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Oral history interview with Nina Perera Collier, 1964 October 23

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nina Perera Collier on October 29, 1964. The interview took place in Alcalde, New Mexico, and was conducted by 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 2022 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 Mrs. Nina Collier at her home, Los Luceros, at Alcalde, New Mexico on October 29, 1964. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe office of the Archives of American Art. The subject to be discussed is Mrs. Collier's administrative work in Washington for the Federal Art Project during the 1930s and '40s. But first, Mrs. Collier, would you tell us where you were born and where you received your education?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I was born in New York in 1920—in 1907. I attended the Horace Mann school, and Belle Boaz [ph] was my teacher of art at Horace Mann. She had a great influence on my life, and I'd like to mention her especially. I come of a family with many contacts in the arts fields. My mother is a violinist, my father an amateur artist and banker born in Venice. My mother, however, was American. But both parents were very interested in music and art and getting us children—there were five of us in our family—a very broad education in the art field. We were particularly familiar with chamber music and knew many of the performers who at that time were beginning careers, such as Yehudi Menuhin and Erica Morini, and my family were close friends of Toscanini, et cetera. This contact had a great influence in my interests and the development of my career.

I went to Bryn Mawr College, and majored in history of art. I graduated in 1928 and took a position with the—as art director in a girls' school in New York, the Nightingale-Bamford School. At the same time, I was very interested in design and was working in an architect's office, especially in connection with furniture design and stage design, and soon realized that I needed a more technical education in the architecture field. So, in 1930, I entered Columbia University, the department of architecture, finishing my architecture studies at MIT in Boston. It was in architecture school that I met my husband, Charles Collier, the son of John Collier, who later became Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington under Roosevelt. My husband, of course, has been very interested in art and design, and we have shared this interest throughout our careers following our leaving architecture school. At the same time as my work in architecture, I had consistently been interested in music and was a pupil of a number—I played piano and studied at the Mannes [ph] School in New York, and kept up my work in chamber music and in the music field in general.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Weren't you also involved in dancing too? Didn't you say?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, I was a student of dance, having worked with Doris Humphrey. One time I studied with Martha Graham and with Hanya Holm and her great European teacher, Mary Wigman, so that I—although I was not a very brilliant dancer, I was very interested in the field of the dance. This I had pursued at college and continued in the days following college.

[00:05:01]

I also was interested in theater, had done a good deal of stage design, and worked with people like Madame Ouspenskaya and her pupils, and others who were in the theater in New York and experimental drama, and was often involved in stage design and in choreography. And that sort of thing has put me into the wide field of the arts, as you can see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I should say you have a wonderful background for the work that you did later with the Federal Art Projects.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Then, when I was married, I came to Washington. My husband was an assistant to his father. He himself developing leadership in the field of land use planning, whereas I continued in the arts fields. But as you know, architects who emerged from college at that time could not find work because of the Depression. And so—

[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what year was this, by the way, that you came to Washington?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: That would be 1932.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: '32, mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: So, we, however, did one stint together involving architecture. We accompanied the architect for the Public Works Program of the Indian Bureau in building and architecture. His name was Hardy Phillips, and we accompanied him into the Southwest, and I had my first taste of the culture of the Southwest at that time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: In fact, I finished my thesis in architecture on a project connected with Indian building. We made a survey of the pueblos and took Mr. Phillip Harding—Hardy—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Harding?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —Hardy, H-A-R-D-Y—to various projects in the pueblo and Navajo area so that we could share our feelings about architecture with this man who was slated to do some marvelous designing in the field of Indian arts. You probably know the buildings in the Navajo capital and other marvelous things that he has done, because he had a real feeling for material and the native—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Materials, mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —materials and expression, and didn't superimpose other styles on the Indians.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: When we got back to Washington, at that time, my father-in-law asked me to help him with problems in the Indian Bureau, and knowing that I had specialized in design, he felt that a survey of the artwork,—arts and crafts work, of living Indians would be of great value so that we could find out who the artists were on each reservation, in each locality and find out what they were doing, with the broad purpose of encouraging them in their own talents and using their talents for the embellishment of public buildings and for the encouragement of arts and crafts. This survey was made, technically, under the Public Works of Art Program. I was employed by the Public Works of Art Program—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —to make the survey and set up a vast correspondence with superintendents of reservations, and teachers, and the artists themselves, thereby compiling probably what was the first list, complete list, of existing artists and their activities. This might be very valuable—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —for students of Indian material; I have all of the materials—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —of course, in those files and they're quite voluminous and would be a good archive for study in that particular field. This later led to the—a survey that I made to find out what modern or contemporary arts and crafts were available for commercial development. R. H. Macy & Company asked me to produce and merchandise a group of arts and crafts materials, rugs, pottery, and the like, which could be sold and marketed to the public.

[00:10:41]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This was also Indian—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Indian, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Indian materials.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, and I made it a study of the available materials which could be reordered and marketed, and eventually out of this study and our findings and the question of feasibility of reproducing things and cataloguing them and so forth, the Indian Arts and Crafts Board was established, with Rene d'Harnoncourt as its chairman. That again might be an interesting phase for some—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was that tied up at all with that exhibition of Indian art that Oliver La Farge and John Sloan were involved in? Do you remember anything about that Indian exposition?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I think that it was a separate thing, but that they were involved in the same sort of thing—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —which was choosing of the finer products. But our general purpose in that effort was to maintain a high standard of quality, and to give an incentive—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —for the artist to continue making things for a selected market.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Was there an exhibition at Macy's? Of this material?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Macy's actually had not only an exhibition, but a sale of materials, which went very well. I had worked with the various traders, like Hubbell's, and all the traders, in fact, in being able to run over their stock and select things that could be duplicated.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And this was a nation-wide survey, then, of all the Indian tribes—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and pueblos and so forth, I presume?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes. But the Macy's effort was actually specialized in the Southwest material, the Navajo and Pueblo.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: This survey that preceded this was a survey of all available arts and crafts work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Well, then from that to the—[Cross talk.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: In the Indian Bureau.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You went from that then into the—directly into the Federal Art—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —the FERA. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: It was at that time that I had become very interested in governmental supervision and encouragement of the work of artists, and people in the general arts fields and learned of the interesting things that were going on in the FERA. So, I interviewed Mr. Jacob Baker, who was the Works Relief administrator. That is, he was in charge of work relief in the FERA. Those days, the FERA left much of the supervision of projects of work relief to the individual states, and our job in Washington was to encourage local administrators to use artists, musicians, writers, in their own professions rather than having them perform various manual labor jobs.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: In that connection, my direct supervisor or boss, was Arthur Goldschmidt, G-O-L-D-S-C-H-M-I-D-T, who was the white-collar administrator under Mr. Jacob Baker.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And it was his division that I worked in with Clair Laning and others who were in that field. Now my job there, since I was a specialist in the arts field, was to concern myself particularly with artists, and musicians, people in theater, and other professionals in the arts field.

