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Oral history interview with Dewey Albinson,
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Transcript

Interview

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH DEWEY ALBINSON
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
OCTOBER 27, 1965
INTERVIEWER: MRS. VIRGINIA NAGLE**

VN: MRS. VIRGINIA NAGLE

DA: DEWEY ALBINSON

VN: This is an interview with Dewey Albinson, Minneapolis painter. It's taking place on the 27th of October, 1965. And I'm here to talk with Mr. Albinson about his involvements with the WPA Art Projects during the Thirties and the Forties, and we hope to have our conversation recorded. We've had some very interesting conversations up to this point. I don't think we should have Mike Fright at this point so let's get back to this because you were talking about the way the artists met around in small groups in homes and . . .

DA: Well, that was . . . I'll explain that a little later. First, I must say that I went to Europe just as the depression hit so I was over there for the first two years of the depression anyway, in Italy.

VN: I see.

DA: And upon my return I had hardly unpacked before I had a phone call from Dr. John G. Rockwell, State Commissioner of Education. And he told me that the State Department of Education had sponsored some projects the year before and that things had been very unsatisfactory, and unless I would assume responsibility for certain projects sponsored by the State Department of Education, the State would not continue the sponsorship.

VN: Oh, I see. Now, the State then was working in conjunction with the government in administering these, or what?

DA: Yes. Well, yes, the State Commissioner would technically have one vote and then the Supervisor of the Projects would have another supposed to be favorable to both the WPA officials and the State Department of Education. But Dr. Rockwell told me I wouldn't need to worry because he'd give me his vote automatically so I had two votes to the one.

VN: I -- Well, this is loading the Commission. I think this is wonderful.

DA: Well, that explains . . . For some reason I sort of hesitated for a while but then I thought it might be good experience and, not knowing how long it would last, I'd give it a try.

VN: Now, were you in a paid capacity with them?

DA: Oh, yes.

VN: I see.

DA: But very poor pay.

VN: How much?

DA: Well, I think I got \$125 a month.

VN: You were working full time? Then you'd be working forty hours a week in this capacity?

DA: Oh, forty! They called me up early in the morning 'til eleven o'clock at night, the desperate people that were getting on the projects.

VN: I see.

DA: There were several projects. The main one was the three Art Centers where they were teaching art.

VN: And where were these located?

DA: Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth.

VN: I see.

DA: And they had been in

VN: Now, where were these located? Is this the one that was at the Walker Art Center?

DA: No, this is before the Walker was

VN: Before!

DA: Oh, yes.

VN: I see. Where was this located? Over in Southeast Minneapolis?

DA: In the Sexton Building.

VN: Sexton? Or is it Seton?

DA: Sexton.

VN: Sexton Building. Yes, this is right down on Portland.

DA: I'm sure it wasn't Seton.

VN: Well, Katie Nash talked to me and said it was the Seton Building so I'm just curious. It's the Sexton

DA: Well, I have an article, I was just looking for it before you arrived, and I'll find it, which gives an article about the Art Center at that time.

VN: Well, wonderful! That's fine.

DA: So if I find it, I know I have that article.

VN: Good. And then in St. Paul, was this in conjunction with . . . ?

DA: Yes.

VN: . . . with the Art Center?

DA: It was in the old Post Office Building.

VN: Okay. And in Duluth, do you know where that was located?

DA: No, I don't remember. But it was a small place, a small group there. What happened was that when I arrived this had been in effect for I don't know how many months prior and it had been under the direction of a sculptor here, an elderly fellow called Wells.

VN: Oh, I've heard of Wells.

DA: Wells was a teacher of quite a few of the sculptors that were around here. He taught for many years at the Art School and I think also privately. I think it was Charles Wells.

VN: Yes.

DA: And our projects hadn't more than started maybe a month or two before there were several bills that went through, one prior

VN: What year approximately would this be? In about '35?

DA: Oh, no, no, long before that.

VN: I see.

DA: I would say '32.

VN: I see.

DA: I would say '32 offhand, but I'll find the article and give you the date on that.

VN: All right. Okay.

DA: Well, at any rate, the Art School had no more been in effect for a short time when a new bill was sponsored, and that was a Federal Arts bill, and that gave more employment to many artists and that started in the Walker Building.

VN: I see.

DA: And Walker Institute Museum. Well then, we continued on the art education which happened to be under Adult Education. And every city had their own adult education program, like here a Miss Curler was head of the Adult Education. It was mostly classes for immigrants and Americanization and I think they had some languages too but most of it seemed to be up in North Minneapolis. Miss Curler was a very nice person and very easy to get along with and very helpful. So this was sponsored by the State Commissioner of Education under Adult Education -- these Art Centers. Well, as time went on, there was a small project also in effect that didn't amount to anything called the Handicraft Project. And this project also was sponsored by, became sponsored by, the State Department of Education, so that was handed over to me about the same time to supervise that in the State. And that had quite a few extra projects, one in Rochester, and on the Indian reservations, and that became

VN: Now did this at any time then get kind of covered by the new bill, the Federal Arts Project bill?

DA: No, it had nothing to do with it.

VN: Had nothing to do with this?

DA: Nothing to do with it.

VN: I see.

DA: This is a separate project and that was under Women's Division. See, they had two divisions in St. Paul -- Men's and Women's. And all of a sudden they threw all the arts in the Women's Divisions.

VN: For heaven's sake.

DA: So the supervisor in St. Paul of Women's Projects, a Mrs. Alma Kerr (K-e-r-r) became supervisor, head of all the . . . even the Federal Arts Project had to clear through her.

VN: For heaven's sake.

DA: Yes. You see, in America they think that women sort of are the ones that sponsor the art project. It's always been that way.

VN: The Women's Section, now what Women's Section -- in the adult education or . . . ?

DA: No, this had nothing to do

VN: This had nothing to do with adult education?

DA: No.

VN: Just the Women's Division of the State.

DA: There were two divisions -- Men's, I suppose were the shovelers and the

VN: I see.

DA: And even the projects like -- well, there were several other projects, strange I can't think of them quickly, but there were two or three other projects going that had little handicraft in it.

VN: Did any of this ever relate to the Index of American Design?

DA: No, no, that was all under Federal Art.

VN: That was under Federal Art? This was the state program?

DA: We made . . . the Handicraft Project made things for schools, endless things

VN: What kind of things? Just craft . . . ?

DA: Well, including tapestries, they made quite a few, mostly craft work in models . . .

VN: I see.

DA: . . . and it became quite a project. And when Forbes Watson, he's the editor of the Arts Magazine,

VN: Yes.

DA: . . . came to tour the country and he saw the handicraft project in Minneapolis, he was quite overcome. He said, "It's one of the most interesting things in the whole country." VA: For heaven's sake!

DA: We had a wonderful supervisor, a Miss Jerry Hudson, a good artist and a very inspiring person on top of it and she added a great deal to the project for these pitiful people almost all women. Although they had carvers on the project and some men, they did woodwork and anything at all pertaining to . . . for the schools . . .

VN: I see.

DA: The first thing you know they were very busy, I can't even recall the many things that they made, but weaving, too, was on the program to some extent. Well, the handicraft projects built up and became quite important, they had exhibitions in schools of the beaded work from the Indian reservation. And I had met and always been interested ever since I was young in the Indian, and there was one very famous nationally-known Indian author, Francis Densmore, from Red Wing

VN: Oh!

DA: And she had written books called Handicrafts of the Chippewa and she had a whole row of books, and she's really more in music than . . . and has taken, oh, I would say perhaps thousands of records of the Indian songs.

VN: Is he herself Indian, or . . . ?

DA: No, no, no, she . . .

VN: . . . just interested in it?

DA: . . . was a teacher.

VN: I see. I see.

DA: And she had a sister called Margaret in Red Wing, and I had met them, so that we managed to get Frances Densmore to go up to one of the reservations and open up an Indian handicraft project.

VN: Well, for heaven's sake!

