Bartlett was primarily at that point concerned with our great project, which was to put on film a copy of the catalogue of every art auction held in America from 1785 to the present. She was really a good research person. Our archivist in Detroit at the time was really a librarian and Bartlett used to get so excited about all these papers that she found, and then the archivist in Detroit was saying, "Oh, not another box full of dirty old papers!" and you had these two rather conflicting ideas.

Anyway, we were getting a great deal of material but our use was not that much. It suddenly occurred to me that our costs were in finding the material, putting it in order, and the original film and you could duplicate it endlessly without much more expenditure. So I got Howard Lipman one day when he was in Detroit and explained to him that whole bank of microfilm, what the cabinets contained, could be in New York; and Howard always felt that the archives center of the art world was New York and we should be there.

So he and a group of friends paid to have the microfilm put in the New York office, which just doubled and tripled and quadrupled our use right away, because here it was in the center where researchers could use it. And that was the beginning of this pattern which I'm out here now doing what is probably the final one of those, in Los Angeles. Then we began hiring area directors as well as area collectors.

RUTH BOWMAN: And this was all before you became affiliated with the Smithsonian?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: The New York operation was, yes, that kind of a term, but it was our affiliation with the Smithsonian that made the whole network possible. One of the thing that was difficult about being director of the Archives in the '60s was that you really hesitated to -- I knew at first that my salary was guaranteed for five years because I was on a Ford project, but to bring somebody if they had two children or even no children from Chicago to Detroit and then think gee, can we pay them next month. And our fundraising, which we haven't gotten into, that was so precarious and it depended on the trips we took or we had an auction and it was all lovely if it worked and if it didn't it was disaster.

I talked to the trustees -- I thought we had two choices. One, to really concentrate and I would have to give up a lot of what I was doing but really put my full time on getting foundation and corporate support, which was a possibility. The other was to get involved with another institution. We haven't talked, either, about our relationship with the Detroit Institute of Arts, which was extremely important. But I felt we really belonged as the research arm of a bigger institution and I talked to Russell Lynes, who was then our president -- that's another story, there are too many things to talk about!

Anyway, he was a great friend of Arthur Houghton's at the Metropolitan; he went down and talked to Houghton and Tom Hoving, and Tom was terribly excited, thought it was great, but Houghton was much wiser in a way and said, "We've just gotten into our centennial year, wait and come back in three years." My response was we'd probably be dead in three years. Larry kept saying oh, go to the Whitney, they've got lots of money. Which of course at that time was a joke because they were more hard-up than we were.

Dillon Ripley had called to talk to me about another job down there that he wanted filled. I wasn't terribly interested in the job so I said, "Why don't we talk about the Archives?" And we began talking about the Archives and he said, "What's your budget?" In those days it was \$200,000. I thought he was going to reach down and pull \$20,000 out of a drawer but we started off then on a three-year marriage contract. After we signed it we became a full bureau of the Smithsonian. We turned the Detroit headquarters into a Midwest center. We already had the New York center. Washington became another, and then within a year we opened Boston, and the next year came up here and in talking to Californians finally decided to go to San Francisco rather than Los Angeles. But we always kept this other center as a goal down here.

RUTH BOWMAN: You mentioned before your relationship with the Detroit Art Institute. You rented space there?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No. Fortunately we were given space there and still are. It's been a most unusual kind of relationship. It was totally because of Richardson and his enthusiasm. In Detroit, as in any city, if anything was going to work it had to have the right sponsorship, and in Detroit at that time it meant Mrs. Edsel Ford, and if Tony Ford felt something was important, her friends rallied around and also the Museum board was more impressed than if it had just been a staff idea.

Within the Detroit Museum there is a fundraising organization called the Founders Society and an indenture of trust was drawn up creating the Archives of American Art as a responsibility of the Founders Society, which because it was private could handle our money: we had to raise it but they could bank it for us, for the Museum proper is a city department and is treated just as the lighting or garbage or any other department is. They've

always given space. The Midwest center never could give us any funds for salaries or anything else.

It was a rather interesting relationship because it's the one I want to continue always in the Archives because it was one of the few really important collections of American painting, and one of the things the city fathers could understand was books, so it had an excellent reference library. We really had a center where we added the dimension of the papers, the oral history, that kind of documentation, but the works of art which were the important thing were there, and the printed material.

RUTH BOWMAN: Are you still microfilming or are you using another method?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We're still microfilming. I think one of the reasons I should retire is that I think there are all sorts of other methods. I would hope that some day we could be almost sitting here and this would be a terminal and we could get any information we wanted, and I think we will. We've outgrown microfilm. Ted used to talk about the fact that the humanities have never made use of modern discoveries, and it was true that if we hadn't microfilmed, which was the whole basis and the way we were able to have the area centers and also that we could service people through inter-library loan and we send our film all over the world; but there certainly are new forms. I was talking to one foundation about it the other day and they figure it would take 45 years to totally computerize our holdings -- I mean in the sense of putting it in the sense of information retrieval systems.

RUTH BOWMAN: Forty-five years with the present size staff you mean?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No. I think they were thinking of bringing in a new staff; our staff wouldn't be involved, I think.

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, some staffs are learning. You started out with Lawrence Fleischman as your first president?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes.

RUTH BOWMAN: And then what happened?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Then Larry got more and more involved in collecting, also more involved in the art market and decided to join Rudy Wunderlich as partner in Kennedy Gallery. It was a sticky moment. When he first talked to me about it he said he'd discussed it with Richardson and Richardson had pointed out -- at that time Larry was also president of the Arts Commission of the City of Detroit, which meant the Art Institute board, and the Archives board. And Ted had pointed out to him that as a dealer he'd have to give those things up. And Larry did understand it and we had somebody who probably would have been the next president -- I hope I'm not being too candid? [overlapping voices -- something reassuring by Bowman] I picked Harold Love, a local lawyer who I thought had no real knowledge or interest in art who was Larry's choice as the next president, so I just stood by him. It's probably easier to get a new director than it is a new president. "You go ahead and I'll find a new job."

Well, that outraged him. So finally he said, "Well, if you don't like my choice, you find somebody." I thought, now I really am stuck. As a Detroit, I'm very proud of Detroit and anxious for it. I still felt that we weren't doing our job as effectively as we could some place else. And some place else was New York. So I had gotten Russell Lynes involved in the Archives through the Ford Foundation conferences, he was one of the first people I'd talked to. He participated in one concerned with the reevaluation of the art of the late 19th century.

So I called Russell and said, "I have a terrible problem, it's probably the most important crisis in my career, and I need your help." And he said, "Sure, what can I do?" And I said, "Would you consider becoming president of the Archives of American Art?" thinking there was not a hope in the world, and he said, "Sure, I'd be glad to."

