



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Charles
Barrows, 1965 March 11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mr. Charles Barrows on March 11, 1965. The interview took place in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and was conducted by Mrs. Sylvia Glidden Loomis for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2021 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview with Mr. Charles Barrows at his studio on Bishops Lodge Road, Santa Fe, on March 11, 1965. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe Office of the Archives of American Art, and the subject to be discussed is Mr. Barrows' association with the federal art projects in the 1930s and '40s. But first Mr. Barrows, would you tell us something about yourself? Where you were born and where you received your art education?

CHARLES BARROWS: I was born in Washington, Pennsylvania. Received my first art education in one night course at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh. And the following summer I took summer school at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and after that, one semester at the Art Students League and after that very little formal education..

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Who did you study with at the League?

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, I studied at the League under Sloan, that was after he came out here. He got me a scholarship there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes.

CHARLES BARROWS: John Sloan.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then when did you come to New Mexico?

CHARLES BARROWS: 1928.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm, and what did you do before you became involved with the PWA [Public Works of Art] project?

CHARLES BARROWS: I was painting on my own. I was in art school.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and then how did you—how did you become involved in that project? That was the first one of the Federal Art Projects in 1934?

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, that was in the depths of The Depression and that's why the project was formed.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: Wasn't easy to make a living and so this was an opportunity to keep on painting and still get a little bit of levying at the same time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: So it was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And was that the supervision of Gus Baumann?

CHARLES BARROWS: Yes, that was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and what work did you do on that project?

CHARLES BARROWS: In that project, I assisted James Morris in painting some murals for the Normal School in El Rito.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were those frescos or oil?

CHARLES BARROWS: They were all on canvas.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you do them right there?

CHARLES BARROWS: No, we'd paint them here and I took them up there and [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and did you work together in the composition of this, or did you—did he block the paintings in?

CHARLES BARROWS: They were Jim's compositions and I simply filled in after he had laid out the sketch and I filled in the color according to his color schemes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Do you know whether those are still there?

CHARLES BARROWS: No I don't. I haven't been up there for a long time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I've never been inside the building. I mean, I've been to El Rito, so I didn't know whether they were, either. Well, then did you just transfer then directly from the PWAP to the WPA art project in 1935?

CHARLES BARROWS: I'm not sure. As a matter of fact, I think it was a period in between when I went back to Pennsylvania. And in Pennsylvania, I was on an art project there teaching,

for about three months. Then I came back out here and—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Where was that in Pennsylvania?

CHARLES BARROWS: It was a small town called—I have forgotten. It was the old home of my wife and we'd gone back there because she was having a child.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes, Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: So, yeah. I had gotten a—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Had you met John Sloan by that time?

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah, I met John Sloan when I first came here in '28.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

CHARLES BARROWS: He was living here at the time, in the summers.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you study with him at all, or—

CHARLES BARROWS: Only in the lake, yes, but not here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see, yes, but not out here.

CHARLES BARROWS: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well now, what was your work on the WPA project under Vernon Hunter?

CHARLES BARROWS: I mostly painted watercolors under Hunter.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And did a few drawings and—that I remember, and three lithographs also.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I remember seeing quite a few of your

paintings in the other museum collection here in Santa Fe Art Gallery, and then when I was in Arizona a couple of weeks ago, I saw your lithographs in their collection of prints at the University of Arizona.

CHARLES BARROWS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So I was under the impression that you were quite versatile, but I thought you painted some oils, but you said no.

CHARLES BARROWS: I had painted oils but I hadn't—I didn't do any oils on the project. I water a better watercolor painter, so.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: I stayed with the watercolor on the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How did you like lithography?

CHARLES BARROWS: I wasn't too excited about it. I don't like the indirect methods.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: Painting. I like the more direct thing I'm painting is what I'm doing. It doesn't have to be transferred from stone to a paper, and so forth.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How long were you on the project?

[00:05:05]

CHARLES BARROWS: I think altogether, probably three years, not much more.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You did a lot of work in that time.

CHARLES BARROWS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And was there any time limit that you were given in which to do a painting?

