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Oral history interview with Wendell Zoehler,
1978 April 14 and 27

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Wendell Zoehler on April 14 and 27, 1978. The interview took place in Boston, MA, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown 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. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is an interview in Boston, Massachusetts, April 14, 1978, Robert Brown, the interviewer, with Wendell F. Zoehler, who is long associated with the Doll and Richards Gallery in Boston.

WENDELL ZOEHLER: Would you explain what maybe led you to be interested in art, perhaps even talking about your youth? Was there any interest at that time?

WZ: Well, I always had the talent for it. I could draw and sketch and so forth. And my great desire was to go to art school. But in the meantime, I had to get an education. So I went to Thayer Academy first.

RB: In Braintree?

WZ: Yeah. It's off Braintree. And graduated in 1926.

RB: Were you able to do anything in art [inaudible]?

WZ: All the time. It was great fun. I used to decorate all the footballs with the dates and stuff for them. And then one year they needed scenery for the class play. We did three plays, one English, French, and German. And I had to design a study, paneled walls. So I'd get off from classes and work in the gym and painted the panels. I had something to go by, but they were eight-foot panels, and they came out all right. That was fun.

RB: Was this all self-taught? Or did someone teach you it?

WZ: Self-taught, yes, no teacher. We had George Dimitrius, a sculptor, came there. I mean, Thayer Academy was filled with Greek plasters. The Parthenon was in the corridors.

RB: Oh yeah.

WZ: And the Charioteer was in the senior room, and the boxers and the dying gladiator and stuff all around. And he came. And he started right away in getting a group of people who were interested to do sketchings from the antiques, cast like they did at the museum at those days. It was 1920. He had spent two or three years just copying in charcoal these things. But that was short shrift because he didn't make any money. But that's my first introduction to it.

RB: But he did encourage some of your students to do that.

WZ: Oh yeah. And then our history teacher, Mrs. Wells—she wanted very much for us to know the museum. And so in June or late May, we would go in two or three times to the Boston Museum. That's when they had the big plasters around, too, before it was redecorated. We'd go through the whole departments.

RB: Was that—was it these plaster casts that particularly intrigued you then?

WZ: Anything ancient did.

RB: Anything ancient? What about—

WZ: Yeah, Greeks. I was fascinated by sculpture anyhow.

RB: What about paintings then, when you'd go to the museum?

WZ: Same thing. Yeah, we liked the museum.

RB: You liked that?

WZ: Yeah, I haunted it afterwards.

RB: Really? What did you particularly like when you were a kid?

WZ: Well, I was always impressed with the great big Sargent of the Boit children. That was spectacular because when you came in, you looked down the corridor and they had placed it so it was the end. It was so realistic. And then we got into the Velasquez and Spanish painting. And—of course, I was interested in all forms of art. I think you are curious when you're young. You soak things up like a sponge. And you never forget them, either, the things that impress you. They had different schools of painting—a Spanish, Italian, you know, American, and so forth.

RB: So you really had a good deal of encouragement from some of your teachers.

WZ: All of them, yeah.

RB: Yeah. What about from your family?

WZ: No.

RB: Were they interested?

WZ: No.

RB: What was your father's interest?

WZ: My father was brought up on the violin, but he broke a finger. We were a musical family. He broke a finger catching a fly. But he still could play the violin. I was piano, my brother was coronet. And he was trained under Clepful [phonetic] at the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He had a natural lip for the trumpet and stuff. But he preferred to play the accordion. And my father couldn't understand why I didn't like to play ball. I'd rather go and be drawing or writing or something.

RB: Even though your father's family were musical, musicians?

WZ: Yeah. Yeah. But it was a typical German family. We played instruments and Christmastime and get-togethers and stuff. There were 15 in the family then, and I was none [phonetic].

RB: But your father or his father had been prominent musicians?

WZ: He was, yeah. His father came from Germany, my grandfather, and went right into the Civil War as a musician. And he was stationed down to Roanoke, Virginia. And I have a diary in German script, which Baroness Mibel [phonetic] translated for me, where he spent most of his time playing pinochle after concerts or before on Saturday nights. Yeah. There was—

RB: Did he have a career in Boston in music?

WZ: Yeah. And he trained—he traveled the whole Eastern keyboard [phonetic] with shows like minstrel shows in those days. And when he died—I still have the newspaper clipping—he was buried from the old German church over there on Charmont [phonetic] Avenue—every band in Boston turned out, gave him a sendoff.

RB: Well, when you left Thayer Academy in 1926, what were you going to do?

WZ: Well, I wanted to go to art school. And we were sizing up—I was on a student—I paid my way by being on the honor roll the whole four years I was there. I was next to the highest, 98 on the entrance examination. So the first year I got a scholarship free, and I had to work for that.

I could have been certified to Harvard or West Point, but my father couldn't afford either place. Thayer Academy had that privilege in those days, having been founded by Colonel Sylvanus there, that two students could be entered into West Point. Scholastically, you had to be good before you could get in. So I didn't take either one. I just went to work.

RB: You went to work?

WZ: Yeah.

RB: What, was it odd jobs?

WZ: The factory, everything, odd jobs. I worked everywhere, anything. It didn't make much difference, except it would give me free time, a little change in my pocket where I could buy art supplies and keep painting, you see.

RB: You kept painting?

WZ: Yeah. And then one Christmas I was working at the Old Corner Bookstore, and Mr. Richards came in of Donald Richards. He was the son.

RB: He was the younger Richards?

WZ: Yeah, yeah.

RB: The oldest son of Richards.

WZ: Yeah. And he understood that—somebody had mentioned it to him. My mother knew an employment agency man who—he owned his own agency. And she spoke to him often about me and my being a misfit in the commercial world. And so he mentioned me to Joe Richards and thought he'd like to talk to me. Well, he did. But after the interview, he said, "I think you would do very well for what we want because you're sensitive to art and we want somebody to be part of the gallery." But he says, "I want you to go up and apply for the job for Mr. McKeen, for Gene McKeen. But don't, on your life, ever say that I talked to you first. If you do, you will not get the job."

RB: Why was that? Well, you found out later.

WZ: I found out later, yeah. There was dissension there. He was a trained forester. He wasn't cognizant of art at all.

RB: Richards?

WZ: Yeah. He was a secretary and treasurer. And then subsequently, he got involved with Henry George's School of Single Tax, which antagonized bankers who wanted money on mortgages and stuff. But anyhow, I went up and applied for the job. And Mr. Turner was president then and took a liking to me. And he said to McKeen, "Well, I don't think we should have to try further. He seems all right to me. Why don't we hire him?" So I was hired. And that's where I started.

I replaced somebody who was surreptitiously taking etchings.

RB: They'd have to let that person go, huh?

WZ: Yeah, because he took inventory and things didn't show up. So I was given the job at the time. That's how I got in at Doll and Richards. I did the thing, the correspondence. I worked at sales and helped lay out exhibitions and so forth. And once a year, I had to do inventory. And I traced down everything. I knew where everything was. If they wanted something, I could put my finger on it. Everything was numbered. In those days, it was a considerable stock. There were three floors, old engravings, etchings, prints, photographs, the old Haas [phonetic] photographs in the basement. And it would take me a whole year to get—I mean, it would take me a whole week to do inventory.

RB: Now, this was your first job?

WZ: Yeah.

RB: Most of it consisted of doing inventory?

WZ: Yeah. Getting to know everything.

RB: That was a rather tedious job, but it was a very—it meant that you had the trust—

WZ: It was great for me because I knew where everything was and what made the thing tick, even to the—if they needed slips in a hurry. Everything was sales slips, and they were all filed numerically on the third floor in the office. So if they needed something, they'd call up. They intercom system in the thing. And the bookkeeper, busy, couldn't get it. So I'd take the elevator up and get it, and save time, especially if a customer was waiting to see how they framed a thing three or four years ago and they want something to match. It was things like that.

RB: Did you find you were interested in Doll and Richards?

WZ: I was fascinated by it. The first day I was there, Mary Ogden Abbott had just come back from Tibet where she had been with her mother. They took a trek on horseback with Coolies up through the Kashmir Valley to Tibet. If it would have been land—this was back in the 1920s, and women just didn't do that. They rode horseback dressed as men, they had whips to keep the Coolies in order. And they were greeted and feted and

so forth. And she made a lot of etchings and sketches while she was there, of Tibetan monasteries and so forth.

When I came on the scene, she was opening up this exhibition. She was the daughter of Charles Francis Adams [inaudible] in Concord. A very masculine woman, she had beautiful horses, you know, an equestrian rider and so forth. She had plenty of money; she never worried. She was always—she assimilated a lot of the Oriental stuff. She wore turbans and she had amber beads as big as goose eggs around her neck.

