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Oral history interview with John Gaw Meem,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with John Gaw Meem on December 3, 1964. The interview took place at 785 Camino Del Monte Sol in Sante Fe, NM, and was conducted by Sylvia Loomis as part of the New Deal and the Arts project for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview with Mr. John Gaw Meem, architect, 785 Camino Del Monte Sol, Santa Fe, on December 3, 1964. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe office of the Archives of American Art. And one of the subjects to be discussed is Mr. Meem's participation in the Federal Art Projects of the 1930's and '40s. But first Mr. Meem, will you tell us something about your background, where you were born and where you received your education?

JOHN GAW MEEM: Well, I was born in South America, in Brazil. My parents were Americans and my father was an Episcopal clergyman in southern Brazil. I was born in 1894. My father came from Virginia and he had gone to the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia, for college work. I suppose because his father and grandfather and his great grandfather all went there so when the time came for me to come to the United States in 1915, it was natural that I went to the VMI as the fifth.

MS. LOOMIS: Fifth generation, yes.

MR. MEEM: Fifth generation. So since then of course I suppose my education has been self-made.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh, you didn't have any formal architectural training then?

MR. MEEM: No formal architectural training other than at VMI where I had a degree in structural engineering.

MS. LOOMIS: Where did you live in South America?

MR. MEEM: In Pelotas.

MS. LOOMIS: Pelotas, what country?

MR. MEEM: Right near Uruguay, it's in Brazil.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh it's in Brazil?

MR. MEEM: Didn't I say that?

MS. LOOMIS: I think you said South America but I don't think you pin-pointed it. What was the name of that town?

MR. MEEM: PELOTAS.

MS. LOOMIS: PELOTAS.

MR. MEEM: And that means hides, bundles of hides -- it was right near the pampas country there.

MS. LOOMIS: So that was where you spent your boyhood?

MR. MEEM: That's right. Then let's see, I came to the United States, to the VMI and then graduated, as I say in structural engineering and up until the first World War I worked in New York city -- in the subways there for the Underpinning and Foundation Company doing underground work most of the time. My uncle was closely connected with that company and he, in fact, was the chief engineer so I got quite a little bit of insight into that type of engineering. Then the war came along, and because of my connection with the VMI I was in the Reserve Corps. I was immediately sent to Plattsburg where the first American contingent of officers was being retrained. But instead of being immediately assigned to divisions, the United States government paid attention to what had happened to Great Britain. The first cadre of English officers, you know, were sent into Gallipoli and to the front and then they were practically destroyed so that Great Britain had no young officers. There were very few of them, so instead of sending us immediately to the front as we had expected would happen, we were kept here throughout the war training other units. We were used as a training organization. Then after the war I came to

the conclusion that I didn't want to be a civil engineer or a structural engineer, and I could speak Portuguese, so I walked into the National City Bank of New York one day and asked them if they could use a person who knew no banking but who did know Portuguese. And they took me on, they gave me a few months training, and I went down as a banker back to Rio de Janeiro. And down there I rather enjoyed the work, but unfortunately I got TB down there and the National City Bank brought me back up here and decided that they were responsible and gave me my choice of where to go, and I chose to come to Santa Fe.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh, I didn't know that was why you came here.

MR. MEEM: Yes. It was very interesting -- after the doctor told me in his office on Park Avenue, very smart doctor, he was the doctor for this great, big New York bank --he said, "Now you can go to Saratoga or you can go to North Carolina or you could go to New Mexico. I know of a place in Santa Fe but," he said, "I think that you're going to have to be in bed awhile." Well, I walked out of there and on my way toward Broadway saw a big sign that said Santa Fe Railroad and I went over and asked them if they had any information about New Mexico or Santa Fe and I got this little pamphlet with a picture of the Museum of New Mexico which had just put up the Fine Arts Building and I got quite excited seeing that and pictures of Indian dances and I decided right then and there that I was coming here to new Mexico instead of going somewhere else.

MS. LOOMIS: It was lucky for New Mexico and Santa Fe that you did!

MR. MEEM: Well, thank you.

MS. LOOMIS: What year was that?

