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Oral history interview with Rexford Tugwell,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Grace and Rexford Tugwell on January 21, 1965. The interview took place in Santa Barbara, CA, and was conducted by Richard Doud for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

Richard Doud: I sort of hate to bore you with going back into all this preview material but I would like you to sort of review a little bit about what happened just prior to your association with the government and tell me how you managed to get into this agricultural department thing, and why.

Rexford Tugwell: I might say, that in the beginning, all of this material will be found in the Columbia University Oral History Project. I had done some interviews for them and gone over this period pretty well, but roughly, I was a professor at Columbia and got to helping Roosevelt during the campaign, and then I was asked to be assistant secretary of Agriculture, and then I became under-secretary of Agriculture. Then I conceived the idea of the Resettlement Administration and Roosevelt set it up by executive order, and we operated with emergency funds. It was the companion piece really to the WPA with Hopkins and the various preceding organizations. We operated in the rural areas. What we had in mind was largely the rehabilitation of the poor farmers, but we had a great many jobs to do which were of the relief sort, because we not only had the emergency of the Depression, but we had, while this was going on, two very serious years of drought, which created what was then called the Dust Bowl, and blew away a lot of soil in the West which had come into use unwisely during the war, and left the people really stranded, and they began to drift away. The drought in '34 started all this, but the drought in '36 completed it. This was so extensive, that the people simply couldn't all leave. It would have taken all the people in Oklahoma, North and South Dakota, part of Nebraska and Colorado. We had millions of them, of course, on relief, on account of the drought, and this was quite aside from our problem of rehabilitation, and resettlement. Because this was so dramatic, and because it meant misery and tragedy for so many families, and because we hoped it would never happen again, at least, not in the same way, we thought not only that we ought to have a record of it, for future generations—that is the historical part—but also to show people who weren't involved in it, how extremely serious was. Then, of course, there was the other part, that these people who had all these skills in order to do this, were mostly unemployed themselves and they were delighted to get the opportunity to work. I think Stryker has explained to you, that it wasn't any soft job for them, either. They had very small allowances and quite small pay, and yet they did this enormous, wonderful job—record making. I know we were all very proud of them later.

Richard Doud: Before we get onto the Stryker project, could you summarize what some of your plans were with resettlement? I sort of get the idea that part of what you were trying to do dealt with teaching the people who were in certain areas help themselves out of problems.

Rexford Tugwell: There was always a reason why a man was poor, and why he was in trouble. Sometimes the reason was that he was poor human material, but this was not often. The trouble usually was that he was in difficulty with his land, because it had eroded, or because he was in the wrong place and drought had come along, or some other similar reason; his land perhaps had worn out. This problem really centered in two places largely: what they now call Appalachia, which is still in trouble, and in the Great Plains area where the droughts were. These were really the great areas, the work we had to do. We had several different programs as far as the poor farmers were concerned. When I spoke of relief, that was simply getting them through the crust. Then the rehabilitation part was that we tried to find them better farms if we thought they were good farmers, and then we made them what we called farm and home loans to start them off in business, under supervision. That part of our program was very successful. Years afterwards, long after I had left the Government, they had a survey that reported that the loans had been repaid more than one hundred percent; that is to say, the loans and the interest that had been paid back were more than the loans had been. I was a little ashamed of that, to tell you the truth, because this came out of the pockets of some people who were very hard up and it was probably difficult for them to pay it back. I used to talk to Harry Hopkins about this. He was giving his money away. I was only lending it and I was getting it back for the Government.

Grace Tugwell: Wasn't there some requirement that you had to charge interest? Didn't I recall that we didn't want to, but we had to?

Rexford Tugwell: Yes, we had to charge five percent interest. This was a required thing. I tried again and again to get the regulations changed on that, but I never could. Any loans that the Government made had to be at the rate of five percent.

Grace Tugwell: Competition with local banks and so on was—

Richard Doud: That was terribly high for that time.

Rexford Tugwell: They didn't want us to compete with the local banks.

Grace Tugwell: In spite of the fact that the banks were not in a position to do any loaning at the time, but still ...

Richard Doud: Not the kind of people you were working with ...

Grace Tugwell: No, they had no security, you see.

Rexford Tugwell: Nobody was interested in these people. They didn't belong to any farm organization and usually their better-off neighbors either used them for part-time help or sharecroppers or some such way as this, and they were simply not interested in their welfare. They were an abandoned lot of people.