[00:15:06]

And I was sent out to various centers to find out what people were available, as to manpower, and what particular projects were logical in these different areas. I remember going into the Illinois area and having to combat the domination of engineers, particularly, and it was through the excellent social work people that I was able to convince the engineers who dominated the picture that there were fine artists available, and they should be put on jobs in the art field.

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

NINA PERERA COLLIER: At the—preceding the development of the WPA, I was sent to the Middlewest, the Northwest, and eventually to California, and in each case made a very thorough report and found personnel who would carry on our ideas from Washington. Which were to ferret out the available personnel in the arts fields and develop projects for which they were suited.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I remember in Salt Lake City, when I proposed this to the administrator, it was not until I found an ally in one of the personnel heads of one of the mining companies who reinforced my belief that it was hopeless to select people for industry unless they were suited for the particular jobs that they were capable of doing. And he pointed out that he would not want to select an artist to do work in mines, just as he would not want a miner to do something with relation to teaching art or recreation or painting murals. So, that this kind of thinking gradually penetrated into these field offices—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, you actually had to do a selling job then on this—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Very much so.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —setting up these art projects.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, and we had to find the agencies that could employ these people. They were very often schools, museums, local musical societies. We found a great deal of encouragement from the educational groups and the recreation groups. I, in general, was very much aided by the social workers, and especially in California, Betty Clouse [ph] was the director there and immediately put me in touch with the key people in the arts fields. California, of course, did some very stunning work, but at the time that I was there, the people who were struggling in the field had to combat political as well as other kinds of forces to make the artistic trend incorporated into the program. And it was a very difficult thing, but we—my reports, of course, included all sorts of visits to projects and to artists at the time who were doing things in California.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Are there copies of those reports in your file?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I'm not sure that there's anything very complete. I don't find actual copies of reports, but a great deal of correspondence relating to the reports.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I imagine I don't have full copies of all those reports. I know that in studying each area I had to make an analysis of the relief set up in each spot, find out just how many people were available for projects, and that kind of survey finally was extremely important in setting up the Federal Projects.

[00:20:18]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How much help did you get from the previous work of the PWAP, the Public Works of Art?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: My field was almost unrelated to the PWAP. That is the division was very rigid, and people were doing murals for post offices and schools, and painting, they were actually under a different organization.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Although, of course, in each case, I was aware of what was going on, but they—but we weren't directly supervising those people, because they had employed their personnel, and they were on their own so to speak.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, well I know that in the PWAP days, the relief was not necessary, a good many of them were—got these jobs just on the basis of merit, not on the basis of need particularly.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But, in New Mexico, from what I understand, when the PWAP closed, then almost all those artists went into the Art Project.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes. We found—

[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible] moved over into it.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: That is true, because what happened really was that everybody in those days, was unemployed because of the economic situation, and almost all artists, the very best and the—even the commercial artists, were out of jobs and had to be supported somehow or other. And had used up their own private means in most cases. So that actually, when one thinks about government intervention in the—in supporting arts, it was a case where practically everybody was on relief or could—or was susceptible to being on relief.

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

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And therefore, could be employed correctly as workers on our projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But they did have to qualify in most cases, except where they were supervisors.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: There of course, we could employ people who had some other resources.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Then when I returned, this was in 1935, from California, word came that Mr. Hopkins was being asked to offer plans for a new type of program which would have more central control from Washington, and which was the Works Progress Administration. This very first project that he offered was based on the collection of data which we had made in our field trips, and I was able to prepare for Mr. Hopkins the Federal Art, Federal Writers Project, Federal Music Project, and give the details of the number of men available in each locality, and also to anticipate the particular projects that we could put these people to work in at once.

And with the data that I had assembled, I was also able to figure out the cost of materials and the necessary funds that would have to be put to implement all the projects. And this happened practically overnight. We had very few days in which to prepare these projects, and on the very last lap of the preparation, I stayed up all night with our secretaries and adding machines and made our totals for the entire national federal projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Gracious. A tremendous job.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Which was—these projects passed the budget. I don't know whether it was Congress or how it—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Appropriations Committee probably.

[00:25:00]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Appropriations Committee in Congress, I think. And Mr. Hopkins penned the acceptance of this plan. Then of course his other federal projects were immediately implemented, but each one was acted upon, and funds allocated. I think there are some covering sheets in my file showing copies of the covering—[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But of course, the data itself took many pages, and was very comprehensive. Later we found that we had calculated fairly closely, and our figures, which we were stuck with naturally, [they laugh] when the appropriation was made—[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible], yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —were found worked pretty well.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was this for a year's period?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: The first graph was for a year's period. At first, he asked for a half a year, and then it was switched to a year, making a rather a scramble to rewrite all the figures, because you couldn't double them up, since materials and—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —expenses were not doubled, but manpower costs were.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: However, I think Mr. Clair Laning could give you an amusing side light on that particular episode.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: He was involved in the—[Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, he was involved [inaudible] projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: We have interviewed him, but we didn't get into the financial end of it.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: He said he had a—he had some reports and records, but they were in storage somewhere, so we didn't go. I haven't seen those, but it's nice to know the connection between the work that you did and what—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: He was in our office, and—but my particular bailiwick was in the arts fields, and as you know, there weren't too many qualified supervisors of those fields in Washington, because we had a great preponderance of lawyers and engineers and social workers, but not too many people who were aware of administrative techniques, and at the same time knew the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Had an art background as—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —the arts.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —broad as yours. What was your title at that point, do you remember?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I don't recall, because every time I would be assigned a particular project, my title would be slightly changed. [They laugh.] I can't tell you right now, but it will appear in my notes. I think it probably was consultant or assistant or something of the kind.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now, we were particularly interested in—well, we're interested in all of this, but I wanted to ask you something more about the Index of American Design, because we have—we've had a few interviews with people that were employed on it, and I know that you

