

**Oral History Interview of
William Curry Holden**

**Interviewed by: Jimmy M. Skaggs
December 15, 1967
Lubbock, Texas**

“REEL TWO”

**Part of the:
*Legacy Southwest Collection Interviews***

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Interview Series Background:

In the process of conservation and digitization, our Audio/Visual department transcribes existing interviews in the Southwest Collection's holdings for a new generation of listeners to rediscover. Such interviews frequently cover topics relating to the founding of Texas Tech and the settlement of Lubbock.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Dr. William Curry Holden. Holden talks about his interest in archeology and his excavations in New Mexico and near the Canadian River. Holden also discusses the process of obtaining funding for the Texas Tech Museum. Moreover, Holden talks about the mural at the museum (now Holden Hall) and Peter Hurd's techniques in creating the fresco.

Length of Interview: 01:22:28

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Jimmy M. Skaggs (JS):

Dr. William Curry Holden interview, reel two.

William Holden (WH):

In the summer of 1930, our enthusiasm—which had kind of spread through the department—caused us to schedule a field course for one of the terms—and we had two terms of summer school, as we do now [1967]—that part hasn't been changed. I took the—I was to give the class—and we had no money, no expense account, not anything—and the students had to—they paid for the privilege of going out and working all summer. But we kept the price down really very low because I had found out that I could feed those students for eleven cents a day.¹ We shared the work, and usually enough of these students—a lot of schoolteachers among them—had enough cars for the transportation, and we paid for the gasoline out of a fund. As I recall, they paid in thirty dollars apiece, and that took care of the food and the gasoline and everything. At that time, the tuition was very cheap here at the college. And so we would go off and be gone for six weeks with the average expense of one dollar a day, and this took care of all expense. I managed to buy the food wholesale. Our first summer was up in Las Vegas. I went up there and managed to get a ranger cabin—²

JS:

New Mexico?

WH:

—in New Mexico, yes—and I housed them there, and this was among the pine trees and so on.³ But we found some ruins to work down on the—oh, what's the name of the creek—it was not the Pecos—anyway, down below Las Vegas, there's a little stream there.⁴ And it was a very small creek—[inaudible 2:54] prehistoric pueblo, and so we went down and got there. We were improving our technique as we went along, learning more about it. I found out later that our technique was very much like Thomas Jefferson—you know, he's the father of American archaeology. He had an Indian ruin on his plantation at Monticello, and he decided that he wanted to see what was in it, and so he worked out his technique, took some of his slaves, and excavated it. He laid off trial trenches this way into each other.

JS:

Perpendicular?

¹ Eleven cents a meal, totaling thirty-three cents a day.

² Corrects first to second.

³ At Tecolote, New Mexico.

⁴ Tecolote.

WH:

Perpendicular to each other—and then laid that off in sections—each trial trench—then took it out in layers and mapped it and kept everything—

JS:

—charted—

WH:

—charted. Then, after he'd found the trenches—perpendicular to each other, then he gridded [**mapped**] the whole thing and took it out. See, none of us had ever had a course of—I found out later that we were—the technique that we worked out was the same as Jefferson back—I don't know just what time in his career that he did this—whether it was before or after he was president. It could have been after he was president. I know he had a tremendous interest in everything—and a great scientist—a great fount of knowledge about him, too. So one thing we did do—I know we were doing a lot of things wrong—but what we did do was to keep a record of what we did, which is the most important thing—and began to publish these articles. Oh, after we got going—in the meanwhile, we'd organized the Texas State Archaeological Society before I left Abilene [**in 1928**]. We furnished for that for, I guess, ten or fifteen years. We have an article in those when archeology in Texas was just being born, you might say—especially. By the way, the little TAPS, [**which is now an important archeological bulletin**] Do you have a set of that in the Southwest Collection?

JS:

I'm not sure whether we do or not.

WH:

You sure ought to have it.

JS:

I can check and find out.

WH:

You really ought to have it. I was the editor of that for five or six years, then I turned it over—of all people—to Ernest Wallace. Never had a course—but he was good a editor.