MR. MEEM: That was in nineteen hundred and twenty. 1920. Well, I came here and went to bed at Sunmount's sanatorium and maybe because Sunmount had a wonderful lot of people in it and was directed by a wonderful man, Dr. Frank Mera, I got sort of a new insight into a cultural world which I didn't have before. And I became particularly aware of architecture, I became aware of New Mexican architecture while lying in bed. And I decided then and there even though I thought I was getting very advanced in years, that I better change my profession and what I really wanted to be was an architect. So after nearly a year, most of it spent in bed, I went to Denver and worked for the finest architectural firm there as an apprentice engineer. And in Denver they had a branch of the Beaux Artes Institute of Design and I worked nights at the Beaux Artes Institute of Design under a very fine architect named Bernam White, who later became quite famous. Well anyhow, after working daytimes and then working at night the TB came back on again, I had another hemorrhage and I came back to Santa Fe and went back to bed and this time I stayed in bed for about 8 months. But during that period I discovered that I really had a tremendous interest in architecture and I got a drafting board and I literally started an office in bed. I got my first commissions -- remodeling one or two houses -- and then I got a commission doing a brand new house. Then when I got well enough to get up I found that I had still more work. People had been giving me work and I took on a draftsman and in 1924 I became associated with young Cassius McCormick, who was also a patient at Sunmount. He was an accountant and he was very good at that sort of thing and he helped me to set up a little skeleton organization and we took on a couple of draftsmen and from that day until the end of 1959, when I slowed up somewhat, tried to retire, we've been busy. And so I should say that I had come by my architectural knowledge somewhat the hard way. Of course in those days there wasn't any Architectural Registration Board and I helped to set up the first Architectural Registration Board in New Mexico and was its secretary.

MS. LOOMIS: When was that?

MR. MEEM: Heavens, I don't remember. 19 hundred and 38, I think, somewhere in there.

MS. LOOMIS: What were you doing when you were asked to serve as a member of the Administrative Committee for Region 13 for the Public Works of Art Project?

MR. MEEM: In 1933?

MS. LOOMIS: Yes.

MR. MEEM: You mean architecturally what was I doing?

MS. LOOMIS: Yes.

MR. MEEM: Well let's see, what commissions did I have? Well at that time I was completing the large addition to the LaFonda Hotel--the multi-story addition. And in 1933 I got my first commission at the University of New Mexico for the Administration Building which is still standing. And then I remained architect for the University of New Mexico, as you know, for 26 years after that and did a great many buildings.

MS. LOOMIS: Almost all of them, didn't you?

MR. MEEM: Yes, about 34 or 35 buildings on the campus of the University. And let's see, here in Santa Fe in 19 hundred and 33, the Laboratory of Anthropology. It was a competition by Mr. Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. - and we were fortunate enough in winning that competition and we did that, also the Director's residence. I don't know, there's quite a lot, we did a great many residences at that time.

MS. LOOMIS: Well I knew-

MR. MEEM: Also in '33 I think I made my first preliminary drawings for the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh, as early as that?

MR. MEEM: Yes, that was a very busy year.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes, I can imagine. Well, I don't see how you had time to squeeze in this volunteer work as a member of this committee.

MR. MEEM: Well, it all seemed to be in line with my excitement that I had with this country. I just loved it here in New Mexico and when there was a chance to be helpful in some way -- in coordinating this work and giving artists jobs, federal government jobs that is -- why, I thought nothing of it. And plunged in, even though I'm sure that somebody who wasn't quite as busy as I was would have given it more personal attention than I did.

MS. LOOMIS: How were you approached, do you remember?

MR. MEEM: Well, I think I got a letter --my files don't show how that happened -- but if I'm not mistaken it may have been through Senator Bronson Cutting, who was aware of my interest in Santa Fe. I had immediately caught first in the architecture here, and he was interested in that and so he may have suggested my name. I think he did, in fact.

MS. LOOMIS: I'm sure it came through him, anyway.

MR. MEEM: And he also suggested my name, I know, in connection with the Historical American Building Survey [HABS].

MS. LOOMIS: When did you start work on that? That must have been almost the same time.

MR. MEEM: It was, it was. You know you're going to find that my sense of chronology is not good. I have difficulty in remembering whether it was '32 or whether it was '33. I think it started in '33.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes, I think it started after the Public Works of Art Project began.

MR. MEEM: I think there was a conference in Washington and I went to that -- to begin it.

MS. LOOMIS: I think there's something in here about that so we could probably pick up the date.