were closely associated with that.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think you have some things that you could tell us about it that may help clear up some of the questions that have arisen.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, that was a particularly interesting project. I recall being called in by Jacob Baker, who introduced me to Ruth Reeves in the fall of 1935, I believe it was. I can't give you the exact date, but probably that appears somewhere in my notes. It appears that Ms. Reeves, whom I had known slightly through Belle Boaz [ph], who was a friend of hers, the prominent textile designer, was—had talked to Mr. Baker about the—her recommendation that the government use the wonderful resources of its arts programs to set up a—this record of the history of American arts and crafts. She was particularly well qualified to do this, because she of course knew the textile field thoroughly, but also knew other fields very well and had worked in compiling the kind of very carefully prepared material that would be necessary.

[00:30:16]

She pointed out that, in this field, copyists could be used. People who were experts in the technique of copying, but who might not necessarily be great creative artists or originators. And as we knew in Washington, a large number of the people on relief skilled in the art field were of that type.

There was also the fact that in the program in New York City, a beginning had been made of studying the arts and crafts and making designs of these. Not at that time with the idea of a national program, but for—with local emphasis, and there was an interest also in costume design and the kinds of design and background which would be useful for contemporary studies and for commercial uses. Now Ruth Reeves had no background in government, and Mr. Baker, being in charge of the whole work program, was of course the person in charge at the top of the federal arts programs. He felt that this project really belonged directly under Mr. Holger Cahill, our art director. But he wanted very much to have someone from his office assigned to Mr. Cahill's office to get this thing started as fast as possible. So, I was selected, and it happened that my own design background in the history of art and in the designing of furniture and architecture and so on, plus the administrative work that I'd been trained in, made the choice—my choice fairly logical. At the time, I recall that we moved into this field with some resistance from Mr. Cahill's office, who—Mr. Cahill at that time was somewhat skeptical of the success of this project and did not see its full implications until sometime later. Although he himself was a specialist, as you know, in American art—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —and had written many books and had studied that field as his own specialty. But he did not realize what an extraordinarily apt program this could be. My first assignment was to visit New York and acquaint myself with what was going on there. And come up with a manual to help art supervisors and various regional supervisors in preparing the plates. Now, of course, it was most important that there be some uniformity.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Not only of approach but also of result in the plates, which would be supervised. At that time, we envisaged that eventually the plates would be brought to some central place and made available for students of design, for all manner of historians, as well as for contemporary designers.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How far back did you envisage this program going when it started, right from the beginnings of the—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Right from the beginning—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —of American art history?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, we realized that there was tremendous regional material which would—had not really been properly documented.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:34:58]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But there was no central archive of material, but that sporadic and scattered museums and centers and such groups as the various schools of design had material. But that there was no compilation which had brought these things together, or that would make it possible for one investigator to go to one place. As it was in those days, you would have to go to New England to see the Shaker material. You would have to go to Pennsylvania to study the Pennsylvania German material. You would have to go to North Carolina to study the North Carolina weaving of basketry and other crafts and carving and so forth. You'd have to go to the New England coast to study the craft of the ship builders. You would have to go to Boston and other places in New England to study the weaving and the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Glass [inaudible].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —glass and other things and so on. Certainly, there was very little known about the Spanish influences in the Southwest. And altogether, this project, to my mind was one of the most creative and useful possibilities of using relief workers.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, how far had they gotten in New York by the time you'd gone there?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I don't recall, at all. This is so long ago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I recall that we had to decide on what the coverage would be and that at first, we thought that architectural detail could be a part of the survey. This was later dropped entirely, and one of my associates, a young architect named Jones, who had been at Columbia University and whom I knew, at the time happened to be working on the New York project, and he was later transferred as I recall to the Historical Survey Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes the H—[Cross talk.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —project which recorded historical buildings.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And he was an exquisite designer and very able person. I think he's mentioned in my notes, as well as a photographer. The question including photography also came up and a very gifted young man named Noel Vicentini happened to be attached to the New York project. There was a question of whether he could be brought into the Washington office and sent out for projects wherever photography was essential. It was later decided that he could remain in the New York office but would be loaned to various projects. And he did the extraordinarily fine photographic record of the Shaker village and all of the Shaker office woodwork and even costumes. These photographs are brilliantly done and very useful. And that was a special case because after all you couldn't separate the architecture and the furniture—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —from these Shaker surroundings.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And he was able to combine things and do an extraordinarily fine job. But in the main, to get texture and color, nothing could be better than a faithful drawing or painting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And particularly the technique of getting the tactile quality of textiles was developed tremendously in New England. Now, in New England—I was sent there following my having laid out the basic manual and having it finally approved in its final form and then having it made available.

[00:40:05]

I was sent to Boston and worked closely with the supervisor there, a man named Dick Morrison. And then I recall going to various centers, such as the Worcester [ph] Museum where Mr. Taylor

was director at that time before he became director of the Metropolitan Museum, and going to other centers and working with the curators of museums and the experts in these various fields. And then helping the art supervisors set up their projects so that they could obtain this faithful kind of rendering of the textiles and the different other objects that were selected: pewter, silver, glass, and so forth.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was there a manual of this technique written up?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: What we did have was rather careful directives—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —of the kind of portrayal that should be done. The various views and best point of view from—the best way to record these things. Whether front view, whether objects should be placed higher or lower and the size required and so forth.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Eye level you mean?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, but the question of techniques were developed especially well within the projects, and then we could take those as samples to other projects.

