



Smithsonian  
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Oral history interview with Wilma  
Harris, 1964 Apr. 22

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Wilma Harris on April 22, 1964. The interview took place in Petaluma, California, and was conducted by Mary Fuller McChesney 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. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution. 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

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This is Mary Fuller, interviewing Mrs. Wilma Harris, W-I-L-M-A, H-A-R-R-I-S, on April 22, 1964, at her home, 304 D Street.

WILMA HARRIS: 504.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: 504 D Street, in Petaluma, California. First, Wilma, I'd like to ask you, are you a native Californian?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Where were you born?

WILMA HARRIS: Ventura.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Ventura, California? That's down in southern California.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what year was that?

WILMA HARRIS: 1910.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: 1910? And where did you go to school?

WILMA HARRIS: Altogether? You mean grammar school?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, no, just after high school. Where did you go to art school, or did you go to art school?

WILMA HARRIS: I went to California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And what year was that?

WILMA HARRIS: For just about a year and a half. I think that was from 1929 to '31.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: At the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's now the San Francisco Art Institute?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Then after you had finished art school, what did you do then?

WILMA HARRIS: I married George Harris.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And when did you first get on the WPA Project?

WILMA HARRIS: It was in the early part of World War II, about 1941.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: 1941?

WILMA HARRIS: In the spring. And I was only on for a couple months.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That was towards the end of the Project.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I believe so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But your husband, George Harris, had been a supervisor of the WPA Project previously to the time you were on the Project.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: As I understand it, only one person in the family was allowed to be on the WPA Project.

WILMA HARRIS: I was no longer one of his family.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yeah, so after you had separated from him, then you went on the Project?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And what part of the WPA Project were you one?

WILMA HARRIS: In the weaving, under Margery Livingston, later, Margery Magnani. I was head of the dyeing department for the weaving project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Okay. [Recorder stops, restarts.] You were head of the dyeing on the weaving project?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Under Margery Livingston, later married to John Magnani?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes. And where was the weaver's project located in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: In the Mission District. I don't remember the street.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How many people were working on the project at the time that you went there?

WILMA HARRIS: In the whole weaving department, I don't remember. There were about four women under me in the dyeing department.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And what, specifically did you do? How was the project organized, and how did you start out? Did you start with the raw wool, or—

WILMA HARRIS: As I remember, the larger part of the dyeing at that time was old army uniforms that were cut into strips and dyed different colors to make rugs. They knitted—or, these were woven rugs, I guess. We dyed material for drapery, too, I remember, which was yarn.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yarn, and then it was woven there at the Project?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, uh-huh [affirmative], they had big looms. And I don't remember how many women were weaving, but there were quite a few.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Were these all artists who were the weavers, or were there other types?

WILMA HARRIS: No, they weren't—they weren't necessarily artists, I think, that were doing the weaving.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And your finished product, then, was both hand-woven rugs and material that could be used for drapery?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. Uh-huh [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you do any other kind of projects on the—any other kind of crafts on the weaving project? I mean, did you make anything else, besides rugs and the drapery material?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember. I just had charge of the dyeing department, and I prepared the dyes to see that they were the right color. Supervised the dyeing of the—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Well, you must have had quite a factory, to go into that sort of work?

WILMA HARRIS: It was a large enough place. It was a loft. And I think Johnny Magnani had wood products or furniture products under WPA in the same building, in the same loft.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I see. Were there other crafts there, too, besides the wood and the weavers?

[00:05:01]

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't remember of any other one.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What happened to the product that you made? What happened to the rugs? Was there some way of disposing of it? Was it sold, or what was done with it?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I think they went into servicemen's clubs. I don't remember. Recreation places.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And some were—they'd go to use by the government, or some government facilities would use your final product?

WILMA HARRIS: I think so, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember the names of any of the other people who were on the weaver's project in San Francisco with you?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But you did know quite well Mrs. Dorothy Livingston Magnani?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's spelled M-I-N-A-I-N-A?

WILMA HARRIS: There's a *g* in there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, there's a *g* in it? I probably don't have it spelled right.

WILMA HARRIS: M-A-N-G-N-A-N-I, I think.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And she was head of the whole weaver's project in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Were there any other places where weavers worked, or were you just located in this one building?

WILMA HARRIS: I was just located—I only worked in this one place.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But did the project—

WILMA HARRIS: I don't know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, you don't know if the project was any larger. What I meant

was, I wondered if the project covered any other groups of weavers in San Francisco who might have been engaged in weaving, but in different buildings?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You don't know. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mrs. Magnani, who was the head of the weaver's project, what was her background as an artist?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But she was a weaver herself?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And after the Project, did she continue weaving, or continue the crafts?

WILMA HARRIS: I think she did, yes. She had Weavers Alley on Union Street for quite a number of years.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Weavers Alley, that was a commercial weaving venture of some kind? What was it?

WILMA HARRIS: They had yarns to sell and all sorts of weaving materials. And I think Margaret did quite a bit of weaving, there, too.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, it's Margaret, not Margery?

WILMA HARRIS: Margery.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Margery. And she sold looms and that kind of thing.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did she produce woven material herself?

WILMA HARRIS: I think so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Her husband, John Magnani, was a potter?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And he was on the Project, too?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Could you tell me what he did on the Project?

WILMA HARRIS: I'm not really sure.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Not really sure? [Wilma Harris laughs.] I wondered if you did know. Did they have—

[Cross talk.]

WILMA HARRIS: It may be—it may have been ceramics. I'm not sure.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I'd wondered if they did have a ceramics project in San Francisco.

WILMA HARRIS: It could have been. I'm very vague on this—just what he did. In the same building. I'm sure he was there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know anything about any of the other craft projects in San Francisco, or whether there were many more?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't really remember at that time.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: So you were on the Project then for about three months?

WILMA HARRIS: I think so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Towards the very end, in 194—

WILMA HARRIS: '41.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: '41?