Richard Doud: Were there any cases of mass resettlement where large communities—

Rexford Tugwell: Yes, we took over from Harry Hopkins who had begun it somewhat before. You see, Resettlement was organized in 1935 and Harry had begun his operations early in 1933, almost at once after the President's inauguration. He had begun a certain number of communities. He had set up a section for this, and he had begun a certain number of communities, which were spread mostly throughout the South and West. As I recall, there were about one hundred of those, but I wouldn't remember the number exactly.

Grace Tugwell: Those were not the subsistence homesteads.

Rexford Tugwell: No. Then there was the organization called Subsistence Homesteads, which was in the Department of the Interior, and which had been a favorite project of President and Mrs. Roosevelt and Louie Howe. This is the one that came under so much criticism in the newspapers and magazines at that time. Arthur Dale was the favorite target. This was one of Mrs. Roosevelt's favorite projects down in West Virginia near Morgantown.

Rexford Tugwell: The idea was that they would build homes for the people and then try to get industries to move in, but the industries didn't usually move in, and if they did, they didn't stay. They were pretty much a flop. The head of this organization was M.L. Wilson who later succeeded me as under-secretary of Agriculture when I left. When we organized the Resettlement Administration, I discovered that the President put in the executive order setting up the Resettlement Administration that this group was transferred to us in Resettlement, so that we had to try and do the best we could with what was really a failing project. I was always a little resentful that I got blamed for what the newspapers insisted on calling "subsistence homesteads" a failure, but I really had nothing to do with this organization. I simply tried to carry it on.

Grace Tugwell: I remember you arguing with Mrs. Roosevelt before they set them up.

Rexford Tugwell: Oh yes, it goes away back. Mrs. Roosevelt put forward this idea during the campaign, and I said, "For heaven's sake, don't say it out loud, or they will laugh at you." She was indignant. They when they got into the White House, she and Louie Howe began the organization.

Richard Doud: After you got the Resettlement established, was there any feeling of rivalry or perhaps irritation in the Department of Agriculture towards what you were doing?

Rexford Tugwell: Not in the Department of Agriculture. We had trouble from the start, but it came from understandable places. In the first place, the farm organizations made up of the more prosperous farmers didn't want us to do this. They said these were shiftless people and they don't deserve anything—what do you do things for them for? If you want to do anything for people, do it for us. They wanted all the help there was going. This was our worst trouble, because we were allied to the Department of Agriculture, and we were functioning in the agricultural field, and this carried with it the opposition, not only of the farm organizations, but of the great farm organization, which was the Farm Bureau and this involved all the county agents. So, in order to help our people and the poor farmers, we really had to set up a parallel organization to the county agents, because they wouldn't do anything for anybody but their own clients. We were criticized for this too, of course, because we were duplication other organizations. Oh, we criticized for plenty. Nobody wanted to help these people. These people were the most friendless, hopeless people there were in the whole country. Nobody wanted to see them.

Grace Tugwell: Another part of this was the migratory laborers who came out, you see, from Oklahoma and for them we set up work camps, so that they would have means of shelter. Also out in California, we had migratory workers' camps. I think you will find some pictures in the Archives.

Rexford Tugwell: These were the Okies that Steinbeck wrote about in his "Grapes of Wrath."

Richard Doud: How did you happen to pick Stryker to do the work with the Historical Section?

Rexford Tugwell: I was chairman of the Economics Department at Columbia University and Roy was one of my instructors. We had worked together in a number of ways; not only was he teaching, but we had written a textbook together, he and Thomas Monroe (Munro?) and myself. Well, Roy didn't do any of the writing. He did the illustrations. It was a Tugwell, Monroe (Munro?) and Stryker book. He had done such a notable job in this textbook that it was the first economic text that we knew of that had ever been illustrated. It was so good, and had taken hold so well, that when I went to Washington and conceived of the necessity for making some record of this and using these pictures to convince people that what we were doing needed doing, I sent for Roy. Grace had charge of that division.