RB: Wow, this was pretty exotic, heavy stuff for you, wasn't it, meeting someone like that—

WZ: Yeah, but the opening show, Charles Francis Adams came in and I had him all to myself. And I sold him seven prints the first day I was there. And when McKeen came back from lunch, and the other salesman, Mr. Peck, was there, he says, "Hmph." That's all they said because they didn't like a new person to, you know, take the sales away from them. There was no commissions involved. They never paid commissions at Doll and Richards.

RB: [Inaudible]

WZ: They considered it a bribe to make a salesman sell to give them a commission, rather than an incentive. And you never can get out of that from Doll and Richards. They always subscribe to that, that it was a bribe. This is the old way in Boston.

RB: [Inaudible]

WZ: Yeah. And after all, they were a commission house, actually. We didn't call them those in those days. But it was the commissions earned from sales of pictures that supported the place.

RB: Sure. So it was a collective thing.

WZ: Yeah. Yeah.

RB: But they probably—their pride was wounded a bit, wasn't it?

WZ: Well, they were very impressed; let's put it that way. And so if I wanted to, I can talk to a customer. And if I couldn't handle it—they would let me take care of the etchings, the graphics. But when it got into watercolors or paintings, they would crowd me quite a lot, because they knew the customers. And if I was talking with somebody they knew, they naturally would go to him: "What do you think is better?" and so forth because I was green at it, although I had an eye, which they didn't know.

Another thing I can say right at the beginning, Mr. McKeen couldn't tell a good picture from a bad picture. He'd ask somebody else, have them ascertain it for him, especially a museum person. But he always went by dollar signs.

RB: Wow. I mean, if something were worth—

WZ: His attitude is, a perfection—a picture of perfection would not sell. The best picture in the room would not sell. People wouldn't buy it.

RB: Really? Why was that?

WZ: Aesthetically, there's something about perfection that doesn't sell.

RB: That's what he would say.

WZ: Yeah. Well, haven't you found that so?

RB: Is that true?

WZ: Yeah. I've found it down the years. I've found it so.

RB: What was that—Mr. McKeen at that point was the manager?

WZ: He was manager, yeah.

RB: What was he like at that time? Do you recall?

WZ: Well, he was a cocky little guy, dressed well, and he was very friendly with George Sloan at the Guild, and he was up there most of the time.

RB: The Guild of Boston Arts?

WZ: Yeah. And he had been there since 1911. When I came on the scene in 1929, you see, he had known Sargent and a few of the other big ones. Homer died the year before he came, 1910, although he used to put out the new Homer.

RB: He [inaudible], right?

WZ: That's right.

RB: And what was his background in? Did you know?

WZ: Well, he went to the Pape School for about a year.

RB: Oh, the Eric Pape School?

WZ: Yeah, which was—

RB: Oh, the arts school?

WZ: Yeah. Howard Pyle and those had been there, and N.C. Wyeth. He knew N.C. Wyeth for a long time. He married—his wife was a Flagg family. And they had a little house out in Roxbury, and he lived with them, I think.

RB: So McKeen did have an artist's background, to a degree?

WZ: Yeah. But he wasn't any good at it. And he didn't stick with it long enough to know what it went into, what went into it, you know. I got into restoration quite a lot, taking care of things in later years. But he would never touch a canvas, not even to clean and varnish it.

RB: Was he the dominant person there at the time you came?

WZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RB: The younger Richards, of course, was not around at that time?

WZ: No. And there was a lot of hostility.

RB: Uh-huh. And what about Fergus Turner, the president?

WZ: He was old. He'd been there since 1885. And this was in the 1920s. And he was a converted—he was a convert to Catholicism and very bigoted. And he knew a lot of the clergy, and they would come in. And he went once a week to—and this was Cardinal O'Connell at that time—to their brainwashing, whatever you call it, and seminars on Commonwealth Avenue and so forth.

RB: How did that affect his business dealings?

WZ: But he had taste. Oh, Turner had a following-ahead taste. And he knew good pictures from bad pictures. He could tell. The reason we stayed open Saturdays—now this seems funny. But we were open six days a week. And the premise is that if you've got something to sell, you've got to be open to sell it. And in those days, it was from 8:30 till 6 at night. And then they shaved it down, 9 till 5:30, six days a week. That included Saturday. Saturday was sort of a social, gallery-trada [phonetic] type of a day. You didn't make many sales unless it was before Christmas and stuff. And Christmas wasn't much because people didn't give away pictures for Christmas presents.

RB: Turner was—what was his involvement?

WZ: He was president.

RB: Yes, but what did that mean? What would he be—was he actively involved in, say—

WZ: Well, he sat in on things. He had a Stokes Adams Heart, which would give out once in a while and he'd have to go up —

RB: What was that?

WZ: Well, his heart would stop beating and he'd have to take nitroglycerin.

RB: Yes, yes.

WZ: Lazy heart. And he would have to lie down. He would be incapacitated for a day or so. He had two daughters who watched him like a hawk. They would come in, take him home. But all this was brought on by dissension because he couldn't stand—now, this is something at the beginning. It's amusing, but in the dead of winter, McKeen would open up the door because it was too hot in the place. And they burnt coal in those days and they had hot-water radiators, and it would be warm. And Turner couldn't stand the draft, so we'd have to go upstairs in the private gallery until the place was aired out. But quite often, it was deliberate, to get Mr. Turner to go home. [Laughter]

RB: Oh, really? [Laughter]

WZ: Yeah. It was funny. This was the dissension when I walked right into it head-first.

RB: You mean between Turner and McKeen?

WZ: And Joe Richards.

RB: And Joe Richards, aha.

WZ: Yeah. They were [inaudible] there was a, really, undercurrent. And not every day—it was just when they were in the mood, something gone wrong or something.

RB: But you as a much younger man were probably drawn into it.

WZ: Oh, no, I wasn't. I stayed assiduously away from them. I played no favorites, either. I was smart enough to do that. If McKeen wanted something, I would do it for him. If Turner wanted something, I would do it.

RB: Now, did Turner have his own following that would come in?

WZ: Yes. And he was very friendly with Morris Carter, who managed Mrs. Jack Gardner's place for years. And they were very friendly. And I got to know them very well. Of course, Mrs. Jack Gardner, she brought a lot of McKnights and she'd have Sargents and—

RB: Yes. That was before your time, of course.

WZ: Yeah. Or I was there when Dodge McKnight had his last exhibition.

RB: Was that—

WZ: 1929, yeah. After that, he didn't have exhibitions; he painted.

RB: Now, he did a mainstay of the gallery, doesn't he?

WZ: One of them, yeah.

RB: What was he like?

WZ: A little shy, quiet Frenchman, roly-poly.

RB: Huh, a Frenchman?

WZ: Well, he had that feeling. He married a Frenchwoman and lived down in the Sandwich, and his garden was French, you know, flowers and vegetables together. And he had lived in France long enough. And he was also a friend of Van Gogh. He was studying and painting at the same time at Arles where Van Gogh was. So he knew that whole group. That's why, when he came back he was painting the lavenders and the blues and stuff and the Amesese in his landscape, which had nothing to do with Boston watercolor schemes. And if you look at it, he kept the same palette for years.

RB: But he acquired a great local following eventually, didn't he?

WZ: Oh yeah, yeah, just like Homer in the early days. That was before my time, but we always had Homers in stock, watercolors, a few oils.

RB: To get back to Fergus Turner. You say he is very close to the high Catholic church. How did that affect business? Did they buy things?

WZ: The churchmen were beggars, not buyers.

RB: I see. Is that what caused difficulties?

WZ: Mrs. Donnelly, the Donnelly advertising?

RB: Yes.

WZ: If we got a copy of an old master or a religious thing, one that was fairly reasonable, she would buy it and put it in the rectory or something in the churches around Boston.

RB: I see. So in a way, that did bring in a kind of business.

WZ: A certain kind of clientele, but you couldn't support yourself on what the church would buy.

RB: On the other hand, Arthur McKeen—

WZ: That's when the Kennedy's were coming up and stuff, but they were not collectors. The Kennedy's weren't.

RB: Well, Arthur McKeen, on the other hand, what sort of people did he draw in? Was he more effective, probably, more valuable to business?

WZ: He was a close friend to Charles Harvey Pepper and William, I mean, John Spaulding.

RB: Spaulding, of course, was a notable Boston director of [inaudible]—

WZ: Yeah, yeah. And Spaulding would come in every Saturday afternoon with Charles Harvey Pepper. They had been up to the art club for lunch, or someplace. And they would come in and sit down and gas with McKeen about what was going on, what he was collecting, and so forth and so forth. Occasionally, he'd buy a painting or pick out something and have it sent up to the museum for the jury to say whether they wanted it or didn't, see.

RB: So McKeen probably had a—he was the principal person in bringing customers in?

WZ: That's right, yeah. He was the motivating force.

RB: What was he—must have been a fairly charming guy?

WZ: No. He was known as a sourpuss. He could be pleasant, but when he smiled, it looked as though his face was going to crack.