WILMA HARRIS: '41, I think, or '42.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: However, during the time that you were married to George Harris, he was a supervisor in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: A part of that time, I believe.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And supervisor of what kind of project? What was his job with the WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: I know he was supervisor of the Oakland WPA easel—painting easel department for about a year.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You have something there that you'd like to read about him?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, but we'd better turn that off. [Laughs.]

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: We were talking about the period during which your husband, George Harris, was supervisor of the easel project, and then later, he became a district supervisor in the Oakland area. During this time, you knew many people who were on different WPA projects in the San Francisco area, and we have a list of names here. The first one is Maya Albee, A-L-B-E-E, and the first name probably spelled M-A-Y-A. Who was she?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, I believe she worked on the weaving project. I don't know very much about Maya, I remember her as a person, and I liked her. She was quite vivacious. I remember her at a party at Ann Mundstock's, one New Year's Eve. It's very vague.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Ann Mundstock, was she a person who was on the Project, too?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't believe so. She had a dance school in San Francisco, and many of the artists were friends of hers.

[00:10:05]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know any of the people who were on the Dancers' Project in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't know. I don't know whether Helen Dunham [ph] was on that Project or not. I think she studied under Ann Mundstock.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's M-U-N-S-T-O-C-K [sic]?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. Dorothy Puccinelli, at that time, studied under her. Esther, who became the second Mrs. Puccinelli, was studying under her at that time. Esther also was a weaver, but I don't remember whether she was on the Project or not.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And was Maya Albee on the weaver's project in the same location you were?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't remember—really, I don't remember if she was on the weaving project, or maybe doing tapestries, perhaps.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was there a tapestry project?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I believe there was in San Francisco, too. I don't know the location.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And the weavers didn't work with the tapestry makers? You weren't associated together?

WILMA HARRIS: No, not as I recall.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Let's go on to the next name. Who do we have next here?

WILMA HARRIS: Victor Arnautoff.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Where did you know Victor?

WILMA HARRIS: I met him first while I was going to art school. He was an advanced student and, I think, working on a fresco at the time.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: A WPA fresco?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, no, this was long before the WPA. It was in about 1931 or '32.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was when you were a student at the School of Fine Arts?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And he was a student at the school, there, too?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He must just recently have come from Russia, then.

WILMA HARRIS: Or he was maybe an associate professor. I'm not sure about that.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember anything about the fresco that he did at that time?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, no. I just remember him on a ladder working. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: At the school?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was Diego Rivera at the school when you were there?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he was. I sat at a table at lunch with him one time, with Hebe Daum and I believe Helen Phillips [ph]. And I—we didn't talk because he didn't know English and we didn't know Spanish, but we sat at the same table, and we enjoyed it very much. We were all very thrilled. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you take any classes from him when you were at the—

WILMA HARRIS: No, he was there to do the fresco. I don't remember him teaching.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's that large fresco that's in the library?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: No, not in the library, it's in the gallery.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. The gallery. I remember the fresco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That has several people from the San Francisco area painted into the fresco.

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes. Uh-huh [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know any of those people?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember who they were.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you ever watch him working on the fresco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What sort of person was he?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, he seemed very nice. He seemed jolly and nice to know, I would have liked to have known him better, but I did not.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How long was he there at the school teaching—or doing the fresco, rather?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, it was several months, I think.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did students work with him as his assistants?

WILMA HARRIS: I think they must have.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Part of the purpose of his being—

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember who they were.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: As far as you know, was Mr. Victor Arnautoff working with Rivera?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't believe so. I think he was gone then from the school, probably.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, he had gone?

WILMA HARRIS: I think so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And then, later, Victor Arnautoff did murals at Coit Tower. On the PWA project.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he did a large fresco on the Coit Tower, on the West side.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know him during that period that he was working on Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes, I knew him over a very long period.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And you were a very good friend of his wife's, Lida [ph] [Lydia - Ed.]?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did he teach at that time, or was he just doing murals and frescoes around the area?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember when he taught.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Let's see what we have on the next card, then.

WILMA HARRIS: Bud Painter.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, yes. This man was either in charge of publicity for the Project but we're not sure of that. You knew him, though, during the WPA period?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember what he was doing at that time?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, I do believe he was doing publicity for the Project. He did know, I think, all the artists. He seemed to know everybody, and everybody seemed to like him very much.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I wonder if he would have worked, then, for the whole area as a publicity man?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, I think probably so. The whole Bay Area, I think.



MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember anything specifically that he did in this direction? I think you mentioned some series of articles in *the San Francisco Chronicle* that you thought he might have been connected with?

[00:15:00]

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I do believe he tried to publicize the artists' work, to get them better-known.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And you have a newspaper here, *the San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday, March 10, 1940, where they talk about a signed print—limited-edition prints, made by local artists. There's one here, *Pier 39* by Herman Volz, who was supervisor of the mural project at Treasure Island later. Later? Earlier, I suppose. But was this what you thought that Mr. Painter might have been connected with?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And then the *Chronicle*, *the San Francisco Chronicle*—local newspaper—ran a series, I guess weekly—

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I believe so. It was to bring the western art to the western public.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: In which they would devote a whole page of the newspaper to reproductions of prints with biographies of the artists. In this issue, there are biographies of artists Herman Volz; George Gaethke; Ray Bertrand, who was head of the lithography project in San Francisco; Reuben Kadish, who did a mural at the—let's see, San Francisco State College; and Arthur Murray [ph], who apparently was on the lithography project.

I guess *the Chronicle* must have reproduced these prints, as they were available to the public at two dollars a print. And they were sold through *the Chronicle* at various local stores.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: City of Paris; O'Connor; Moffat; Paul Elder, the bookstore; Schwabacher-Frey; and Gumps.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What else do you know about Mr. Painter? Do you know of any other projects of this nature that he was involved in during this period?

WILMA HARRIS: No. I just became a friend of him through my husband, George Harris. And he did know the different artists on the Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And who do we have next on the list?