Grace Tugwell: An interesting, amusing sideline on Roy's participation here—of course I must say he was very reluctant to join the outfit, because he thought his future was in teaching, and he came down several times and we explained to him what we wanted and what we were interested in doing, and he finally became so excited by the excitement around us that he couldn't resist. He came down, and went to work, and he plunged in and got all these people, and began to take pictures and every once in a while he would come in and he would say, "Now look, I want about fifteen minutes of your time for a little discussion." I said, "All right," and invariably this was the same discussion and he would say, "Now, I want you to explain to me what I am doing."

Rexford Tugwell: Yes, he would say, "What does Rex want?"

Grace Tugwell: He would say, "What is it that Rex wants?" I would say, "Look Roy, you are doing exactly what he wants." About five years ago, he called me up and he said—we were living in Greenbelt—"I want to come out to see you and Rex, because I really want you to tell what was the objective for the historical records." He never did come out actually. I just couldn't believe my ears, because I had kidded him about it all through the years. I thought he was just kidding, but he was very serious about it. He still wanted to know what he was supposed to have been doing, and apparently he was under the impression that since he enjoyed this so much, he was not doing the correct thing. I never could understand it, but invariably, every once in a while, he would ask me, "Please say what it is that I am supposed to be doing."

Rexford Tugwell: He still doesn't know. He still doesn't know. He said that to me—he still doesn't know. This amused us so much that we talked about it many times and just decided to put him off, because what he was doing was all right and whether he understood it or not didn't matter to us

Grace Tugwell: I don't know exactly what it was, but Rex and I always had the policy that you choose a man that you know is good, you tell him what you want and then you give him his head; and this is what we did with Roy. I think he kept feeling that he needed some guidance that he was not getting or that we should be telling him something that we had neglected to tell him. Every time I would come in, I would tell him, "Roy, that last batch of pictures was absolutely wonderful. This is exactly what we want." Of course, in between he would be getting directions about what areas needed attention and so on, but not specific directions. We would just say, "Roy, this is the situation here or there; can Dorothea or so on go in there easily?" That was all the direction he needed.

Rexford Tugwell: I think what bothered Roy, and in a way it bothers me too, is the wording of this job description that Lawrence Hewes wrote up.

Grace Tugwell: No, he knew that this was just a method of getting it through the Civil Service because the Civil Service had no description of the thing.

Rexford Tugwell: We didn't want to tell them what he was doing. We had no intention of telling them what he was doing. You know how these things were looked at in those days. Congressmen just loved to make fun of all kinds of projects of a cultural sort.

Grace Tugwell: And cut off funds for them. We couldn't say exactly what—

Rexford Tugwell: They would cut off your funds.

Richard Doud: I read through the description, and I think photographs are mentioned once or twice and—

Rexford Tugwell: It was done. I read that over a short time ago, and I noticed that there were no lies told.

Grace Tugwell: One of the geniuses we had in our outfit was the man who did exactly that sort of a thing. Whenever we needed a job done, he had worked previously with the Civil Service people—I think we borrowed him—he would tailor the job description to it from the old Civil Service requirements, because so many of those jobs had never been done in the Government before. I think probably what would be really interesting would be to get the job description from Adrian Dornbusch and his crew. I've forgotten what that was, but that must have

been really quite curious.

Rexford Tugwell: They were really doing art projects. This could be justified.

Richard Doud: Did you really intend for photography to play the role that it did? Had you planned on this?

Rexford Tugwell: We didn't have any idea it was going to become an art form. No. We knew that these were awfully good photographers and that they were something more than just the kind of people that the newspapers would send out. We knew that all right.

Grace Tugwell: I think in many cases, the job made the man too. I really do.

Rexford Tugwell: That's right. Carl Mydans and Rothstein were nobody in those days.

Grace Tugwell: I think aesthetically, they had a chance to see material for the first time.

Rexford Tugwell: Oh, they got very stirred up about this material.

Grace Tugwell: They had never seen it before, you see.

Rexford Tugwell: This built itself up, this enthusiasm.

Richard Doud: This whole thing was a real education for these people and they do give credit to this business.

Rexford Tugwell: This was such a tragedy and so wide-spread. To go and analyze it and explain it to people through pictures was really a thrilling experience.

Grace Tugwell: It was the only way to do it. Words were simply not adequate.

Richard Doud: Had you counted on the cooperation of the press to any great extent? Did you realize that you would have a cooperative press, or did you feel that would have an antagonistic press?