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

NINA PERERA COLLIER: This was the best method of—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —of getting the results. Now, I was taken off that project after I performed my function which was to get it started and to establish techniques of supervision. And to channel the objectives of Ms. Reeves and others in getting the project underway. And I was needed by the central office for other jobs. So, this—I think my job with the Index led me into the spring of '36. And then I was assigned to help with the interpretation of the arts programs for the publicity of the WPA. And in that respect, I had to very often summarize the activities of different projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But you would probably be interested in many of the things that I was assigned to at that time. I recall having to prepare publicity for exhibitions for example. And among those exhibitions were opportunities to show the work of the Index of Design. Which had become more and more popular. We ended up with a result which was quite interesting when the arts programs were under fire as being either boondoggling, which was the term used popularly, or were supposed to be manned by very subversive individuals who were said to be Communists. And in Maine, there were no Communists, or very few Communists [laughs], connected to the Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I would say that the Index of Design was the one project which was completely non-controversial and even the DARs [Daughters of the American Revolution] and the most conservative people felt that this was a worthwhile activity. So, that in the end, the Index of Design became one of the most popular projects and got the support of all localities and all the people who treasured their family relics and brought them out proudly to have them entered into the archive.

[00:45:10]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But as I recall it when I did see Mr. Cahill later, and Mr. Glasgow, who was his assistant in charge of a lot of the work of the project, I found that what I had supposed would happen had happened, that they had finally decided that it was absolutely essential to call the plates into Washington and bring them into a central archive and to do a job of assembling them and actually filing them and finding out what had been assembled. Mr. Cahill told me at the time that they were having great difficulties because these works were so beautiful that the local museums and local agencies felt that they should be left there in the localities and were very loathe to part with them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: They had a very difficult time, and, I have no doubt, lost many plates in the process of trying to get them over to Washington. By this time, Mr. Cahill was a tremendous enthusiast and had felt the pride of ownership. And the pride of—not ownership, but—I think he felt he had—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Initiated?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —initiated the whole movement. And I have no doubt that he had them converted rather rapidly when we saw how very, very popular this particular activity would become.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I've seen from correspondence that Ms. Reeves didn't agree with that, with his ideas at that point, that—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, the fact is that, I think both Ms. Reeves and myself were assigned this project somewhat over his head. Or I should say, he was extremely reluctant in the beginning to embark on this on a national basis. And the friction that developed there was largely one of the reluctance of his office to actually put its energy into fostering the project. But [clears throat] when he took it over, with Mr. Glasgow and others of his staff, [coughs] I think he felt very differently about the whole thing. I don't recall how long Ms. Reeves remained with the project. She may have gone—left it soon after I left it. I have the impression that she stayed on this as director of the Index only through that spring.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Or she may have had only a nominal position in—as director or consultant. Because she did not, as I recall it, stay with the program in the several years that followed its development.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I don't really remember just what happened because I had so many other things to do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, was the reason that you left that project because you felt that there was some resistance to your being there over Mr. Cahill's head?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, I think I may have felt that, but the reason that I left the project was that there were so many other things that required particular abilities that I had—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —at that time. And I don't recall whether Mr. Cahill was displeased with my services or whether there may have been some requests from the field that I be withdrawn from the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I don't think that that was the case because letters kept coming in from the field, continuing to expect that I was still connected with the project. When in fact I had been assigned to other things.

[00:50:14]

However, I was deeply and personally interested in the work and feel that the project supervisors and the researchers did an extraordinary job. And we were very fortunate in personnel, especially down the line. Because of course the results show themselves in the plates.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I've seen the National Gallery. I had seen them at different times and in various collections. And I think that this is really one of the landmarks that we created—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —in the WPA. I feel very proud that I had the opportunity to take part in the beginning of the project, and I kept up my interest. Later, I was assigned to do this publicity work and always found that the Index lent itself to increasing our good relations with the public.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You said the exhibitions were sent all over the country? Was that right?

[Cross talk.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, they were compiled, and I think films were made. I find for example that there must have been a series of slides and possibly films made. In the—in the files, there is one group of the Index plates that was used for a film. And I noticed the question of the wording had been sent over to my office for review. And I find some of my comments on the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —on the script. But at the time there were so many other things that I was very concerned with, especially the Music Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: You may be interested in the fact that I had the opportunity to go to see the Federal Drama Project, [clears throat] even before it became a Project, in that I visited Vassar and reviewed the fine summer program directed by Hallie Flanagan, and saw the extraordinarily inventive and fine work of her productions at the Vassar Summer Theater where she was doing some extraordinarily exciting work. And throughout her supervision of the Theater Project, I took a very personal and keen interest in the productions and was very excited by such things as the Living Newspaper—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —and many of her projects. In the music field, the FERA had made considerable strides, especially in New York where there were so many musicians on relief. And the projects such as the pop concerts, concerts in the park, all sorts of low cost and good music made available to the public interested me very much. And I was on a very close personal relationship with all of the music people with whom I was very well acquainted, even before I had anything to do with them in the FERA and WPA days. I made some reports of the strides being made in New York and got a great deal of my inspiration for the patterning of the National Program from the New York Project. I believe there's a fairly good report in my file of the New York, both art and music, Projects. Mr. Sokoloff—Nikolai Sokoloff—the head of the music program, and all of his field people were and have remained good friends. And I believe we found that they could depend on my support from the Washington office in interpreting their needs, which was very helpful.