RB: [Laughter]

WZ: And this was brought about by a physical being. He had a sacroiliac condition, which was very painful. And he wore a brace most of his life that I was there. It was very painful, some days. And that didn't help to humor him.

RB: I see.

WZ: If things went wrong, you could get the blast of it. I used to get the gist of it once in a while.

RB: Sure, sure.

WZ: Until I fought back one day. Then he went out for a walk for about two hours. I threw a bronze across the gallery—

RB: At him?

WZ: At him. He would needle you, you know.

RB: Yeah.

WZ: But this was all right. We were always friends, very close. I stayed with him till he died.

RB: Well, now can we talk a bit about, when you came in there, in the 20s and through the 30s, I suppose, more or less you could think of as one era, because it was the Depression-

WZ: Well, one thing—it was taken or not—1929, I went there, there was a crash.

RB: Sure.

WZ: But it didn't affect the art business until about 1932 in Boston.

RB: Oh.

WZ: Because the Boston families, their fortunes were made. And they weren't affected particularly by stock. There was very few people on our mailing list that were wiped out. Kruger [phonetic] did something to the Boston families, Lee Higginsons and stuff, you know, when he was playing around.

RB: Yes.

WZ: But they made good on what happened.

RB: So your stock at that time, you've described as you had concentrated in three areas—oils, watercolors, and graphics, right?

WZ: Yeah. We had three galleries. The first, as you came in the door, was devoted to graphics or small watercolors and stuff.

RB: Why were those smaller things in the first gallery, do you suppose?

WZ: They were very salable. And the person who wanted to spend more money was introduced into the second gallery where watercolors were shown, or the big gallery where there was nothing but oils. We had a Charles Pallison [phonetic] show at Marines the last year I was there. That's before he stopped showing. And it was superb. We had Frost and Reed, which would send Mr. Gallup over and send a lot of English watercolors, Turners and stuff with those, Cottons and so forth, prestigious things.

RB: Those were very salable, were they?

WZ: Yeah.

RB: Yeah.

WZ: I remember the Ames [phonetic] can be known now. But during Depression years, they bought a watercolor. It belonged to—oh, the famous English critic there that had so much trouble with Whistler. You know who I mean?

RB: Ruskin?

WZ: Yeah, Ruskin. He paid 2000 guineas for it. But the Ames [phonetic] bought it and presented it to the museum.

RB: It was a Turner?

WZ: It was a Turner. And it was a big price. But they didn't want it known because in those days, in Depression years, you didn't spend that amount of money. And the same way with Nelly Carter when the Kayots [phonetic] were showing their empty glass there, she paid 9000 dollars for one bowl. And that had to be hushed up because the people who took care—her heirs wanted her committed for this extravagant spending, that she had lost her buttons.

RB: How did you happen to have the Kayot, that glass—who were the Kayots?

WZ: They were dealers in New York. They had a gallery there. But they were smart enough to—they were Syrian—

RB: Yeah.

WZ: —to show in different—they'd pick a prestigious gallery in a city and set up an exhibition of ancient glass. And Nelly M. Carter liked the glass and bought it. And she has a case in the museum of her things, Elizabeth M. Carter collection.

RB: Did Doll and Richards periodically take on work from other dealers?

WZ: Oh yes, quite often, consignments.

RB: And this was one example?

WZ: Yeah. They always did well.

RB: Now, you more regularly dealt with people who were dealing in paintings and prints, didn't you?

WZ: Yeah. But we had Robinsons Silver in New York.

RB: Yeah.

WZ: They would set up shop before Christmas. That's when the Hunt sisters were alive. And they would come in and buy several thousand dollar's worth of silver just for gifts. They loved it. They didn't know anywhere in Boston they could go to get silver, especially Georgian silver and stuff. And they were all hallmarked. And Mrs. Hatch, who lived at the Ritz, she brought in a collection of little vinaigrettes, you know. The women carried them, little silver things with grids and sponges, where they used like smelling salts.

RB: Right, right.

WZ: She had over 200 of them. I had to catalog every one of them and identify them for the hallmarks.

RB: So you've mentioned—did you travel at all in those days?

WZ: No. I was —

RB: Mr. McKeen did most of that?

WZ: Yeah. He did all the business. He would go to New York twice a year and down to Philadelphia, Breslin, Philadelphia, and get prints, consignments.

RB: And [inaudible] would work [inaudible] and all that?

WZ: Yeah. He was very friendly with the Macbeth Gallery, McIntyre there, and Davidson with Nerbler [phonetic]. Davidson would come up twice a week. Later, Victor Spark—he was very friendly with him.

RB: Did you get to know some of these men?

WZ: All of them, all of them. McKeen was smart enough not to make you just a clerk. He wanted you, so in case he wasn't there, you would know who the person was and could find out what they want or help them, without his being there. See?

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: If he was out to lunch or something—and get them to come back. I answered all the phone calls and so forth that came in, except the personal things that had to do with his own private life. And I would just shunt them off to him and make notes.

RB: Sure. Could you characterize some of these other dealers? Why don't we start within Boston itself, the Voses. Were they—

WZ: The Voses—they were over on Merson [phonetic] Street, and the two boys were still in Harvard when I was there. They came to the gallery in 1932.

RB: Robert Junior, and Martin?

WZ: And Martin, yeah. Martin came first, yeah.

RB: Did you —Were they your principal rivals in the field?

WZ: We never were rivals. Each gallery had its own stable of artists. And the Voses were doing what we called the dead ones. They had contemporary shows there, artists. But they were making more money by buying and selling the dead ones, you know. The Carplys, the Stilberts, and so forth.

RB: Oh, I see. And you weren't. So Doll and Richards—

WZ: We did. We got our share of them from our mailing list.

RB: But you did more with contemporary artists?

WZ: Contemporary stuff, yeah, right. Promoting talent, yeah. Well, the Voses did that a lot. They had a lot of superb shows there. And they were headquarters for the Boston Watercolor Society for years. The yearly exhibitions were there.

RB: What was Robert Vose Senior like?

WZ: He would very nice to me, but he could be a bastard. He would throw you out if you didn't like your looks. Especially on hanging day, he'd order you out of the gallery. But I would stand around quietly, and they'd say,

"Oh, you're with McKeen. How is the old coot?" He'd say like that, "the old sourpuss" or something. I says, "Oh, he's functioning. He's a dealer like yourself."

He's very gathered what he says, and I have to be very gathered what I said. I was taken to task more than once as a source. You never tell your source where you got a painting from, what family is it from, because another dealer would go behind the back and say, "You've had it there six months. They can't sell it. I'll take it away" and so forth and so on, and all the things like that. Very careful not to say—and what you were doing with the museum either. That was a no-no.

RB: So there was a great deal of discretion required in this work?

WZ: Yeah. You couldn't tip your hand on anything. I got to know it after two or three years, what to say and what not to say, especially on telephone calls and stuff. I would get a signal from McKeen. I sat at a desk across from him. Turner sat here, and McKeen sat here. And I'd be talking on the phone. And if I was getting over my head, he'd lift the receiver and say, "May I help you?" See?

RB: [Laughter] I see.

WZ: I'd say, "This is Mr. McKeen. I'm sure he can give you more information." And I had to hang up. See?

RB: Yeah.

WZ: We had little tricks.

RB: But did you feel you had quite an aptitude for this, didn't you?

WZ: Well, this develops with you on the job, you know, what's to be done. And of course, I was practically fresh out of school. So they trained me the way they wanted me. And most places prefer to do that today. If you're going to work for a big company, they prefer to train you in their ways. And it was an easy life. It wasn't bad. It wasn't bad. You didn't make much money [inaudible]. You weren't paid anything.

RB: Yeah. Well, getting back now, you talked about Vose. What about some of the New York people? Could you characterize some of them? What was Robert McIntyre like?

WZ: Very pleasant, very cordial. You'd never know he was an art dealer. He was just another business man. Dark blue business suit, but enormous amount of information.

RB: What about Victor Spark?

WZ: Oh, he was great. He was very friendly. And he took to me right away. And I used to go on junkets with him. We'd find a place. "Come on." We'd go—he and McKeen would go out together. Victor had lost a son that was very dear to him. And he was going through an emotional trauma, too. He had a good eye, and he was in on it when Carolik [phonetic] was collecting. He knew all the junk shops down on the Grain Street, Abberton and so forth. He picked up a lot of Hudson River School things when nobody wanted them, Harts and so forth, down there.

And I was trying to [inaudible] Littlefield, who had studied under—oh, one of those French artists—Serat, yeah. He was doing the cleaning and restoration for Allison in the winter months, you know. He taught other artists to paint and also restoration. That was part of it, how pictures were put together and so forth. And that's something I learned to do, too. And he would go down there and pick up a few paintings, and they would take them up to his studio on Beacon Street, those rooms, and clean and varnish them for them.

RB: He was Littlefield, right?