Rexford Tugwell: Well, we did and we didn't. The Eastern press was quite naturally indifferent, because it was mostly urban and they had other interests. They had poor people in the city too, you know. There was no particular reason why metropolitan papers would pay very much attention to what was going on in Arkansas. No, we didn't expect much of the press, but we hoped that if we gave them this kind of service, they would use it, and they did to an extent.

Richard Doud: Were you satisfied with the extent?

Rexford Tugwell: I think the answer is that we were satisfied.

Grace Tugwell: I wasn't particularly satisfied.

Rexford Tugwell: We would have liked to have had more.

Grace Tugwell: There was a tendency to use the same pictures over and over again. The newspapermen would come in and they were always in such a hurry. They would not run through the thing. They would say, "Where is that picture of the cow skeleton?" That is why that became such a symbol, because all the newspapers used it, because they were too lazy to go through the portfolio, and that was striking. We had many other striking ones.

Rexford Tugwell: Did Roy you about what happened about that particular picture? This was one of Rothstein's photographs and it was used so many times and so many different captions were put under it, that some congressman denounced this for Rothstein for taking this cow skeleton and moving it around the country and he carried it in his car and he put it up and photographed it wherever he was.

Richard Doud: I know I have seen a cartoon with Rothstein carrying this skull under his arm.

Rexford Tugwell: Well, that's it.

Richard Doud: Looking for a place to photograph it.

Rexford Tugwell: Of course, the fact is the newspapermen took it and put any caption under it that they wanted to.

Richard Doud: What about motion pictures in this whole thing?

Rexford Tugwell: Tell him the story of Pare Lorentz.

Grace Tugwell: I don't remember who we got Pare Lorentz. How did we get him?

Rexford Tugwell: I don't know how he was introduced first. I think it was through Russell Lord and Flaherty. Did you ever hear of the name Flaherty in connection with that?

Richard Doud: No, I haven't.

Rexford Tugwell: Flaherty was a famous documentary film maker—Irish. He made the Men of Ireland and he made Nanook of the North, and several other very famous documentaries. In those days, he was the best known person. He was under Russell Lord, who was one of the information men in the Department of Agriculture. He introduced me to him, as I recall, and we had conceived the idea of having a motion picture showing what had happened to the soil in the Dust Bowl. The story about that was a very dramatic one. It was the extension of agriculture in a dry-land country where it never should have been extended to. The story was that the Indians had always warned the white men that they shouldn't break the plains. Pare Lorentz was a young fellow who wanted to undertake this, and my recollection is that somehow or other, he was brought in by Flaherty and I think through Russell Lord.

Grace Tugwell: You are right.

Rexford Tugwell: He wanted to undertake this. He turned out to be a very, very difficult fellow, but also quite an artist with the film.

Grace Tugwell: Just recently, I saw it on educational TV one evening.

Rexford Tugwell: He did another one called "The River."

Richard Doud: "The River," yes.

Rexford Tugwell: Grace had charge of all that. I really didn't.

Grace Tugwell: My having charge of it was second hand, you see. They came to me only when they had problems, or when they couldn't get along with each other, or when they needed money.

Richard Doud: You were secretary to Mr. Tugwell?

Grace Tugwell: No, I was administrative assistant in charge of the three divisions, you see. Labor was one of them; special skills, information and what did we call the thing that was in charge of getting out all of the directives, all the paper work? We had regional offices, state offices and so on and the directives had to go out from Washington in all these various fields, so we had one division that was devoted to doing nothing but that—getting stuff out. Then the historical section. Of course, these were the service sections and they served the larger divisions that were actually doing the work. Of course, they were always having squabbles with each other and they all centered in my office and my real job was to keep everybody happy. Pare was difficult because he was improvident in a good many respects. He would run out someplace taking different shots, and his car would break down and he wouldn't know what to do with it, and he would never follow the Government regulations, you know. He would never save receipts. He would never get travel authorization before he went; he always tried to get it when he came back, and that was very difficult. He would always go without funds, so he was always stranded somewhere, and we always had to get him out of trouble. This was really why he was difficult. He wasn't difficult in the sense, in an artistic sense, it was just that he didn't want to be bothered with all this red tape. Well, no one else did either. The result was that every once in a while he would get into a real hole and we would have to pull him out some way or another.

Richard Doud: Roy mentioned one time that there were some very good disc recordings made for radio to be played in local areas. Do either of you know anything about those?