[00:55:06]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you actually set those up too in the same way—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —that you did the Federal Art Projects?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes, I did. I did that bit of compilation for the departments.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And later when I studied the cultural trends in the United States for the National Resources Committee, I was able to use my contacts and a lot of the information from the resources of the WPA.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And that leads me really to the fact that in—when I left the WPA, it was at the time when Mr. Baker was no longer the Works administrator. He had been assigned to a position of working on cooperatives, and the woman's division finally took over the whole arts program instead of having it a separate white-collar division. So that Mr. Baker was supplanted by Mrs. [Ellen] Woodward, who was the arts—who was the woman's division director—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —who then had control of the Art and Music and Theater and Writers' Projects. These became somewhat a political football as you know, and were very unfairly criticized because they were not too well understood. So, that it was very important to do good publicity work—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —to interpret what the objectives were of the art programs. However, as you know, art has always had a pretty hard time. Well, to go back to this interlude, I was asked by the National Resources Board to assist Dr. Lorimer in a study of population trends in the United States. And he was enchanted with the idea of recording the cultural changes and trends as he studied the movement of populations and the different national influences in these populations in the United States. His report contains a section which I prepared on the art and music of this country. Some references made to the contribution of Indians. Some references made to the folk art. And here again I was able to go back to the Index of Design—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —and the specialists who were working in that field and get a good deal of material. I also made a study of the question of the machine age in art and the trend towards commercial multiple production and the effect it had on art. And I also at the time made a study of music in radio, especially with CBS, through Mr. Davidson Taylor who is the—who with Mr. Murrow, Ed Murrow, was very interested in education and the increase of good music on the air. And all of this fascinated me and my contacts with such people as Carlton Sprague Smith, the director of music of the New York Public Library and many composers and conductors and so forth. All of these contacts came into the picture and enabled me to get some very interesting material. Of course, my surveys of this country under the WPA had given me a very intimate picture of the state of being [laughs] of the arts in this country.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, and a wonderful background for such a survey.

[00:59:54]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Just at about that time, I was asked by—I did some work for Rudolf Modley, the very brilliant Viennese pictorial statistics expert who had done a great many studies of economic and other trends.

And produced pictorial statistics which were very widely used in governmental public relations and public education. And he asked me if I would be his Washington representative, and I was that. And during these days, had dropped my relationship with the WPA and instead took assignments from specific departments to interpret their accomplishments for the public, using pictorial statistics.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: At this time, in the late '30s, the Division of Cultural Relations of the State Department was formed with Larry Duggan and Dr.—I think it was Harrington—was the director and Larry Duggan was the assistant director of this new division of the State Department. In order to establish this division, they required that a survey be made of inter-American agencies that were in the field doing exchange of scholars or supervising art programs or were active in educational enterprises. But in the Latin American and inter-American field, there were many agencies in this country, for example, closely in touch with cultural activities in Latin America. So, they assigned a—they asked that I do a survey of all agencies in this general field and the Economy Corporation and the Council of Learned Societies were actually my—the agents to employ me to make the survey. This work apparently was satisfactory, and I was very interested in the Division of Cultural Relations and its objectives, which were chiefly to work in the inter-American field. And then this department called National Conferences of Leaders in Art, Music, and Education. And I was appointed the secretary of these conferences and prepared the summary of the national meetings—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —of the—I just recently looked over my files and I found the reports, for example on music, were most interesting because they referred to all the personalities with

whom I had been in touch anyways.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And all leaders who eventually were part of a permanent international music committee.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[END OF TRACK AAA_collie64_63_m.]

[Portions of this recording track are muffled but most of the spoken words remain audible.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: We were speaking of the Division of Cultural Relations and the fact that these national conferences were—led to recommendations and advice for the Department and the conduct of its new office. Actually, this was—led to the employment of cultural relations officers in each embassy, which was continued for some time through the war. And then these offices were abandoned; the Cultural Relations Office was abandoned and became the Information Offices. The last of these cultural relations programs, I think, were conducted at the close of the war. And it was found more expedient to call these officers not cultural relations people, but information people.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. Was this just in South America?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, the—no, this took place on a worldwide basis later. The Cultural Relations Division was abandoned. I don't know the exact date of that. But the Information Service of the State Department took over that function. I think the parting of the ways occurred when a rather controversial exhibition of American art was sent to Europe. And congressmen found that this was so vanguard and so controversial that they took exception to the intervention of the United States government in matters of modern art, so called.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was this WPA art by any chance or was this—[Cross talk.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: No, this was just—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Universal, I see.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —universal art and the finest examples of contemporary—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. When was this?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —that were sent. I don't recall, it within the '40s sometime, but I know that the congressional explosion, as a result of this, was on the tail end of the accusation of boondoggling, which had beset the WPA and had made the WPA so controversial. It was purely the lack of understanding and the lack of cultural background of our congressional administrators. However, the situation was dealt with by simply changing the name and avoiding the sending around of any—[Cross talk.]—controversial art. Now, my job after the work that I had done for the State Department led me—and my work, of course, had been in the Latin American field—my next job was that of assisting Nelson Rockefeller. He was the newly appointed coordinator of inter-American affairs, had come to Washington at the request of Mr. Roosevelt, our president, who had chosen him as a person who could enter into the inter-American situation as a completely new personality and not related to anything of the State Department. He was given this new office under the prerogatives given to the president at that time, and the president and he, I believe, met at dinner, and the story goes that they sat down then and there, after the president had sounded Mr. Rockefeller out and wrote the—what is it you call it? The terms of the new department's scope.

[00:05:03]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And I understand Mr. Rockefeller embarked on this new project at once. He set up a new office, and I was one of the first employees who was asked to join his force. My work with the Cultural Relations Division of the State Department enabled me to act as a liaison to the State Department. And naturally having access to all the communiqués and releases coming up from embassies, I had the opportunity to know pretty well what the cultural, educational picture and so forth was. And I could be very helpful in that situation to study setting

up the new department.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: So, I was placed in the same bailiwick as I had been in the WPA, that is, I was asked to assist in the formation of projects under music, art, education, cultural exchanges, sending down of troops or dance groups or theater groups, the exchange of scholars, the exchange of artists, and music programs, encouraging composers to compose and sending down our music and having their music come up to us and all that sort of thing. And I, at the same time, continued to serve as the secretary of each of these committees. So, there was an education committee, a music committee, and so forth, and committee on publication, I remember. These committees included such people as Henry Allen Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation at that time. People like Archibald MacLeish, who was the librarian of the Library of Congress, and people like Carleton Sprague Smith, Alan Seeger, who eventually became the director of the music division of the Latin American—of the—it was actually the—what was it? Pan American Union, which was later turned into the Organization of American States.