JS:

Was he interested in archeology?

WH:

Pretty much—he never did do any fieldwork. I think, though, after he went from the University

of Texas to take his doctor's degree—he and Bill Pearce, who did their undergraduate work here. This thing is a virus, this archaeology and anthropology, and both of them had bad cases of it—and they minored in it. As I recall, both of them did—going back for their doctor's degree. So Ernest had a good background, and then he was editor for several years, and turned out. Before we gave up editorship, I tried to salvage **[the publication and keep it going]**, when I turned things over, about—I think it was seven files of that. I'll tell you how I did it. While I was editor, it was right during the worst of the Depression; our membership got low on account of people just didn't have whatever it was—three dollars a year—to pay in, and we had a little bit of departmental funds left over—I think it was a hundred and twenty dollars. And that's just about what we needed to finish and get it out—the issue **[of TAPS for]** one year—and so what I did was to send in a requisition to purchase seven files. At that time, it must have had, probably, fifteen or eighteen—no, nineteen, perhaps—volumes. So I went, and we had a lot of back numbers—and made complete files—wrapped them up in paper. Then—what we really did, technically—the department bought these complete files. Then we took this money and got out the next issue. There may be one or two of those files, still, over in the little room right south of the planetarium—which I let Ike have when we started the Southwest Collection. And I know when the Matador records came from Dundee, that's where we stored them.

JS:

Well Connor may have brought those over.

WH:

I don't think he'd brought those over, but they—the point I'm making is that there may be one or two files there, and if so, we ought to look into it—Southwest Collection ought to have as complete a file as we can get. Now, there is a file of it, I suppose, in the main library. But there ought to be one in the Southwest because this is the previous—

JS:

[inaudible 9:12]

WH:

I'll tell you, wait and let me kind of peep into it. Earl Green is such a peculiar person.

JS:

Well I meant [inaudible 9:20]

WH:

Oh, yeah, you do that. Earl being is peculiar—if they're still in there—he's just liable to—thumbs down because he's not cooperative with anybody—he's a—

JS:

You said that you began your [inaudible 9:44]— where did you store your artifacts before you built the museum?

WH:

Well, this is another phase of the—our coming here. Let me back up a little bit and I'll answer that question now. This is the beginning of the museum. In February, before I came here in June [1929]—and this place is such a thought of this—this places the time that Dr. Granbery wrote me the letter and I accepted. It was in January, I guess, of '29, when he wrote me the letter and I accepted. It was—I believe it was on February the twenty-eighth, or something—Dr. Granbery and Mrs. Mary Doak—the Dean of women—got together and decided that we ought to start a museum here. They called an initial meeting of people who were interested—as a matter of fact, I think that the first thought was Dean Doak—D-o-a-k. And so they called a meeting, and I believe Dr. [Studhalter] in the biology department, I know, was there and several members of the history department and so on—there must have been—they held the organization meeting on the second floor in one of the classrooms of the administration building—which, at that time, was the only classroom building on the campus with the exception of home economics and the textile building—but all the arts and science was confined, at that time—and this included all the sciences—was confined to the main building. I don't know—forty-odd people, I would say, came—and I wasn't there because I was still at McMurry, but I had a notification of this thing [meeting]. And so they met and elected officers—they called us the Plains Archeological Museum—oh wait a minute, I believe they called it the Plains Museum, yes, it was the Plains Museum. This was the Plains Museum's Association—now I've got it. And Dr. Granbery, knowing that I was coming and I was the greatest archaeologist of all time—they elected me the curator of this museum, I think curator and vice president or something, and I was informed about the meeting and my status in the association by letter. When I got here and learned that I was curator of the museum, well, as soon as I could get to it, I started out looking for the museum and couldn't find it. Nobody knew where it was. Well, I understood they had some things donated already, but nobody seemed to know where it was, and everybody said, "Well, go see Cecil Horn, maybe he would know." Well, Cecil Horn was, at that time, the public relations man. He was head of the journalism and also in charge of public relations. Nearly everybody at that time wore about three hats. And Cecil said he didn't know, but they'd just finished the chemistry building—the old chemistry building—and that maybe it might be over there somewhere. I went over there and made inquiry, and finally somebody said, "Well, I've noticed two or three old things up in the attic." I went up there to the attic and found the museum. It consisted of an old son-of-a-gun pot, a branding iron, and the skeleton of a pack saddle—and that's what we started the museum with—and an old cowboy, who had been in on the initial organization, he started the museum off by—he had these things down at his house—he was retired—and he brought them up, and that's what they had—and kept them up in the attic. Well, they had nothing in the attic in the time, and so these things that we were bringing in, we took