WZ: Yeah, William Littlefield.

RB: You got to know him at about that time, too?

WZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they—the galleries in those days—everybody went around. They came in to see other people had painted. And they were, still wanted places to show. And there weren't that many artists in those days. Today anybody who draws a straight line can show anywhere if they can get a foot in. It's just jammed with people making nothings.

The damning part of it is that a few years back, Life magazine was publishing little brochures on American artists. You know, they'd have half-a-dozen. Where are they today? You don't even hear of them.

RB: Well, I suppose that happened to them, too. There would be people who were flashes in the pan.

WZ: Yeah. They'd go up like skyrocketers, great technique.

RB: Yes. Yes.

WZ: But once—I found out, once they acquired a sense of accomplishment, it peters off. They end up painting the same picture over and over and over.

RB: Were there people that you can recall in those, say, through the 30s that your gallery discovered? And some that—

WZ: Andrew Wyeth was one of them. He'd come, a little boy.

RB: So there were—Andrew Wyeth, then, when was that show, the late 30s?

WZ: Yeah, the late 30s, yeah. He had a show and it did well. And so we had subsequent shows.

RB: Why do you suppose it did well, that first show? This was his very first show, wasn't it?

WZ: I know it, but his father was well known, N.C. Wyeth. And he was very much tending to his studio. And then the Macbeth Gallery in New York was building him up. And people had heard of that, too. And the Wyeths were a dynasty. Henriette was doing portraits. And she was married to Peter Hurd. And the other one that taught school down in Pennsylvania, she showed once or twice. But she was a harem-scarum one, really brainy. The whole thing worked out. It was predestined. You couldn't change it.

RB: It also—Doll and Richards lost him, didn't they? He went—

WZ: He got too big to handle, yeah.

RB: What do you mean? Doll and Richards wasn't prepared to handle large-scale promotions?

WZ: No, we lost him to New York dealers. Quite often, this would happen. Quite often, somebody would get big.

RB: Can you think of any other cases in the 20s or 30s where that happened?

WZ: Well, we had Haversom [phonetic], the Marine painter.

RB: Did he become fairly important?

WZ: Oh yeah, very collectible, if you could find the stuff.

RB: Anyone else?

WZ: Well, I have to put my thinking cap on for that.

RB: Sure. Your chief clientele was a Boston-area clientele; is that right?

WZ: Oh yeah.

RB: People wouldn't come, say, from Cleveland or Dallas or New York?

WZ: Well, Mrs. Albert Beverage, Senator Beverage, she had a place in the Middle West, and she had a place down, Beverly Place down in Florida, and one Switzerland.

RB: Yeah, but she did have some local connections.

WZ: Yeah, yeah.

RB: So it was mainly people with local connections. And these were mainly the old families? Or did there—

WZ: All the old families. The social register was our Bible.

RB: And what would you say their taste was? What were they looking for?

WZ: Well, Doll and Richards made their taste.

RB: I see. So they were rather conservative. There were less adventurous—

WZ: Always conservative, yeah. We had—I remember the 1930s, we got a show of prints from New York, Diego

Rivera and all those people of that period. And they didn't sell at all—Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse.

RB: Yeah?

WZ: Yeah. And they came into ridicule. And the same prints fetch a fortune now.

RB: That's right.

WZ: We had superb little studio drawings of still lifes of Diego Rivera. They were silver-points, meticulously drawn, which never suggested what he was going to be. Early things like you'd get with Picasso and stuff.

RB: Well, now—so someone like John Spaulding was an exception, right?

WZ: Yeah. But he had New York dealers collecting for him.

RB: I see. He didn't really buy that much from Doll and Richards?

WZ: Yes, he did.

RB: He did?

WZ: Yeah. Yeah.

RB: But he was an exception among these families?

WZ: Yeah. And he was friendly with Desmond Fitzgerald, who was another man who built a studio, a gallery to house all the Dodge McKnights he had—Sargent watercolors and stuff. And when he died, it was all auctioned off. That was the 1920s, he was quite a motivating force.

It's funny. If an important collector buys a picture, everybody stampedes to buy that artist. This has been over and over, the case. Nothing succeeds like success.

RB: [Laughs]

WZ: [Laughs]

RB: Now, if you were—your customers are mainly these socially prominent families. And they sort of had in those days, there was sort of a season, didn't they? They were gone—

WZ: The season was from October till May. They came back in late September. Early October they would open the townhouses and get settled for the symphony that opened in the middle of October about that time. And they had to be there for the first performance. The theater was opening, and it was a very exciting time. And when it came late May, we knew just when to shut down. But the shows needed a following, a new following, see? We wouldn't come out—young people at that time would put on group shows, you know, sort of a cross section of the artists that we carried.

The group shows were a great thing in those days. And they would extend all through the summer. We never closed in summertime because there was, in those days a lot of transients went through Boston before the superhighways. They'd come to Boston, stop in a hotel, and take a walk around, look at what was in the shops and stuff. But today they go right through, zoom, to Maine.

RB: But were they very good customers, some of these tourists?

WZ: Yes, some of them turned out to be, yeah, over a period of time.

RB: Your best thing I think you said—you showed—

WZ: People like the Wells down in Southbridge, Steerbridge, you know—

RB: Southbridge, yes, yes.

WZ: Southbridge, American Optical, they were good clients. They'd come up two or three times a year.

RB: Of course, they essentially were of the region. That's not—I was—they wouldn't be a tourist, would they?

WZ: No. But they were out-of-towners.

RB: Okay.

WZ: You know what I mean?

RB: I see. So you were really—

WZ: They went to Crown and Shields, the Amesese, the Endicotts, and so forth.

RB: Your bedrock was those families who were originally Boston, at least—

WZ: That's right. That's right.

RB: And would you show your best stock, your most expensive things, say, after October?

WZ: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

RB: Down through Christmas?

WZ: Yeah. That's why we had a private gallery on the second floor. If somebody important came in from New York, a museum dealer out of the West Coast and stuff—and in the summertime, a lot of people come in from Frisco and stuff, dealers looking for antiques and paintings.

We had a rack on the second floor where we kept the Old Masters and fine things. And we would trot them out and show them one at a time. If they were looking for a special thing, we didn't have it, and we knew whether one could be obtained, we would get it. See how long they'd be in town, we'd get it to show or take them to the home that had it for sale. It was all part of it, too.

RB: What about—did you get involved in the sales of those Old Masters?

WZ: Occasionally.

RB: In those years, your earlier years, Mr. McKeen probably handled it?

WZ: Yeah. Well, if it went over 5000 dollars, he usually did, see? Because this was a tip-toey thing, and you didn't want to lose a sale, because there was a healthy commission in it. And you would prefer that he take the responsibility, anyhow.

I remember one Saturday afternoon, the Wells came in from Southbridge, and McKeen had gone out to lunch. Well, Genie Wells was there and his wife and a couple—the young one, one of the—Charlie Wells was at [inaudible]. They were charming people. And they bought over \$5000 worth of small pictures, Laura Hills pastels, and the Dyers, and stuff, Christmas presents. So when McKeen came back, he hit the roof.

RB: Why?

WZ: Because I had made the sale; he hadn't. There was that feeling there, too. Yeah. He saw that I was crowding him.

RB: Did he also maybe think that if he'd been there, he might have been able to sell them one or two 5000-dollar pictures?

WZ: This is possible, too. This is possible.

RB: And could he? Did he usually—

WZ: But these were—as I explained to him, they were Christmas gifts, giveaways. They weren't for the Wells family themselves. And I said, "They have seen what we have upstairs, and they're impressed with one or two things. And I think we should write to them in the future, keep reminding them of it."

RB: What was your approach when somebody you thought might want to buy a substantial work—how would you handle these people?

WZ: I'd turn them over to Mr. McKeen right away.

RB: Oh. And how, did you ever, how would he—

WZ: I'd say, "Mr. McKeen, this person is looking for a Smybert [phonetic]. Now, I know we have one or two, but I prefer that you show them."

RB: Yes. And then what would happen? Could you describe how—typically how McKeen might handle such a transaction?

WZ: McKeen wasn't, McKeen, in our business, we were good listeners. The customer sold themselves. If a person could afford a Smybert, they knew it's—

RB: Which was worth a lot in those days.

WZ: Well, they would be 15,000 or so. They were rare.

RB: Yes.

WZ: But they knew what they were seeking, and they probably had museum connections which they hadn't told us about. A lot of them, they just on their own—like Mayor from Metropolitan—

RB: Hyatt Mayor.

WZ: Yeah. He would come in. He would never announce who he was. Then one day he says, "Do you have any old Metsu tints?" I said, "But loads of them." "Lantzes?" [phonetic] I said, "Yes." Well, I trotted him downstairs and took them all out. And he said [inaudible]. I said, "Nobody wants them." I said, "If you make us an offer, we'll give them to you."

They were big things, you know, the sentimental—the sad-eyed hounds with little maidens holding them and stuff.