MR. MEEM: I can get the exact date in the quite voluminous files on HABS.

MS. LOOMIS: I see, well as I recall -- from some other interviews I've had about architects that were originally involved in the Federal Art Project -- they went off into the HABS, so that's why I think it developed soon afterwards and it drew off the architects, to a great extent, so I haven't been particularly concerned about that in this survey that we're making because it was an entirely separate thing.

MR. MEEM: Well, the HABS was set up, not just from a cultural point of view, but it was to keep the architects from selling apples on the street corners in New York.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes, it served the same purpose for the architects that the art project did for the artist. Well what were your responsibilities on PWAP at the beginning, do you remember that?

MR. MEEM: No. I think it was largely trying to find a local chairman here and my responsibilities were more of a general nature. I remember I went up to Toas with Jess Nussbaum, and we interviewed the artists up there. That was the first interview to see if they wanted to participate and so forth and get their names and addresses, life histories and what have you. And then I think Jess just went on on his own, he then got in touch with other areas.

MS. LOOMIS: Did you ever go to Arizona?

MR. MEEM: No.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, I know that Jess got Gus Baumann to act as the field supervisor because he knew very little about art himself and he said that he would take the job if Gus would do the work, but so many of the artists that

I have talked with remember you as being one of the people who approached them during those very early days so your name has come up a good many times in the interviews that I've had.

MR. MEEM: As I said before, I imagine one reason that the experiences connected with the PWAP haven't registered more thoroughly in my memory is that I was really taking on a little bit more than I could, and I was delegating as much as I could, and I literally can't remember all the people that we did contact.

MS. LOOMIS: No, of course, but they remember you. So we have it from the other angle. I know that later on -- during the WPA days when Vernon Hunter was the state director for WPA art projects here -- that you were involved in the architecture for the Community Theatre for Albuquerque. Do you recall anything about how that came about?

MR. MEEM: Yes, I associate Ruth Hanna McCormick Simms much more with that project than I do with the WPA. She was the one who got it touch with me and said that she had gotten interested in the Little Theatre movement through Katherine Conner, was it? Katherine O'Conner, who was quite a gifted person in Albuquerque and was head of the Little Theatre. And Mrs. Simms said she'd like to do a nice small building for Albuquerque and would I be interested in doing it? Naturally I said yes and we did the building that is there now. And the question of decorating it came up and we were terribly fortunate in being able to get Dorothy Stewart who caught fire with the idea of something quite nice.

MS. LOOMIS: Those were the frescos in the front?

MR. MEEM: We had a two-story portal in front, well, now a 2-story but a portal that was as high as 2 stories. And she made some designs for that which we thought were terribly nice.

MS. LOOMIS: Well it was my understanding that this was paid for by WPA funds.

MR. MEEM: For the mural?

MS. LOOMIS: Yes, it was in the city of Albuquerque, and this Community Theatre group had to put up a certain amount of money, or they were involved in some way, but as I understood it this was a WPA project and they brought in persons like yourself as the architect and Dorothy Stewart as the mural artist.

MR. MEEM: Well my fees were paid for by Mrs. Simms.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

MR. MEEM: Yes, I am under the impression that she also paid a large part of the building itself. Now, I tell you, we have files on that project and that would show who made the payments and how they came-

MS. LOOMIS: That would be interesting because I understood that that was one of the few buildings in this particular area that was paid for by WPA funds.

MR. MEEM: You may be perfectly right but my impression is that my relations were all with her and payments came through with her, too.

MS. LOOMIS: Of course she might have been the sponsoring agent for this.

MR. MEEM: She may have been, or guaranteed it, or something.

MS. LOOMIS: But I know that the furniture, for instance, was all made by the craftsmen on the WPA project. The great curtain -- that *colcha* [embroidery technique] -- was made by some of the women who were seamstresses on the project, and as I recall from my other interviews, Vernon Hunter designed the interiors for the ladies lounge and for the foyer and so forth.

MR. MEEM: And decorations?

MS. LOOMIS: And the decorations that would go into them. He kind of coordinated the interior decorations, but I was curious about the larger project which was the building itself and whether or not that was entirely a WPA project or how much-

MR. MEEM: I think I can give you a lot more information by looking through those files.