DA: Yes. That went for about three or four months only, when there was a pest, a woman in the project that so annoyed her that she resigned. Well, the projects were filled up with all sorts of strange people and people who'd (would) go around checking and seeing what was going around, but his one person really was something!

VN: Isn't that unfortunate!

DA: I wouldn't mention her name, but she was a very bumptious thing, she went to the projects and tried to get the Indians to make things for her privately. And she was crazy about a white beaded bag that she tried to buy, but it couldn't be sold, this was government property, but after the close of the exhibition it was the only item that disappeared, so she was a character.

VN: Oh! She raised a little suspicion along the way, eh?

DA: I was so busy at that time I didn't have a chance to see Miss Densmore and find out why she left, and when I did find out, it was too late to do anything about it. She didn't want to go back.

VN: Yes.

DA: But she had some very interesting things to mention up there. She got them to do many of the old things, using the old dyes, and they made quite a number of things that pertained to the traditional Indian

VN: Would this be up in the Red Lake reservation, or what reservation?

DA: No, it was at Walker, I think.

VN: I see. Do you know what tribe it was at all?

DA: Well, they're all Chippewas.

VN: All Chippewas?

DA: Yes. There are no Sioux here 'til you get down to the southern part of the state.

VN: Oh, I see. Well then, you were actually almost always involved in an administrative capacity. Did you ever teach?

DA: Yes, I taught a little bit at the Sexton Building and a little at St. Paul, too. When they were short of an instructor I would help them out. But it was really a rat race between the St. Paul project and the Minneapolis, and occasionally these trips throughout the state.

VN: I see.

DA: So that they raised my salary shortly after when they would arrange it but there weren't the funds in this adult education program . . . that happened to be in the Federal Art Project. They had more money and new projects and

VN: I see.

DA: And the supervisor was far better paid. Mr. Wells was the original director of that project. He had an assistant in a fellow called Hoppers and Mr. Hoppers assisted him so well he took over the power very shortly afterwards.

VN: Now, this is something new. I didn't know that Mr. Wells had been the original supervisor.

DA: Yes, he was the supervisor.

VN: And this, of course, was the WPA project?

DA: Yes. Mr. Hoppers was more able but more smooth too. I think he was more literary. Mr. Wells was elderly and rather slow in some ways. It didn't take long for Mr. Hoppers to take over.

VN: I see.

DA: And from then on that project grew and I had very little to do with it. I was so busy with my own projects that the difficulties of keeping them organized and the supervisor and problems with many of the pitiful people. And I began to regret shortly after that I ever got into it, and I don't think I would have stayed if it hadn't been for the students that were studying at the Art Center and their plight. There were many of them there that were out of school; they were not going to school. And many of them were very sincere and hard-working and the instructors, there were three or four of them, who were practically just out of school, and

VN: Do you remember any of their names?

DA: Oh, yes. There was a fellow who since has become Ph.D. He's in California, he was called Erle Loran Johnson, he dropped the Johnson .

VN: That's Erle Loran, he's at Berkeley, isn't he, now?

DA: And his instructors used to call him the , the south end of a horse going north. And he's the sort of a type that makes a Ph.D.; he's very successful out there, I'm told.

VN: I see. I see.

DA: I mean almighty, he was that way even when he was young. And then there was Sid Fossum, there was Mac LeSueur, and then there was a sculptor off and on, and then they had design teachers. They would come and go. but it was mostly painting and drawing and designing.

VN: Was Evelyn Raymond involved at this time, do you know?

DA: No. I think she must have been connected with the Federal Art Project.

VN: I see.

DA: I was never in the building and I knew nothing about more than what I'd hear. I'm trying to think of some of the others connected with the project. In fact, the whole thing became a little bit of an unpleasant competition between the adult education. They tried to take it over to increase their salary.

VN: I see.

DA: So I just maintained my independence and then after it was all over I went to Quebec, Canada and spent two summers and the winter there to forget the whole thing.

VN: Ah.

DA: Because I couldn't be here, there were just too many pitiful people on the handicraft project that really were desperate, and there were as many poor widows and women there that were I'm sure hungry. In fact, one time I was told about one that had told the supervisor that she hadn't had a meal for several days, or something, so she

VN: Oh, for heaven's sake. How much were these people paid? And they were paid by the state, then, I take it?

DA: Yes, I think they were It was \$45 to \$65 or something like that.

VN: And did they as the Federal Art Project limit the amount of time they could work so that more people could have work, or . . . ?

DA: Oh, no. They worked eight hours.

VN: Eight hours a day, and this is

DA: But there were many very dear people involved. And the thing that amazed me was that many of the projects, and I've talked with others afterward, that the projects, these poor people resented trying to do anything original to begin with in these handicraft projects.

VN: I see.

DA: And it took them quite a while before they got the inspiration to kind of do something and after that they were all having a grand time trying to out-originate, outdo the others in originality.

VN: I see.

DA: So that there were some things there that were very, very interesting. There was a poor prostitute on the project that turned out to be quite a genius

VN: In what respect?

DA: Well, in making dolls

VN: Oh, for heaven's sake!

DA: . . . and small figurines in costumes. And in one of our shows these were on display and a doll manufacturer saw them and got excited and dashed to the project to employ this person. And when he arrived there for some reason and talked to this poor, miserable woman, why she was fearful of going, and so she said, "No, she wouldn't do it." So it made a little scandalous article in the paper, you see.

VN: Oh, how . . . too bad.

DA: And shortly before that Oh, it was nothing but running to suppress stories all the way through. The Federal Theater Project went under because of a story. You know that, didn't you?

VN: No, I didn't know that at all.

DA: For goodness sake! The Federal Art, the Federal Theater, had a series of skits for entertainment. And somebody wrote an article in the newspaper, "Government Fan Dancer Number One" and it hit the Associated Press all over the United States. And the fellow here that wrote that article was given a job in Washington, or New York, he had a great elevation.

VN: But in the meantime the project died?

DA: And killed the project for the ridicule.

VN: Oh, for heaven's sake!

DA: "Government Fan Dancer Number One" in big letters. And I had some of these articles. And then they were cagey about the art projects. And one time one of the big fellows dashed into the Art School -- we had a very miserable secretary -- and I had given her instructions and instructions not to let anybody through the first room into the second room where there was a life model, see, for the advanced students.

VN: I see.

DA: And this big fellow dashed into the second room and saw the model and the next thing you know the main office trailed me town in a hurry and had me over to St. Paul with great alarm for fear there'd be a story. But I knew the fellow quite well and I called him up and I gave him some pretty sharp stuff. I told him the model was not nude, it was a Greek pose. A likely story! I said if you'd taken a second look you'd have seen it. I said besides, it's about time that you'd go to the Minneapolis School of Art and the University and get a little broad-minded and understand that studying the figure and the human anatomy is from ancient times, from the Egyptians on, and there's no place as vulgar, and if you write an article I'll follow it with one with one other that will put the whole thing to shame, the vulgar-minded people in this country. I said we can't have even a statue in this country without it being defaced, the only place in the world. I said I have plenty TNT. That article was suppressed. but from then on, oh, they told me would couldn't have figure models. Oh, I had to go around -- and I got to know Chrisco [phon. spelling] quite well, he was head of all the projects in the whole state. VA: For the state, you mean?

DA: For the state, yes.

VN: And what was his name, Chris -- ? How do you spell this?

DA: Chris -- I just forget his name.

VN: Chriscow?

DA: I just forget his name, it'll come to me again. I think it's Chrisco [phon. spelling]. I'm not quite right. But anyway, he was a man in the military and he took this position and he was in for many a headache and criticism. There was an article

VN: I'm sure anybody who was

DA: Anybody. And I even got in for some of it because I had only a few patrons and they were very much disturbed and even some of them were infuriated that I got into this government work, which was being sponsored by the Democratic Party.

VN: Of course.