So then Russell took over, and it was extremely helpful because he had a reputation and had tremendous contacts in the art world which he immediately involved in the Archives. He had a breadth of interest too. Ted is primarily a painting man; Larry was a painting man; both were interested in the decorative arts. But Russell's interest in culture history in all forms, the sort of things he's done in his own writing, were a great addition, of course.

RUTH BOWMAN: And needlepoint!

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: (laughing) And needlepoint. I guess it was that Russell needlepointed a tobacco pouch for Louis Boucher. Louis was the first person I ever interviewed and he had an enormous great big old Tanberg [phon.sp.] and he lived on a fifth floor walkup and I carried that damn thing up all those steps. Also I thought that oral history was supposed to be terribly spontaneous, so I had one of the secretaries type up Louis's interview and took it down to him with all the "umm's" and "and's" he said he'd never open his mouth in public again, he was an idiot. Later on, Harlan Phillips said, "You idiot, you should have presented him in his own best

way." But we're getting sidetracked --

RUTH BOWMAN: No! It has a lot to do with how you transcribe.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Let's just do it.

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, the hesitations can't be typed in. I've noticed in reading the transcriptions of the interviews that I've done that they don't put the long pauses in.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: (laughing) No, this is the old problem. Is oral history really oral, and it's true that in some ways it should be.

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, if you and I were doing this interview for a fixed time it would be one thing, but what this is is ruminations and free associations based on some kind of structure. You have a lot of philosophical commitments, really, to the way in which the Archives should grow. You've had, I'm sure, many board meetings where this issue has come up -- what to collect, how much to collect, where to put it.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, it's been one of the things I've been able to accomplish. One is to keep our nose pretty much where I felt it belongs, and that is collecting and getting material used. There's always been someone who wanted to get us involved in exhibitions, or get us involved in film production or some other thing. Also, it's been important, I think, to insist, with the board, that our job is to have the material and it's not our job to publish it or do anything with it, that's somebody else. This may change but it's something I felt very deeply about.

The other thing is that we have thrown our net very widely and I think this has been important -- that it's the accumulation that we have, and the depth of our collecting, that makes the total so important. Perhaps we have lost individual collections but we're richer by being fairly broad and --

RUTH BOWMAN: What were some of the earliest things that you collected?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: One of the very first things that we got, that was happening when I got into the Archives, was the acquisition of the Macbeth Gallery papers, that having the first and longest in those years, 75 years dealing only in American art; the gallery in which the exhibition of the Eight was held. Like so many people who give you their things, the nephew who was running the gallery when it closed, Robert McIntyre, gave us marvelous things in most things but he kept the best ones back because he couldn't part with them and he had them in the attic of a garage up in Vermont.

I used to go up and he'd show you these marvelous things, and it was terrible. He usually gave you a few but there was still this great hoard up there of very important material. Bob died and I began calling around trying to find heirs or find some way of our acquiring the things. Finally one day a real estate woman called me and said that house had been sold and would have to be cleared within the week. So we sent Garnett McCoy up and we got all the stuff, but how to get it back to Detroit? We found there was a man down the road who had an apple farm, we got his apple crates. But that was an important collection.

One thing that happened early on: I heard about "Pop" Hart's papers. They were in the possession of a kind of stepiece of his who called herself Jean Hart, she was really not a Hart at all. She lived in Kew Gardens and I used to get on the subway and go out there and look at the Hart material. Then I began to realize that she was just delighted to have somebody to spend the evening with and I was never going to get the Hart material. So I finally gave up. This is one of the things the collector always has to know -- when is there any point in being persistent. It's rather fascinating, because suddenly our new operation in Seattle found out that there was a man there who was executor of the Jean Hart estate. She had since died and now the contact has moved way up to Seattle.

RUTH BOWMAN: So you will get them you think?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, they're delighted to have them there. And then Edith Halpert -- I used to spend hours with her both while I was at the Museum doing American shows, you couldn't do anything in the field without Edith -- and trying to get her papers. Those finally came in, a very major collection.

RUTH BOWMAN: Did you get Bertha Schaefer and Rose Fried?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, both of them, and some of the early experimental gallery, like the Tanager Gallery -

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh you did!

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: -- and the Green Gallery and -- who did the shell book? Hugh Stix He had done some

very interesting things. The Macbeth and Downtown were marvelous, and Wren, they're the major things; and Doll and Richards and Childs in Boston. We have most of the major American galleries, and there are these little not fly-by-night but things that were there for a little while and then disappeared but did very important things in their time.

RUTH BOWMAN: Did Sam Kootz give you anything?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Sam always insisted that when Jane died he threw into the incinerator --

RUTH BOWMAN: He told me he took crates and crates out to the dump in Easthampton and I guess he did.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I guess he did but he did then give us something like 20 scrapbooks, which are extremely important. Just before he died he wanted to do a history of the gallery himself, and he wanted to find a researcher who would go through the scrapbooks and say, "Look, this is important" and sort of do the groundwork for him, but unfortunately he was too sick at the time. We sent the scrapbooks over, he started, then wasn't able to finish. Mrs. Kootz intends to go on with that; I hope she will.

There are so many things that get writing about and somebody should -- we have marvelous material relating to American museums. We have most of the major directors. We've been doing a lot of exciting work -- it's constant but it's come up recently -- with the group of men who were sent over either during or just after World War II to try and restore and locate the monuments. We published an article based on Tommy Howe's reminiscences and his experiences. It bothered Mrs. James Rorimer. Kay felt that Tommy wasn't being fair to the work that Jim did in his book, so I said, "Okay, let's get Jim's side of it."

We already had Andrew Ritchie, he was one of the major people, and George Stout, and Parker Lester. There were so many people that were involved in that. Again, it's the accumulation of bringing all of it together, and the photographs are just unbelievable. I think we forget how total that destruction, and you look at Dresden, or Berlin, and you wonder how in the world they ever were rebuilt, and how so much was saved. The stories these men tell about the condition in which they found major works of art --

RUTH BOWMAN: And the reason this is Archives of American Art material is that American art people worked on it?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: It's part of their careers. That brings up the subject which we probably should do something about at some point, our definition, which perhaps I've insisted on, though I think it was Richardson's intent, that we be art in America as well as American art --

RUTH BOWMAN: Oh really?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: -- so we have Panofsky's papers, and Stackhouse and we have the Seligman Gallery papers, and many things that are totally outside the subject of American art but they're activities that were in America, therefore they're important to us. We have to do some education to convince people in other disciplines or other fields to come to us.