CHARLES BARROWS: No, none. None whatsoever. I sat there painting every day when I felt like painting and I don't know whether it was once a month or twice a month, Vernon Hunter came out and collected what he was the best work I had done for the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was when you were in Chimayo?

CHARLES BARROWS: I was in living in Chimayo at the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were there any other artists in working out there, too?

CHARLES BARROWS: Chimayo? No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was very much of that done and do you know with artists living outside the side of Santa Fe and living—

CHARLES BARROWS: I don't know of them at the time that were out of Santa Fe, except, of course, for Taos. .

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But what did you do after the—after you left the project?

CHARLES BARROWS: I don't know what year that was, but somewhere along—shortly after I am back in New York again. It's all very vague.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: After then.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's a long time to remember back.

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: But I have, however, always made my living in something related to arts, either decorating this, that, and the other, or making silk screen prints, or silk screen printing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: Something allied to art at least.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I wanted to ask about your Tewa Enterprises and what time those started?

CHARLES BARROWS: I started Tewa Enterprises in 1951 because I was aware that there was a greater market for Indian paintings than the Indians could supply, and also the way the Indian painting—the Indians painted was a personally kind of painting to be reproduced by the silk screenprinting process.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: I knew that I could do a perfect reproduction of an Indian painting by the process and that would be a great sale for the prints.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And it proved very successful.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah.

CHARLES BARROWS: In the beginning.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well I remember seeing one--

CHARLES BARROWS: We reproduced about ten of the Indian artists and something like 75 or 80 of their paintings. And also a few other artists, non-Indian painters.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do they still keep coming to you with their paintings?

CHARLES BARROWS: Always there's some coming wanting to have something done or wanting to see if I want to reproduce some print.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Would you tell some of the—these Indian artists?

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, the most famous were Harrison Begay, who's still living, Gerald Nailor who's been dead for four or five years.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And I've also done Pop Challee, Alan Hauser, Turahoma, Tsinnejinni – another Navajo—and Frank Vigil, one of the best Apache painters. I think that's all.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You had your studio previously in Santa Fe, didn't you--

CHARLES BARROWS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: At the Borrego House

CHARLES BARROWS: Yes. Until 1959 on Canyon Road.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Did you—where did you learn the silk-screen process?

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, I learned that indirectly also through the WPA Art Project. I wasn't on the project. That's what I did after I left the project here. I got off of it because, I had a side income, or my wife had a side income, which was too much to allow me to work on the project. And that's what happened. But I went to New York and it was—the silkscreen process, making painting— making prints was simply my, with that time, just being

developed by an artist on the WPA project. Before that process had been used only for commercial posters and so on. And the artists there were developing the techniques for making painting reproduction and I went down to the project there and just worked with the fellows there for a few days and

I earned what they were doing, carried on from there myself.

[00:10:12]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. You went then as a student, not as a--

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah, not as a--

SYLVIA LOOMIS: --not as a teacher.

CHARLES BARROWS: Not as a part of the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: On the project, Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you know Beatrice Mandelman?

CHARLES BARROWS: Very well.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BARROWS: Very well. I belonged to, I was a charter member of the Serigraph Society. It was formed somewhere in those days of the late 30s.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: I was a member of that Serigraph Society for many years. Exhibited through their gallery in New York for quite a few years.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I had an interview with Louie Ewing--

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —who did silk-screen on the project.

CHARLES BARROWS: He did it here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

CHARLES BARROWS: While I was in New York.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, and I remember I asked him about you 'cause I knew you had been on the project and he said there was no relationship, and that hadn't worked with him on this at all.

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, he was the first one to do it here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, so he said he was allowed a great deal of leeway in his experimenting under Vernon Hunter and that he was the first one to do it in this area. But the fact that you were so well-known for your silkscreen prints in this area, I thought there might be some connection, but he said there wasn't. So I've been curious about where you did learn the process, which I know is new at that time for paintings. Well, what—how do you think that your work on the project affected your career as an artist?

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, those three years of being free of the pressures of making a living allowed me to develop faster than I could have done otherwise, that's for sure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: I did more painting in those three years probably than I could have done in two or three times as long as I had to be doing something else to help make a living.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

CHARLES BARROWS: And a period of concentrating work—concentrated work like that is much more valuable than scattered bits of painting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: It was great. Very valuable.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were you completely free to experiment in any way you wanted?