DA: And I'm absolutely non-political, in any form. I have never had any connection with any political party. In fact, to me they're all disturbing, consuming of time and getting nowhere, as far as I'm concerned. Besides, I need all my time for my work and I'm not too strong physically, I never was, to go chasing nights and painting in the daytime; I couldn't do that. So I had nothing to do with it but the only thing that kept me was these people that I became rather You might say, I felt sorry for them, so that it was sympathy that kept me on for about twenty-two months. And then I got by chance a little private information that there would be no new funds coming through and that the projects would be ending in about, oh, two months' time.

VN: I see.

DA: And that's what happened. So then it was early summer and I resigned and just packed out.

VN: Would this be about '35, then, that this happened?

DA: Oh, no, this was '34.

VN: '34?

DA: Yes, I think it was about '34. [Date actually was '37.]

VN: I see.

DA: Just about '34. The projects lasted for about two months longer. In the meantime, I had met many of these people and I realized that under the conditions at that time that something like that was very necessary. It also gave employment to some of the young artists that were just barely out of school, like Sid Fossum just had, I

think, four years at the Art School. And none of them have ever shown any appreciation and they don't even know. I don't know if they know or not that they would never have had that project if it hadn't been I took them over. But I'm not looking for appreciation. As a matter of fact, I got mostly hostility.

VN: Yes. Well, did they have to make application to you to work on these projects or . . . ?

DA: No, no, see, they were already assigned to the adult education program, these few instructors, but then there were many new ones that had to be put on the program, particularly in St. Paul and elsewhere, so that it was just a constant absolute, constant chase. One time I tried to get away for a few days and I had only got out in the country a short distance before I was called back. There was always some intrigue going on, somebody trying to get somebody off a program, always the most fantastic . . .

VN: Isn't this amazing!

DA: I wouldn't go into the details but St. Paul caused me more headaches than Minneapolis. As I said, there was a sort of a complex for fear of scandal stories getting out. And there could have been one there too, because the secretary of the Art School was helping himself to funds and he cleared out and went elsewhere. I don't know what ever happened to him. It was something.

VN: For heaven's sake! This really is a time of great stories, isn't it? But I do note now then after this there was the -- in '34, you know, they set up the Public Works of Art Project under the Treasury Department and this lasted just a very few months and you were listed in an exhibition for this group at the Minneapolis Art Institute in March . . .

DA: That was before.

VN: . . . of 1934.

DA: Was that '34?

VN: 1934.

DA: Oh yes, now I know the whole story. There was a little extra fund that came through and it didn't even last - - maybe it lasted two months -- but I only stayed with it for five weeks. And I brought in one canvas a week to them, and after that was over Now I recall something else -- this fellow, the vice-president of the University that has the Harold Lloyd Wright --

VN: Middlebrook? No, Willy, you mean?

DA: Willy, Willy.

VN: Willy.

DA: He somehow or other managed to get a small fund and offer the artists to continue there and they originally paid \$45 per week

VN: Oh!

DA: This fund that went through the Art Institute and they expected you to bring in a canvas a week. So they get a few canvases out of me and one has been hanging ever since in the Labor Building in Washington.

VN: For heaven's sake!

DA: I'll see if I can find an article, I'll find the article about it. It was reproduced in a book called Our America by Agar. It's a book that reproduced some of these paintings that were in that project. You'd be interested in that, I think it's called Our America by a newspaper man from some mid-central state that's quite a good writer. I'll get the title for you; I was just looking before you arrived to try to find some of these titles. And that I think lasted only, oh, it could have been that the Art Institute got five canvases out of me, five weeks, and also the painting that was in Washington I recall now was one of that group. And then Dean Willy, he offered me twenty-five dollars a week and expected you to bring in a painting, so they got four paintings from me and I had a magazine -- one of them was reproduced on the cover of the teachers' magazine. I have that, I was just looking for it . . .

VN: Well, good.

DA: . . . when you arrived, I was just going through over here, and that will give you the exact date.

VN: Fine. Wonderful!

DA: That is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous, when you realize the cost of the cloth, the canvas, and the stretcher and then you go out and work and pay twenty-five dollars. I was infuriated, and I decided I'd make a few canvases anyway and they're at the University. Every now and then I hear about them.

VN: For heaven's sake! They're still holding them there?

DA: In some building, they still have them there. They've got four of mine. The rest of the artists I don't know what they did with. I think they brought in small color sketches and so forth, or watercolors, or something.

VN: There were quite a number of things. I know I talked to Sid and he said he did many, worked in many media and then he got involved with printing and silkscreening and things like that.

DA: Yes. That was after . . . quite a bit later.

VN: A little later on. He was involved for a number of years.

DA: Yes.

VN: Through '41, I guess.

DA: Well, I think he's perhaps one of the most talented of the whole group, too, for that matter.

VN: Mmhmm.

DA: And there were others, too, but I really have lost pretty much contact with all these artists here. See, I spend half the year in the South and I come up here . . .

VN: Yes, I know.

DA: . . . and I've got all my work here to . . . I'm trying to finish up paintings. I've been somewhat successful, even selling paintings I made as far back as 1916, '18 . . .

VN: Well, wonderful!

DA: They have historical value now.

VN: I think that's great.

DA: I was fourteen years old, so naturally . . .

VN: For heaven's sake!

DA: There's a man, a consul in Guadalajara, Mexico. He was told that Dewey Albinson was living in Tepic in Mexico: "You mean that artist? Why I thought he was dead long ago." I started to exhibit and I had exhibitions in Chicago as far back as 1921 and I had a few in the East after, so that in those days there were very few artists, most of them were considered queer, or something. It wasn't fashionable then, it was thought you were a sponger on society, and everything else you can imagine. So that the exhibitions in those early days, they might be 20 to 30 people coming to visit the annual opening and . . . V: Ahhh! Well, there's some difference now.

DA: Yes, now it's a social event.

VN: Indeed.

DA: Yes.

VN: There are so many people that you can't see the paintings.

DA: Well, art is being pushed just like religion so they go to the church in the morning and take care of their spirituals and they go to the afternoon to take care of the cultural.

VN: That's right. It's also become a good investment, you see.

DA: That's possibly true, too. But you'd be surprised how little they actually pay, I mean many of them still expect art for very little.

VN: I'm sure that's true. I'm sure that . . .

DA: In Chicago and New York and California they somehow or other have been accustomed to paying more. If an

artist gets any kind of a reputation at all, he usually can get a fairly good price.

VN: Umhmm. Well, I think I'm going to stop this now, I think we have very little left on the tape and I'll turn it over and we can start the tape running back the other way.

DA: All right.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

[SIDE TWO]

VN: Now, I'd like to ask you about some of the people who were active at the same time, and one we can mention right now is Will Norman, and what you might know about him?

DA: Well, he made some lithographs, he came down and studied, he was from Duluth, and these lithographs were quite remarkable and he became quite the seemingly successful artist. And they were very developed, they were from Duluth, the harbor. And then later, as the years went on, I saw him a few times, once in Duluth by accident, and then he finally got a job teaching in Duluth at the University Extension, I believe.

VN: Oh. Umhmm.

DA: And then he had a show in Duluth and the reason I know this is because various Duluth artists come down here occasionally and stop in and say hello. This is years ago when I lived here. And he put on an exhibition and, after the show was up, they found that he had plagiarized all the things.

VN: Oh, how dreadful!

DA: And some artists are very clever at making slight variations, these weren't even that, so that I think he lost his job. And I was told that he was teaching at this Federal Correspondence School in Minneapolis.

VN: Oh, I see. Umhmm.

DA: There it doesn't make any difference; that's all sort of a hack re-traced criticism. It's highly standardized.

VN: Yes.

DA: So that ended his career in Duluth. I have this from two artists that lived there. You see, I went up to Lake Superior occasionally and I happened to meet two that I know of, I don't even remember their names. One of them stopped off here not too long ago, maybe four or five years ago, and told me about him.

VN: Did you do any work at all with Alex Oja?

DA: Well, Alex. Yes. He studied at the St. Paul School of Art years ago.

VN: Oh, he did?