RUTH BOWMAN: When did the idea of sending all the original material to Washington develop, or how did it develop?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: (laughing) Necessity, I'm afraid. When we became part of the Smithsonian we dissolved our whole -- we have only the identity as a bureau of the Smithsonian. I just felt that the art world and most of our trustees, the artists were in New York, and I wanted to be there; I'm not terribly fond of Washington, for one thing. But it seemed to me that if we were headquartered there in the sense of physically there and our processing is there, it's the best place for our collections. In general we don't give the researcher the original material anyway -- that's one of the great advantages of microfilming, that you are protecting the original, saving it from wear and tear --

RUTH BOWMAN: In the funding of many, many offices, are there local support groups for the Archives?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: In each office. I think what we had hoped, when we became a bureau of the Smithsonian, is that, say, in Boston we would supply half the money and we would raise half the money in Boston. That has always worked in Detroit and New York but it's never worked in Boston and San Francisco, and it's one of our continuing problems to get them to understand the real resource that they're being given free or supported by activities in Detroit.

I was talking to the trustees at this last meeting where we had a group of new people, trying to explain that our first years of existence, until we became part of the Smithsonian, were supported through very minimum membership contributions and lots of fun. The Detroit committee started auctions; they'd go around and I think

we cleaned out every attic in Grosse Pointe by the time we gave up. We used to stay up all night on the floor of some dirty old warehouse marking and evaluating glass and furniture, anything we could get our hands on to sell. The so-called "airlifts," our trips abroad, in the days when our budget was \$200,000, we figured we'd make about \$75,000 a year on an auction and \$50,000 on a trip. So a good deal of our budget was in those two activities.

In Detroit, too, Harold Love, who was then president of the Detroit committee, was marvelous at fundraising ideas. Detroit was founded by the French in 1701 and had a Mardi Gras before New Orleans was ever heard of, so we decided to have Lundi Gras, which is still going on; the first one was in 1960. And the great Flemish show was in Detroit the same year -- supposed to have been in New York and Chicago and it wasn't. So Eloise Spaeth, who was chairman of the New York committee, got a group together, they chartered a plane in New York and flew people out to Detroit.

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BEGINNING SIDE A of TAPE 2

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I was talking about Eloise's chartering a plane to bring a group of people to Detroit to see the great exhibition of Flemish painting which, again, Richardson had been responsible for. Both the New York and Washington [sic: not Chicago, see above] dropped out at the last minute, and it was a marvelous chance to lure them out to see the Flemish show but also to talk to them about the Archives. We were so broke in those days we didn't know where our next dime was coming from but fortunately I had the Ford Foundation money. But I really was kind of annoyed to think here we'll go broke, we'll have to pay for that plane, but it was a great success and they had a wonderful day in Detroit -- saw the show and we went to Mrs. Ford's for cocktails, then put them back on the plane. On the way back, a group of them decided to charter a plane and go to Europe. That was in 1961, the beginning of our airlifts, which are still going on. That first year we went to Amsterdam, Rome, Paris and London. We took 100 people and everybody who came gave us \$500 over the cost of the trip, so that was \$50,000 for the budget.

It's funny: here you've got a very serious scholarly institution supporting itself by dinner parties and auctions and trips to Europe. Really those were, and still are, our major private fundraising things before the Smithsonian.

RUTH BOWMAN: How much of your support comes from Smithsonian now?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: About half. The original agreement was more or less that they would provide half and we would provide half, which is a nice idea. Our board, when we became part of the Smithsonian, wanted to keep their own identity, and the way to do that is to keep up your end of the financial burden. Our budget is about \$1,250,000. Some of that money is earmarked for special projects, like our Northwest oral history project, or the California oral history project.

RUTH BOWMAN: You run everything for only \$1,250,000? All those offices? Even the office in Washington? And a staff of how many?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Thirty-eight I think it is. But you see, as I say, I grew up in the Depression, I have (laughing) very definitely a Depression mind. We were talking about this earlier today, that when we started in San Francisco, Ian White offered us space in the Tower at the De Young -- I don't think most people even know it's there; and you had to step over mops and pails because it's where the cleaning women kept their equipment, and there really were birds and things up in the Tower with us. In each city we've kind of operated as orphans. It is funny that we're always sort of guests in other people's houses. Even in Washington the building we're in used to be known as the NCFA/NPG Building, but at least now it's known as the American Art and Portrait Gallery building, so we can be the American art part too. But it definitely belongs to those people and we live in very small space on the third balcony in the Library.

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes, you're really in the attic, aren't you!

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We really are.

RUTH BOWMAN: It's sort of an honor to be a part of "the nation's attic," but it's still a very small budget. You must be very, very careful.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We're very careful. Some of our expenses are almost totally personnel. We're a people organization, both that we're involved with people and we're people doing it. We have absolutely no purchase funds, never have had. I begin to wonder if we'll really need them soon, as there's more competition. I keep urging us all to take a very aggressive stance, because I think if we ever relax a little bit, somebody else could come along and get into the act. We've been lucky that we haven't had any real competition.

RUTH BOWMAN: There are oral history programs in many universities --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Oh yes.

RUTH BOWMAN: -- and some of those programs include works about artists but I take it there is a congenial interaction there.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: There seems to be very much so, even beginning with Allan Nevins in the Columbia project. They kind of welcomed this because they felt if we would take the art end, they wouldn't have to do that much. With very few exceptions, they haven't worked in the art field. The program here in Los Angeles was important in the art field and we've never asked for those transcripts but we could probably --

RUTH BOWMAN: This is UCI?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes. As you know, better than I do, the problems of restrictions when it comes to oral history have been very gray until just recently, and we now in general try to get everybody to remove all restrictions before we interview them. When we first started, that was true every place. No matter what, the researcher had to get permission from the person being interviewed.

RUTH BOWMAN: Sometimes there's a time restriction because someone is writing a book or something like that.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, we have that happen with lots of papers. I was annoyed the other day reading a New York Times story about the Fairfield Porter show in Boston and they were quoting from our interview. It happened to be done by Paul Cummings, so they kept saying "in Cummings' interview." We need credits to be visible, it's one of our most important continuing problems -- how do you let people know the Archives even exists? And the more reference you get -- as I said, "the interview done with Fairfield Porter by Paul Cummings" would have been a nice plug.

RUTH BOWMAN: When you developed your board of trustees, how did you go about doing that?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, the first group that were the founders -- as I said earlier, Ted Richardson and Larry Fleischman had the idea. They were very aware, particularly Ted, that if it was to "go" in Detroit, Mrs. Ford was the person to interest. So she was one of the founders. The three of them were alone for about a year, and in getting their organization together again realized it was extremely important from the beginning to be national rather than local, instead of just doing a group of Detroit people, and I think went after some of the obvious people.