WILMA HARRIS: Benny Bufano.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Beniamino Bufano. B-U-F-A-N-O, B-E-N-I-A-M-I-N-O. Was probably one of the best-known sculptors in San Francisco.

WILMA HARRIS: Or the West Coast.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Or the West Coast, right. [They laugh.] Or the United States, probably. And you knew Benny when he was on the Project in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He was on the sculptor's project?

WILMA HARRIS: I believe so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know if he was the head of one of the sculptors?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know what he was doing at that time?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't. I don't remember what he was working on.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But you met him socially?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, through my husband at that time, and the different artists, they all knew Benny.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What kind of person was he?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, he was jovial. Sort of like his name, Bufano. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's a good description. I never thought of that. [They laugh.]

WILMA HARRIS: "Bouffon" [ph] means a sort of a clown.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He was doing very large pieces during this period, I think.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, huge. He was a very small man working on large projects, always. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And apparently always getting into difficulty with the government [they laugh] of San Francisco in one way or the other. I wonder if he was—

WILMA HARRIS: Getting publicity one way or another.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He seems to have managed that very successfully. I wonder if he was doing mosaics at this time.

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember him doing mosaics until later. A later date.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you ever go to his sculpture workshop?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Or did you ever watch him at work on any of his pieces?

WILMA HARRIS: Not really at work. I went to the studio in North Beach one time when he was doing mosaics. That was in later years though, about five years ago, perhaps.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know any other sculptors who were on the sculpture project in the WPA period?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, I knew Raymond Puccinelli, but I don't know if he was on the Project or not.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I see.

WILMA HARRIS: He was a sculptor, and very well-known in San Francisco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He taught over at Mills College, didn't he?

WILMA HARRIS: I believe he did, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And who do we have on the list next?

WILMA HARRIS: Dorothy Puccinelli Cravath, who was at that time married to Raymond Puccinelli.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Sculptor—And is she a painter, or what?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, she is a painter, mosaicist, um, she did frescoes, too. Murals.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did she do frescoes on the WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: She did a large mural in the Mother House at Fleishhacker Zoo. I don't know whether that's WPA or not. Was it? Do you know?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I'm not sure if it was WPA or PWA. This is the Fleishhacker Zoo

in Golden Gate Park?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: In San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. And that was with Helen.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Helen Bruton?

WILMA HARRIS: Helen, no. One of the Bruton sisters did a mosaic in the entryway—or on both sides of the entryway.

But Dorothy's work in inside, and I think with Helen Forbes. They did this together as one big mural all around the wall.

[00:20:10]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, and this is painted, not—

WILMA HARRIS: It's painted. It's high on the wall. It is of the ark biblical scenes, and—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, yes.

WILMA HARRIS: —it's very well done.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: It's up over some of those arched windows, runs all the way around the room.

[Cross talk.]

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, it runs all around the room.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's a very large room, too.

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes, it is. It's a huge piece of work.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And you knew her then in the WPA. Do you know if she did any other frescoes during that period, or mural work?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I think she did, but I don't remember now what they were. Seems like she must have done something else.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And just recently, you were engaged in working with her restoring the murals at Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: When did that begin?

WILMA HARRIS: The fall of 1961, and the spring of 1962.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: So it ran for about a year? The restoration?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, she worked much longer that I did on it. She worked two and a half years, or maybe three years on it. I didn't come into until rather late. She had already done a huge amount of work. All the cleaning—or most of it, the general cleaning, and the restoration of a large part of the works.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Why did the murals have to be restored? Had they had water come into the building in some way?

WILMA HARRIS: There had been some seepage. There was much damage by vandalism, carving into the frescoes, lipstick, pencils, pen, obscenities. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh.

WILMA HARRIS: Just terrible damage, altogether. They no longer were available for the

public to look at. They were just so badly carved up and damaged. We—where I helped with the restoration, it was a huge task. Some of the frescoes had actually parted from the masonry on the stairway, on the curve. That was due to water seeping in between the concrete—the original concrete, and the lime composition they made for the fresco—to take the fresco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: These frescoes were mostly painted into the wet lime composition, weren't they?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, they were all done that way. [Inaudible.]

[Cross talk.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: So, how did you go about cleaning to begin with?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, as I said, Dorothy did most of that cleaning before I started work on the frescoes. I think they used a sponge and water, but that would just be one swipe of the sponge over just one small part, and then the sponge would have to be cleansed thoroughly and then gone on down.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, I see, did the paint—did the color come off with the—

WILMA HARRIS: No, the fresco—in a fresco painting, it's incorporated in the wet plaster as it is done. It has to be painted on the fresh plaster, just a portion at a time.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Then they were repainted, the areas that were badly damaged?

WILMA HARRIS: They were not painted over the original paint, except just very fine hairline. We worked with the smallest camel-hair brushes, and where a scratch or a carving had been dug into the original plaster, we filled that with a composition that approximated the original plaster as much as possible, and then painted over just that one tiny area with a very fine brush, just hairline strokes, to make it as close to the original as possible. And it was all very fine work, incredibly fine.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's why it was so time-consuming?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, it was. And there was so much damage. And most of it was man-made damage.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: It was?

WILMA HARRIS: Not just children, because some of it was too high for children to have reached. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's quite a comment on our [they laugh] admiration for culture in San Francisco.

[00:25:00]

WILMA HARRIS: But I wouldn't say that the originals have been painted over. Some were just very fine cracks in the plaster. That was done, I suppose, by the shrinkage of the material, but we had to fill those in, too, and to paint those over. But wherever we could leave the original paint, we did, so that it does not look painted over.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: No, I've seen those since they've been repaired, and it's certainly true, they don't look at all painted over. It's a very good job.

WILMA HARRIS: It's a very careful job. Very time-consuming, careful job. Dorothy studied quite a bit before she went into this at all, before she did any of the work. She went into the chemistry of the paint and the material it's painted on and what materials or solvents she could use, and what she couldn't, how it would affect the original paint. It was a large task.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Who employed her to do the restoration?