MS. LOOMIS: Well it would be interesting, because the only other building I know of that was constructed by WPA funds -- if this one was -- was the one in Roswell, New Mexico. That was entirely, and that served as an art center for some time and eventually the city took it over. But just how this came about has always been a little bit of a question. I also had some questions here about your work on the buildings of the University of New

Mexico campus. This was all going on at almost the same time, wasn't it?

MR. MEEM: The work on the buildings of the University was going on up to 1959, as far as I was concerned.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes, you just kept right on.

MR. MEEM: Some of the projects that are going on right now -- such as the Fine Art Center -- were originally projects assigned to me and with the permission of the Regents of the University I was able to turn them over to my successor firm. They're still working on those projects so in a way I've got a distant connection as a consultant on the Fine Arts building.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, would you tell us, John, a little about your philosophy in regard to the architecture of this area, I mean how you came to develop it as you did, and how it has become so closely identified with you?

MR. MEEM: Well I don't know. I certainly disclaim responsibility for having started it, because I didn't. When I came here the Fine Arts Building of the Museum of New Mexico was already up and that established a precedent for doing building similar to adobe building in a permanent material -- masonry and stucco. The architects for that were a Colorado firm, Rockford and Hendrickson as it was, they also had done the first part of the LaFonda Hotel so they sort of established a precedent for large public, or semi-public, buildings.

MS. LOOMIS: And it was based on the Pueblo Indian architecture, wasn't it?

MR. MEEM: Pueblo Indian architecture yes, and principally the Franciscan Missions, connected with that.

MS. LOOMIS: And that would bring in the Spanish influence, too?

MR. MEEM: That's right, and of course in those early days, when we first started, the effort was to make these buildings as closely imitative as possible of the prototypes. But then as time went on, and sort of a new outlook on architecture was developing all over the world, not only here, or not only in connection with architecture, and I became very conscious of the fact that there was a possibility of expressing these forms in a way that wasn't completely imitative yet would suggest the architecture and would bend in with our architecture rather than be exactly like it. The Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, for example, was quite a different type of building and material -- being concrete on the exterior -- and yet, because it was to house collections of Santos and Southwestern material, the owner, Mrs. Taylor, and I decided it would be nice to recall this architecture. And that set a pattern of the possibility of using the masses, the terraced masses, and sparse window openings in relation to big wall spaces, which we increasingly developed after that. The Library at the University of New Mexico, for example, has no precedent in Pueblo architecture at all. It's 9 stories high and this great central plinth there presented a problem -- how can one do this and still somehow say that this building is part of the Southwest. Well I was solved by light entasis in the surfaces of the walls -- a slight batter -- and softening the parapet slightly. And then using the color of the earth and other appropriate colors, it enabled us to use some very modern elements. For example, the windows of the stack rooms are long vertical slits, and then we introduced frescos into those windows which are symbolical of shapes of eagle feathers with Indian colors, Indian red and black.

MS. LOOMIS: Who did those frescos?

MR. MEEM: We designed them and then the -- I'll have to take that back, they're not frescos, they are an encaustic material, they were made up in Denver from our drawings -- and they're not encaustic either. They are actually a form of concrete inside of molds that have been ground down and these little molds are made of brass strips that separate the different colors.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh I see.

MR. MEEM: When you go there at the University next time, you look up there at the tower and see this. Well that is the type of thinking that I've had in connection with this architecture -- that it didn't have to be exactly like it, but that it was a wonderful thing to recall it. And it's the kind of philosophy, for example, that I think modern architects are using. Saarinen, for example, in his TWA airport in New York uses forms that inevitably suggest flight, they're great curved shapes that look like wings. Actually he says he didn't do it to make it look like a bird, or anything like that -- or a plane -- but it does recall flight in some way. And I think it's perfectly legitimate -- not only legitimate but almost a duty in this part of the world where we have a native architecture with these wonderful shapes -- that we should recall them. So it has been done. An example, for instance, is the First National Bank of Santa Fe. You can look at that and then look across at the Fine Arts Building of the Museum and you can see the contrast. The Fine Arts Museum does look very much as if it were actually an adobe building whereas the First National Bank Building, when you look at it, it simply doesn't look like an adobe building, it has an adobe color and it has these soft parapet lines, it has a slight entasis, or batter to the walls, but actually it's all much more a formalized and more rigid in its interpretation and brings in shapes that are not particularly