RUTH BOWMAN: Collectors?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No, not really. Senator Fulbright was about the only person in government at the time; it was before people were interested in the arts. And Vincent Price, because he had been buying and talking about art and he was a national figure. Richardson was always interested in cartoons and felt too that the thing shouldn't be so deadly serious, so Al Capp was one of the original trustees. And Henry Francis du Pont, partially because of his position and partly because of his interest in decorative arts, American art. Joe Hirshhorn. Again, these were people who were interested and the hope was both du Pont and Hirshhorn would be very generous donors. Harry du Pont was always marvelous -- he used to come to our meetings and be delighted to hear about all the fundraising that was going on in Detroit. He said, "You know, I love to come to your meetings and hearing about all the money those people are raising." But it never seemed to occur to him [laughing] that he could give us some.

Howard Lipman was very important in the group. He and Jean owned "Art in America" at that time and were very serious collectors, again both in the decorative arts and painting. Howard was more interested in contemporary paintings. Larry Fleischman, of course. The three founders.

RUTH BOWMAN: When did Irving Burton get involved?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Irving was in one of the Detroit groups that had been involved in the beginning in fundraising projects. He came on the national board in 1962, I think, kind of in recognition of the work that he and his wife had done with the Detroit committee in the auctions, which then was our biggest fundraising project.

RUTH BOWMAN: You had to spend a great deal of your time fundraising, even so, in terms of what you do.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Involved in fundraising, yes. It was only two years ago that we hired Nancy McDermott, the first time in our 23-year history that we've had a professional fundraiser. She's a development officer, but everything else has either been done by members of the board or the staff. I think it is kind of fascinating that we were able to fund that much activity without a professional. Certainly the airlift, while we made \$50,000, took a great deal of time. When we were in Russia in '64, we had 128 people and three staff members. Then you

begin to argue: if you really cost-accounted it, are you making that much money?

But one of the important things about all these events, whether auctions or airlifts, they get people involved. And once people are interested in the Archives, they usually stay. I always argued if you make a list of donors who give over \$100, most of them are people who've been on a trip or have taken part in one activity or another. This is the continuing problem: how do you get the general public to support something that is so specialized and so aimed at scholars? Every once in a while one of our board members asks, "Why don't the scholars support the Archives?" [laughing] Which is true. We try to explain scholarly salaries to them.

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you ever have parties where you invite the living artists and the donors to come together? The social aspect of the Archives is what?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: It depends on where you are. Different cities have done different things. Each one has a support committee or a group of people who are there to raise funds. We have done a meet-your-artist kind of evening. We had a very successful one in New York where we invited a group of artists who'd given their papers to the Archives and invited our members to come meet them. Then we also did another one with authors who had used the Archives and had been involved. We have had two successful artists' dinners where the artists in New England first of all submitted recipes or donated recipes; the first idea being they would come and cook, which they didn't do. That was a success there, so the Detroit committee tried it.

We've also, in San Francisco, Boston, Detroit and New York had tours of the artists' studios for the members. I always worry about involving the artists too much in fundraising; it's hard for people to understand, if they want Motherwell or anybody to come out to Detroit or San Francisco to lecture, it really means shooting a week, the artists can't just put their brushes down and rush off and give a lecture or come to a reception, then go back and pick up the brush and start to paint again. It's a real donation of time, and should we really ask them to do --

RUTH BOWMAN: Have you had any really big surprises in the papers that arrived or in people dropping something by unexpected?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Like your Anschutz experience? Would that be unexpected when you found those, the negatives, and told us about them? There was some publicity about a trip we had to Texas and we were contacted about it by a woman professor at the University of Texas who said she had this group of Thomas Eakins letters and that his niece -- who was actually in medicine, I think -- had been on the faculty of the University and had told this art historian one day that she had these letters from her uncle Thomas Eakins and she didn't know what to do with them. Fortunately the art historian said right away, "Let's give them to the Archives of American Art." So here we were in Texas and getting this nice group of letters.

RUTH BOWMAN: When you know of a group of papers that are available and hard to get at -- something like I believe there was somebody in upstate New York who was sitting on some papers that belonged to Samuel F. B. Morse, or some correspondence, something like that -- how do you introduce the idea to people that maybe the Archives is the place they should be in instead of being kept in the family?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: (laughing) There are many ways. Perhaps one of the things we should talk about is the kind of area-center idea of the Archives. I'm always fascinated when we're together as a staff because I think they, each, are extremely successful but they're all totally different. Bob Brown in Boston is quite different from Paul Karlstrom here. I don't think Bob would be as successful in California or Paul in Boston, but each of them has very specialized knowledge of his area, adds to it all the time. Their job is to keep an ear to the ground and know where things are, to be constantly about.

I think a lot of people feel that we're hiring scholars, which we really aren't; no scholar is going to do somebody else's work and we have these men and women -- we have an area collector in Texas, Sandra Curtis Levy, who does a very good job. And they all have to be kind of super-salesmen and they have to be able very often to convince a very reluctant person to part with family treasures.

In general, you know, our policy is that we have no pride of possession but if we get the information on microfilm, that's what the scholar really needs. My concern about that is if we have the information on microfilm and some other institution gets the original and can clamp controls on it -- universities in general tend to be a bit dog-in-the-mangery, and if a paper enters a university it could be put under restrictions that would be harmful to the scholar.

RUTH BOWMAN: I know that Virgil Thomson, for instance, has given his papers to NYU, and there's a lot of material on the visual arts in there. On people like Gertrude Stein, for instance --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I'm surprised at that, because you know one of the things that has -- not worked against it but just a fact of life -- is that Thornton Wilder was in Europe when I think the war hadn't started yet but he was with Gertrude Stein, an old friend, and Thomson, and convinced Stein to let him have her papers sent to

Yale for the duration, and partially because of the number of people who were involved with Stein. They were in the Beinecke Library, which is concerned with American literary figures, but because Stein knew so many artists, other papers attract papers; and when the critic Henry McBride was on his deathbed, although we didn't know it, we had been in correspondence with him, and Richardson got on the train in Detroit to go to New York to meet with McBride practically at the moment he was put in an ambulance and taken to the hospital, where he died.

His estate's executor, Maxim Miloslav [phon.sp.] decided the papers should go to Yale. And that made certain sense, because again McBride was a writer. But I got to Miloslav and he agreed that we could microfilm the papers before they went to Yale. But if you use the McBride papers on our microfilm, you have to get permission from Yale to quote from them; they physically belong to Yale.