CHARLES BARROWS: Oh absolutely, with no restriction at all.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

CHARLES BARROWS: Vernon was a very good supervisor.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm, well I've heard that from all the artists in this area that I've interviewed. That he did allow people to build their own way, and--

CHARLES BARROWS: That's very important.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm. I know in some other--

CHARLES BARROWS: And the artists weren't on there to just get something for nothing. All the artists want to do anyway was paint.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And this is what gave them the opportunity to do it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How'd your lot get along with Gus Baumann, by comparison?

CHARLES BARROWS: I had practically nothing to do with Gus, myself, because he supervised Morris rather than me.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

CHARLES BARROWS: My being assistant, I didn't come directly under his supervision.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what are your feelings in general about that project? Aside from what you've said already?

CHARLES BARROWS: I think it was a great idea and I think it should have been continued.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: I always did think it should be continued.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And do you think your fellow artists shared that feeling?

CHARLES BARROWS: I'm sure that many of them do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that they also felt that it gave them the same kind of a chance to be creative—

CHARLES BARROWS: I know many of them, undoubtedly. It carried a lot of them over a very bad period.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, well, there's no question about that. Well, now do you think that this might have given us—given a great impetus to art in America?

CHARLES BARROWS: That is hard to say. I think the impetus of art comes from something else and it'll be there whether it's subsidized or not. The artist would simply suffer, and the world would suffer from having less [inaudible], the impetus will still be there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: It encourages, that's all.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: It's helps it along.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what effect do you think the projects had on the appreciation of art in America by the general public?

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, I think it was great in that respect because, in the first place, it made the whole general public aware of such a thing. Made the whole general public aware that art is for people and art is for doing things, and artists were doing things that were valuable.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And they saw a lot more paintings because there were many more exhibits had, and many of the things that were made on the project were hung in public buildings all over the country.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: So that everybody saw a lot more of it. It was great for the people as well as for the artist.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was—do you think that has been reflected in the sale of artwork since then?

[00:15:05]

CHARLES BARROWS: I think undoubtedly it must have, because the more the public becomes aware of art, the more they're going to spend money to buy it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm. Well, I know before that—the Paris, the main art center, of the world, most people thought that you had to get art from Europe in order to have--

CHARLES BARROWS: And also it was a very expensive thing. This actually, the project, brought art home to them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: That was a very important fact [ph].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I always felt that myself.

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, if the government were to subsidize a similar project in the future, what form do you think it should take?

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, they worked out two forms that seemed to me were very good. The one was the mural projects and all government at that time, all government buildings had to give two percent or something of the cost two murals for the buildings, which is a very important item 'cause there are a lot of mural painters in the country that don't have enough wall to paint on, and good ones. And then the other aspect, allowing the artist that wants to paint pictures, to paint absolutely on his own, exactly what he wants to paint. I don't know any better way that can be done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: The big problem in such a thing - since it has to be limited to how many are going to be on - the problem is who's going to be on it and who's going to make the selection? Who's going to do what? This—I don't know how it could be worked out. It would have to be some kind of national jury or national competitions. I don't know any other way it could be done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I know those first PWAP murals, a good many of those were on a competitive basis, and then the Treasury Department also had these competitions that were--

CHARLES BARROWS: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Several of the artists that I have interviewed had commissions in completely different parts of the country.

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But they would apply for one of these--

CHARLES BARROWS: That competitive basis is about the best way it could be done on murals, I don't know of anything else that could be done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well--

CHARLES BARROWS: It seemed it worked out very satisfactorily, too.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, the unfortunate thing about this entire project, to my way of thinking, is that it was based on need.

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And that it was necessary to have released status in a good many cases in order to get on the project--

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and I think that that was somewhat difficult for a great many independent people to have to concur on that in order to get a job. So I think that--

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah, a lot of talented artists probably stayed off for that reason.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: As a matter of fact, they were too independent, they would rather starve.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What's that?