DA: And he's connected with the Institute over there.

VN: The Science Museum?

DA: In the Science Museum, yes, where he does . . . works on these figurines and the manikins.

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: I haven't seen any of his paintings at all so I don't know if he does any. But I think he has quite a nice position there because that Science Institute has grown tremendously. V: Oh, it certainly has. DA; I stopped off to see the old building, I was very fond of the old building as far back as about 1920 and so that . . . They even had paintings there at one time in the old building on the hill.

VN: What happened to that? Is it just a deserted building there or what?

DA: I imagine it is, yes.

VN: Maybe they'll build some new development project. do you remember Roland Rustad at all?

DA: Oh yes. Roland had, I think, four years here and one year abroad and when he returned he made a few paintings. They were on display and he was one of the talented artists, there's no question about it. And all of a sudden he went into commercial art and he's been completely absorbed.

VN: Is he still working here, do you know?

DA: As a commercial artist.

VN: As a commercial artist.

DA: He's connected with some of these advertising agencies.

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: But you might even find his name in the book, but he hasn't, I don't think he's had time to do any painting whatsoever.

VN: And there was a Sebastian Simonet who . . . ?

DA: Yes, I knew him quite well. He was studying at the Art School at the same time. I think he came about 1920, and he was here for a while. There was another one -- Roland Mousseau, do you have his name?

VN: No, I don't.

DA: Roland Mousseau. (R-o-l-a-n-d M-o-u-s-s-e-a-u). He's a little stocky fellow and he was from this area and went to New York for quite a number of years and he's a very During the time that Sidney Dickinson was teaching here -- one of American's successful portrait painters -- Roland was able to make the most realistic drawings in the whole class. He had a great eye for fine detail. There was nothing sketchy or free about it, but for sheer realism he had a real capacity. Well, he went to New York and he spent (studied) quite a number of years there. Then he came back here and I saw him one time only, and it was during the WPA project period. An issue came up about a Federal Arts Project at that time, and I met him in an art store and he was then teaching at the Art School, and that's the last I ever heard of him. I don't know anything about him.

VN: I see. Well, I'll get him down. That must be the Minneapolis Art School then?

DA: Yes, he was teaching at the Minneapolis Art School.

VN: And then

DA: Sebastian Simonet, he disappeared completely.

VN: There are some Simonets in the area. I wonder if they're related to him?

DA: I don't know. I usually go through the catalogues when they send them to see how many names I recognize, and they get fewer every year. There weren't many in the first place.

VN: And do you remember John Socha?

DA: Oh yes. John Socha. Did he study with me or didn't he in St. Paul? But he was here in the twenties, late twenties, and then Where did he go?

VN: Well, I have a Minneapolis address for him.

DA: Maybe he's back here then.

VN: Apparently he's not -- he's not very active as an artist any more. I don't know what

DA: Well, he showed here for quite a while, he made some rather stunning things. He had a lot of facility, they were not tight, and he was represented in exhibitions quite frequently for a number of years. Since then, I've never seen the name again.

VN: Do you remember Bennett Swanson?

DA: Yes, Ben Swanson was kind of a pathetic soul. He was a great friend of Haupers' for years and the two were always together. And he went to Paris and he arrived there just shortly before I left Paris. And I introduced him to a fellow called Galinee who was a famous wood engraver, because Ben had been doing quite a few wood engravings and they were rather interesting. His paintings had a sort of charm, too; they were not too developed, and I think he had some success. There were some people that were interested in his work. But this Galinee I saw several times and I introduced him -- see, I spoke French quite fluently, I'd been out in the country for six months. I said, "This fellow is very interested, he's been doing a lot of wood carving and wood engraving and so forth." So he got intimate with Galinee and helped him and was even in the studio for a while. And then he returned here and he submitted a wood engraving to the State Fair and it was accepted but no prize. I saw it,

and I called him up and I said, "My Lord, that's a masterpiece. What got into you! Congratulations!" Then he sent it to the Art Institute and won first prize on it. I think the show was hardly over before the director of the Art Institute called me and he showed me a folder being sent out from a New York gallery announcing the first exhibition of Galinee wood engravings brochure, and right on the front was this same, same engraving.

VN: Oh, for heaven's sake!

DA: Yes. And then I realized that he was not responsible. And from then on he was never permitted to exhibit at the Art Institute again. And I don't know what -- he took a little bit too much to drink, too. I saw him -- I was in St. Paul for three years with the St. Paul School of art At that time he came around occasionally and I'd see him from time to time but he was never too clear. He got confused and I don't know really what happened to him. I think he passed away, to tell the truth. Because I haven't heard anything about him since about 19 . . . well, it would be about 1930, or '31. I don't think he's ever exhibited since or I've never heard a thing about him. Haupers is the

VN: Well, he was listed at this Art Institute show in 1934. That's where I got his name.

DA: Well, that's possible, that's possible.

VN: And then there was a David T. Workman listed. Do you . . . ?

DA: Yes. He was very realistic and very academic, and I think commercial. He did some commercial work. He was not a young man.

VN: Well, let's get back to some of the things that you did. All the while that you were working as an administrator, you were still productive as a painter if you had time . . . ?

DA: No, I had very little time.

VN: Very little time to paint?

DA: No, it got to the point where I was just, in the end I was just dragging myself around. I got more and more involved and there were problems here and problems there, and changing supervisors, so that there wasn't too much . . . I didn't have the energy even to paint on Sundays. And the salary was so poor that I had to augment my income with a few sales now and then, otherwise I couldn't have survived it. And then, as I mentioned, when things started to brighten up a little bit, I had a little extra income and then I decided to go to Quebec, so I cleared out completely. Because there were just too many phone calls. Some of these people became fond of me, would call without letting me know at different hours, interrupt my work. And, nice as it was to have them come, but many times they would disrupt my work for the whole day.

VN: Well, I think that's a little thoughtless.

DA: Well, no. They don't realize it, they think an artist is free, you see. He doesn't work, you know. But when I start a canvas in the morning and I work inside, I like to work on it all day. That way I can sometimes finish it or carry it right along.

VN: Well, now, in the three Art Centers I got You mentioned three that you were directly in charge of?

DA: The handicraft projects were around the state, as I mentioned

VN: Yes.

DA: But the two main ones were Minneapolis and St. Paul by far. They had I wouldn't know how many people on these projects, but Miss Jerry Hudson You didn't mention any women artists here and there were quite a few of them that were on these projects here. Like one of them was -- funny, I'm trying to think of her name. And she was on this project and I think she was a better painter than many of the males sometimes.

VN: For heaven's sake! I hope you can remember her name.

DA: Oh, isn't that funny! She was a chubby thing, heavy ankles and the boys used to tease her and she took it literally, and she finally entered an Episcopalian convent in the East. They have convents; she became a sister in this convent. I didn't know there was such a thing existed

VN: No, I

DA: Isn't that amazing! I'll think of her name. But, you see, it's been years since I've had occasion to even talk about these people.

VN: Miriam Ibling? Mary Ribling? Do you remember her?

DA: Mariam Ibling. I knew her very well. She went to Art School before 1920. And she did some rather interesting things and then, about the time of 1941, I would say, she went to New York, and I never heard . . . I had a letter from her. Mrs. Handy used to -- I had one note from her one time -- and Mrs. Handy heard from her off and on, and I never heard of her since.

VN: Do you know Jean Lurie who was a sculptress?

DA: Jean Leary?

VN: Lurie (L-u-r-i-e).

DA: Oh, I don't know any

VN: She apparently taught at the WPA Art School, or at the Walker

DA: Or, at the Walker. I knew

VN: But really those are the only ladies' names that I think I have.

DA: Oh, for goodness sakes! This one did murals, she did cartoons

VN: Oh, Elsa Jemne!

DA: Elsa Jemne.

VN: Jemne.

DA: No, no. I knew her very well, a charming person. But Elsa and this gal were quite close friends and Elsie is the one that told me about this gal that went East and became a sister in the Episcopalian order.