RB: Yes. At that point, you knew he was a museum man.

WZ: Yeah. And this was all done while McKeen was out.

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: When he came back, I said, "Now, we have the Metropolitan Hyatt Mayor, and he wants some things." "Harumph." He said, "Give them to them as a present." Well, Mayer wouldn't do that. He said, "No, we'll make it legal. I'll pay you five dollars, and that will make mine." So we got rid of them that way.

But there were a lot of museum people snooping around that would never say who they were. And if I got wind of it, I would turn them over to McKeen. I'd say, "Why don't you talk to this man? He's been at it longer than I have, and maybe he knows sources, private families who have what you're looking for."

RB: Yes. I'll bet you were very careful of them because this would—they stood for long-term customers.

WZ: Always, always, sure.

RB: By doing that with Hyatt Mayer as you did, you hoped that he would then come back again, right?

WZ: He had. He used to visit—very friendly. A lot of those museum people did. Taylor used to drop in. That's when he was with the Worcester Museum and stuff.

RB: [Inaudible]

WZ: New York did a job on him. "The Taste of Angels," I remember the book came out. I got it. I had it autographed, and I still have it.

RB: What do you mean they did a job on him?

WZ: He couldn't take the pressure. Metropolitan, the big place in the world. There was a lot of politics in those things, too.

RB: Yes.

WZ: As, you read Johnny Walker's book how he had to bow and curtsy to an awful lot of collectors.

RB: Yes. Right.

WZ: And then they would up and go off and give somebody else the benefit of the doubt.

RB: Yes. Did you—you had to bow and curtsy do all that, too?

WZ: All the time.

RB: To make sure of your business.

WZ: Yeah.

RB: But you said a little earlier that you let the customers sell themselves.

WZ: Pretty much so. And then when they're to the point where they're almost convinced, you push them over.

RB: Do you have a feeling of how you did that?

WZ: "Take it home and live with it for a week." That's the sales.

RB: Okay.

WZ: And invariably, it would stick. We didn't have time payments, never. We frowned on them. We didn't want to be involved. We didn't charge. If a person wanted to get something—like Laurie Coleman wanted a Wyeth drawing of a deer—this is the drawing—it was 450 dollars in those days. It was a big thing. We didn't have the 450 dollars. But the sales of his pictures, at that time he was being an assistant to Charles Curtis Allen and helping him out. Allen had had his leg amputated and had a wooden leg, from gangrene and so forth. So Lauring [phonetic], the big, husky, strapping guy, was learning to paint. And he was his assistant. Well, we let him have it. And he paid on installment. And we got the money.

RB: But that was an exception?

WZ: That was an exception because he was [inaudible]. We had another guy who took away several paintings. And I didn't like it. No, he ordered several paintings, one of them shipped here and there. And we found out he did this with a number of galleries and they had lost money on him and never reclaimed the paintings.

But in those days, you were close to customers. If a person came in with a dark suit on and sports shoes or sneakers and started to put on a big act, we knew they were phonies right at the beginning. You could spot it.

RB: Why? I mean, from the dress alone?

WZ: Yeah. Just alone.

RB: What would that dress signify in those days?

WZ: Well, Boston was very proper and sedate.

RB: So it was a very platonic [phonetic] sort of person?

WZ: Yeah. A person who wasn't part of our city or our mailing list, you know.

RB: Yes.

WZ: They could talk around, but they'd have to give references. And we'd telephone all the time for references, banks and stuff.

RB: Yes.

WZ: I used to check up immensely. We would do more looking-you-up, finding out how much you had in the bank, and so forth before we'd do business with you. The Voses were very fastidious that way, too. And we'd often call the Voses: "Do you know this person? They've given your name for a reference." And they would say, "Yes, they're okay. Aren't you nice you got them? We didn't get them this time." Or they'd say, "Watch out." That's all they'd say.

RB: Uh-huh. What you're saying—

WZ: So we'd get a down payment, which was usually two-thirds of the thing so that—we got a third in those days, so the artist—we would lose our commission, but the artist wouldn't lose his money. The artist depended on them in those days. That was their livelihood. It was nip and tuck with a lot of them.

[Audio Break]

RB: The second interview with Wendell Zoehler; the date is April 27, 1978. WZ, when you first went to the gallery in 1929, what were your impressions? What was particularly going on then in terms of the artists that you met, the exhibitions that you gave, other dealers, critics, the like?

WZ: When I, the first day at Doll and Richards, it was practically a lucky day for me. I was given a desk and instructed as to what my duties were and so forth, telephone calls, what-not. But opening exhibition that day

was Mary Ogden Abbott, who was the niece to Charles Francis Adams. She had been in Tibet. She and her mother took a junket through India, Kashmir Valley, up into Tibet, which was a forbidden country in the 1920s. She had a group of Coolies with her. She went horseback. She carried a gun. She had a whip. And she had no problems. She made friends in the Lamas areas and made a lot of recordings and—graphically, etchings and drawings of the life in Tibet.

And when they came back, she entered the etchings and she opened up for 1929 with Doll and Richards. Her first day, I was watching an elderly man there who pointed to me with a cane and says, "Come here, young man." He says, "I want that, that, and that." And he bought several pictures right off the bat. And I wrote them up.

So when McKeen came back from lunch, he said, "Anything doing?" And he saw all the stars on the wall. And I said, "Yes. And it happened to be your grandfather on the Abbott side."

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: Charles Francis Adams was there and, you know—

RB: So you did tremendously well. Was McKeen happy?

WZ: I made a big impression. No, he always liked to do the best in sales.

RB: Yes, you've described him as rather a sourpuss.

WZ: Yeah, except there was no commissions. And he once told Freddy Hall, the etcher, who wanted to have me take this sale, that sale, he said, "There's no commissions to sales." McKeen told Freddy Hall that they didn't bribe their help to sell. There were no commissions involved. They were paid a salary. And that staggered him for a moment. And that was—well, a commission gallery. And they lived off the commissions earned. It was the only source of income they had.

RB: Who did?

WZ: Doll and Richards.

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: You see?

RB: But you were simply salaried. You're talking about the owners lived off commission.

WZ: Yeah. No, the whole gallery sustained itself. We did framing, restoration, shipping, and stuff.

RB: Right. Yeah.

WZ: But on the exhibitions, it was just straight commission gallery like all the others.

RB: Uh-huh. But Hall was surprised that you wouldn't get commissioned?

WZ: Yeah.

RB: I see.

WZ: He thought by buying this and that, that I would get more for a weekly income.

RB: I see.

WZ: He liked me, Freddy Hall. He was quite a—he was married to the Amesese, you know.

RB: Yes, yes.

WZ: So just mentioning Frederick Garrison Hall, he was married to one of the Amesese. It was sort of a tragic death. He was a very good etcher and had been written up a number of places here and in Europe for his work. He studied with Paxton, made some painted still lives that were very tight enamel-type of panels, typical Paxton, but a lot of taste. And he had a big collection of brick-brack that he could draw from still life.

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: The thing is, one Saturday afternoon he was over by the Copley Theater, and he stepped out of the wrong

side of the taxi, and another one hit him and killed him. It was as quick as that. He was a cripple. He had polio or something.

RB: But Hall was one of the mainstay printmakers with Doll and Richards when you first came?

WZ: Yeah, Uh-huh. He was very much a part of the scene.

RB: Now, a printmaker, you would take and sell his work any time of year, right?

WZ: Right.

RB: On the other hand—

WZ: We always had in stock. And any new print that came in was always put in the window, recent—like Benson would be oversubscribed. And if you could get them, to put them and display them right in the window because they sold like hotcakes.

RB: But now, on the other hand, with painters, you saved the ones that were the most popular for the peak months, the midwinter months, right?

WZ: Well, a lot of the time, for our regular stable.

RB: Right.

WZ: And took new ones in on the off seasons to try them out. Quite often, we would not arrange an exhibition. We'd take a half-a-dozen paintings on consignment and show them in the window or in group shows so that we'd get a public response before we had an exhibition. Trial by error, you know.

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: If nobody showed any interest, the things didn't sell, then we went to the gallery for them. And we were very honest to that point of view. They liked them better somewhere else, or they painted too much like another artist whose work we were showing.

And this—with the watercolorists in Boston and in Rockport, there was at least eight of them that all painted alike.

RB: [Laughs]

WZ: Don Stone, Strizek, Joe—what the hell was his name?

RB: Those fellows are both a little later than the 30s, right?

WZ: Yeah. They were later than the 30s, but this was developing.

RB: That was true in the 30s.

WZ: Yeah. Because Rice and Gallagher and those people all painted alike—Charles Curtis Allen. You'll see them in the Boston Watercolor Show. There were a very few outstanding. That's why John Wolf stood out like a sore thumb among them. They were all sort of namby-pamby, but he had punch.

RB: He did more [inaudible] shows starting with you?