WILMA HARRIS: The park commission—Francisco Park Commission.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: The San Francisco Park Commission. Do they actually own Coit

Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: It is under the parks system.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Under the jurisdiction of the parks system?

WILMA HARRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Which murals—murals by which WPA, or PWA rather, artists did you work on?

WILMA HARRIS: I started with Wollo.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Wollo, that's W-O-L-L-O? Who was a puppeteer—

WILMA HARRIS: I think he later was a puppeteer.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —around San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: And he did other murals or frescoes. He did one in Palo Alto in a doctor's reception office.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: A private doctor's office, or was this a public hospital, do you remember?

WILMA HARRIS: No, it was the Palo Alto Clinic.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was this under WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't believe so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was later.

WILMA HARRIS: It was for a pediatrician's office.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And the mural that you restored of his at Coit Tower, where was that one located?

WILMA HARRIS: It is up the stairs, on the second floor.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: On the second floor. How large a panel was that?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, it was about eight by 10 feet high, I think.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Eight by 10 feet. And what was the subject matter?

WILMA HARRIS: There were children in a playground.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And this is done also in the fresco technique?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Painted directly onto the wet plaster?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. They're all done that way.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Everything in the building is done that way, I see. Then after you had completed the restoring of the Wollo panel, which other ones did you work on?

WILMA HARRIS: I worked on Ben Cunningham's, Jane Berlandina's—these are all upstairs. I don't remember who else I worked on up there. I think there were some others up there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How many murals are there in Coit Tower, in the building?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, I think there are about 27.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: 27?

WILMA HARRIS: There are quite a few. And all up the stairway, there are frescoes going up

the spiral stair to the second floor. But they end at the second floor.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did Dorothy Puccinelli Cravath do any of these original murals at Coit Tower herself?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: She didn't. But she was on the WPA Project?

WILMA HARRIS: I'm not sure of that.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You're not sure?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Whether she actually worked during that period?

WILMA HARRIS: I think she did tell me that they were not on it, because they got along quite well during the Depression without it.

[Cross talk.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And they couldn't meet the relief qualification?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't know. If they worked on it. Raymond's father had a produce market out in the Richmond District.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: In San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And he was doing sculpture during this period?

WILMA HARRIS: Raymond was.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes. But she was mainly a painter?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. At that time, she was.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And who—let's see, you mentioned Jane Berlandina? A fresco at Coit Tower that you helped to repair?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: She was on the WPA Project.

WILMA HARRIS: I believe so, but I don't really—I met her, but I don't know her.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Her name is associated in my mind with the women's lounge at the zoo. I could be wrong. Do you remember if she did anything out there? A mosaic, perhaps?

WILMA HARRIS: She may have. I don't know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I may be thinking of someone else. Let's see, the next name on —

WILMA HARRIS: Dorothy Wagner, who was Dorothy Puccinelli, and later Dorothy Cravath.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Who was the person that you worked under on the restoration of Coit Tower.

WILMA HARRIS: Rinaldo Cuneo was an easel painter. He did very, very fine oils. I don't remember what he did on the WPA.

[00:30:02]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know if he was on the easel project on the WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't remember at all.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But the name is familiar to you from that period?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And who do we have here?

WILMA HARRIS: Ben Cunningham, who did one of the frescoes at Coit Tower that I worked on, on the second floor.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes, what type of work was he painting at that period? What did it look like?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, more easel painting, I think, than anything. I don't really remember, either. Or he did some—I think woodcuts. Fine work.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Well, the mural, I meant—or the fresco at Coit Tower.

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, at Coit Tower.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What was that like?

WILMA HARRIS: That was sort of a romantic scene out in the country, a picnic, I believe.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: With a lot of figures in it?

WILMA HARRIS: Some figures, a stream, trees, greenery.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This is also up on the second floor of Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was he a supervisor of a project? We have him down as supervisor of mural painting for northern California prior to April 1939. Did you know him during the WPA days, too?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes. I knew him before, even.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, before that. Did you go to school with him?

WILMA HARRIS: No. He was a friend of George Harris'. I got to know him through George. I knew his wife, Marion very well, too.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Marion, was she on the Project? Marion Cunningham?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember what she did on the Project at all.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: She became rather well-known around San Francisco for—

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, she was very well-known for her serigraphs [ph] of San Francisco scenes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And did postcards of cable cars, as I recall. [Cross talk.] They were very popular.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, some of her serigraphs [ph] were lithographed and put on postcards and note paper and various things. She was very popular.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, she died when she was quite young.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, she did, 39.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Something like that.

WILMA HARRIS: Mallette Dean.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's M-A-L-L-E-T-T-E, Dean, D-E-A-N. Was he involved in doing

frescoes at Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I believe he worked with Stackpole, on Stackpole's fresco, under Stackpole.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This is Ralph Stackpole?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: The sculptor?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And he did a fresco painting—

WILMA HARRIS: He did a large fresco painting in the tower, on the north side, downstairs.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: It's on the first floor?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, on the first floor.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you help to restore that one, as well as the others?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I didn't. That was done already. It's a fine piece of work. It's beautiful.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_harris64\_149\_m.]

WILMA HARRIS: Well, you should really look us up in the news. And—

WILMA'S SON: How's it going?

WILMA HARRIS: [Laughs.] I don't know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes, we'll check this out. We're just looking at a photograph from an old copy of *the San Francisco News*—which unfortunately has no date on it—which Mrs. Wilma Harris has in her scrapbook. This is an article about the Rivera mural in New York termed "murder." And that's cut a little bit or torn a little bit, so you can't read it all and ["somebody couldn't take it," declares Steffens -Ed.]. I suppose it's Lincoln Steffens. And there's a photograph of a portrait of Diego Rivera and a photograph of a group of San Francisco artists who were working on the Coit Tower project at that time. And what were they saying there, Mrs. Harris? Wilma?

WILMA HARRIS: What did they say?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: It says above—

WILMA HARRIS: [Reads from text.] "Maxine Albro was reading a manifesto on the destruction of Rivera murals in Rockefeller Center, New York, to the local artists."