VN: I see.

DA: Yes. And I remember distinctly when I saw Elsa the last time she told me about her. Curious that I can't think of that name. I even let her use my studio one time when I was away and she was here. She was a little stocky, chubby, girly type.

VN: For heaven's sake. Well, we'll have to

DA: She came from the West Coast, the state of Washington. And if you call up Elsa you ask her the name of that

VN: Yes, I will. I'm planning to talk with her.

DA: She'll tell you about her because I think she had correspondence with her.

VN: Umhmm. Now, when in the Art Centers you had students, you had a staff, or were these just facilities where people could come and do their work?

DA: Oh, it was a regular art school.

VN: Regular art school?

DA: Oh, very. Painting and drawing and doing everything there.

VN: How large a staff in the school?

DA: Well, we had -- it changed according to what the demand, and what was available. And I'll find this article that, and I'll mail it to you or

VN: Fine.

DA: But I would like to have that back because

VN: Yes. I'll have the things duplicated, with your permission, and then return them to you.

DA: It's funny, if you can ever find anyone else that was interested in this subject, ask him if he has that material of mine.

VN: All right. As long as -- you didn't -- John White doesn't have it?

DA: No, I never met John White.

VN: I see.

DA: I know he wrote to me and was interested, and I mean to get in touch with him but, upon my return, I've always been tied up and so I don't think I've ever spoken with him.

VN: Well, what was your general feeling about the projects and the programs and if you were . . . ?

DA: Personally, from my experience, I don't think the government should have anything to do with art. It's a different thing in Europe like where they have had a Ministry of Art for generations, if not centuries, and they have established something that is, that has -- it's traditional, I mean like the ballet form Russia and all these countries that have well-organized And the people are discriminating, because here the groups are politically-minded and hot, you might say; I'm not saying pink or red, I'm just saying hot.

VN: All right.

DA: Like the -- even the groups in New York, I meet the artists there and I know that all they've organized for is to look after themselves and to h--- with everybody else.. And it's the same here in the Twin Cities. There are little cliques here that are so desperate, I'm sure, to get all they can out of this federal fund that's coming through here.

VN: Yes, the President's fund, but I think there's a little different way of distributing the one that's coming up now.

DA: I doubt it, because all of the great poets and writers that I have known Edgar Lee Masters -- he died in a cold room in New York, nobody gave a hoot for him -- and all the rest of them have had to scrape along. And even this fellow that's in Italy -- what's his name? Our favorite poet, our famous poet?

VN: Ezra Pound?

DA: Ezra Pound, yes. Artists that have any individuality never go in for group activity. It's just these that need to reinforce themselves and to make protests and all this and that. There are some here and they're everywhere I go. I have friends and I travel around and I stop off and see, and it's almost like hearing the same thing over again. But whenever there's an organization it's just for the benefit of the organization -- even in New York between the Whitney Museum and the Modern Museum cliques. They were all For years there was a struggle and finally the money won out, that favored the Modern Museum, the Rockefeller backing. The Whitney Museum, I haven't heard anything about that group for some time.

VN: No, there isn't so very much about them.

DA: But I went to art school with quite a few of them in New York that became very well-known and I see them in New York and many of them were very openly and frankly communist. It never bothered me what they were because, after all, that's their lookout, like Adolph Dehn, for instance

VN: Umhmm.

DA: And I won't mention too many names but there are still two in New York that, when the government officials come around, they, just like Don Quixote, they stand up and say, "We are loyal to dos tumeya de la tubosa, the peerless lady." Yes, they won't budge a speck. There are two that I know of. Most of the rest of them -- butter melts in their mouth as soon as they start to succeed.

VN: Yes. Well, there were . . . this was a time when someone said that their only social life was the activities that were sponsored by the Seamen and through the communistic party and

DA: Yes. There's a wonderful book called -- now what is the name of that little book written by five outstanding communists, ex-communists? And one was written by a colored writer in Chicago, and he tells about all these communist meetings that were held, and how the artists were the most impetuous and furious, most protesting of all the groups, and they took over some of the meetings by vote.

VN: For heaven's sake!

DA: They were the dominant factor. I knew Floyd Dell who was editor of The Masses for quite a number of years and he wrote one book that made him famous -- I don't recall Isn't that strange -- I haven't had anything to drink -- but this book came out in the early twenties by Floyd Dell, Moon Calf.

VN: Oh!

DA: And he was editor of The Masses and he told me whenever he published a cartoon -- that the artists were the most difficult to control -- when he published a cartoon that was too much they'd come and throw him into prison, not the artist. Yes. So he was arrested quite a few times.

VN: He had to take the brunt of it all.

DA: Yes.

VN: Were you ever in New York during those days, or not:

DA: Oh, yes.

VN: Or did you stay pretty much here?

DA: No, no.

VN: Are you involved . . . ?

DA: I never did too much here. I'd been in the East. And in the last twelve years I've been wintering in Mexico, and before that I lived in New Jersey and then, of course, I met quite a number of them going in and out of New York. I lived near Lambertville where I saw a lot of Nordfeldt, and there were quite a few artists there. When I'd go to New York, I'd see some of the other artist friends . So that at that time, I mean the Forties and the fifties, why things were rather tame in comparison to the Thirties.

VN: I'm sure so. Did you find that the artists were able to work together or not on some of the projects that you were involved with?

DA: Well, I know on one project here, this project that you mentioned about . . . what is it? Making drawings of the artifacts?

VN: Oh, the Index of American Design.

DA: They had all the artists in one room and they assigned them to making drawings of all sorts of knickknacks and all kinds of stuff, and there was one artist here whose name is hardly worthy of putting on, but he did show, and even won a few prizes around, let's say, 1920-24 in there. And he got in on this project. His name was Walter Ginter, by the way.

VN: Gunther?

DA: G-i-n-t-h-e-r. Ginter. And he was assigned -- he wanted to be on the painting project but they didn't consider him there although he was just as talented, I would say, as most of the artists there. And so, against his will, they put him to a table to make copies of this, and he worked at it a month or two, and all of a sudden, right in a calm work hour, he rose up out of his chair screaming bloody murder and threw everything down and left. He couldn't take it.

VN: For heaven's sake. - - - -

DA: Yes. He left and went to Dakota and I never heard of him since. By the way, I will mention something else and this is rather important because it was called to my attention not too long ago about some of the murals. Miss Knute was here, we were talking, she brought up the subject of the murals, and "Had I seen the St. Paul Papers?" I said, "No." Well, she mentioned then that a mural was made on the projects in the round house at Fort Sterling. And there had been a new fund come through and they were going to restore the round tower back to its original form and they tore . . . this mural was destroyed. And the St. Paul papers made a big issue out of it. And I admitted I had never seen the mural, I had seen the drawings, which were rather well done, but I do know this: that the government in Washington has various people going through making reports on these murals that are around the country.

VN: Oh!

DA: That were made at the time. And one of these men was on the jury at the Art Institute Annual Show. And he called me up and said he had only a short time, so I went out to the Art Institute to see him. He was from Milwaukee -- Garrett Lee Sinclair by name. And when I met him there, we were talking and up comes the Director of the school and asked him what he thought of that Fort Sterling Round Tower mural. He said, " I only like the sketch." He wouldn't make any comment about the mural.

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: And I know when Forbes Watson toured one time he went out to Hopkins and he went out to various places where there were murals and he asked me what I thought of the Hopkins mural. I said, "It's very decorative. It's a good job. It's not great painting or anything like that but it's still dignified." Well then, along comes two teachers, the supervisor, or the director of the Layton School of Art, a Miss Partridge, and she's making a tour, making a report for the murals, so the government in Washington has a record of these murals.

VN: I see.

DA: And I think it was an absolute disgrace for these hotheads around here to make an issue of that mural. The fellow that made it just got out of art school and he had a little trip abroad and he comes back. He's lucky to get a wall to practice on.

VN: Yes.