Rexford Tugwell: Would this be the folk songs? We had a whole division for that.

Grace Tugwell: I don't remember.

Rexford Tugwell: Who was in charge of it?

Grace Tugwell: I think it was Gilly's job.

Rexford Tugwell: Margaret Valiant was the one who did most of the folk music.

Grace Tugwell: The folk music was under Adrian Dornbusch, but I think Gilly had some of the—

Rexford Tugwell: Gilfond. She is talking about Gilfond.

Richard Doud: There is a name I have run across.

Rexford Tugwell: You could talk with him.

Grace Tugwell: He is in Washington now.

Rexford Tugwell: He was our regulation man for a long time.

Grace Tugwell: You got his story, did you, about the Key West art project?

Richard Doud: No.

Grace Tugwell: Our project grew out of the Key West project, and if you haven't gotten that, that is one of the most colorful things you have ever had.

Rexford Tugwell: That is one of the most interesting stories there is, how the artists took over Key West.

Grace Tugwell: Do you know Key West?

Richard Doud: No.

Grace Tugwell: Key West is only a tiny island. In those days it was an island about one square mile and it was at the end of this one hundred miles of keys and it was isolated completely. It was one of the first places to be very badly hit by the Depression.

Rexford Tugwell: They had no business but cigar-making. They were mostly Cubans doing that. The economy completely broke down. The city government resigned and there was no government.

Grace Tugwell: they hadn't had their garbage collected for six months.

Rexford Tugwell: There was no power; there was no water, there was no anything.

Grace Tugwell: There was a Navy installation there—there was a submarine base there.

Rexford Tugwell: No. It was an old Navy station that was on stand-by status.

Grace Tugwell: I mentioned this because it has a part in the story of Key West which you should get first-hand. The WPA went down there and evidently there was a group of artists there.

Rexford Tugwell: Yes, there was an executive order, and they just took over the town.

Grace Tugwell: There was a group of artists who were stranded there and they brought some more in. The artists began working in this community by painting public buildings and putting murals on the walls.

Rexford Tugwell: In the bars.

Grace Tugwell: In the bars. This naval base—they redecorated the whole naval base and made guest rooms.

Rexford Tugwell: The idea was to attract tourists, and it did right away. They set up an art gallery.

Grace Tugwell: They made the furniture and they did everything you could think of, and it was the most attractive place. They gave plays and they gave operettas.

Rexford Tugwell: Gilfond was in charge of that for WPA and we cooperated too. He could tell you all of this story.

Grace Tugwell: It is really a fascinating story. We had been down there on vacation and everybody who knew about it went there for vacation. It was delightful in the wintertime. It was better than Miami, because it doesn't ever get cold at all down there. We had seen what was going on, so we started ..... Rex asked Adrian Dornbusch, who was in charge of part of that art project, to come out and be in charge of ours and he brought some of those artists with him. If you are doing work in government in art, you really must get that story. That is really beautiful.

Richard Doud: I am glad you mentioned it, because this is the first time I had heard of it.

Grace Tugwell: I remember, for instance, walking into one of the bedrooms in the naval base—beautifully done.

Rexford Tugwell: Some of those fellows who worked down there now are very famous.

Grace Tugwell: Oh yes. And seeing this beautiful furniture. They had antiqued this old furniture that they had picked up. I don't know whether it was put together with string or not, but they had put it together and it was the most beautiful thing. They used their imaginations, you see, so that it became almost overnight a tourist makeup. This was the work that these artists did. They were allowed to work on their own too, for instance, if a man was a water colorist, he could do one water color, or one piece of work a day for the Government, then he could do one on his own. Then they began having art shows, you see, and those they painted on their own, they were allowed to sell. So people came from all over and bought pictures. We still have some of their work. The artists have become famous since.

Richard Doud: Very interesting.

Grace Tugwell: It was lots of fun.

Richard Doud: I would like to ask Mr. Tugwell if he can support Stryker's assertion—Roy keeps saying over and over again that you protected him—you held an umbrella over him all the time you were there and your successors continued this protection .... I was wondering who you protected him from.