indigenous. But there are enough of the actual indigenous forms so that it seems at home, and I feel by doing that -- especially in these big, public buildings -- that it has enabled Santa Fe to keep its architectural style, its character going, because if this had not been done, the existing adobe buildings simply would have gone to pieces and wouldn't have been kept up and we would have lost, I think, the kind of city that Santa Fe is right now. So I think it's terribly important that it be kept up. The Historical Santa Fe Ordinance -- style ordinance -- provides for this and that's one reason I feel it's so very important. The question has come up whether it's legitimate to use shapes that recall something else. That comes up in connection with whether it is right to cover a real adobe building with stucco because with stucco -- especially when you color it -- is no longer adobe. And yet if you don't do that you would have lost the Palace of the Governors.

MS. LOOMIS: That's right, because it is a mud building that would have eventually deteriorated.

MR. MEEM: And I think that it's legitimate to do this. Apparently in modern architecture Corbusier is considered an example of a great modern architect in his thinking. He would do a church like the one at Ronchamp in France with fantastic shapes. He really forces these basic materials into certain rounded shapes and so forth. Now he's doing that in order to convey a certain spirit that probably is the spirit of religion, as he sees it. I question why, if that should be legitimate (and I think it is, it's completely legitimate) why should it be so wrong to bring in the spirit of a region which is unique to us? And I don't think it's wrong, I think it's right, it's perfectly legitimate.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, almost all architecture is influenced by some tradition and to get something this is completely uninfluenced I would think would be pretty dull. Also in this area -- which does have an indigenous architectural form -- I think it is the responsibility of the architect to adapt that to the needs of a modern world.

MR. MEEM: Well you know if you look back at this business of recalling a traditional form, it's happened so frequently in history -- the Parthenon built in marble recalls the wooden temples of ancient Greece. They could have built something that didn't recall it, but they did recall it, and that doesn't make that building a lie or something that is wrong. It's legitimate, it's right and of course the whole of the Renaissance does the same in the sense that they caught first from rediscovering Greek forms, Roman forms and they adapted them, they changed them, they didn't copy them exactly, but the result was a tremendous era in architecture, of period, marvelous buildings, you cannot label all of that as being completely incorrect. So when modern architecture says that one must be completely functional I think that while, in principle, in general, they are right that actually it cannot be interpreted too Puritanically. It would bind our spirits, it would limit us in our expression of architecture.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, to have such a unique architecture as we have here in Santa Fe and one that is so well adapted to this country it would seem certainly to me a great tragedy to lose it and to make the architecture in Santa Fe the same as it is everywhere else. We really have a precious heritage, I believe and during the past 15 years that I've been in Santa Fe I know how closely you've been identified with the various movements to preserve the architectural heritage of Santa Fe -- through the Old Santa Fe Association and the Historic Santa Fe Foundation -- I wonder if you can tell us something about these organizations and what they have accomplished as far as keeping this heritage?

MR. MEEM: Well, you know how the Old Santa Fe Association started -- it was back in, when was it, '26, '27? Somewhere about that time a colony of Texans proposed to colonize Santa Fe, there were 3 or 4,000 Texans were going to buy land up near Sunmount somewhere and the Chamber of Commerce and the Museum of New Mexico and others thought it would be a wonderful thing, because Santa Fe seemed a little stagnant and it would be fine to have this. But a group of citizens led partly by Mary Austin and Frank Applegate felt that so many thousands of people coming here might overwhelm Santa Fe with their ideas and spoil a little city that needed protection, and so they protested the movement and as a result of several public meetings the Old Santa Fe Association was born, with the principal objective of preserving our heritage along with all kinds of lines, as you know. Not just architectural but customs and ceremonies and the way of looking at things, and the association has continued since 1927. Its had its ups and downs, I think for awhile it was very much down, then about 10 years ago, I think, it began to be quite active. I've always been interested in it but I became much more active, about when?

MS. LOOMIS: I think it was about 1949 that it was reactivated, because that was about the time I got here and it was when they tore down that old trading post next to La Fonda and there was a great deal of agitation about that, and at that time Ina Sizer Cassidy was very active in trying to preserve that building but was not successful. Then again when we tried to save the old Nussbaum building which was, I guess, 6 or 7 years ago. Now would you tell us something about these forces in Santa Fe that the Old Santa Fe Association has had to fight in order to preserve what heritage we have?