But all the people involved in music, representing different phases of music, sat in on that committee, Davidson Taylor for radio. I've forgotten who was for music publishing. There were composers present and so forth. So, I continued in that capacity. I also helped to work on such matters as interpreting the findings of the State Department and putting them to good use for Mr. Rockefeller's division. For example, in each of the great centers in South America, there were art centers or cultural centers interested in American—United States culture. And these units very often were units where our art could be sent, our music could be played, books could be distributed. And so, the knowledge of what existed and where to press the button was part of my responsibility in that field.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was there any particular interest in the southwestern art and the art of the Spanish American—New Mexicans?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Very little was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were they aware of it, do you know?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —done in that field. As a matter of fact, now that I'm living out here, I wonder why more wasn't done to emphasize the fact that the Spanish influences have been a very basic part of the Southwest culture in this country, and it would have possibly been flattering to have brought that to the attention of Latin American countries. But it may be that at that time as now, there is more interest in archaeology and anthropology than there is in the colonial Spanish.

[00:10:18]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think it's only been recently that it's been widely known.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I think there are very few historians or art people there. As I know now from my recent experiences, they're only recently beginning to appreciate their fine colonial Spanish, and if we had emphasized that, it might not have been a popular trend at all. At that time, especially since it's, even now, lagging very far behind.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's true.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: However, I wonder why we didn't use that, but as I recall it, we didn't. But we did embrace all kinds of phases of contemporary art. Invited the leaders to come to this country, gave funds to help the publication of music and encourage great composers. And I think Mr. Rockefeller's office performed a very great service at that time. It was divorced from the State Department, but I had this function of being a liaison in the arts fields. And there was no conflict, really. My duties also covered such things as photography, films, and various other fields, and one of my responsibilities was to discourage Mrs. Roosevelt from making the tour of South America.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, really? [They laugh.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: It was a rather amusing episode. The president—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: A little difficult, too.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —felt that perhaps his wife was too outspoken. She had visited Puerto Rico and had been very frank in her comments about the dreadful conditions that she saw. And naturally, it seemed very unwise to have the possibility of her visit to the Latin American countries with similar comments at that time. Because it was very necessary—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wouldn't help diplomatic relations very much.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: It would not. So, I was secretly asked to appear to be encouraging her while—as an agent for Mr. Rockefeller, while at the same time it was agreed [laughs] between Mr. Rockefeller and the president that she was not to make the trip. [They laugh.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And this was a very delicate and amusing situation.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I should think so.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But she was finally discouraged and did not make the trip. But I had some very amusing talks and opportunities to exchange ideas with her at that time. I had known her in WPA days, having very often been assigned to meetings where she was present and having had to have opportunities to exchange views with her.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you want to say how you managed this, or is that too personal?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: You mean the question of discouraging it?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. I just can't [cross talk] imagine how you could do it.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: I have a file which is marked "Mrs. Roosevelt," and it's a very amusing file. I don't think it's pertinent to our—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. [Laughs.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —discussion here, but I'm very fond of Mrs. Roosevelt and very, very excited to have the opportunity of knowing her. I attended—I went to the White House frequently in those days, and one evening, I recall bringing films which the president wanted to see by a Mr. Bryan [ph], who wanted to propose a project to do filming under the Inter-American Affairs Office in South America, and I took the films and helped preside at this showing of films and the president joined us.

[00:15:00]

And when the films were over, Mrs. Roosevelt, who had at the same time invited some house guests who were members of the youth movement in this country, she appeared—and I think Vice President Wallace was there also and his wife—and she appeared with a little suitcase and said, Well, dears, just help herself to anything you find in the icebox. Enjoy yourself. Of course, by that time, the president had been wheeled back to his quarters. And we were—just the guests were there and the film operator and expert. And so, Mrs. Roosevelt rushed in with her little suitcase and said, I'm awfully sorry. I have to take a plane to go to such and such meeting at such and such place, but make yourselves at home and help yourself—[Cross talk.][They laugh.] —you'll find things in the icebox.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: She must have been a wonderful woman.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: A very darling person, of course. And so simple and so direct and charming. Naturally, we loved her. Well, to go back to my life at that time, in '42—in the spring of '42, the new ambassador to Bolivia, Pierre Boal, who was a personal friend of ours, came to our home for dinner. My husband had a job at that time, as—I believe that was in connection with the Inter-American Indian Institute, or he—I don't know exactly what his responsibilities were at that moment. But I was—I had been appointed as secretary to the policy board of Mr. Rockefeller's agency and continued in my work in the arts programs and as secretary of these various committees. But I had also done a special research job for the Inter-American Affairs office, research in art, and music and cultural projects, and various educational programs and study of the universities.

These studies were basic material for our press department under Mr. [Francis] Jamieson. And they were also basic research for all public relations and propaganda work that we had to do.

Well, that was my public responsibility. Then this incident occurred when Mr. Boal came to dinner and he talked about his new program in the Andes, Bolivia, where the supply of tin for the Allies had to be maintained because the Malayan tin had been blocked off by the Japanese invasion of the Malayan area. And he realized that my husband and I had spent some time in the Andes in the '30s, '36 or '37, to be precise, and had made special studies of the Andean agriculture, economics, arts, and crafts, which was another—completely another chapter of our lives, but one which we enjoyed very much. And we had become rather expert in the whole problem of the Andes. So, he begged us to accompany him, if he could persuade the Secretary of State to appoint us and if Mr. Rockefeller and my husband's department would release us. And he wanted us to accompany him and do a sort of teamwork job to reinforce his position in Bolivia. Well, he offered us a very attractive position. That night, and we spent the entire night thinking about whether we should do it and whether we should accept. And then, by morning, we have decided that if our departments would release us, we would do this team job.