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And you recognize—Maxine Albro did a large mural at—or large fresco at Coit Tower—

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —on the first floor. Who were some of those other people in the photograph? They're all in their working clothes and white—the women in white coveralls.

WILMA HARRIS: Helen Clement—her name has changed now—is in the center along with, I believe, Bill Finner [ph].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Helen Clement, did she do a fresco at Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: She was one of the helpers, I believe. And it looks like Tom Lehman, Farwell Taylor, I think. George Harris is there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Tom Lehman, L-E-H-M-A-N?

WILMA HARRIS: I believe so.



MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And do you think he was on the Coit Tower project too?

WILMA HARRIS: I think he must—or maybe he just came up. I'm not sure whether he did actually work on it or not.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And you recognize—

WILMA HARRIS: Bernard—perhaps that's Bernard Zakheim there. I don't—I don't really know. It's not a very clear photograph, newspaper print.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was the famous mural of Rivera's at Rockefeller Center that they took down or destroyed. What was it? Did they take out the portrait of Lenin that was in the—

WILMA HARRIS: Yeah, I think they destroyed the whole thing, didn't they?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: They destroyed the whole thing? But there was a famous poem written about that by E. B. White. Didn't he write one called the—I remember one line from it where Rockefeller says, After all, it's my wall?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, no, I don't remember.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —the poem? [They laugh.] It's in most American poetry collections. So, I suppose this must have happened at the same time that they were working on the murals at Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: I think so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know Maxine Albro?

WILMA HARRIS: I knew her just as an artist. I didn't know her well at all.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And Helen Clement, who you believe was a helper at Coit Tower murals—

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes. I knew her. I went to art school when she did. And Tom Lehman, I went to art school with, and Farwell Taylor.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Are these people artists now?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. Helen is working in a wallpaper factory in San Francisco. Farwell Taylor and his wife, Fay, who was also in art school with me, have [the Palette in Miel Valley -Ed]. It's a little restaurant, and they have their paintings on the walls.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: On display in the restaurant?

WILMA HARRIS: In the restaurant. But that they do both paint, and they do very well with very nice paintings.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know what's happened to Tom Lehman, or do you know what he did on the WPA project besides the Coit Tower assistant?

WILMA HARRIS: No. I don't remember. I don't remember him [inaudible].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Let's see, the next person we have on our list here is Luke Gibney, who was an assistant at Aquatic Park, which is a rather large WPA or PWA project? WPA, I guess it was?

WILMA HARRIS: I guess so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: On the San Francisco beach.

WILMA HARRIS: Near Fisherman's Wharf, on that side.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes.

WILMA HARRIS: [Inaudible] San Francisco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And I have it down here that he was an assistant on the Hilaire Hiler mural at that time. Did you know Luke when he was working there at Aquatic Park?

WILMA HARRIS: I believe so. I believe I met him when he was working on the WPA Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know what other projects he worked on?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Just that he was on the WPA Project.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. He later did mostly portraits of society women in San Francisco. Rather romantic paintings, they were very popular and very, very good.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He became quite well known around San Francisco.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he did.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Let's see, he died only a few years ago, like two or three years ago.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:05:03]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He was well known in the area as sort of a professional Irishman.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I believe he actually did fight in the Irish Republican Army. I remember his talking—

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, maybe.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Talking about it a great deal. [Wilma Harris laughs.] What else do you remember about Luke?

WILMA HARRIS: He worked at the Vesuvio's Cafe.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Vesuvio's cafe, that's the—

WILMA HARRIS: It's on Columbia Avenue. It's a rather unique little cafe. They serve wine and beer only, I believe. It's run by Henri Lenoir. It's been there for quite a few years. I believe Luke worked in a Black Cat restaurant at one time, on Montgomery Street. He seemed to like working in the cafes; he got to meet people and talk with them. They enjoyed talking with him. He enjoyed people very much.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes, he was a very charming man. Do you remember anything else about what he was doing during the WPA days? I understand he was on the Treasure Island mural project.

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, I guess he was. No, I don't remember, except that I became quite friendly with Luke. He helped me out very much at one time.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He was always a very generous person, wasn't he?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he was. He was generous with his time, and he was a nice person to know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Tom Hayes, who worked as an assistant at Coit Tower, I have that down, and also did a kindergarten mural and was possibly on the Treasure Island project and did his own murals. Did you know Tom Hayes?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I knew Tom quite well. I have a painting of Tom here, a large painting, a Oriental painting.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was that the kind of work that he did—oh, is this is painting

right here? This is a very good-looking, very stylized oriental painting.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Brilliant, high-toned, high-keyed yellows. When did he do that?

WILMA HARRIS: 1934, I think is the date on it.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He was on the Project. You knew him then he was on—

WILMA HARRIS: I knew him before that, quite a long time before.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know him at art school too?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't know whether he went to art school. I know I knew him when I was first married to George Harris. He was a friend of George's, and I got to know him that way.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He has been dead now for some time. Do you know when he died?

WILMA HARRIS: He died about five years ago.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, it was only five years ago. What kind of work did he do on the WPA? Was it similar to this rather oriental motif?

WILMA HARRIS: I think he assisted in some of the post office jobs. I believe he and George Harris assisted Ray Boynton in the Modesto post office, for one.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Modesto, that's a town down the San Joaquin Valley.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And George Harris did a mural there?

WILMA HARRIS: He assisted. Ray, I believe did the mural or fresco, and I believe that—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: The design.

WILMA HARRIS: —George Harris and Tom Hayes assisted; helped paint the mural.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Have you ever seen this mural in Modesto?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes. I used to live in Modesto.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh. What does it look like?

WILMA HARRIS: The mural or Modesto? [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: No, I know what Modesto looks like. What does the mural look like?

WILMA HARRIS: I think it's an early western scene? I'm not too clear about it now. But it's very well done.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: The Modesto post office was on the WPA too?