Rexford Tugwell: He was extremely conscious of the kind of criticism that might come from yokel congressmen, you know, who liked, in those days particularly, to make these small criticisms of people whom they called bureaucrats. They loved to dig out their mistakes and loved to dig out anything that they did that was unusual that they could write home about, or make a speech about—ridiculing them, you know. Of course, Stryker felt that he was very vulnerable, because he had people out taking pictures, and taking lots of pictures too.

Richard Doud: There is some 270,000 of them, I think.

Rexford Tugwell: Once in a while we would hear of an outbreak about to happen, and we would try to damp it down or explain it or stop it, or something. This is what he meant, I suppose.

Richard Doud: Were there any serious threats against the photographer?

Rexford Tugwell: I don't remember now. There was lots of this kind of carping criticism, but we had one great protection—the President. If we got into any particular criticism, all I had to do was go and tell the President, "You are going to hear something bad." He would laugh.

Richard Doud: It is probably due to this general attitude then, that something like this could happen, that might not have been able to, a few years earlier or a few years later.

Rexford Tugwell: Of course, the people who got it worse were the Harry Hopkins people. They were—well in the first place, there were more of them. They had the Theater Project too, which became very conspicuous. Then he had the artists and then Harry was kind of belligerent about it too. We just tried to keep out of sight.

Grace Tugwell: Art was not something that you could hide, you see. A good deal of the documentary films you could hide very well, because it wasn't on the wall of a post office.

Richard Doud: Some of it probably would have been better hidden, really.

Rexford Tugwell: Some of it was, I suppose, pretty bad and some of it was very offensive to uncultured taste. You take an avant-garde artist and have him paint a mural in a small town post office in North Dakota, and you are liable to hear about it.

Richard Doud: How successful was the use of the photographs?

Rexford Tugwell: The photographs? This was one thing about this, you could never say anything about a photograph—it was a photograph, it was a picture. This was something that you couldn't deny. This was evident.

Richard Doud: This was real.

Rexford Tugwell: It was real. This was tremendously effective.

Richard Doud: It did help further the New Deal?

Rexford Tugwell: Yes. Some of those pictures that were shown in the Museum of Modern Art last year at the show they had, we had known for years that they were classic pictures. Just look at them.

Richard Doud: There has been some mention that these photographs played an important part in re-electing Roosevelt. It is hard to say, "Yes, they did" but do you think they had anything at all to do with it?



Rexford Tugwell: No, but they played their small part in building up the idea that here was a man who cared about people, you see. This was true, but then so many other things did too.

Richard Doud: Just sort of helped build an awareness.

Rexford Tugwell: This whole picture was—it was all of a piece. This was just more of the piece.

Richard Doud: In what way do you think Stryker's operation could have been improved?

Rexford Tugwell: I don't think it could have been improved. I think it was perfect.

Richard Doud: Everybody says the same thing.

Rexford Tugwell: It was wonderful, and we told him so all the time, but he was always unhappy. He always felt he wasn't doing ... we always told him that the reason he was unhappy, was because he liked what he was doing and he felt guilty.

Grace Tugwell: I think the only way it could have been improved—

Rexford Tugwell: I think that was true.

Grace Tugwell: the only way it could have been improved is, if we had had enough funds so that we could put them together into various types of publications, because we were always so short of funds. We never could do that. More attention should have been paid to their final disposition, so that it didn't take twenty years to have them become available to the public through such things as the Museum of Art.

Rexford Tugwell: If we got out a pamphlet telling about the operations of Resettlement, well, this did happen. We got out an annual report for our first year of operations and our second year of operations in Resettlement, and it had kind of a fancy cover and fancy photographs. There were tremendous speeches in Congress denouncing the waste of the taxpayers' money and so on, and all this fancy propaganda.

Grace Tugwell: Which was exactly what we were trying to do—was propaganda. This is what we were trying to do—tell the story, so that we would get more cooperation and help.

Rexford Tugwell: There were people who didn't want the story told.

Grace Tugwell: That is the only thing, that I can think of that should have happened. We left Resettlement quite early, Rex and I, so I guess we assumed that somebody would eventually take care of the disposition of this.

Rexford Tugwell: "Beanie" Baldwin tried his best. He always supported Roy wonderfully.

Grace Tugwell: He supported Roy with his tongue in his cheek as he will admit even to this day, because he didn't understand the significance of this, but he felt that since Rex wanted it as a good assistant he would go along and he always did. Even after we left, he supported the project. I meant, you know, that there should have been some sort of room, or what have you, in the Library of Congress where this collection should have been made available to scholars.