RUTH BOWMAN: Do you use the Smithsonian lawyers for all these complex contracts and so forth?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We do. We have a couple of cases right now. It's been marvelous to feel that if anything comes up you can grab the phone. One of the things that we need advice on all the time: it's very hard for any of us to understand, certainly the layman, all the government regulations concerning gifts and that papers self-generated -- artists cannot take tax deductions for their papers any more than they can for paintings that they give. This has affected us very much in the area of photography, because we used to -- oh, Hans Namuth and Arnold Newman used to give us photographs regularly and get a nice tax deduction. Now they can't, so they don't give them to us. I think that will change; I hope within the next few years.

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, certainly there has to be something to induce collectors who have the related papers to paintings they collect, because I know I've met a number of collectors who like to have documentation -- letters in the hand of the artist, correspondence. I know one collector here in Los Angeles who bought some papers that Gordon Hendricks built [?] up and was persuaded not by Gordon but by somebody else to sell those papers. Which is rather sad because they would have been --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: It is sad, and it's alarming that practically everything can be sold these days. When we started nobody would have given two cents, fortunately for us. And it's always been interesting to look at autograph dealers' catalogues because really Copley or Sargent or Whistler or Rauschenberg's papers or signatures still have no great market value, while almost any minor writer's papers will carry a very high price.

RUTH BOWMAN: When we talk about your view of the difference between using the original material which is now in Washington or the microfilm of that material or the microfilm of other things which are elsewhere which you also have, how do you feel about the subtle difference between a scholar who works from microfilm and the scholar who works from the original documents? Do you think there is a difference?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: In the scholar? (Bowman confirms) I don't think there's a difference in the scholar because I think sometimes the scholar is kind of forced by circumstances to use the microfilm. I think practically anybody would much rather work with the original, because there is something about the piece of paper -- it's like looking at black and white: we used to think that a black and white slide of a drawing was perfectly sufficient but when color, Kodachrome 2x2, came in, we realized we could do it rather inexpensively. All the variation in the ink and the paper and all those things made a great deal of difference. And certainly looking at an old letter, seeing the brown ink and the quality, the roughness of the paper, you never can substitute --

RUTH BOWMAN: You had a David Smith exhibition recently from the Archives at the David Smith show at the Hirshhorn?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: One at the Hirshhorn and one at the National Gallery. The big archival section was at the Hirshhorn.

RUTH BOWMAN: Then years ago, when the Rockefeller collection was first shown in San Francisco there was an exhibition of related materials.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We did another one, yes. We've done them from time to time.

RUTH BOWMAN: Those are costly things to do, aren't they?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We've never paid for them. (laughter) We've always been kind of "invited" to do them and we've had to say we'd be glad to do it if you pay for it. The great problem, I think, with exhibitions like that or exhibitions which supplement an exhibition of paintings, it's much more difficult to install and make interesting and protect a document, a manuscript, than it is a painting. Almost anybody with any sense of design at all can arrange 50 paintings in a gallery, but trying to show a document so it can be read in the manuscript, so it's protected from the light, so it's interesting -- we always kid about an exhibition at the New York Public Library called "Other People's Mail," and there is something fascinating about reading letters; maybe it's because we don't get enough of our own any more. People love to pore over documents. We did a big exhibition,

too, at the Whitney, at the time of either the centennial -- we have lots of Whitney-related material as well as the big collection of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's own papers.

RUTH BOWMAN: That was the Fiftieth Anniversary. (Woolf confirms "it must have been") That was after Tom Armstrong was there, there was a whole room of it.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: We have lots of photographs of it.

RUTH BOWMAN: That was lovely.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Right. Having had experience both as a curator and being in the Archives, I must say I agree with a lot of the curators who feel that an exhibition is an exhibition of objects of works of art and you shouldn't be distracted by supplementary material. I tend to agree, too, that a section like the David Smith show, which was introductory, totally apart, is fine. Then you go in and if you want to just look at the sculpture, you look at the sculpture but you're not doing both. It's like labels that are too long.

RUTH BOWMAN: But what about the people who really have difficulty getting to the painting -- doesn't this adjunct material in the room could be helpful or supportive?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: It can be, yes. And it's just like I should say labels can be bad, labels can be good too, because they can call attention to something than an average viewer might not --

RUTH BOWMAN: You want the esthetic impact.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I think so. I think an object's an object. I mean, I think you can do a show that is totally based on that kind of narrative or the connection between written things and the visual. We did a very interesting show at the time we circulated some of the Macbeth Gallery papers. It was a wonderful setup. You could borrow pictures that you knew Macbeth had sold and often you had a letter from Henri or one of their artists saying "I've just painted the most marvelous picture of such-and-such," and then you get Macbeth writing back enthusiastically that he'd like to see it. And then very often you find Macbeth writing to a collector saying, "Henri's just brought in picture I think you should see," and then you finally get the bill of sale and you know where the picture was.

RUTH BOWMAN: Speaking of that, when I went to the Pennsylvania Academy, I noticed that the Archives had microfilms of all the artists' records but they didn't have any of the business records.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Really? We'll have to go back.

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, that's an amazing thing, because in the old days the carbon paper used was not very stable and you really have to just die looking at it for about an hour before you can read what it says.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I was using some material the other day in the Archives and really there was no way it could be microfilmed. We have, at times when things are that bad, had a typescript next to it but this was a whole group of records on a funny kind of tissue paper that just didn't film.

RUTH BOWMAN: The National Archives in Washington has a very small overlap with you. Or they have things that you don't have -- from the WPA, for example.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes. Well, most of the WPA things are in the Library of Congress. We've used them there. The National Archives would have things, and so does the Library of Congress, that relate to art in government buildings that overlap with us. But in general I think that it would be a very limited -- we've been a little distressed when -- one of the things that was very much on everybody's mind were the Charles Eames papers. We have a great many of the things that relate to Cranbrook Academy because it was just beyond us in Detroit and I personally knew so many of the people had been there and gotten their papers and Eames would have fitted into that group. In fact, there's a marvelous interview in the Archives where Harry Bertolia discusses the first Eames chair, which was really a class project, and later in Harry's own chair you can see that many of the ideas and that there was a certain resentment among the group that worked on it that it ended up with Charlie's name on it.

RUTH BOWMAN: The first bentwood chair you mean?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes. The Library of Congress paid an outrageous price -- I don't mean outrageous: an enormous price. We have no purchase funds at all.