CHARLES BARROWS: I said some of them were probably too independent, would rather starve than to submit to that what they'd call or considered degrading thing. Being on a relief status. In other words, they didn't want to accept what seemed to be charity for what they considered was a great value to the world.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, yeah.

CHARLES BARROWS: Not as much, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's the thing that I felt was a great flaw in this was that there--

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —there was that feeling on the part of the many artists and I understand how they would feel that way about it, too. Well, are there any additional comments that you'd like to make about that particular period?

CHARLES BARROWS: No, I can't think of anything on this for the moment.

[Long pause.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were there any objections on the part of any of the artists as to the way the project was administered?

CHARLES BARROWS: Oh yes, of course, there gripes all the time. Artists will always gripe no matter how it's done, they'll find things to grip about.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What kind of things?

CHARLES BARROWS: Some of them might have been justified and some of them probably

weren't. Well, I did hear gripes of too much supervision, at times, by certain artists. They were being felt—rather they felt they were being told that they had to work from eight o'clock in the morning 'til four o'clock in the afternoon or something, or some such thing as they would do if they were working in a factory, punching a time clock. They resented this.

[00:20:02]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BARROWS: They felt that if they felt like starting work at nine o'clock that that was when they should start, and work 'til six if they wanted to or work only 'til one if they wanted to and felt like it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: Although there's something to be said about working whether you feel like it or not, an artist undoubtedly does his best work when he's feeling best.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, of course.

CHARLES BARROWS: Because inspiration, it's a word that's hard to describe, but it certainly has its place in the work of an artist. He's working because of an inner urge and this inner urge comes and goes. He just doesn't have it, you know, in the day between eight and four.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah.

CHARLES BARROWS: Oh, some of the artists resented this aspect, that you were expected to put certain hours within certain limits.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Vernon Hunter was the supervisor of these projects. Did this apply to New Mexico or is this more general?

CHARLES BARROWS: This is more general than that. It doesn't apply at all, in my memory, to Vernon Hunter.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well that was what I was, you know, getting at before, was whether or not you did have, you know, punch a time clock sort of thing. [Cross talk.] If you had to turn out a certain number of paintings in a certain length of time because this seems to vary throughout the country.

CHARLES BARROWS: It definitely seemed to vary. I know in New York, when I was down there working with the boys learning the silkscreen process, they were required to print one color a day on whatever picture they were making. That is, they are required to make the stencil and print a hundred prints of one color per day.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, that's very little to do if you—if you know what you're doing and you can go right through it but sometimes it might take much longer than that to make a stencil because you make and change, you make and change. It's a process of trial and error.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: So to require one a day, might push them to the degree that one color might not be as good as it would have been if they had two days to do it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

CHARLES BARROWS: But they felt—you see they had no experience, that is, the supervisors, the people running the thing, weren't artists and they felt that they were expected to get something for their money, as you must in any commercial enterprise.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: But art is not a commercial enterprise [laughs] and they had no yardsticks to go by.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm, Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: So, that was one of the things they did. They did make specific requirements and sometimes they were all right, and sometimes they were definitely not all right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But there wasn't much of that out here.

CHARLES BARROWS: There was very little of that out here that I remember.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you remember any complaints at all about out here?

CHARLES BARROWS: Yes, I do. There were—there were complaints with Gus Baumann.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BARROWS: He wasn't very—he wasn't very well-liked. I don't know just what it was about because I didn't have personal contact with him myself. But I know some of the artists did have fights with him.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I sort of gathered that from [inaudible].

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, I [cross talk; inaudible] was true. Willard Nash got to the point where he wouldn't let him in his house.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right? Hmm. Well, Gus is pretty opinionated.

CHARLES BARROWS: Very definitely so, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: If things weren't the way he thought they ought to be, why I can imagine he'd be a little difficult.

CHARLES BARROWS: That was a problem. But that didn't last very long, as I remember. I don't think he was on very long.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, it was only about a year.

CHARLES BARROWS: He didn't like it any better than—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, I don't think he did.