WZ: No, he never showed with us.

RB: He never did, huh?

WZ: He was with the Vose, and then he went with the Campbell—I mean, the Shore Gallery.

RB: Yes.

WZ: He didn't like McKeen, so he wouldn't show with us.

RB: Uh-huh. Well, watercolors, like prints, are a steady commodity in the 20s and 30s.

WZ: Yeah. Look at [inaudible].

RB: Right. Who were—now, the painters, though, the ones that were the most collectible that you would show

in your peak months when the well-to-do were back in Boston for the season—can you—

WZ: We used to have shows with Charles Patterson. He was the famous marine painter.

RB: Patterson.

WZ: Clipper Ship.

RB: Uh-huh. And that was very popular then?

WZ: Very popular, to sell. We got those on consignment from New York for exhibitions. They would book for me.

RB: Who was the consignee? The consignor in New York?

WZ: Patterson?

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: We got them through Knoedler.

RB: Knoedler?

WZ: Yeah. I don't think—

RB: Was Knoedler always a good gallery for [inaudible]?

WZ: Always good. Davidson always did well with us. He'd come from New York and see what we had that he could buy, especially Old Master things or beat things if he was looking for things. Or we'd send them over on consignment, which—it was the typical thing.

RB: Now, Patterson, though—Charles Patterson then was a mainstay?

WZ: Yeah. And subsequently, we got Frank Vining Smith from Hingham.

RB: Frank Vining Smith?

WZ: Yeah.

RB: So that sort of thing was a mainstay by the 30s, huh?

WZ: Well, that, and the group shows. We had the Diaz [phonetic]. We had Laura Hills. Laura Hills was a good seller. Of course, McKnight hadn't bowed out completely. He had his last show in 1929.

RB: But that was as you were coming in.

WZ: But the stuff was in the stock, and we'd always make small exhibitions of McKnight. And his name would be on the thing, and there was a ripple of business that way. We always had Homers in stock, too.

RB: Did you?

WZ: Yeah, always. [Inaudible]

RB: These would be the ones you kept in stock or they would come back to you from old customers?

WZ: No, no. They were right from the Homer estate.

RB: I see.

WZ: And from New York, too.

RB: Do you think it made a difference for the Homer to be sold through Doll and Richards rather than for the Homer estate to put them out to some other dealer?

WZ: For one reason. Any Homer that came through our hands, they knew it would be authentic.

RB: I see.

WZ: There have been some phony Homers around.

RB: Yes.

WZ: Unsigned ones.

RB: But they knew because you had been his dealer much of his career, his own career?

WZ: That's right. Yeah, right, yeah. And we knew most of his pictures, as I turned over the whole catalog of the paintings and showed the research that we had done on them to keep apace with what was going on.

RB: Exactly.

WZ: And you're never infallible. And once in a while, we'd consult Lloyd Goodrich. Did he know this picture, this title? We didn't have a record of it. And if we got a photograph, we'd submit it to him. And he'd say, "Stay away from it" or "It looks right," see?

RB: Uh-huh

WZ: This is something that dealers have to work together, too. Costano [phonetic] would get a picture. I'd say, "Well, you sold it to So-and-so back in this date. Could you look up and see if it's the same picture?" And we'd quite often do it. And if the purchaser of the picture and title and everything coincided with what information he had, we'd know that it was established. But you had to always have provenance on some things, especially when the artists was dead.

But Heinselman [phonetic] was coming in as an etcher. He was back from Europe. He later took over the Williams collection, you know.

RB: Oh, to make a library.

WZ: Yeah. But the thing is—

RB: Now, part of your getting well known and an artist knowing whether his work would sell or not was no doubt through the role of the critics. Were critics fairly prominent in Boston at that time? Was there a good deal written about art exhibitions?

WZ: There was a great deal of respect for critics.

RB: There was?

WZ: Yeah. And the paper was the Boston Transcript. It had H.D. Parker and Olden Downs [phonetic] was doing the stuff. And the art critic was Albert Franz Cochrane. He was a very well-dressed man. He was a cripple, wore a cane. And he was a little on the standoffish side, hostile. I got to know him very well.

In those days, at opening exhibition you had photographs, which was necessary, because they gave a lot of space to art in those days. They'd use a reproduction, sometimes two, depending upon the openings. You had a biographical data about the artist and also a catalog. And when the critic came in, he was handed that. And that was my duty, to have things ready.

Then you backed away. And you didn't say anything to him till he reviewed the exhibition. And if you were caught talking to him, you were admonished. I mean, they would chastise you afterwards. "Leave them alone," see? McKeen used to like to get in before anybody and get an impression of the reaction the critic had to the work and all, so try to point out what the artist was doing and his connections and so forth.

RB: You mean McKeen would go up to the critic after he looked at the exhibition?

WZ: Yeah, afterwards, yeah, yeah. But quite often, a critic would come in and say, "What do you think is good? What's he trying to do? Where's he from?" and all that stuff, you know. They don't like to sit around and read it up. They had copy in their hand, but they'd rather get a firsthand reaction of somebody. And gradually, I got to know all of them.

There was Alice Laughton. She was the Boston Post. She was very good at the things. After Cochrane died back in 1935, William Jermain Nooly [phonetic] took over. He was running the antique page for the Transcript.

RB: And were these—did these reviews mainly consist simply of descriptions? Were they—or were they—

WZ: They were reviews. We never looked on them as critics.

RB: Were they very brutal?

WZ: No. Alice Laughton was very pleasant. She always listed things. And I know I incurred Marion Sloan's [phonetic] wrath one year. They had at the art club a group of painters called the Independent Artists in Boston. And you could submit a picture. Well, I had done a pastel all in yellow of a yellow vase, yellow background, yellow rose, and so forth. And she mentioned it in her copy. Well, Marion Sloan was furious because here's a person, not even a professional artist, gets a nod, and she didn't get—you know. She was furious.

RB: Yeah. I see. Well, what—at the other end, what effect did this have on the buyers, on the collectors?

WZ: They read it. They read it. They'd flock in.

RB: They did?

WZ: Yeah.

RB: Now, would they come in—

WZ: A lot of art was word of mouth, too. Somebody came in and they saw a picture they liked, or we called up somebody and said, "Why don't you come in and see it? It's the sort of thing that you like." Let's see. A.J. Philpot [phonetic] was with the Globe then. And he was a good boost to any artist because he brought in the whole history of art when he reviewed a show.

RB: Wow.

WZ: Plenty of space. And Edgar Driscoll [phonetic] was his protégé. When he died, Edgar Driscoll took over. And he was a product of Yale University Art Department and so forth.

RB: Well, the range of artists, though, in that day was not very great.

WZ: It was typical Boston painters. It was the Boston School.

RB: But I mean, they were all representational.

WZ: Yeah.

RB: You did mention a bit earlier someone like Howard Giles [phonetic] with his theory of dynamic symmetry.

WZ: Yeah. That came up in the 1930s. He was [inaudible] New Hampshire.

RB: But that would be a more abstract then?

WZ: Yeah. Right.

RB: But that was a minor element in—

WZ: And then Charlie Hopkinson, the portrait painter, he was experimenting with watercolor and trying to reduce things to a least common multiple in the design and pattern. He was doing rocks down at Magnolia or [inaudible].

RB: Were these very salable, this sort of thing?

WZ: They didn't sell.

RB: No?

WZ: No.

RB: Now, Boston is a pretty timid art community.

WZ: Very much so. We had a show from New York—we took it on—of Gauguin, Cézanne, Orozco, Diego Rivera, and so forth. And the things that sold were their very early academic things, rather than the more recent. These were prints, etchings, lithographs, and dry points and drawings. And it was a most amazing—just flopped. Today you'd get thousands of dollars for each one of them.

RB: Yeah. But in that day and age, a man like John Spaulding then stood out as an exception, right, because he was interested in some of the Post-Impressionist French work, wasn't he?

WZ: Yeah. But he didn't give it in New York. He had an agent—I mean, he didn't do it in Boston.

RB: Right.

WZ: He had an agent in New York that did it.

RB: Yeah, right. But I mean—but at least he was a Bostonian. He was an exception.

WZ: Yeah. And he had Charles Herby [phonetic] Pepper with him all the time, who had a keen eye. He was an artist himself. They were together all the time.

RB: Now, you've mentioned some of the other critics, the dealers in town at that time. You've mentioned a bit about the Voses close relationships, and also with Knoedler and with Victor Spark. There were some other shorter-lived galleries, such as Grace Horn Gallery. Was that—

WZ: Yeah. When I came, it was over on Stewart Street. Of course, Goodspeeds were always going up there.

RB: Was Grace Horn showing mostly younger people or—

WZ: Yeah, younger people. She moved from Stewart Street over to Newberry Street, below. Margaret Brown worked for her for a while, but Brayton Whitmore was there as one of her—mean, I made a photograph of him. I gave you a small one, I think.