WILMA HARRIS: I think so, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember what techniques—was it a fresco done on the wet plaster?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't believe so. I think it was done as a mural and set in place.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: [Cross talk.] That's oil paints on—

WILMA HARRIS: I'm not sure about that. It may have been executed right there too. I know they were there for some time. It probably was done right there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How large of a mural is it?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, it runs around the post office, up above, as most of them do. Up above the doorways.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And above the little booth at the—

[Cross talk.]

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —stand [inaudible]?

WILMA HARRIS: And it's a fairly good-sized post office. I'm not sure the area size.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did George Harris work on this Modesto mural during the period that he was on the WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: I believe so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What—do you know much about the extent of the Project as far as going out into towns like Modesto and the Valley, which is quite a distance from San Francisco. It's a good, what, 80-90 miles?

WILMA HARRIS: About 100.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: About 100. Were there many projects like that that was done by San Francisco artists? Did any of them, as far as you know, go out into outlying areas—

[00:10:02]

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I think quite a few of them did.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: So, that probably all over California in these small towns you'd find murals—

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I helped restore one in the—in Susanville. I helped Dorothy Cravath restore one in a small post office.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Susanville, that's a town in northern California, up above Sacramento.

WILMA HARRIS: It's high in the Sierras.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, I'm thinking of Marysville. Susanville—

WILMA HARRIS: No, this is way up.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —that's way up. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WILMA HARRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's south of Lassen, some way—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But north of Reno.

WILMA HARRIS: It's west, northwest—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Northwest of Reno, so it's quite a way up in Northern California.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, it's right away up in the Sierras, in the snow country.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Who did the mural up there that you helped restore?

WILMA HARRIS: I think it was Maxine Albro.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Maxine Albro. And this would have been done—

WILMA HARRIS: No, it wasn't either. It was Helen Forbes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Helen Forbes? [They laugh.] Did she do—

WILMA HARRIS: Again, she is the one that has worked with Dorothy in the children's—at the Children's House at the Fleishhacker playground.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative]. When was this that you restored the mural in Susanville?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, well, it was during that time I was helping on the Coit Tower restoration. We went up over one weekend, Dorothy, and Mark—I can't remember his name. He also helped on the Coit Tower job.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Helped with the restoration?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you do any other restoring around in other small towns out of San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, that's the only one I helped on. He was talking about doing another restoration. But I don't know which one it was. We just went up over one weekend. I believe we stayed two nights in a hotel. And we worked very hard in that short time. We have to clean it and restore it.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How large a mural was this that Helen Forbes had done?

WILMA HARRIS: This was—excuse me.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, I just wanted to identify it again. This mural that you restored in Susanville, which was done by Helen Forbes under the WPA. How large of a panel was that, and was that a fresco?

WILMA HARRIS: I think that was a fresco, yes. And I think it was probably about five by 12, some sort of area like that. It was a small post office.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Five feet by 12 feet?

WILMA HARRIS: Perhaps.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And it was a fresco?

WILMA HARRIS: Five feet by 12 wide, perhaps. I believe it was a fresco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And what was the subject matter?

WILMA HARRIS: Deer in a forest. Forest scene. Very charming and well done.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And she also did some work at the women's lounge at the zoo, you said?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Who was—

WILMA HARRIS: Children's, something like the Children's House?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, the Children's House? Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you know her?

WILMA HARRIS: The children's playground. I knew her only slightly.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was during the WPA days that you knew her only slightly.

WILMA HARRIS: I knew her before.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Let's see. Who do we have on the list now?

WILMA HARRIS: William Hesthal.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: William Hesthal, that's H-E-S-T-H-A-L, who was on the easel

project during the WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: Perhaps. I didn't know him. I don't know whether he was on the easel project or not myself. I knew him before WPA days, more than during WPA, I think.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I see. You don't know that anything about what he did on the WPA Project?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't know, except that he did one of the frescoes at Coit Tower.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, he did a fresco at Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And where's that fresco that he did located?

WILMA HARRIS: It's on the ground floor—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: On the ground floor?

WILMA HARRIS: —near Stackpole's.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Near Ralph Stackpole's? And how large is it?

WILMA HARRIS: It's quite large. Maybe 15 by 13 or—from floor to ceiling and takes in one corner.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And what's the subject matter of that one?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, dear. After working on that, I should know [laughs].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: [Laughs.] Well, you've done so many it's probably hard to separate them.

WILMA HARRIS: I think it's the plants in the foreground, cactus-like plants, that took me forever. And some bricks that I didn't think I'd ever get looking like bricks again. [Mary Fuller McCchesney laughs.] The weather had come in on them and through the little window—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, it was near a window? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. Those were the—yeah—the hardest thing. There were a group of workers.

[00:15:06]

But the subject itself is a little hazy on these things. I've worked in such fine pinpoints and lines that sometimes it's about all I remember [laughs].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You remember the bricks but not the forest. [They laugh.] William Hesthal, I understand, is now a curator at the Santa Barbara Museum in Southern California.

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, I believe so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You knew him during the WPA period, though?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, yes, and before I knew Bill and his first wife, Eleanor [ph].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you don't know whether aside from the Coit Tower PWA—

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —Project what other things he worked on during that period? And Hiler Hilaire [sic], H-I-L-E-R, the last name, H-I-L-A-I-R-E, Hiler Hilaire [sic] [Hilaire Hiler], who did a large—was I guess, the head of the Aquatic Park Project in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh [inaudible].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Or did a large mural there?

WILMA HARRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You knew him during the WPA period?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know him—

WILMA HARRIS: And before that.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And before that? What do you remember about him?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, I remember a bang out Hawaiian party he gave one time [laughs]. All Hawaiian food, it was quite a party. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He wasn't a—

WILMA HARRIS: He knew his color. He put out a color chart that I have, a book on color.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He actually did a scientific analysis of color.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he did.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And worked out a system called the Hiler System, I believe.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was he doing that when you knew him on the WPA Project?