[00:20:00]

So, by morning, we call him and said that he could go ahead with the request for our transferal to him. And pretty soon, we were embarking on our way to Bolivia in the spring '42 with our four children. The last child had been born in January. And so, we went, and my job in Bolivia was chiefly in connection with educational programs. And my husband had the title of cultural attaché, but he also was a special assistant to the ambassador. Of course, immediately there was a revolution; the ambassador was recalled. We were standing down there, with—holding pieces together as much as we could. And it was a very thrilling time. However, I had the opportunity to see how we could use exhibits, paintings, reproductions, music supplied by our government in specific localities in South America, and I was able to use a fine supply of these materials, which were allocated to our embassy. And this gave me a rather interesting insight into the importance of cultural exchanges in the field of international diplomacy. I think it's very important.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How long were you in Bolivia?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: We were there until '44, '45, and then returned to this country. It was soon after that that I started the Young Audiences Movement in Baltimore. We moved to Maryland, and my husband left the government. And then, it was that I started a big project for young audiences in the Baltimore area. In other words, the use of fine performing arts for children in schools as a teaching device and using great younger artists of our time. That's another chapter, again. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. How far did that spread?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, that had spread nationally and has received Ford and Rockefeller grants. And I would say thousands and thousands of children hear concerts and it even has now spread to this area.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I knew that you were doing it here.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: [Inaudible] form out here. But it started actually with the feeling that I had when I was a housewife in Baltimore—near Baltimore. And when we were living on a dairy farm, so that I felt very strongly that my own children in the schools where they were should be given the kind of rich contact with the arts that I had had in my youth.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And it was my longing to bring this to my children and their friends that led to my developing this new program. Well, that gives you the picture, roughly, of the historical sequence.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Yes, and I could see that the work that you did during the WPA days and before that has just continued right along. I mean, from one aspect to another, right down to today.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, I think the general—if I could analyze the motivation behind all this, I think that my own enjoyment of the arts and my wish to sensitize the public so that audiences and spectators would have opportunities to come in contact with the arts, and then create the opportunity. It all really ties together.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. And—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And I think it's very logical that I was in a field where I could touch on all the arts, rather than only one, because I'm not myself a tremendously gifted painter or designer or artist. But I have a great love for all these things.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

[00:25:03]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And also, some ability in organization.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I should say so.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: So, this was the one field where I could—[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, then I'm sure that you appreciate this opportunity that the government provided to extend the interest in the arts as broadly as it did.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, I thought it was absolutely extraordinary that with the, really, excuse of a relief administration and the catastrophe of a Depression, that such a marvelously creative movement should have developed. And, of course, I'm one of those that feel that government should subsidize arts and should create opportunities for the arts. The time of the patron of art has gone. The time when the artist can be subsidized by private means is very precarious and in the main, has disappeared. We don't have the great patrons of arts who will foster individual artists, and the artist is now really buffeted about by circumstance, the economy, and everything else. And of course, we've got trends like the artists in residence and the artists who can find commercial outlets. But the sooner we can revive this kind of interest in the arts, the better. Of course, Europe has already gone forward on this kind of thing. And Russia has put a great deal of money and help into maintaining fine artists and giving them training. But our country hasn't begun to develop in this field.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Would you want to tell us what form you think this should take based on your experience? I mean not only the strong points of the program but also the weak ones. I mean, the sort of thing that would have to be avoided, perhaps and—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, of course, you're right. There are dangers because whoever is in the driving seat, the question of their taste and the question of their flexibility comes in, and you have to be awfully careful of having one type of influence or another. But I think this can be avoided. I think that it will be a difficult thing. But there are types of encouragements that could be made. I think we could give more help to universities to have more great art teachers, and we could subsidize instead of giving so much stress to the sciences. We could do the same sort of stimulation to artists and to creative people, poets, and writers. And it shouldn't have to depend only on Ford and Rockefeller Foundations to give a lift to the—but there should be governmental monies available in the form, perhaps, of the National Research Science Foundation and through the Education Department, and very possibly, we should have a chair in the Education Department devoted to the fostering of the arts and the training. Because it's just like training for professionals in the field of science; it's very expensive and very hard for artists to have a chance to get training or to express themselves because they have to eat, and they very often have to take jobs which prevent them from pursuing their careers. And this is very true of artists and composers.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then I suppose scholarships for particularly talented art students, because I know they—

NINA PERERA COLLIER: We could do that, and we could also have much greater subsidies to orchestras to enable them to—for example, a state orchestra to make tours.

[00:30:09]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: And to perform at popular prices. We could give subsidies to the city orchestras or to state orchestras, and we could, of course, insist on a certain level of standard.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think in a way, it's easier in music, isn't it, than it is in art—

[Cross talk.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —much easier—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —this day and age?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But we're doing nothing about theater in these times.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, that's true. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Since the WPA, there has been almost no forward movement in either playwriting or techniques or experimenting with different kinds of presentations. In those days, we experimented with every phase of theater, everything from the staccato Living Newspaper-type presentation to doing Shakespeare in modern dress, and all the various techniques that have since been copied or continued. But I know that a playwright who wishes to try out something new has almost no chance of having a company take his play or try it out. We have practically no experimental theater. We have some off-Broadway shows that try to do this thing and very often go bankrupt.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: No traveling modern theater. And I understand from Broadway people that the only sure success where you're sure of getting your money back is a musical comedy.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, dear.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: But we have no way of attempting completely new techniques. And the WPA did that, and there is no reason why this couldn't be done, probably through some specialized educational supervision.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What department do you think that would come under in the government, Health, Education, and Welfare?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Probably Education would be a good group to put a little emphasis on this. Or there might be a separate arts portfolio under one of these. Or it might be even the Secretary of the Arts or a Ministry of the Arts. [Cross talk.] But I don't know if we could ever achieve that, but it would be very useful. However, of course, Mrs. Kennedy and many others have at least made the first steps.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Is there a movement that you know of, in this direction?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, yes, there is a group in New York, I think, that—I get their publications, and they still are for government and the arts. And they report new findings. The State Department did supervise and has continued the question of allotting funds to pay for transportation of groups throughout Europe and Asia. And at one time, Robert Schnitzer was the director of that, for the Theater Association. And he had been Hallie Flanagan's = assistant. So that he had much inspiration from his work with—he's a very fine organizer and actor who was a splendid director and organizer. He's now teaching, and his wife is also in the field of television. But that is a governmental subsidy for the arts and also the Fulbright scholarships, which have enabled—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes, yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —many outstanding young people to circulate in Europe and bring the word and perform and lecture and do research. There has been a very good impetus through the Fulbright scholarships. Outside of those two movements, and some of the education funds devoted to language learning, and some few projects devoted to research in music and other things under the National Defense Act for education.