DA: And they were And everybody that I know, Miss Knute said the same thing. It's a very stereotyped thing. Miss Knute supervised the authenticity of the costumes and all that.

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: She collaborated with this young artist

VN: His name was Haines.

DA: Haines, yes. That's right.

VN: Dick Haines.

DA: Yes. And it was done in a rather realistic way. And finally they sent me a reproduction that was in the St. Paul paper of this mural, and I thought it was awful, it was very poor, but it gave this little protesting group here a chance to scream.

VN: I see.

DA: And it is very unfair really, it's really pitiful, there are a lot of good artists all over the country would have been very happy to have a wall to work on just for the experience, even if it didn't last over thirty years. But the Director of the Historical Society, as I understand, was given the butt of it with the many assistants involved and other committees. I don't know who got But I can mention this, that -- I've seen a couple of other murals that were made, one is in the corridor going up the stairs at Northrup Memorial, some gears are supposed to represent the machine age. It's very Any good commercial artist could do that job. Then they made another mural in Central High School

VN: Oh! This one I didn't know about.

DA: Yes. And that was made by a fellow who got very cocky and important with us. I knew him very well.

VN: What was his name?

DA: Carranza, or something. It isn't quite Carranza, he had an Italian-sounding name. And he was supposed to have been head of that mural, and Miss Ella Ritter was supervisor there of art, and one of the last times I saw her she was furious. It was a copy of a Picasso print that they'd put there.

VN: Oh, for

DA: It wasn't even original.

VN: Oh, how too bad!

DA: Well, that's the way some artists are. There's more plagiarism going on in art than you'd ever dream.

VN: I suppose, yes.

DA: I can show you art books, American art books and this and that, and I can tell you one thing. After you see a lot of books and you travel, like Cervantes said, "Those that read a lot and travel a lot know a lot." And it's there's something about visual . . . I have good visual memory, that's my field, you see, and I actually gulp at times when I see pieces -- how they had the nerve to make a piece so similar and put their own name on it. And yet the people in the area don't know and you don't want to say anything. I did mention this one about Ben

Swanson because that was quite a shocking thing for him to do.

VN: Yes.

DA: So when I saw Ben at the time I said, "That was an unethical thing to do." "Oh," he said, "I helped him with it." I said, "Don't be silly. Don't be silly." Because I happened to . . . Galinee was an elderly man when I was in Paris in 1923-1924 and I met him two or three times. I even had dinner with him one time. So that I know he wouldn't need any assistance.

VN: No. That was not very nice since you brought them together, I don't think.

DA: Well, I did like some of the things that Ben made in those days. He did quite a bit of painting and they had a kind of originality about them, they were landscapes, and then these wood engravings, he was particularly fond of wood engravings.

VN: I think we'll go back . . . I talked to you, I think, not on tape though, about a Mr. Granahan. Mr. Granahan had done some of the . . .

DA: David Granahan -- I just barely met him. He studied at the Art School after, quite a number of years after I left and I think he won a prize and he became quite a favorite of Mr. Plimpton. So what happened was: the first fund that came through from the State Department in Washington, the money was turned over and give into the jurisdiction of Mr. Plimpton . . .

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: . . . to give commissions for some murals. And Mr. Plimpton only gave it to David Granahan, one of his pets, and another boy, I forget. And here there were any number of artists that had been painting here for years, and one of these artists, Erle Loran Johnson then, wrote to Forbes Watson in New York, in Washington, and told him about it. So that Mr. Plimpton got a letter immediately and saw to it that some of the other artists were given some benefit of this money.

VN: Yes. Now, were you ever involved with any of the competitions that the Federal Art Project sponsored? Much of the work was finally awarded by competition, you see, and judged and juried. I'm curious about whether you ever served on . . . ?

DA: Oh, some of these first funds . . . I made a mural in the Cloquet Post Office . . .

VN: You did! Well, I didn't . . .

DA: "Lake Superior Yesterday and Today." I'll give you a photograph of it. I think I have . . .

VN: Well, fine! Wonderful!

DA: And that was made . . . Forbes Watson had full charge of that. Oh! Here's what happened: There was an Increase Robinson, Mrs. Robinson of Chicago. She was supposed to be the regional supervisor for this project. She came out here and a little clique monopolized her and they didn't invite, oh, any number of the artists here. She notified some group that she wanted to meet the artists here. And I finally got word from Washington that I should submit a design or two for her as a project for a mural. So I sent a drawing to her in Chicago and I got it back that I was completely off the beam. It wasn't what they had in mind at all. They wanted Americana or something. The American scene was then the cult. So I just smiled and forgot about it. And then a little later when a commission came through, I submitted the same thing to Washington and it was accepted. So that's the mural for the Cloquet Post Office.

VN: I see.

DA: I really chuckle over that one.

VN: Oh, indeed. If at first you don't succeed . . .

DA: Well, this gal in Chicago had an idea I had to do American, the American scene, or something; I don't know what she had in mind. It had to be social conscious.

VN: Yes. Yes.

DA: That was the big issue at the time.

VN: That was. This is the time of social consciousness in art.

DA: And I had -- this tree that I introduced, the witch tree that became very famous, the tree is now in the Historical Monuments of Minnesota in this new book and all this and that.

VN: Now is this a tree you planted or what?

DA: No. it's been there four hundred years, and the point -- and it's a legendary tree.

VN: I see.

DA: I'll give you a print of it, it's a reproduction. And I made a mural of that tree showing the Indians putting tobacco on the tree representing Lake Superior yesterday and then today I show fishermen there, a fisherman with his nets and his family, the modern, you see. But I was told that it wasn't either -- they didn't use the word "social conscious" but it was something to that effect. I've gone through the country and I've seen some murals and sometimes I gulp for the horror, and then again there are some that were very excellent. I think there's one in Winona or some place that's very good, don't go by Winona, it might be Red Wing and it might be Wabasha.

VN: I wonder where there would be a record of where all these were done, you see, some were done under Russell Plimpton's direction, some were done under

DA: Those were just the first few.

VN: Yes, the first few. but some were done under the Treasury Department.

DA: All that was just the same thing, I think that's the same project.

VN: Yes. And some were done under the WPA. It's hard to really get a source on all the

DA: I wonder sometimes where all the supposed-to-be murals are because they had so many working, and I've gone into a few schools and I've never seen anything.

VN: Well, the ones at Northrup were just painted out.

DA: Oh, they were?

VN: Institutional beige now covers up the murals.

DA: Well, the ones that I saw there's no loss. As I say, any commercial artist could make enlargements of gears and a few -- they look like automobile gears if anything-- I asked people, you see, I'm curious, "What do you think of that?" It's just like a garage or something, there's nothing that It had no warmth or any appeal; it wasn't even colorful or decorative as far as I could see.

VN: Yes. Were you ever involved in any of the shows at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington during that time?

DA: Yes. Oh yes. I had one painting there and that's the one that was taken over by the Labor Building, and two people have told me it's in the Labor Building in Washington, and it hung there for years. I have a reproduction of it and it's the one that's in this book by Herbert Agay called Our America. And I don't have the book, but I have a reproduction in the eastern magazine. They reviewed this Treasury Project and of all the artists in the United States they just produced two paintings. Mine was one of them. Of course, that only arouses hostility around here.

VN: Well, I'm sure! But how nice for you.

DA: Yes. I have it -- it was one of my good paintings, too. I mean, it had a drama of a mining country up in northern Minnesota and it has a little bit of the social consciousness in it, and the railroad track, the big mine, and the big pit behind it and then in the foreground I have some workmen in a huddle as though they are arguing, beefing --

VN: Ahhh! This would be --

DA: That made it a little bit social conscious.

VN: Could you tell me how many people might have been active in the Duluth area at that time? You said there were very few.

DA: Very few, yes. And really it was so few that it was just something to keep a few people occupied, that was all. And the rest of the state, most of it I never even got to, and the stuff that they did on some of the reservations was a disgrace.

VN: I see.