MR. MEEM: Yes. Well, of course, the principal one has been literally ignorance, I should say people just not knowing, not realizing that they've got something valuable. Then there has been the commercial element

represented partly by the Chamber of Commerce rather innocently. Their main objective being to try to bring in all the business they could, not realizing that it had to be done with discrimination and very carefully. The general apathy or general indifference which again I think is due to ignorance. Then lately, of course, as you know, there's been some opposition to the Old Santa Fe Association from the younger architects who feel that the championing of the Historical Zoning Ordinance by the Old Santa Fe Association makes them disapprove of the Old Santa Fe Association because they feel that the Historical Zoning Ordinance in turn limits the potentialities of their possibilities of expression architecturally. So they are against it. Think they don't quite realize that the Historical Zoning Ordinance covers only a small area of Santa Fe, the historical area, and that it is legitimate to preserve that area and to put restrictions on the styles of architecture, just as restrictions have been placed on so many areas of cities in the United States in the past. The historical value such as New Orleans, and Georgetown and Boston and Bunker Hill. I don't know just what the final outcome of this will be. They, of course, tie part of their objection to the use of permanent materials that might resemble adobe or reflect the traditional architectural forms. And the movement of opposition gains a certain strength from the fact that they presumably are expressing the modern point of view, but I feel so strongly that here in Santa Fe we architects should recognize that this is a very exceptional town that has inherited a type of architecture that has come to us for a thousands of years, is absolutely native to America, as no other architecture is, and that is worth preserving.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, I agree with you 100% about that, as you know. Well there are some of your other activities that I wish you'd speak about briefly, John, and that is your appointment by both the Mayor of the City of Santa Fe and by the Governor of the state of their historic committees, would you tell about that?

MR. MEEM: Well, I suppose that the city has known of my interest, my connection with the Old Santa Fe Association and when the question of the preservation of the Fort Marcy area, which is still being threatened to be turned into a development, it occurred to the city that I might be of some help to them as my experience in this conservation field with a view particularly for Fort Marcy. Then that developed a little further and it has become a committee that is interested in the preservation of all the old buildings in Santa Fe. We are trying to get the city to find a way, if it can, to protect certain areas, specifically such as the Barrio Analco, but just how to do that, the answer hasn't come up yet. As far as the Governor is concerned, Buildings Improvement Commission 2 years ago brought me in touch with the developments at the capital. I was a member of that commission and took quite a stand --partly on my own and partly representing the Old Santa Fe Association for the preservation of the Barrio Analco area, and also for the preservation of the certain style of architecture native to Santa Fe. When I got off the Commission a new one, of course, was appointed when Governor Jack Campbell came in, and I was asked to be present in an advisory capacity.

MS. LOOMIS: Was that after the new design for the Capitol had been presented to the public?

MR. MEEM: Yes, when the new design came in, I then went in representing the Old Santa Fe Association and protested the design on the basis that it was a completely modern expression architecturally, and since the Capitol is in the historical zone of Santa Fe it was imperative -- if the city was to save its historical zone -- that it be changed to conform. Well, one thing led to another, the Governor asked me to serve as an advisor as far as the historical part of the Capitol development was concerned, and I said I would and then, as you know, I was instrumental in making or suggesting a new type of design for the exterior of this modern group of building and it was accepted and it has been carried into effect. Well, I think the Governor then became conscious of my activities in this general field of conservation and appointed me to be Chairman of the Governor's Commission on Historic Sites, which has to do with making a survey of all the historical sites since post Spanish times. This would exclude the archeological sites, purely archeological sites.

MS. LOOMIS: Was this for the whole state?

MR. MEEM: That's for the whole state, and it's to be carried on for a period of one year and then the Commission will come up with 25 of these sites, we'll select 25 of them for special consideration by the State for preservation and development, so I'm tied in with that.

MS. LOOMIS: Well now, just to complete the record, suppose you tell us some of the other things that you are doing since you supposedly retired. When was it you were supposed to?

MR. MEEM: Fifty-nine and I didn't retire of my free will. It was a matter of again of conservation in this case, supposedly conservation of my health. Blood pressure and so forth, Dr. Hausner told me I'd have to go easy, so I did and I have found it a certain relief, because these big architectural projects do put a great deal of pressure on you and I haven't had that type of pressure, but because of my interest in these various civic organizations and the conservation movement I've found myself very busy.