WILMA HARRIS: I think he might have done that before the WPA Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You knew him when he was doing the Aquatic Park murals?

WILMA HARRIS: I think I knew him before that.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Before that, do you know if you've done any other mural projects around San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember what he did.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He's now living in France, I understand.

WILMA HARRIS: I guess he is.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And Hy Hirsch, H-Y, first name, the last name is H-I-R-S-C-H, who was on the photography project in San Francisco. And you knew him at that time during the WPA period?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know what he was doing? What kind of work was he doing?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, I think—I thought he was doing photography. I don't know whether he was doing photography of the Project things or just what he was doing.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, you mean—

[Cross talk.]

WILMA HARRIS: [Inaudible.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —there was a photographer's project that went around?

WILMA HARRIS: Now, I'm not sure, but he was a professional photographer.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: At that time.

WILMA HARRIS: At that time. And later, he worked for the Palace of Legion of Honor, didn't he?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: As their photographer? Or do you know? Or just in some other capacity there?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't—I don't know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you know anything about the photography project in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: No.

WILMA HARRIS: I just remember Hy as a friend mostly, coming to the house when the children were little. And they would always say "Hy!"

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, "Hi, Hy," right. [Laughs.]

WILMA HARRIS: And then we were friends of Hy and his wife and had dinner at their place sometimes. They'd come to our house.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Sargent Johnson, S-A-R-G-E-N-T, first name, J-O-H-N-S-O-N, Sargent Johnson, who was a San Francisco sculptor, who was quite active on the WPA Project, worked in the Aquatic Park. You knew him during the period he was on the WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know what other work Sargent was engaged in at that time? There's—you have a copy in your scrapbook here of a—I guess a graphic—a lithograph, yes, called *Singing Saints*, which is one of a series of graphic prints that *the Chronicle* newspaper was making available to the public. And this apparently, was in some way connected with Bud Painter, who was the publicity man at the WPA. Although we're not sure what the connection was or how it was arranged. But apparently, a great many artists in San Francisco did some kind of graphic work that was then carried out, reproduced, and reproduced in the newspaper and then sold through the newspaper. What do you remember about Sargent from that period?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, a very likable person. I think everybody liked him. I don't remember his work in the Project. I remembered some of his sculptures that he did very well, but I don't know that it was done in the Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What material was he working in then?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, he worked in ceramics, I think, largely.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I remember seeing a piece of his at the San Francisco Museum a long time ago in a painted wood which was rather unusual at that time, like it was quite early. But he did work in ceramics, and then he worked in—did a bas-relief in carved stone that was at Aquatic Park.

[00:20:03]

WILMA HARRIS: Oh.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Some kind of a gray stone, I don't know what it is. It's rather beautiful—on the entrance as you go in.

WILMA HARRIS: I hadn't been there for so long.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Reuben Kadish, R-U-B-E-N [sic], K-A-D-I-S-H, who was a mural painting supervisor in San Francisco, after Ben Cunningham. And you knew Rube—and also did a mural himself at San Francisco State College in San Francisco—you knew Reuben



during the WPA period?

WILMA HARRIS: I knew Reuben quite well and his wife, Barbara.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember what he was working on at that period?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You don't remember whether he was the supervisor then or whether he was on the Project?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't remember.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Have you ever seen his mural at State College?

WILMA HARRIS: No. Unfortunately, I don't know it. I have one—a reproduction of one is his lithographs that I like much very much.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What kind of work was he doing at that time? Do you remember what the painting looked like?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't really remember his painting much.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You knew him more, then, personally—

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —than as an artist? Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And we have Dong Kingman, D-O-N-G, K-I-N-G-M-A-N, Dong Kingman, who was on the easel project in San Francisco, and is now quite well known as a painter, not only in New York but all over the United States. Did you know Dong Kingman during the WPA period?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What was he doing then?

WILMA HARRIS: With most of these artists, I knew them just more personally as friends than as artists, so that I don't remember their work as well as I remember the person.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Or their position?

WILMA HARRIS: Maybe having dinner with them, or at our house. Or their position, I don't really remember.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you did know him during that time?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I knew him very well.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Lucien Labaudt, L-A-B-A-U-D-T, who did many murals around San Francisco and did a mural at the Coit Tower. Did you help restore Lucien Labaudt's mural?

WILMA HARRIS: Not very much. I worked just a little bit on Lucien's mural. I just remember him more as a friend also, and the large mural he did out at the Beach Chalet, I remember.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: The Beach Chalet is the building on the San Francisco beach in San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Which he—

WILMA HARRIS: He was quite well known as an artist. And very well-liked among the artists, too.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes, he was a *Life* artist correspondent during the war and was killed in a plane crash in—

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he was.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —India or Burma, I believe.

WILMA HARRIS: They named one of the Liberty ships after him.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes. [Inaudible.]

WILMA HARRIS: It was built in Oakland, I believe. Or Richmond—Richmond shipyard

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And Gordon Langdon, L-A-N-G-D-O-N, was he on the WPA Project?

WILMA HARRIS: I think so. I remember him from art school days. I knew Gordon and his wife Barbara quite well as friends. He did a nice little fresco at the George Washington High School too.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: On WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: I think it was WPA.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was at the George Washington High School in—

WILMA HARRIS: In San Francisco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Where is that located?

WILMA HARRIS: On Geary Street. It's out in the Richmond [district -Ed.], I don't remember the avenues. It must be about 25th or so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: About Geary and 25th then in San Francisco. Do you know if he did any other projects around the Bay Area during the WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, he did a lot. A very nice one at Coit Tower.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, he did a mural of fresco Coit Tower too? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And where's that located?

WILMA HARRIS: On Telegraph Hill.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, I meant in the building. Where's his fresco—

WILMA HARRIS: It's in the entryway as you enter, on the left. So, it would be the south side on the first floor.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes. What size panel did he do?

WILMA HARRIS: It's in one of the corners. So, it's a large fresco, and of, I think, it's a butcher or livestock scene.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, yes, I remember that.