Richard Doud: You mentioned tirades in Congress against this—this is sort of an aside too—did most of the opposition of this sort of thing come from Congressmen in the depressed areas themselves? Were these people who trying to ... ?

Rexford Tugwell: I don't remember, but there were many people who were looking for areas in which they could criticize somebody without attacking the President himself. You wouldn't know it now, but I became a favorite target quite early, and anything associated with me was very sensitive material, and anything they could get on me was apt to get into the papers everywhere, which is what a congressman wants. I am afraid that I was more to blame for everybody's difficulties in Resettlement than anybody else.

Grace Tugwell: Which was one of the reasons you got out. He thought he was such a liability to the program—the cause of the publicity.

Rexford Tugwell: I thought the program would go on better if I left.

Richard Doud: Would it be getting too personal to ask why you felt you were the favorite target?

Rexford Tugwell: No. It was very easy. It all began with the people who wanted to criticize Roosevelt without really attacking him and they looked around for somebody and here I was and then there came along a very convenient thing—the early Food and Drug Act, which came from the Department of Agriculture where I was the

under-secretary. I sponsored it very strenuously and this offended the newspapers. It hit them in their advertising, you see, and this together with the congressmen who wanted to criticize Roosevelt was enough. I was a notorious character. There is no secret about that.

Grace Tugwell: This is not a personal reaction, this is fact. Everybody knew it then and there was the question of whether he was going to be more useful continuing in this situation or whether it wouldn't be better for the program if he got out, because after all, every day this sort of thing was jeopardizing the source of funds for the project.

Rexford Tugwell: This is the reason they changed the name. As soon as I resigned, they changed the name to Farm Security Administration.

Richard Doud: To give it a new life—a new birth, so to speak. You mentioned that Mr. Baldwin didn't really understand this whole business.

Rexford Tugwell: Well, it wasn't his first interest. He had other interests.

Richard Doud: I have a quote here where he says that he didn't understand it, but .... I was sort of wondering whether you feel that he really didn't.

Rexford Tugwell: Well no, I didn't feel that he didn't. I think he knew that the photographs, were of use for information purposes. I don't think he ever understood that we were making a contribution to the history of some very strange and difficult times—I don't think this would impress Beanie very much, but it always did me. Beanie was a very loyal fellow and a very able administrator and if he knew I wanted to get it done, he would get it done if he could, somehow, and he always did.

Richard Doud: Was he your immediate successor? Or did Mr. Alexander come in here?

Rexford Tugwell: No, Alexander came in. But Beanie was my assistant along with Grace and he was also Alexander's assistant administrator. Alexander only stayed a couple of years and then Beanie succeeded him for three or four years.

Grace Tugwell: I don't remember. He wasn't there more than a year or so, if I remember.

Richard Doud: Could you give me some sort of evaluation of this file now—this group of pictures that were taken, and what part you think they play in our cultural life today? Do they have any value other than an historical value?

Rexford Tugwell: I wouldn't be able to say about that, because I don't know anything about aesthetic theory and I am not an artist. To me, they are very tender and touching things—very sensitively done. To me it is still marvelous that a fellow like Rothstein would sit a woman in a doorway and tell such a big story—that is a genuine artist who can do that. It is the kind of touch that Wyeth has. He paints someone at a window, and a flower, and you see the whole world in it.

Richard Doud: Very much the same. I am excited about this whole business from an historical point of view and in a way from an aesthetic point of view. Could you offer some suggestions as to how to make this file more useful, how to make people more aware of it? I think part of the problem that we haven't gotten into in the past few years—

Rexford Tugwell: I would have felt that people were very much aware of it, because you hear about it all the time. It has achieved a whole exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art. This is not obscurity, certainly.

Richard Doud: What bothers me, sir—the exhibition you mentioned I think is a good point—that this exhibition in a way gives a sort of false picture of what the file itself is or what it was, you see. This of course points up the Depression. The file today is much, much broader, as you probably know. In any event, it would be valuable not only to economic historians, but to social historians, perhaps even to a political historian.

Rexford Tugwell: I think it would be interesting to people who are interested in the development of this art form. This was a stage in it. These are people who are going on to do great things.