RB: Uh-huh. These people were not as successful as your type of gallery; is that right?

WZ: No. We had Vose Gallery. They were outstanding.

RB: Sure.

WZ: The Compley [phonetic] Society. They had yearly things. And then the Old Boston Art Club was very active with exhibitions.

RB: Right.

WZ: And the Boston Guild of Artists.

RB: Now, weren't they showing some of the same people that you or Vose showed?

WZ: Yeah, yeah, they did. And then we had the Chervais [phonetic] Gallery up in Boylston Street. They were wholly graphic—subsequently, and the Cassing [phonetic] Gallery for the Irving Cassing Building.

RB: But how could these artists produce so much, that in a given year, that they could have a show at the Art Club, at the Compley [phonetic] Society, the Guild, as well as one or another commercial gallery?

WZ: Well, most of the like—they belonged—they were members to them and they had group shows. It's very rarely that they would have an exhibition. But most of the artists, they were prolific. They painted. They did it all day long. They worked at it seven days a week. They preferred it that way. They didn't—they got up in the morning and painted, or went around on field trips to get material. Summertime, mostly, they would do the, you know, Vermont, New Hampshire round.

RB: Did you find that actually, all of these competitive showings, to your—to Doll and Richards actually worked in your favor?

WZ: Yeah.

RB: Because you developed a higher —make more excitement, more—

WZ: That's right. We never, never contracted an artist to stay completely with us. They couldn't have an exhibition with another person. But the fact that they would show at the Symphony Hall, they'd show at Jordan Mash group shows, or the Art Club, or with the Guild, and so forth, membership things, we didn't frown upon it. But we only stipulated that, if they were going to show with us, we had the selection of their pictures for exhibitions. And they could show in Boston, courtesy Doll and Richards. We never contracted an artist; you can't do that. It's disastrous for the artist to—because if they don't sell at one gallery, they might do better at another gallery.

And it was sort of a floating population in those days, too. An artist would go in and see something they liked in another gallery. And the other gallery would say, "Well, you're with Doll and Richards, aren't you?" They said, "Sure, why not?" But, "Well, we're having a group show, if you want to submit one." It was okay. And they can say, "Well, the Vose want to show pictures. Is it okay?" I said, "Go ahead. You have to eat." This is Depression

years, too. We didn't get hit till about '32, Depression. Then prices took a nosedive.

RB: You said earlier that in these years that watercolors paid the rent, so to speak, during the Depression.

WZ: That's right. Yeah, yeah.

RB: These watercolors you mentioned earlier, yeah.

WZ: That's right. And they would take the summertime—the artists would all disappear, take most of their pictures, go down to the summer colonies.

RB: Uh-huh.

[END DISK ONE]

RB: There were a number of fairly small galleries then in Boston, in the beginning, at least, in the 30s, right?

WZ: Yes.

RB: You mentioned like the Goodwyn and Walker Gallery?

WZ: Yes. That was—

RB: Was that—what sort of things did they specialize in?

WZ: Wait a minute. They were always 607 Boylston Street right in the corner. But they had drawings, Old Masters drawings, and stuff. And it seems they got their stuff directly from Paris, some dealer there, very good impressionist stuff, and name stuff, and quality.

RB: Now, was that stuff of interest to the Boston collector at that time?

WZ: They had their following.

RB: Yeah, yeah.

WZ: Every dealer has a following. And sometimes they shut up a shop. And the fact that they have a lot of friends who would buy a thing, get the things for them.

RB: Now, you mentioned—I believe Boris Mersky would have been—

WZ: He was down on Charles Street. He had a frame shop.

RB: Right. Was he doing—beginning to be an art dealer as well by then?

WZ: He got to know the younger artists, which were going to the Museum School. And that's his strong point when he opened up here, like Barbara Swan and that group.

RB: Yes.

WZ: Herman Fink then; it's the Alpha Gallery now. [Inaudible] had that whole group.

RB: Yes.

WZ: Oh, Levine, Jack Levine [phonetic].

RB: Yes. Well, these were all—these weren't really directly in competition with you?

WZ: No, because it was a different school.

RB: You're coming from Allen Richards, right.

WZ: That's right.

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: But they were a talented people. They had Ed Zimmer [phonetic] instructor.

RB: Yeah, the instructor at the Museum School.

WZ: Expressionists, yeah. And as a matter of fact, they would have a joint show at the Midtown Gallery. And rumor was that the New York artists were afraid of the Boston artists that were so technically competent.

RB: I see.

WZ: That was the expression, "technically competent."

RB: Sure.

WZ: And they were great. And they're still around, a lot of them. Stoltenberg [phonetic] is another one. Margaret Brown got him, and later Hy Switzof [phonetic] got him.

RB: Yes. Of the young artists—

WZ: Kempish [phonetic], too —Kempish was another one.

RB: Of the young artists that Doll and Richards showed in the 30s, were there some that you then latched on to and became very—your principal artists that you would give a one-man show to?

WZ: Well, one was Elliott O'Hara. He was outstanding. He wasn't that great as an artist, but he could paint pictures that were salable. They were almost poster-ish, reduced them to—he studied Japanese prints a lot and saw the arrangement of space and color. And he worked on that business, plus the European poster business.

RB: And those things were very—salability, of course, in the Depression years was very important for you, wasn't?

WZ: They weren't too expensive. Yeah. He was just back from Russia. And no artist had been in Russia. So he was showing beach scenes, nudes, and the onion top churches, you know.

RB: In the 30s, what —did you have dealings with the painting curators at the Museum of Fine Arts?

WZ: Oh, they were always [inaudible].

RB: People like W.G. Constable came in in 1937.

WZ: Always Constable came in to see things. And we would quite often pick his brain on certain things, if we had a picture, he would authenticate it, rather than go up to the museum.

RB: What were these things, mainly, European things, that he would authenticate?

WZ: Yeah. Like a Turner would come in. We had a beautiful Turner, a watercolor, magnificently framed. And he turned it right down quick because Turner was his boy. He'd made a lot of studies.

RB: Well, hum. And he turned it down? He said it was—

WZ: Yeah. He said, "No. It doesn't smell right." That's the expression he always used to use.

RB: Uh-huh. But would you use an investment? Or were these something you had usually on consignment?

WZ: No, no. On those things, we always took them on consignment. We never bought outright. We were the middle man. We would take it on and find another dealer in New York to buy it or another client looking for it.

RB: In fact, Doll and Richards seldom laid out much capital, did it?

WZ: Very seldom. Very seldom. They didn't have that much to work with. Voses had a kitty. And they would buy cheap and sell high like Charlie Chiles [phonetic] did, you know, steal them and make them get rich.

RB: Did Charlie—Charles Chiles began his gallery then in the later Depression years?

WZ: That's right.

RB: And what sort of things—did he start showing good things immediately?

WZ: Well, he stuck to Americana very much so.

RB: And he got good early things?

WZ: Yeah, the Hudson River School and so forth. And then he got a few contemporary artists, but it was quite a

while before he broadened out into one-man exhibitions. He had one of our men.

RB: Did he do quite well early on, from the beginning?

WZ: Charlie always did well. He made a point to know people socially, and this was the racket. He was with the Botolf [phonetic] Club member and other societies. He was quite a singer in his day, too. His wife was curator out at the Fitchburg Art Center, I think, for a while.

RB: So they had many contacts?

WZ: A lot of contacts, yeah. He got through. He knew them up in Goodspeeds. And like all the young people, Bob Camel, all of them, they were like runners at first. They had their client, and the client was looking for something. And they'd see it and a chance to make a fast buck, they would show it to them. This was Depression days. You make a buck where you could. So once you got a following, a mailing list, you set up shop.

RB: Now, in the Depression—

WZ: And Charlie knew also the men of New York. He wasn't allergic to going down to the dealers and finding what they had, seeking out things that he thought he could sell, ask, and get them on consignment.

RB: Well, you did quite a bit of that, too.

WZ: Always, always.

RB: I mean, you're—did you go to New York yourself?

WZ: No, I never went, no.

RB: You never went?

WZ: No. It was always selected for me to sell. [Laughs]

RB: I see.

WZ: No, I discovered a lot of people, like Dwight Chapler [phonetic], William Jewel, and people like that.

RB: Local people.

WZ: Yeah.

RB: Now, the—what did Goodspeeds do in the 30s? They had the base of a bookstore and Audubon business.

WZ: Goodspeeds? No, they did prints. They were strong on Audubon, that type of thing.

RB: But they weren't pushing contemporary printmakers as they did in the 20s?

WZ: Yes, they had a few. And they got them from the Hingham Print Corner, Mrs. Whittemore.

RB: What was that?

WZ: Nasons [phonetic] and things.

RB: Oh, I see. She was a dealer out there in the suburbs?

WZ: Yeah. Yeah. We wouldn't deal through an agent for a dealer. We wanted to deal with the artist directly. And if an agent approached us, no way, because we didn't like split commissions. There wasn't that much money in it.