DA: They got into even Grand Portage. When I went up there after the projects were over the following summer they were making stone hatches out of round stones and putting the handle on. Horrible tourist stuff.

VN: Oh, how dreadful.

DA: And they were employing about eight Indian women there paying so much for putting the handle on and so much for the binding and so much for this and that to these various people. But that began with the handicraft project, but I couldn't get up there, it was a very bitter cold winter, very impossible.

VN: You see this is the first that I heard about the extensive state projects that were separate from the federal government.

DA: If you could get into Forbes Watson's record you would hear some very complimentary things about the handicraft projects. And he was frankly a little disappointed with the Federal Art Project.

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: He told me so himself. Mr. Haupers wasn't there that day, and he looked around and he didn't seem to be very much impressed. But that might have been just a bad day, too. As I said, I never mixed with them, although I did have quite a bit of influence in the main office, and at one time I got a whole group together and we almost revamped the Federal Theater Project.

VN: Well now, how did you do that?

DA: Well, the various people that were involved had been, some of them were transferred to other -- the head of the Theater Project was Van Boskirk, he was put in the Recreation, but I was supposed to supervise the work that was going on under recreation too. I had given talks occasionally and seen them. They had any number of teachers that were doing craft work with the recreation program.

VN: Oh yes.

DA: And between Van Boskirk and some of the others, we made a chart, curiously enough, where I had arranged it so that -- you see, on the handicraft project we made costumes and puppets and marionettes. We had Indians doing performance all over, with dances and costumes.

VN: Ah, yes.

DA: Oh, it became a regular -- the puppet shows and the marionette shows were going on in schools all over the area.

VN: Well, how exciting.

DA: And that's where this Forbes Watson was sort of quite taken over, the drama and so on. And I got help from some of the others, and then as this, we were trying to revive the project. I was not to have anything to do with it except the handicraft projects would make the costumes.

VN: I see.

DA: And then there was intrigue: the Federal Arts Project supervisor tired to gobble up the handicraft and he tried to impose himself, but each time he was ushered back into his own seat, because I had too many good friends in St. Paul where headquarters were. And he tried to claim inefficiency and so forth. It's all trickery that you get in any form of group activity, small or large.

VN: I'll say.

DA: They say even a minister can only last ten years before there's a group of dissenters start to organize.

VN: I'll say. Well, I know that it must have been trying times getting through all the administrative part of it, but I think it did keep a number of people alive.

DA: Yes. I had people call me up at eleven o'clock at night accusing me of having them drop them off the programs, and I had nothing to do with the requisitioning of these people. I mean, they had to clear through the government relief requirements, sign the pauper's oath, and I don't know what all they had to do. And after they cleared through, there was people there, they asked them what they would like them to do, what projects, and if we knew of some, or naturally they'd fit into our program like this poor prostitute -- she was an artist, an

absolute artist: she made masterpieces, dolls. We made Radisson, Father Marquette for one parochial school, we made all sorts of things in miniature. The supervisor, as I said, was a very talented person, Jerry Hudson --

VN: Is she still around, incidentally?

DA: No, her brother went to Chicago and his wife dies and so she went there for a while and she's still in Chicago some place.

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: But Jerry Hudson could be reached through Miss Olga Johns. I'll look and see if Miss Olga Johns has got a phone.

VN: All right. We'll stop.
[INTERRUPTION]

VN: Let' begin. Let's talk about Mr. Ranney.

DA: I shouldn't give you all the scandal. I know that when he was studying at the art school he got into an argument with somebody there and the first thing you know it was fists. And I heard another time he had some difficulty. And then when my friend Nordfeldt was teaching here -- B.J.O. Nordfeldt, he was an instructor at the art school for years -- I heard a few more things about him. But he painted around here for a good many years and had a number of shows. The last I ever heard of him was about ten years ago. I don't know anything more. But he was on the projects, I'm sure.

VN: Yes. Yes, he was, and he was a part of the projects and again the show that I go back to, the one that . . . ?

DA: Oh yes, yes, I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

VN: And so I think I asked Sid about him and I think perhaps his widow is still alive, I think he may . . .

DA: She was a teacher.

VN: . . . but I can check and see.

DA: Oh! Frank Kerrick.

VN: Oh, Arthur Kerrick.

DA: Arthur Kerrick, yes. He was a character here.

VN: Yes. And he was involved in showing in the shows, and he taught too, then, at the WPA art school at the Walker.

DA: Yes, yes. Well, he was studying at the art school in Minneapolis before 1920.

VN: He was?

DA: I think he started about 1919 or so. See, I studied at the art school 1915 to 1919.

VN: Oh, I see. This is . . . ?

DA: That goes back to the beginning of the art school.

VN: Did you ever teach there?

DA: No, no. I never somehow or ever have been in standing with the various directors. I was condemned here for years for being too radical and too modern and suddenly overnight I'm an old fogey. It turned the other extreme. I've been teaching here occasionally, privately. I taught last summer at the Minnetonka Center out here, but I never had any connection at all with the Art School other than having studied there in the early years.

VN: Do you remember an Alexander Maisley?

DA: Oh yes, he was one of the most talented young students as well as artists here. He went down to the Southwest someplace and I haven't heard anything since. He studied here . . . I would say that he started studying around the Twenties, early Twenties.

VN: And how about Sam Sabran? Do you know . . . ?

DA: Oh yes, he's a sculptor. I saw him it could be ten years ago. I saw him in New York. He spent some time in New York studying with Hans Hofmann. He became enamored with this instructor and he . . . I don't know just what happened to him. He was a sculptor for quite -- he did quite a few pieces of sculpture around here. I've never seen anything of his work. but he taught here

VN: Yes, I know. I hear about him coming back periodically, occasionally, but it's been a number of years and someone said he's at Penn State now.

DA: Oh, is that so?

VN: He's an assistant dean or something in the art department there, so I guess that takes I thought he was a painter, I don't know why.

DA: Well, he originally was a sculptor, as I recall, and he took up painting later.

VN: I do have my little note here on Mr. Ranney. He died; his widow is here. And then, of course, there's the retrospective show now at the St. Paul Art Center on Bob Brown.

DA: Yes. I knew Bob very well. He died of alcoholism.

VN: Oh, really? Isn't that a shame.

DA: He was one of the nicest fellows there and he inherited, according to a banker, \$70,000 and went through it in four years in a wild . . . traveling to New York, hiring taxis all day long.

VN: Oh, how sad!

DA: Just spending like a fanatic, and stayed at the Continental Hotel in Paris. He was in Paris after I was there but some friends of mine that were there told me that. So that it didn't take him long to go through his inheritance.

VN: Not at that rate.

DA: No.

VN: \$70,000

DA: Kind of unfortunate. In later years he was only sober at times, and it was bad moonshine too, so that they don't last long once they get that far.

VN: No, of course not. Well, these are some exciting times that you've lived through. I wonder if I could just make arrangements with you to take the documents that you find and have them microfilmed and then return to you what you might have.

DA: I don't have more than one article now that I can think of. All this portfolio I had, the magazines I was telling you about

VN: Yes.

DA: Meridel LeSueur had articles in it and I think, I don't know for sure, that she was the publisher.

VN: Well, I can check. I think maybe she would have copies of all this because, you see, I don't think we have this on the

DA: I don't know whether she'd acknowledge it or not because that was during the days when everybody had to be pinko at least.

VN: I see. Well then, this might be difficult to track down.

DA: It might be difficult to, yes.

VN: But I didn't really realize that there was such a publication. This is the first that I've heard about it.

DA: If you could get at the FBI files you might be able to find out.

VN: I'm sure. But it would be lots of fun to be able to put these just microfilm copies

DA: Well, that was mostly connected with the Writers Project protesting and articles about this and that, and I

never even looked at it too carefully but somebody gave me one of them. And there were things going on all that time that I knew about, like the art students at the Center would go every Thursday evening to the home of an elderly couple where they'd be given a talk on communism and they had to contribute ten cents for a doughnut and a cup of coffee.