CHARLES BARROWS: Matter of fact I think he wanted to supervise too much, you know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

CHARLES BARROWS: He wanted to practically dictate to the artist and he went to the artist's studio and the artists weren't there, well, then he held that against them. He thought they should be there working.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: While the artists might have gone downtown to buy this, that, and the other, you know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: He was one that expected we'd be there. Any hour he wanted to come around in the day to see what he was doing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: They resented that, definitely.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But during the Vernon Hunter days, you don't recall anything of that sort?

CHARLES BARROWS: I don't remember anything much at all about Vernon Hunter.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And I'm sure he got just as much work out of them as the—Baumann did, too.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, probably got more with those—I think if an artist is allowed to work and without these restrictions, he does much better work. Can't be cramped in your style to that extent. About how many artists were there in this area? Do you know? Do you remember?

[00:25:00]

CHARLES BARROWS: I think there were 40 [on the project (ph)] in Santa Fe.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right?

CHARLES BARROWS: There was another fault of that project. I don't know whether that was national or here, but anybody in town that they couldn't fit in any other project, particularly old ladies that should have sewing on buttons or something, if they couldn't fit them any place else, they'd stick them on the art project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Laughs.]

CHARLES BARROWS: It lowered the status terribly.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BARROWS: Now under the project Lou Ewing was on, they were making an index of design.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And I think Louie made wood carvings, I'm not sure. The wood blocks.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

CHARLES BARROWS: I'm not sure. There were wood blocks made and then these were hand-carved.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And so, all these old ladies that should be sewing on buttons, they had no artistic training at all, they had them filling in the colors in these. They thought anybody—a child to do it. Well, I got into a mess—there was so much of this that was lousy work, that Vernon would [bring it out to (ph)] me and practically beg me to do it over so at least would be presentable.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BARROWS: A lot of it had to be thrown out, but I did spend some time during that project doing over some of these badly done things. But those people shouldn't have been on the project at all.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I've heard that complaint from E. Boyd—

CHARLES BARROWS: We probably had more than ten percent that shouldn't have been on the project at all. That is, before the art project, they didn't call themselves artists, they didn't have training.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And hadn't been painting, you see? So they hadn't any business on it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: Maybe something like ten percent shouldn't been on it, but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I've heard of this objection from E. Boyd who is also involved in this. I

think she did the original drawings for that Index American Design.

CHARLES BARROWS: Oh for that Index, yeah, that's right she did, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and then--

CHARLES BARROWS: She would have been complaining 'cause she, it was her work that they were messing up for the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, she was quite unhappy about some of the things they turned in.

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Of course, she said they worked with just little boxes of watercolor paints and even though she had a sample for them to follow they just—

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah. It was amazing how they could mess this thing up and how awfully they'd get the coloring.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: And evidently Vernon didn't have any right to throw them off because he didn't determine their getting on, you see?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BARROWS: So, it was kind of a problem.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I suppose those then were sort of the administrative things--

CHARLES BARROWS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —that were done higher up.

CHARLES BARROWS: As I say it was a very difficult thing, how are we going to—who's going to decide how people get on.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARLES BARROWS: The need was the first thing but it seemed to me as well as need, artistic ability should have been important [laughs] on an art project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I would have thought that a screening process would have been a little more stringent than that because certainly if people hadn't had any training or they wouldn't—they shouldn't have qualified for the art projects but, as you say, for some other projects such as sewing, something they could do better. Would you think of anything else you'd like to say?

CHARLES BARROWS: Not without prodding.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And you say you don't have any papers left of that period, or any records? You didn't keep anything? We're also trying to collect papers and records as much as we can, but--

CHARLES BARROWS: In fact, I had no papers or records.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Probably not, if you dealt directly with the supervisors, why, you wouldn't have occasion to. Well, we are very grateful to you, Mr. Barrows, for this interesting interview that gives us another angle of the work of the Federal Art Projects in New Mexico.

CHARLES BARROWS: Well, I'm very happy to give it because I think it's a worthy project. Anything new they intend to do is also good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm. Well, we hope to have to publish a survey called *The New Deal and the Arts* from this material that we've been gathering from the artists that we have interviewed, and from the records that still are available but there are too many of them, and some of the artists are going, too.

CHARLES BARROWS: Yep.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So we're glad to have your comments about this. Thank you very much.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]