RB: But Goodspeeds could afford that, apparently?

WZ: Yes. Their business was fundamentally books, rare books, and autographs.

RB: Right. Right. Now, you mentioned, you know, various ways—it's come out, of course, that the 30s were times when you had to sort of make do. And you had to stick with the most salable items. Then in 1940 or 41, you had to—you were already on Newburg Street, of course. But you had to make a move from 138 to 140. Could you explain the circumstances of this?

WZ: Well, the treasurer, Joseph Richards, the son of the old man Richards, he was into a single tax. And he'd had meetings at the gallery, which was a little shocking for the other people in the building, to think that the gallery was used for such a thing, proposing single tax and so forth. And he harassed the bankers with this.

RB: How were the bankers affected by that single-tax theory?

WZ: I don't know, except that they didn't like it.

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: They didn't go along with it. We had a 250,000-dollar mortgage on the building. And interest had to be paid. And some of the principal had to be reduced from time to time. But Depression years, we were licked.

RB: Sure.

WZ: So they foreclosed one day.

RB: Partly because they didn't like him or his ideas?

WZ: Well, he antagonized—it was the point where he did.

RB: Yes.

WZ: Because subsequently, the building was sold for 50,000 to the Institute of Contemporary Art. And that was quite a shocker. But then the people that was behind the Institute of Contemporary Art were bankers, too, like Nat Saulenstal [phonetic] and so forth, see?

RB: Right. So you had suddenly to move.

WZ: Yeah. And it was a scramble. One day we had to get out four floors.

RB: But you moved—

WZ: We went next door. We knew Dowan Gardner because he was an amateur artist and writer, and he used to haunt the exhibitions and so forth.

RB: And what was he? The owner of the building at 140?

WZ: Yeah, the Gardner estates. They were all over New England, Florida, St. Louie, around.

RB: But you had to reduce the size of your shop when you moved next door; is that right?

WZ: Yeah. The gallery—we only had a basement and a street floor. But we got a lot of stuff in. We had closets. There was plenty of room there for exhibitions. It was set up pretty well.

RB: Well, did the younger Richards stay with you after that?

WZ: No. He was out completely. Mr. McKeen bought the business, through the help of Morris Goldberg, who subsequently owned it, too.

RB: I see.

WZ: He loaned him the money and they made a down payment. You see, in those days, you could buy the goodwill. But what was goodwill worth? If a place was foreclosed, you got what you could. McKeen grabbed the mailing list and hid it so the Richards family couldn't have it. No one knew what happened to it. I did. But there was that dissension in and out.

RB: Yes, you mentioned that earlier.

WZ: McKeen says, "I'm going to move next door." He says, "I've bought the business. I want you to stay with me." It was simple as that.

RB: And were you happy to do so?

WZ: I did until 43. Then I went into defense work. I was called up in the draft. And because I had polio in my right leg, they sent me home as 4F. I said, "Well, I can do clerical work. I can work in a hospital or something." They said, "No. In a few months you'll be claiming impairment, a limb, and you'd be on a pension for the rest of your life. We're going to sidestep you." They were very—

RB: But you did stick with McKeen for two years, anyway, there.

WZ: Yeah. And during the war years, which were two-and-a-half years I was away, he came—wanted me to come back with him.

RB: Right.

WZ: He had Owen Rossiter, who was—he was an alcoholic to begin with. But he was a decorator and did all the windows for Feline's and the displays in Feline's store. He had come from New York, and he was knowledgeable in antiques. He had a small shop on Newbury Street. He had lost the shop. He couldn't make it go. So McKeen had him come there, and he stayed.

RB: While you were gone?

WZ: Yeah, while I was gone.

RB: What effect did the moving to the other building have on your customers?

WZ: It didn't harm in the least. A lot of people would come and say, "Oh, we like your new place better." "It's more spacious" or something like this. And we had it painted and fixed up, displayed. We went right on functioning, didn't lose the clients because McKeen knew them, I knew them. So it didn't make any difference. The Richards family—they weren't active in it except to keep the books.

RB: Right. You kept, then, the similar artists. Now, at the very end of the 30s, you'd have that first show of Andrew Wyeth, hadn't you, in 39?

WZ: We lost one or two. During—yeah. Yeah.

RB: He did not stay with you after that?

WZ: He had two or three exhibitions with us. We could always have an exhibition of his things. He stemmed out at Macbeth Gallery in those days. His father was still around, but after his father got killed it was disastrous for Wyeth. He went into a deep funk.

RB: Was Wyeth easy to work with? Do you recall him?

WZ: Oh, as a kid he was beautiful. I made photographs of him. He wanted me—he was very friendly with Steve Ethnea [phonetic], too, New York Addis [phonetic], and also Peter Hurd who was married to his sister. And that's where he learned the art of Geso. I mean, the egg tempura. So there were no problems with Wyeth, no problems at all. And even when he was no longer with us, if we went through Boston to Port Clyde, he'd stop in and say hello. Very friendly.

RB: Were his things salable from the beginning?

WZ: They always sold, yeah. The father had a lot of pulling power, too. But he painted well. His father took him as a boy to see every Winslow Homer that was ever painted. And you can see traces of it in some of his work, subject matter or technique. After he got into the egg tempura stuff, he got very tight. But he never lost the freedom of the brush for watercolor. He claimed if he couldn't do it in an hour and a half, it wasn't worth doing. He did them fast.

RB: At that time, yes.

WZ: Yeah. And his palette was very limited to blues and reds and so forth, when you see them now.

RB: Right.

WZ: But, jeepers, even those days, he could paint. And they bring big prices when they come on the market now, too.

RB: Oh, sure. The—also those days were the time when the Institute of Contemporary Art was getting underway. Did that have—do you recall what effect that had on the rather timid art scene that there had been in Boston?

WZ: We welcomed it. They came next door. And Saturday afternoon was the afternoon devoted to Trotters. Artists would come and sit and talk in our gallery. They'd go next door to see the show. They'd come from our place, next door, or vice versa.

RB: Sure.

WZ: And it was great. And then they'd go up to the Guild. And so the whole thing worked very well. We were very pleased, and we were always at all their openings and stuff. They didn't tread on our toes, and we didn't tread on theirs. And they learned a lot from us, and so forth. They had a very good girl, Sandra Ovalenski [phonetic], there. She knew everybody. And she was a lot of fun for openings.

RB: But they gave Boston some of its first showings of the contemporary European things.

WZ: Like Kokoschka.

RB: Right.

WZ: Kokoschka. I remember when Kokoschka come to Boston. Everybody had their mouths open. This is the famous Kokoschka.

RB: But did they buy? Were Boston collectors—

WZ: They didn't buy, but they had commissions done. Most of the stuff, I don't think was for sale. It was loaned. Plout [phonetic] took care of that. He assembled the exhibitions and they came to Boston. But there was a number of portrait commissions come out of it because they had a Jewish clientele there that we couldn't break or get.

RB: And they were more inclined to the more innovative?

WZ: Right, yeah. Well, it was a thing of status with the Jewish people, too. If a collector was collecting a certain artist—like when Jack Levine or Hyman Bloom or those came up, they would latch on to it. "We got to have this artist. He's one of us. He's good. And the big collectors and museums are getting his stuff. We've got to own one. Get them now while they're cheap," see?

RB: Uh-huh.

WZ: And this is what's happened with a lot of Jewish artists. They've had patrons that have grabbed on because some collector like Hirsh—what's his name?

RB: Hirshhorn, right?

WZ: Hirshhorn, yeah. He would buy a whole studio right out.

RB: Sure. But you never tried to develop that clientele?

WZ: [No audible response]

RB: No?

WZ: No. No.

RB: Because you had sufficient business with the—

WZ: Well, we had the Bernhardtts. But they were into, at the time, the Oriental—I mean, the Chinese ceramics, you know.

RB: That's right. You had, occasionally, things such as that, didn't you?

WZ: Right. And they were also into the eighteenth-century Dutch. They were buying them, getting mostly auction in New York, in London, Sotheby's. We sold one or two items to them for their collection, beautifully painted Vandervelt and that type of thing. But those were consignment things. They were kicking around for years. Nobody wanted them. Nobody was collecting Dutch stuff, still life and so forth.

RB: What was it like after World War II, right afterward? What was the art market and all like, in the later 40s, in other words?

WZ: This I'd have to take a second thought on.

RB: You were gone for awhile.

WZ: Yeah.

RB: When you came back, was it any different?

WZ: Well, I came back. It wasn't any different, except there were better artists.

RB: There were?

WZ: And there was more of a demand at the gallery.

RB: There were at that time? There were better artists, you're saying?

WZ: Yeah. Yeah.

RB: Such people as what?

WZ: Well—

RB: Can you name a couple of them that the gallery did show?

[END OF RECORDED INTERVIEW.]

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