RUTH BOWMAN: They actually got IBM to do it, \$500,000 I think. It is hard to think, now, of any papers not going to the Archives but there are these problem areas, of people not really understanding what the goals and the purposes of the Archives are. In other words, the collecting aspect is still an area --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes. Well, I think one of the most dangerous things that happens -- fortunately, it doesn't often come to fruition -- the idea that there be a center for kind of a shrine. Norma Marin, John Marin's daughter-in-law, I think envisions a room in which Marin's palette and smock and letters will be and his paintings will all be there. And this is true with Annalee Newman right now is I think hoping to create some sort of a special center for Barnett Newman's papers. They seem to forget that this is, again, one of the reasons we exist. Because it's almost impossible out here for a youngster to fly into New York to look at Barney Newman's papers

END OF THIS SIDE, A of TAPE 2
BEGINNING SIDE B, TAPE 2

RUTH BOWMAN: As interviewers on commercial television ask interviewees, if you had it all to do over again, what?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: What are we talking about? The Archives or my life??

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, I think we're talking about your life --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: In the Archives?

RUTH BOWMAN: Yes. Well, not just in the Archives but, you know, when you think about your dreams in your childhood, for instance, and the things that interested you and the way in which your work evolved.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: It's interesting, particularly when I interview, as I've been doing on this trip, people who might work for the Archives, because I don't think any of us ever sat down and said, "We're going to end up working for the Archives of American Art." And certainly nothing that I ever did, other than the American part of it, had any connection with anything archival.

I do think there's a strange kind of direction in my life that has been people-oriented, though. I do enjoy people, I enjoy knowing about people; it could be called gossip or anything else. But the Archives is, simply, recording people's lives and being concerned about what they've done in many ways.

What I might have done? One of the things that's interesting right now, I think, is the whole problem of conservation, and we are always concerned about how you could let people know what they're doing to papers. Even by just neglecting them they'll destroy themselves. It's amazing how little the public knows about Scotch tape and what it does, or even paperclips that oxidize and rust. I was in Detroit recently with my sister going through some boxes of family papers with early letters, 1820s or so, still folded and put away in boxes and envelopes. I couldn't believe this was in my own house, because if I was seeing anybody else's papers I'd say the first thing you have to do is open those up --

RUTH BOWMAN: And get them in some kind of protective covering -

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: -- and get the paperclips and everything off. When I talk about retiring sometimes people say, "What are you going to do?" And I think, gee, why not paint? That's what I started out to do. I used to say I was going to make bricks and pile them up so I could hide behind them. (laughter) There's a certain great satisfaction out of whopping clay and beating it up and pushing with the shape you wanted.

I think I made the decision long ago that I wasn't going to be a painter. I think that you have to have a very strong ego to be creative and to paint. You have to believe in it so strongly and I never was able to. I think one of the troubles with being in art history, you see too many avenues and too many directions.

RUTH BOWMAN: Of course people do say that your creativity has been bringing together all these forces to make all these things happen.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yeah, that's fine. But if I stop doing that, am I going to paint?

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, you still have an eye for color, and line, and your coordination looks to me as if it's pretty good.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: (laughing) We'll hope. It's patience in some ways, too. I always think it would be fun to weave but who wants to sit and string a loom, and you can't just take the fun part. Another thing which I think might be fascinating too is binding books. It's not only fun but it could be terribly useful to sit down and redo your favorite books in bindings.

RUTH BOWMAN: Speaking of favorite books, what kind of books do you like best? What have you collected?? You've probably got a pretty sizable library by now.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, I have lots of books. I think it's very catholic in the kind of thing I have. On trips,

you're always putting a book down some place and find you're halfway through it and you don't have it any more and that's frustrating. I find, strangely enough too, when I go to the library in Easthampton, which has an excellent library, the non-fiction seems to me much more interesting these days than the fiction. And it's true of The New Yorker -- their non-fiction pieces are usually terrific, they're well researched and full of information, and it makes the fiction look so kind of skimpy beside it.

Certainly when you look through your library you wonder about some of those very fancy -- I don't think we even called them "coffee table books" in those days, but the early -- were they Pantheon? those great big folio editions. I realized I never look at them, and you keep them because they're there. Also I've found that --through the Archives airlifts I've traveled so much -- travel books have great fascination for me. from the Vineyard has just done a book bringing together what famous writers have felt -- you know, the kind of impression as they stand "at the foot of" Mount So-and-So or the Parthenon. But I don't think the library has any direction or focus at all.

RUTH BOWMAN: When you were working in Detroit, and you had a -- let's see, how to put this -- when you were beginning to build the Archives, working probably as hard as you do now, although with a very different focus, what kinds of recreation did you have?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, the one form of exercise I ever really get involved in is swimming -- after all, Detroit is on the Great Lakes. I think again it was people-oriented, I had lots of friends there, saw a lot of things, was with people all the time. Which was a little hard when I moved away from it because you're -- when I was first with the Archives I was spending a week a month in New York, I decided early on to make it a definite week, so I'd been in New York the first week in every month, and people expected you. But it did begin to fracture life because just as something was interesting going on in Detroit I'd get on a plane and fly to New York; and vice versa. I thought at the time that I moved to New York I'd reverse that -- I'd spend a week in Detroit, which hasn't worked out at all. Partially because just at that moment we added all the other offices, so you begin to really live at LaGuardia rather than any place.

RUTH BOWMAN: Will you miss that?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Living at LaGuardia?? (laughter) Yes, I think I will miss traveling a great deal. It's been really kind of marvelous, because you feel at home in so many places and you have a very wide circle of friends because you know people in all places. But also you're never any place, it seems to me. Certainly what's happened to plane travel! When I was first traveling for Archives you often had three seats to yourself, and now every seat on all these flights is taken. On the way out here the gyroscope was broken and we sat from 8:30 takeoff time until 11:30, when I demanded to be let off, we were still sitting at the gate waiting for the gyroscope. That's partially just because I've traveled too much, I'm tired of it.

RUTH BOWMAN: So you will have some recreation that has some coherence to it, I suppose.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Maybe that's what my dogs are going to be!

RUTH BOWMAN: Your three dogs on one leash, or -- ?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I used to try that, it doesn't work. What it really takes is the confidence to let them off the leash, and I don't know that I have that.

RUTH BOWMAN: You mentioned, before, a sister. Where were you in your family -- how many were you --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: It should be obvious: I'm the youngest, very spoiled --

RUTH BOWMAN: Really??

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Uh-huh. [very affirmatively] You can always spot the youngest child. I have a sister six years older than I am, and a brother four years older, who died about this time last year, very suddenly. We were a very big family on both sides. Mother and Dad both had lots of relatives, all in Detroit. I grew up in a very secure way. We lived in a neighborhood where everybody owned their own house, everybody had kids my age, I never in my life had to wonder about whom I was going to be with. It was all very pleasant but not very challenging, and I think sometimes that was my trouble. It might have been better if you had to push and shove a little bit.