[00:35:23]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: National Defense Act.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, Defense?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Has an educational phase in it, which permits projects in the arts fields and communications. [Cross talk.] But again, this is very limited.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I would say so. [Cross talk.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Although, I think a lot could be done under those fields.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. What happened to that organization that—I think you have a file on it— [cross talk]—Citizens for the Arts?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: It was directed by Aline Hays, who died. And I don't know but I've noticed in my notes that in May 1941, Mrs. Aline Davis Hays was secretary for a newly formed Citizens Committee for Government Art Projects, which really resulted from the work done by the government under the WPA. She died. I don't know exactly when her death occurred, but it was a few—possibly, very soon after that development. But among the activities to be drawn upon in her outline, she mentions the *Index of Design*, the—as among the resources for working in the field of arts. And she had in mind not only theater, but especially she was interested in the visual arts, also documentary, and other photography projects. And—[Phone ringing.]—of course, since then, the major emphasis has been placed on government projects connected with theater—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. Do you want to answer that?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: —more specifically.

[Recording stops, restarts.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: After this interruption, I think we've probably covered most of the events of this period. But I wonder if there are any additional comments you'd like to make, Ms. Collier?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Well, thinking—I'd like to say, thinking back on the time of all these projects, that it was a great pity that the witch-hunting and attacking politically by such forces as the McCarthy forces obscured some of the important work of the period, especially, I think that a great many people who provided very imaginative leadership have not received the kind of recognition that they should receive. I would say that, first and foremost, Jacob Baker was a man of great vision and energy and a man who had a tremendous imagination. And I don't think that his true value was realized, nor has he, in the historical sense, been given credit for giving so much creative emphasis to the arts during the WPA days. Arthur Goldschmidt was another person who worked very quietly and with keen intelligence. And none of these things could have happened without those two men and their enlightened point of view. And yet, in thinking back, very little mention was made of their leadership and their vision. As a matter of fact, Mr. Baker was put in a position of having to turn over his organization to another division. And he was asked to do research in the field of the cooperatives, a field which he was very interested in, but it was, in a sense, a step to disengage him from the work relief pattern and put in some other place where he would not be subjected to political attack.

[00:40:46]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: He was attacked, particularly?

NINA PERERA COLLIER: He was attacked, as many of the projects were attacked. It was very natural that disgruntled people on relief, and especially the most articulate ones who were artists, would have a generally leftist or liberal coloration. And this was made a great deal of, when it actually had very little significance. It did not involve—it should not have involved the downfall of the arts. And it was simply picked up as a target by people who wanted to get control of the situation and wanted those who were in to be out. This happened fairly consistently to the arts programs, and that sort of thing seems to me, in the light of history, very unfair. I think the record should be straightened out.

Of course, I didn't encounter any Communists who were trying to subvert the Projects and use the Projects to propagandize against—for the downfall of this country. I think that was grossly exaggerated. And on many occasions, I was present at the meetings when the Project workers were asked to air their views. And some of them were disgruntled, and naturally, there were always people who felt that they weren't being treated fairly. And that sort of thing occurred and is perfectly normal. But that is not a reason to throw out a complete program. And of course, as you recall, the Federal Arts and Federal Theater Project were discontinued. Only parts of them

continued. And there was constant effort and attack in the press, and that kind of thing, which one deplores very much, because what was accomplished was so extraordinary.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: It was an era when enormous strides were made, not only in, of course, social work, but obviously in the Indian field, helping the Indians to express their own culture, in the field of the arts, where many great talents were discovered. And it was an extraordinarily creative movement, the whole Federal Project. It's, I think, a wonderful thing that an organization is now going to concern itself with revealing the true facts and discovering what enormous strides were made in these times.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think that certainly is one of the purposes of this survey is to find out just what did happen and the effect that it had on the whole field of art in America, the impetus that it gave it. And several people have said—artists have said that they think that it was the reason why the whole art movement shifted from Europe to America. That now New York [cross talk] is more the art center than Paris, which it always used to be. And that if it had not been for the impetus given by the Federal Art Projects, this would not have happened. [Cross talk.]

NINA PERERA COLLIER: That's true.

[00:45:09]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: On the contrary, that even those artists who were good would have been in such desperate straits financially that they would have had to do something else. So, we would've lost even what little we had at that time.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Yes. Well, I think that's absolutely true. I've spent my entire life in the arts fields, in art, in music management, or in fostering one kind of art or another. And if this story can be told vividly, I think it will be a tremendous contribution, but there has been, to my mind, no really forceful, complete study—been published. Now, Hallie Flanagan has written a story of her Theater Project. And yet, I would say that the flavor and the excitement of that period and the marvelous thrill that we all had working our heads off, and many young people had this opportunity in the New Deal, and were able—and given—were able to express their ideas and given the confidence of their superiors. And this was, to my mind, an extraordinary opportunity.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wonderful thing.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Imagine a girl, just barely out of college and training, given the chance to know what was going on throughout the country and to have a chance to implement ideas. It was just extraordinary. And this happened to many, many other people.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: My husband had a similar experience in another field, it happened to be land use planning. And he made history in the field of soil conservation. And my father-in-law certainly turned the tide in connection with Indians and the opportunity to give them a sense of pride in their own culture and a chance to express themselves. But altogether, this was a kind of renaissance. And it would be interesting to think how it could be achieved, again, without having to have such a horrible economic crisis as the excuse for it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. It's too bad that it had to be that kind of a crisis. But at least a great deal of good has come out of it, and we are extremely grateful to you, Mrs. Collier, for this background of information that is so valuable, and also for the use of your files, which we will microfilm and keep and see that they get back to you very safely.

NINA PERERA COLLIER: Thank you.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Thank you again.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]