VN: Buy their own refreshments.

DA: Sure. And this was going on and so forth, and actually that's all right if they can learn something. At least they might find out something that's interesting in the social problem and at least know what communism is about. I tried to read some of it and I found it so boring I couldn't go on, frankly. But if it appeals to them or not, at least it gives them something to do. The main thing at that time was to get people occupied seemingly, even if they couldn't do anything but lean on a shovel, or create projects. And many of the projects were very good. The only projects that I curse were those that destroyed nature, parks on the North Shore, destroying the rugged nature and fixing it up to parks. I call them these "fixer-uppers" that are all the time have to change and make it look artificial or something. Look at what they did to Taylors Falls, the highway runs slam through there and you park over the very beautiful area and destroyed all the beautiful areas so that they could park on it instead of parking just back of it or on both sides of the river. It's a disgrace! And that's something that can never be corrected.

VN: No.

DA: There are many things that went on -- the biggest farce in the whole state as far as my interest I had quite an interest in the Indians, felt terribly sorry for them because, as one said, "Between the sentimentalists of the East and the grafters of the West, the Indians have never had a chance." Another one said that, "If you take any group of ordinary whites that are inclined to be lazy or indifferent, or lacking in ambition, and put them on the reservation and treat them the same, it won't take long before they'll be in the same situation." And it's pretty true, too, because much of the reservations have low whites or poor whites mixed in with them. But what they did to the If you ever want to read anything -- one of the greatest disgraces of this period was John Collier. He became, I think, coordinator or head of the department, one of the heads of the Department of the Interior. And he was going to save the Indian. He was going to decentralize them, so that this idea of his, he wrote a book and it's the most fantastic thing I've ever read in my life. All eulogetic (?) word and no substance. But the essence of it was to decentralize them and restore them back to the original Indian

VN: However could they do that now?

DA: That he shouldn't be a white man after For a hundred years they've been trying to make white men out of them. All of a sudden he comes along and maybe he could work out in the Southwest where the Indians like the Navajo and the Apaches and those are. But what they did to Grand Portage, it's a little village with all these old houses built French-Canadian style. Tore them all down and put the Indians in the woods in piano boxes. Oh, my Lord! It's so pitiful what they did there. And the Indians are social-minded. They like to have little gatherings; they don't like to live separated in the woods. But that was supposed to save the Indians. And the more they tried to save, the more miserable he got. So that . . . I lived

VN: Well, there are some pretty disastrous tales and situations even today on the Indian population here.

DA: Yes. I know quite a number of them today, and some of them married -- some of these Indian girls went out and got jobs, and one is married to a doctor from Grand Portage, another is married to a fellow that I know, and some of them turned out rather well. But most of them became streetwalkers and shiftless. They're not responsible, they work for a while and they quit. It's hard for them to adjust to the white man's sense of reliability.

VN: Yes.

DA: And that's the same thing with the colored people, I'm told. They're not as reliable or as responsible, although I think that there are many colored people today that are very well-adjusted and highly responsible people. You can see that. They're moving up into the nicer districts; they're living very well, and their children, I think, are nicer dressed and cleaner than the whites.

VN: In many instances.

DA: I've seen it when I go to where my brother lives. Coming back to the projects, there should be something else that could be expressed in that connection. Have you encountered any of the reactions at all that you've heard? Are they favorable or unfavorable?

VN: Well, it has varied a bit. Cam -- I talked to Cam -- he was one of the supervisors under the very early crash program of the Treasury Department, and he said he thought that it had done more just to keep people alive,

the artist alive, as well as the fact that many young people who never would have been artists could continue to be, or at least work during this time, which they otherwise would just have starved to death, or gone into something else to do.

DA: Well, the press, of course, was ninety-four percent Republican at one time, and of course, when these projects came along and were under the Democratic regime, and Roosevelt too, they watched for every opportunity they had. There's one thing we haven't discussed and that was that original Federal Art Project.

VN: No.

DA: Have you ever seen that project, the bill?

VN: No.

DA: It was written and developed by the artists -- members who were working on these projects, and the principle of it was to perpetuate themselves on the government. If you can find that bill, you'd be very interested to read it.

VN: Was this done by the Artists Union, by any chance?

DA: The Artists Union, yes. Exactly.

VN: I think I have a copy of that. I think Lonny Hauser gave me a copy of that.

DA: Yes. Well, you read that and you'll be absolutely shocked, the supervisors -- everything had to be favorable to them.

VN: Ahhh!

DA: And that was a pure, clique rule, principle. And there have been other projects, other bills. The National Academy for years had tried to create a federal art bill, but never got too far. Then when this thing developed, no one paid too much attention to it here until all of a sudden when people were told, "You'd better read it." So when I read it I could hardly believe my eyes! It was so fantastic!

VN: For heaven's sake.

DA: And I knew artists in the East too, I'd been East at that time. I had just returned from Europe right in the heart of the depression and they were all on the social conscious side, and they were all of the malcontents, and here they were going to try to pull over on their people a theatre and everything that would be entirely under the control of this group.

VN: Ahhh.

DA: And there were amongst them plenty of absolute, open communists, and I think a little communism might help a little bit, put a little bit of fear of God in some of the other extremes. But I don't believe in putting anything in their control, to tell you the truth. So that I had, unfortunately, a strange experience at the time. Dewey Johnson was our Congressman from here in Washington, and he had a secretary all the time that he was here before he went to Washington. So he asked her to go to the artists here and get their reaction about this bill. She went to the Artists Union which is there, not knowing which one, and she got in for a hot session.

VN: For heaven's sake.

DA: And then she got excited, she realized something was wrong, so she called me up. And we had organized, prior to that, the Minnesota Artists Association, which was not necessarily conservative. Mr. Harms at the University was head of the art department there, he was not head of the art, he was head of the teaching, the art teaching. And we developed, between the two of us, by discussing about the different organizations in Wisconsin, so we patterned ours after the Wisconsin Artists Association, and started here by augmenting two at a time, or doubling and doubling, and the think took and it's still in existence. That's the Minnesota Artists Association. And at that time we had quite a big membership. And the Artists Union group were going to boycott us and they were going to do this and that. Well, anyway, without our knowing it, the same secretary called up somebody and found out the Minnesota Artists Association were having a meeting, so she appeared. And I met her there. And there's where I learned about this, that Dewey Johnson was on this committee and she was making a report. So they got reports form elsewhere, too, and then again the bill, they managed to push it up to the House and put it before the House, they got that powerful.

VN: For heaven's sake.

DA: And a fellow got up from one of the central states and he made a dance, a hula dance or something that they were teaching, he claimed, under this program, and that they're teaching married women how to pin diapers on babies, on this Federal Art Project, or something. He made a joke of the whole thing and made everything roaring -- threw it out.

VN: Oh, I see.

DA: That was the end of it. VA: The end of it. It never really did pass?

DA: No, it didn't pass.

VN: I see.

DA: And I would never subscribe to it because that would have been something. It was purely hot political, you might say, propoganda because they used names. They were all doing that, they were using names. "Won't you sponsor this?" And you got names of people that didn't know what they were signing for.

VN: I'm sure that

DA: Was that before your time?

VN: Well

DA: I mean, I think it was before your time.

VN: Yes, I was quite young during the depression. I remember it very well.

DA: The thing was that many people all over, even Lawrence Tibbetts, signed for something and found out it was entirely a communistic thing all under the cloak of culture. That was the thing at the time. I don't follow those expos s but they're still being done. But I know that the art end of it was purely social conscios at that time. And it's all right. Anything as long as the artists get inspiration to work and do good art. I've been doing Don Quixote, which is partly social conscios too.

VN: Yes, it is.

DA: I've been working on Don Quixote for thirteen years.

VN: Have you?

DA: I have many of the paintings here.

VN: I'd like to take a look at them. I think we've exhausted all the WPA information

DA: All right, I think we

VN: Why don't we take a look at it and we'll just end this.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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