them up and put them up there—up in the attic. After about a couple of years—let's see, Dr. Reed was the first head of the chemistry department, and the second year I was here Dr. Goodwin came—I came just one year before he did—as head of the chemistry department. At that time, we'd bring this stuff in, we'd just take it up there in sacks—I was up there one day, and—first time I ever saw Dr. Goodwin—he came up there. He looked around, and he looked me over and he said “What are you doing up here?” and I told him what I was doing. “Well,” he says, “this is the chemistry building. I think we're going to need all of this space. Where are you going to move this stuff?” And I didn't know. He says, “Well, we'll let you have a little space for a short time. Now, can you get all this together and build you a little chicken-wire pen around it.” We got some old two-by-fours and come cheap wire netting, and I made a little door, put a little cheap lock on the door, and we kept stuff in there. We soon filled it up. And he tried to get us out from time to time, but there was nowhere to go. Then, in 1935, the legislature passed a three-million-dollar appropriation to celebrate the [Texas] Centennial in '36, and when they passed that, well, they gave us in idea that we might get a little help and latch on to some of that money. So we—Dr. Wagner at that time—a physician here in town—and because of his interest, I had invited him and his family to some of our excavations—they always came and would get out there and just work like Trojans, as long as he could stay. Well I unfolded this plan to Dr. Wagner and the president's association, and he had a car—pretty good car, really—and suggested that we visit each—the administrative part of this association—every county—the governor appointed a county centennial committee—so every county had an official committee. Most of them didn't do anything, much—they didn't know what to do. So we went around, from county to county, and we visited sixty-seven counties—all the way from Breckenridge this way [east] to the New Mexico line that way to Tulia this way [west], and this way [north] as far as Ozona [south]—and we asked them—told them—our plan. Our plan was to ask the county committees—the official committees of these sixty-seven counties—to join with us and request the centennial commission to allocate whatever money we had coming to us—it was three million dollars—one five—and build with it a museum on Tech campus. We got every one of these sixty-seven counties to sign—we had it [a petition] all made out for them, all they had to do was sign it—didn't cost them anything—so we got them to agree to that. Then, we went down—the centennial commission had a subcommittee called the historical committee, composed of three people—Lou Kemp [Louis W. Kemp] from Houston, and a priest from Saint Edward's University—who's name I can't think of at the moment—and Frank Dobie [J. Frank Dobie]. So we went down and made our appeal to them—they had an open meeting, I remember, in the senate chamber at Austin where all the county committees come in and make their pleas. So we went down, armed with our sixty-seven petitions, and asked them to consider this, and we figured, on the basis of—we'd done a little research—on the basis of population and taxes paid to the state—that we would be entitled to about five hundred thousand dollars, at least, for this area, because we had some oil fields at that time in the area. So we made our presentation and we could tell it was kind of hitting it cold. Not a single one of these men was a historian. Frank Dobie was a folklorist, and Father Faulkner [Father Paul J. Foik], I believe his name was, was a