RUTH BOWMAN: It doesn't seem to me that that's a factor that entered your life at all; that you've always found ways of getting things done.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, but it's always been very comfortable.

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, it's your way with people. What about supervising staff? What do you think your

management style is, if you were to sum it up?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Aha! [laughing] You should be asking staff that. Well, I enjoy them. I think I've been very fortunate in one thing in that it's very unusual to have an organization like the Archives where one person has been primarily responsible for hiring the staff. The average museum director goes in and finds a staff there that he has to put up with until he can get rid of it, if he can, and most of them never can. It just happened through circumstances that I would say at the end of the second or third year I was with the Archives, any staff that had been there when I came on had for other reasons moved on, so I've been able to pick and choose. It's really a very unusual situation and one I've enjoyed.

I think that at times I get a little resentful if somebody says, "You know, your real ability is picking people," and then somebody else pats me on the head and says, "Well, why not relax and think that is an ability." And it is, I think. It's difficult, too, because we're all so spread out and have needed to have people who needed to be self-motivated and yet also were good enough about checking back. This ability to have Paul Karlstrom in San Francisco and Dennis Barrie in Detroit and Bob Brown in Boston, these people working all over the map -- it's rather an unusual situation. That sounds like -- [he breaks off, laughing]

RUTH BOWMAN: No, it isn't but you're talking about 38 people and you haven't had that much turnover, either.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No. We're very lucky, we've had practically no turnover. I always try to explain that to people writing and asking about jobs: it isn't a matter we just don't have a job at the moment because -- I always say, in quotes, "I hope", or "lucky for me." In talking about the staff right now, I think the newest professional staff member has been with us eight years, and most of the area directors are ten years and a little longer. Garnett McCoy, who's worked so closely, 1962, I think.

And then we've had all of the changes from the kind of freedom of the Detroit situation where we had our own organization structure, then you go into the Smithsonian with all the government regulations and the ways of -- we used to all be in one room and if I wanted to talk to Garnett, we just kind of yelled across it. Now he's in Washington -- fortunately the government has federal lines and we can talk.

RUTH BOWMAN: You had to reclassify everybody.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Had to reclassify everybody. Looking for my replacement instead of the trustees going out and finding someone, you have a Smithsonian-appointed search committee who then go ahead and search.

RUTH BOWMAN: Going back to your family situation and the point of view of your family about responsibility and ethics and so forth, the way which I guess you established your values in this loving and working with people, you work in the broadest sense because you have support and you have fellow professionals and then you have staff. What do you think in your own family background contributed to this?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, I think parents who like people, and being surrounded by people all the time; again this kind of neighborhood situation where there were a group of us the same age who got along. It's strange, though, their interests were all entirely different, and as you grow up you think, "My gosh, how in the world did we get along?" -- maybe that's why we did. We were brought right much with the idea -- I was going to have a marvelous sick time because you were never supposed to stay home. If you could move you went to work, you went to school. It was very much a kind of a -- what do I mean -- the idea that you got in there and pitched.

I kid all the time about having a Depression mentality, because we really did get by on very little, and this is what we've had to do in the Archives. I think a lot of people wouldn't have put up with the kind of scroungy equipment we've had at times and, as I say, never a building that's our own, you're always having to hope that the Detroit Institute of Arts keeps giving you space, or the De Young, or the Colonial Society.

RUTH BOWMAN: But the work ethic that you're referring to of your own family you feel did contribute to your point of view about -- you work just as hard as anybody else on your staff.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yeah -- well [laughing] I would hope. Partially because you enjoy it, too, and I think I've been extremely fortunate in that. I mean, how many people spend their lives in something they enjoy? It is work, and I can shoot the staff sometimes and the trustees most of the time. But on the other hand, you think of the people that go into offices and grind away. Especially in the Archives, it's been new people all the time, new experiences, traveling. An ideal job.

RUTH BOWMAN: But is funding a major frustration, or getting new equipment? For instance, the changeover to video from audio tape -- I would like to be sitting here, doing a videotape with you, discussing --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: That's interesting -- I don't know if we want to get off on that at this point, but what

does video mean for the Archives? If you take our interview with Edith Halpert that went on all one winter, who wants to look at anybody that long? And how much importance does -- well, watching a painter paint, because nothing happens, and unless you fake it and you suddenly have a beginning, you stop the camera and he goes on and then you start again --

RUTH BOWMAN: Like Hans Namuth, drill a hole in the painting and watch De Kooning attack it.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes. But I really don't think we have come to grips with what video means for us. We've done some very interesting work -- Dennis Barrie in Detroit has been particularly excited about it and has done some very good films. But then are we in effect doing the same thing as if we'd gotten involved in exhibitions?

RUTH BOWMAN: And you really don't feel that exhibitions are a primary responsibility of the Archives?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No. I think it's lots of other people's but not ours. We're here to collect manuscript material and try somehow or other to get it in the hands of the scholar who needs it. And if you do an exhibition, you're duplicating -- one of the reasons the Archives has survived and grown is that nobody else was doing it. And there are an awful lot of people doing exhibitions.

That's the way I feel about videotapes. I think we must collect video material just as we would a manuscript, but if we expend our resources and energies producing videotapes -- I've always thought that perhaps in an interview, if you had a -- what? -- five minutes, it is true that something of the person doesn't come across, but how do you put that on a transcript? And if you were coming to us to use an oral history, you would have a transcript, not the tape.

RUTH BOWMAN: That's sort of sad, because the inflection is sometimes --

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, very --

RUTH BOWMAN: -- part of the meaning.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I always say you can say "no" thousands of ways and the way you say "no" has something to do with what you mean.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Do you say "no" more than you say "yes"?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: [hearty laugh] I probably say "maybe." [Bowman laughs]

RUTH BOWMAN: Would you call that an aspect of your personality?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: What, "maybe"?

RUTH BOWMAN: Or, "will be"?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: No, I don't, really. There are times when I think of myself as a mugwump, but on the other hand I do think I know pretty much what I want. I can be terribly stubborn, which is probably an unfortunate trait.

RUTH BOWMAN: Well, seeing that you've been where you are as long as you have been, it seems to me that there is no one who would question your success. What are your major frustrations as you end this career at the Archives?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Oh dear... Well, partly that we still have such a long way to go. We're national, and we really haven't done anything in the South. We have one man in New England. We haven't really worked in Philadelphia for 20 years. Louisiana is untouched. We're just beginning in this area. Really, Paul Karlstrom is to the West Coast, which means everything from Portland and Seattle down to San Diego -- nobody could do it. I think they've all done amazing jobs in their areas, but I wish we had had the staff.