Grace Tugwell: I think Mr. Doud is talking about its practical use to historians and people who want to write books and people who want to teach. You know how difficult it was to teach your own sons what we were talking about when we were talking about the Depression, and it is still difficult. You talk to a young person of eighteen or twenty and it is almost impossible to make him understand what the whole country was going through at that time, that your neighbor who was always so well-to-do was suddenly selling apples, you know.

Richard Doud: Look at how many adults today don't really remember the Depression.

Rexford Tugwell: You have to be fifty years old or more to know about the Depression.

Richard Doud: It is something that is pretty easy to forget once good times come along.

Grace Tugwell: This is what I have always felt, that some way should be found to make it available to colleges.

Richard Doud: It was a pretty dramatic time, let's face it.

Grace Tugwell: If funds could be gathered somehow to put it into a series. Suppose you divide it into political sciences, you see, or what have you. There are so many headings that you could use. Get it into some sort of form that people could—

Rexford Tugwell: They have it in volumes, which have used the pictures.

Grace Tugwell: I know, but you have to go through the whole collection. If you are interested in something like Appalachia ....

Rexford Tugwell: I am amazed that the Library of Congress had lost all of this. I thought that all these years it was in good hands at the Library of Congress.

Richard Doud: They do have the photographs. They are there.

Rexford Tugwell: Can you see them?

Richard Doud: Yes.

Rexford Tugwell: I never tried, but I always felt safe about them, because I always felt that they were there.

Richard Doud: They are there, but what we can't find is all the supplementary materials that goes along with them—the official papers.

Rexford Tugwell: Well, I'm afraid it is gone. I have had occasion once or twice to go to the Archives and try to find material from my own file in the Department of Agriculture, and I discovered that they kept nothing but the Secretary's file. They didn't keep anybody else's file. It had been all thrown away.

Richard Doud: It really tears you up to think .... This is our National Archives.

Rexford Tugwell: After all, think of the bulk .... Somebody had to sort it out.

Richard Doud: That's true. It has to be edited somewhere along the line. Could we talk a little bit about some of the exhibit problems, Mrs. Tugwell?

Rexford Tugwell: I have got to go. I think I have done about everything that I can do for you anyway.

Richard Doud: I certainly appreciate your contribution. I am very happy to have had a chance to talk to you.

Grace Tugwell: I don't know that I have much to contribute. What do you mean by exhibit problems?

Richard Doud: Some of the material that I found concerned exhibits, Resettlement exhibits, whether they were in State fairs, or whatever—the whole problem of distributing exhibits to various—

Grace Tugwell: That was always a very difficult thing, because as Rex just indicated, we were always torn between wanting to exhibit this material and not wanting to do it so flamboyantly that some local congressman could complain about the amount of money that was being spent. So our exhibits never amounted to anything in the eyes of anybody, any of us. We always felt that we were always pulling in horns while at the same time trying so hard to put the point over. It was always difficult.

Richard Doud: Did you decide on the type of exhibit, or did the regional Resettlement person decide on it?

Grace Tugwell: The regional man usually did. I didn't attempt to do anything but try to interpret policy and to cooperate with the regional people when they indicated an interest or a willingness to use this material. I would just put it in Roy's lap. "Roy, rush out there and see what you can do," which he would do and he always did a good job. I was second hand on this business. I had nothing very much to do with the actual work of the division. I oversaw it and I think maybe all the time I was there, I only visited the offices once or twice.

Richard Doud: Were these exhibits generally favorably accepted? Were they the type of thing you felt would get by?

Grace Tugwell: I don't ever recall any criticism of them, particularly. There probably were, but nothing stands out in my mind any longer about them. My only recollection was that we always felt they were not as good as we wanted them to be. We didn't want to spend the money, or we didn't have the money to spend actually.

Richard Doud: I think that about all I have. Can you think of anything you would like to say about this?

Grace Tugwell: No, I can't think of anything. You know, I have such a bad memory. If we had somebody here talking with us who might recall some of this, who was closer. I was hoping that Roy would be with us, that he would come down to Puerto Rico. So much has happened in between, that I have forgotten a good deal.

Richard Doud: Over a span of years it was a pretty short and insignificant. I will not take up any more of your time now and I thank you very much.

Grace Tugwell: You are entirely welcome. I hope you can dig something out of this.

END OF INTERVIEW

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