MS. LOOMIS: I should say so.

MR. MEEM: One of my activities in town has been the School of American Research and that is a very old



organization. It's existed now for about over a half a century and at one time the Museum of New Mexico and the School of American Research were one organization, but since 1959 they've been separated and the School has continued as a privately endowed organization, to promote research into the archeology of the region and they've been interested in art development. They have large collections of art.

MS. LOOMIS: And you're the chairman of the Board of Regents.

MR. MEEM: No, I'm the Chairman of the Board of Managers. Then the other field that I've been somewhat busy in for a number of years now, in fact ever since I was the architect for the building, is the Folk Art Museum. As you know, Miss Bartlett, the donor of the building also gave 2 and one half million dollars for the use of the Museum of International Folk Art. However, she didn't give it to the Museum of New Mexico, she gave it to a foundation that would be sure to stress her particular interest, which was the international aspect of the Museum. She had a sort of spiritual outlook on this, that folk art in some way was a bond between the people of the world and she wanted that kept up. And she sort of visualized, way back then, when she established this fund, that the Museum of New Mexico if given directly to them, that they might not stress this because of their tremendous interest in the local folk art. So part of the duty of this Foundation has been to be sure that the Museum of International Folk Art would function along the lines laid down by Florence Bartlett and I've been on that Foundation Board almost from the time it started. I skipped one year between.

MS. LOOMIS: Are you the Chairman of that, or just a member of the Board?

MR. MEEM: No, I've been chairman of it, but the chairman now is Judge Oliver Seth. Well, these are some of the things-

MS. LOOMIS: Well, it doesn't sound as though you've retired completely!

MR. MEEM: Oh no, and I never will, nobody ever does.

MS. LOOMIS: No. It seems to me you have been just as busy since your retirement as you were before.

MR. MEEM: Well in a different way, yes, I can pick and choose on it, not always. Sometimes I find myself in a bind.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, when there are emergencies in all these various departments that happen at once I know that it makes it sort of difficult for you.

MR. MEEM: In connection with the Old Santa Fe Association, of course, it was instrumental in founding the Historic Santa Fe Association. You know the reason for that was that the Old Santa Fe Association has to engage in propoganda, the attempt to influence legislation, and so forth, which makes it unable to accept gifts that are tax free, or tax exempt. So in order to make sure that money wouldn't be withheld from the conservation movement in Santa Fe the Old Santa Fe decided to found this other organization which is tax deductible in its setup, and its gifts.

MS. LOOMIS: So that makes it possible for people to contribute large sums, or old buildings, or substantial amounts and still get tax deduction. Well I know some people are a little confused as to why there should be two of these organizations in Santa Fe, but when they understand the reason they realize both have very distinct functions. I know that you were instrumental in setting that up as you have been in carrying on the work of the Old Santa Fe Association with all kinds of pressures from every direction, both those who don't see how important it is to keep our architectural heritage and also those who think that the historic zoning ordinance should be eliminated-

MR. MEEM: Or modified.

MS. LOOMIS: -so that they could have complete freedom. They have all the rest of the world to be free, but they should let us save our little historic zone.

MR. MEEM: One of my fields of activity which I didn't mention other than in passing was the Historical American Building Survey which still functions, and when it made a record of old buildings here in New Mexico they did really quite a wonderful job and I was in charge of that. And as a result New Mexico possesses some of the most beautiful drawings of its old buildings that have been made, and which are deposited in the Library of Congress. These include Acoma, not only the ancient Acoma church but the whole of the pueblo which is a very extraordinary thing because Indians ordinarily don't allow anyone in. And a great many of the old mission churches.

MS. LOOMIS: You said you'd been on the central committee for 20 years. Are you still?

MR. MEEM: No, I'm not on it now -- no, its been reorganized, changed a little bit. I'm not, now.

MS. LOOMIS: Well it's just about the end of our tape here-

MR. MEEM: Well sorry that I'm so hesitant on a lot of this-

MS. LOOMIS: Oh not at all, it's extremely valuable and I'm glad to have some of these questions answered that I wasn't sure of in the past, and we're also very glad to have this file of some of your papers from that period, which we will have microfilmed in Detroit and then returned to you. I know this is part of your professional file and shouldn't be removed permanently. So we thank you very much.

MR. MEEM: Thank you.

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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