And I have this urgency for two reasons. One is that paper is self-destructive and as we become more and more a moveable society and move into smaller and smaller spaces, people throw more and more away. Then paper left to itself destroys itself. There's something -- you have to tear a building down, it takes equipment and really quite a bit of effort, but it takes nothing to burn something or throw it away.

Also I'm concerned that, as we said earlier, keep a very aggressive posture so that nobody else thinks they can muscle in. Because it does defeat what we're trying to do. The centralization scholar should know that practically anything he wants we have in some form --

RUTH BOWMAN: Interlinking is very important.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: -- yes, and that he doesn't have to, again, goodness! go down to New Orleans and dig up the records there, that he can expect to come to us. I like the idea of -- the Smithsonian itself was started with private money. It's been a kind of fascinating combination of public and private money, and we are too; which is a very American way, I think, of doing things.

RUTH BOWMAN: What do you think your successor has in view?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: [laughing] I don't know, not knowing the successor. I feel we're very much -- and one of the reasons I feel I should retire -- I think we're very much at a plateau. We've been able to do so much, we've kind of dragged ourselves there. I'm hoping that we have now, both because the Smithsonian base is there very solidly but we're hoping to attract a group of young trustees who can see the need. We hope to do much more with a very broadly spread out, a very systematic national collecting program where we really do get into these areas we haven't worked.

And I think probably the most important thing, I don't know why I didn't say it first because it's first on my mind, is coming to grips with the implications of the computer and the various developments in information retrieval that I hope can totally revolutionize what we're doing. We talked a little earlier about the fact that the Archives can only exist because of microfilm and that is what enabled us to establish the branch offices, and also enabled us to service through interlibrary loan. But there are all kinds of new developments --

RUTH BOWMAN: So you really think the computer might be able to dictate the next direction that the next group of trustees can move in. Do you think that that would be less or more expensive?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I hope in the long run less, because you'll eliminate all sorts of steps in between. I evidently am being terribly naive about what it takes to get a document into a retrieval system; and there are all sorts of ways of going in. I'd like to see, eventually, that we two sitting here could call up from a local library the actual image on a screen, but maybe all we can hope for in the next, what, ten years, or five years, would be some sort of a precis of what's in the documents --

RUTH BOWMAN: Are there people at the Archives or at the Smithsonian who are doing research into this?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: The Smithsonian as an institution, this affects probably every branch of it. Yes, we have staff members who are kind of charged to keep abreast of developments in technology, and with our professional connections with art reference library network and these various professional groups, we know pretty much what's happening.

I would love to see us convince some computer business to take us on. We're not that enormous, we have 10,000,000 documents. It should be -- we'd make a nice demonstration piece to have somebody take over and say, "look, this is what you can do with information." But whether we can do that or not -- we've never been very successful in getting microfilm companies to donate all the microfilm.

RUTH BOWMAN: I would think that with the exception of those early microfilms or whoever microfilmed them didn't necessarily put them upside down or right side up but in recent years the microfilms all seem to be in the same direction -- couldn't that be converted directly into, say, a video disc or something like that?

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, with microfilm we kind of skirted around -- we were talking about the difference between the scholar who reads microfilm and the scholar who reads the original document and we, I hope, decided that maybe he does it often because he can't have the original, it's easier for him; but the visual disturbances of reading lots of microfilm are nothing compared to the video disc, which has a great deal of vibration. And I think you'd find eye tolerance very much more limited even than in microfilm.

RUTH BOWMAN: So even the access to the computer, if it were to come out in print, would be a problem to read because of the way the characters come into light.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Yes, but one of the things that Archives has done that is rather unusual is to use our numbering device so that when you're looking for an Anschutz document or anything else you're looking for, you can pretty much know from our card catalogue that the item you want is on roll number so-and-so, and the frame number. The average manuscript collection you have to go in and search all through it to find the item you want. This kind of searching, with proper information retrieval -- supposing you aren't going to have to read as many documents because you already know what's in them, I think.

RUTH BOWMAN: A lot of literary people who've been working with Shakespeare and other writers to find out how many times they used a certain word or certain phrase. I'm certain that if the program were written well, you might be able to do that.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: See, this is one of our problems. We have such great riches that people aren't even

aware of -- I mean, other than the art historian, it's always a shock when the art historian doesn't know about us, but the people interested in economics, or business history, or cultural history in general. We had a staff member once who wanted to bring out all such things like domestic servants, women, subject matter which we've never been able to afford to cope with. If you start on that there's almost no end, I felt.

RUTH BOWMAN: You mean, the whole cross-referencing business is a very expensive thing to do, but it can be done. The question, you will have to go through an awful lot of scrutiny to see the relative value of all that.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I always remember Hyatt Mayor [longtime Curator of Prints at Metropolitan Museum] talking about that kind of thing and that when he came to the Metropolitan, the sort of things that might have been "transubstantiation," if somebody were interested now it would be "transportation," and the kind of concepts that interested the 19th century scholar have no meaning to people today. And who is the cataloguer that decides on the kind of subject matter?

Elsie was a feminist deeply involved in the matter of domestic servants as they related to the housewife, but I don't think that as a basic art historical research that was our concern until we'd been able at least to bring out - - I would love to see us bring out much more clearly the time sequence, if you're working in the late 19th century, or you're working with silver or the geographica -- these things would be ideal, and that's not too difficult.

RUTH BOWMAN: They can line up every potter from New Jersey to California.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: To me it's just so mind-boggling that I think I'd better retire (laughter) because there's no end to what can be done with this.

RUTH BOWMAN: But basically the excitement and the magic of it is not going to leave you and you'll have some involvement with the Archives.

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: I don't know. I feel one -- I have several feelings about this. One thing: Ted Richardson felt very strongly that he must remove himself because he always said, "You can't live with my ghost." I think I can, very well, but one does have the feeling as one speaks about retiring that the last thing you want to do is to be breathing over somebody else's shoulder. One of my reasons for retiring is to bring in a whole new point, I hope, and somebody can see things that have gotten to be problems to me would no longer be problems for anybody else. Or directions.

I've been meeting -- anybody's retirement, especially in such a small organization as we are, causes all sorts of quakes through the whole -- and I've worked with these people and many of them have worked with nobody but me, and I don't think we're talking about whether some major decisions should be made now. I think it would be very unfair to straddle a new person with structures that they might not feel comfortable with. I think somebody should come in at this point and, "Look, this is the way we'll go." But it's very nerve-making for the staff that remains.

RUTH BOWMAN: I thank you for these two hours and I trust we will have more. It's been wonderful!

WILLIAM WOOLFENDEN: Well, you're very easy, and as I say (he laughs) I have to be very careful whom I trust.

END OF INTERVIEW

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