WILMA HARRIS: It's very well done.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And—

WILMA HARRIS: Medalie.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: M-E-D-A-L-I-E, Medalie, Ann. She was on WPA in San Francisco at Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't believe she was at Coit Tower. But I do believe she was on WPA in San Francisco. I don't remember what department or anything. I remember her as a friend, and I remember being at her house at a party and she was a very wonderful person.

[00:25:14]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You don't know what works she did?

WILMA HARRIS: No, I don't.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know where she is now?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Urban Neininger, U-R-B-A-N, first name, Neininger, N-E-I-N-I-N-G-E-R, who was a supervisor—mural painting supervisor after Ben Cunningham in San Francisco, and a color technician on the federal building project under Herman Volz. The federal building project was at the Treasure Island Fair. And you knew him under WPA?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I knew him. I didn't know him very well. I knew him as a friend of the Kadish's. He was quite friendly with them.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I think he also did a—some kind of color spectrum or something like that out at Aquatic Park?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't really know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You don't know what kind of work he was doing then?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Richard O'Hanlon, Richard, O-H-A-N-L-O-N. And you knew him on the WPA—he was on the sculptor's project.

WILMA HARRIS: I believe so. I knew Dick from art school days and his wife, Ann. They both went to art school when I did. They later got married. And I guess both of them worked on the Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: We have down that she was an assistant to Hiler Hilaire [sic] at Aquatic Park. And I believe that he was on the sculptor's project, but I'm not sure whether he worked with Bufano or with whom he did work. He's now a—

WILMA HARRIS: I think perhaps with Bufano. I think I have it in this article somewhere.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: He's been a professor at the University of California Berkeley.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he has, for some time now. In fact, my older boy had a class with him when he was attending.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, your son who just became an architect?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, fine [laughs]. Otis Oldfield, O-L-D-F-I-E-L-D, did he do a fresco at Coit Tower on the PWA?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember him doing a fresco. I remember him as a teacher at art school when I attended there. I really don't remember.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Is he still around San Francisco?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't know. I don't know what became of him.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Rick Olmsted, O-L-M-S-T-E-D. Is that spelled correctly?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes. It's Fredrick, really, but everybody called him Rick.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And he did a—

WILMA HARRIS: I believe that he worked with somebody at Coit Tower. I think maybe Frede Vidar.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Frede Vidar, who did a mural at the Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, he did one of the frescoes. He did the one next to George Harris'. I— Barbara, didn't she work, also, on there? Do you have her name?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Who is that?

WILMA HARRIS: Barbara Olmsted.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Worked at—

WILMA HARRIS: Did she work on the WPA Project? I don't believe you have her name, right?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I don't believe; I'll check that.

WILMA HARRIS: I guess not.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And we have Raymond Pucinelli. Well, we already talked about him when we were talking about his wife.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And Beatrice Judd Ryan, R-Y-A-N, who has been already interviewed by Lew Ferbraché. She was head of the exhibition committee, as I understand it.

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, she was—she seemed to have a knack with shows. She was head of the Rotunda Art Gallery for years in the City of Paris.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That was after WPA.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, and before WPA even, she had charge of a gallery in San Francisco. She opened, I believe, on her own, and that was in existence for some years. I remember her from art school days. I think she had the gallery then, but that was during Depression, and I worked for her after school for \$10 a month.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: In her gallery?

WILMA HARRIS: Cleaned her apartment, and cooked her dinner and washed the dishes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, while you were an art school student? [They laugh.] I see.

WILMA HARRIS: We took anything in those days. But I got to know her quite well.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I see. [Recorder stops, restarts.]

WILMA HARRIS: [Inaudible.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: We were just talking about a painter from San Francisco named Frede Vidar, V-I-D-A-R, who did one of the frescoes at Coit Tower?

[00:30:06]

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And here's a newspaper photograph from *the San Francisco Examiner*, April 23, 1935. The headline reading, "His Exhibit Wins Prize, Broke, Telegram Arrives." He's holding a painting of his in his hand. And apparently—all of the text has been torn off—he won a Paris award for the San Francisco Painter. You knew him during the time he was doing the PWA fresco at Coit Tower?

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, yes. I met him while we were both in art school.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did he do any other frescoes around the area?

WILMA HARRIS: I don't remember that he did. He might have.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And do you know where he is now?

WILMA HARRIS: I think he's on the East Coast somewhere. I think he married a prominent socialite back east. I don't know where though.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: His luck held after the Paris prize. [They laugh.]

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And Jane Berlandina, B-E-R-L-A-N-D-I-N-A, Jane Berlandina, who was on the PWA and did a fresco at Coit Tower.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You helped to restore hers.

WILMA HARRIS: Yes, I did.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Where was her fresco located?

WILMA HARRIS: It's on the second floor, on the south side. She did a whole room—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, she did a whole room?

WILMA HARRIS: A small room. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Her fresco goes all around the walls. I remember a man reading a newspaper. I believe it's all sort of a family scene, and it's done in a monotone. It's very nicely done.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: It must have been rather one of the larger ones at Coit Tower, larger.

WILMA HARRIS: Well, it is a small room. Although it is altogether quite large, taking in the four walls, from—I don't remember them going to floor to ceiling, though. I think they stop because I don't remember getting on a high ladder for that one. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: I see. Was there very much restoration needed for this mural, Jane Berlandina's?

WILMA HARRIS: Quite a lot. I think part of it was from the weather, though.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: From leakage through the windows?

WILMA HARRIS: Well, the sun from the window.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And Bernard Zakheim, Z-A-K-H-E-I-M, who has already been interviewed by Lew Ferbraché, who also did a PWA mural at Coit Tower. But you didn't do restoration on his fresco there?

WILMA HARRIS: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And Ralph Stackpole, S-T-A-C-K-P-O-L-E, who was the very famous San Francisco sculptor. Did you know him during the WPA days?

WILMA HARRIS: Oh, yes. I knew him from art school days. He was my—[teacher at the California School of Fine Arts -Ed.].

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]