librarian, and Lou Kemp was a sort of an insurance man—big man to one of the big insurance companies—who had a hobby, and his hobby consisted of trying to find all of the bodies of the—killed at the Alamo, I believe it was—and get them together and bury them at the state cemetery, I think, was his interest, and he wanted to use all the money for that. Well, when the report of the committee came out, they had recommended something like half a million to be spent in San Antonio, and Lou Kemp had seen to it—also, he was interested in the men who had been killed in the battle of San Jacinto—and something like a million to build that big monument at San Jacinto, and then they let Dallas have the rest of it to build those buildings there for the fair—that's all it was, just giving Dallas over a million dollars of that money—a million and a half dollars—for the fairground—and most of those buildings they have there, now, were built with this money. It was just politics right on through—but they'd get—the state of Texas built Dallas their fairgrounds. Well, we didn't get a thing. They ignored our petition—these sixty-seven counties—and they did not one thing—not a dollar. As a matter of fact, the only thing they recommended for the western two-thirds of the state—from a line just west of San Antonio, north—well, two-thirds of the area of the state west of that—the only thing recommended at all was a few of these marble monuments. You've seen a few of them.

JS:

I recognize—

WH:

That's right. They were probably—can't believe that came from the highway department—it really did. Well, [to] the western two-thirds of the state, they just said, “Well y'all don't have any history to celebrate,” and we were brushed off. Well when the news came, A. B. Davis, [**Executive Director**] a chairman of the Chamber of Commerce here, who was a ring-tailed hooter and a driver—and who could cuss louder than any man twist his size—he hit the ceiling and exploded. He had helped us in this whole thing and had advised with us and so on. And he said “By blankety-blank, those sons of bitches down there can't get by with this. We're going to make a march on Austin and we're going to appeal to the commission. We're going to ignore these S.O.B.'s —this three people” —incidentally, Frank Dobie was the only one that mildly recommended that they should pay some attention to this [**West Texas request**]. The padre and Lou Kemp dominated—well, they just bullied Frank out, and he didn't put up a big fight on it at all. So A. B. Davis said, “We are going to make a march on Austin. We'll go down and confront that commission, and we will demand, why we have been left out.” And incidentally, the federal government matched this three million, so they really had six million, and over—about two and a half million of that went to Dallas. He got on the telephone, and he phoned to various—we had the list of these committees, and by golly, do you know we got about a hundred and fifty people? We had people from Tulia—county judge and somebody from Tulia—from Breckenridge that way, to Parmer County up this way, and we even had some men from Ozona. We agreed to—they all said, “Yes, we'll go down there.” Now they were not outraged about our museum; they

were outraged because West Texas had been left out. And so when we got down there, we had—they had the hearing in the ballroom of the Stephen F. Austin Hotel—and the commission was headed by Lieutenant Governor—and I know he had a bad cold, I think. He felt rotten. He called the thing to order, and he growled around a bit, and he looked over the agenda and said, “All you people from West Texas about this museum stand up,” and about a hundred and fifty people stood up. And he said, “All right, all right. Now, y’all—each—begin here—each one of you stand up and tell who you are and where you’re from.” Well, when he began to see the range covered, he began to sober up and be respectful because he was going to run again for Lieutenant Governor—and Coke Stevenson, speaker of the house, he began to pay attention because he wanted to be governor—and on down—I think four or five of the state officials—in Austin—the general officials’ proclamation about—all of them were fixing to run again. Well, they began to take this thing seriously, and they saw that a lot of these people had blood in their eye. So we run through; they went into a little caucus and came back and said, “Well, all the money has been allocated. This thing you want to do sounds good and everything. We wish we could help. At this moment, there’s not a dollar left. If y’all will give us a little time, we’ll see if we can’t do something and give you some money to start this thing.” Well about two weeks later, we were having a—I think we were having a meeting with the association here in town—and while the meeting was on, a telegram came to A. B. Davis. In fact, that they had twenty-five thousand dollars for this museum to be built on the campus of Texas Tech. Well, we wanted—at least, we thought—a hundred thousand. We were willing to take half of what we thought we were justified in asking for based upon how much taxes we’d pay in to the whole thing—and that would have been two hundred and eighty-eight thousand. We figured we were entitled to about half a million, and that we needed two hundred and eighty-eight thousand. Well, we had to content ourselves with twenty-five thousand. Well, we took that money and built the basement. We knew we couldn’t build anything that looked like a museum—complete—for that amount of money, so we decided we’d just build a basement and hope to high heaven that somehow, someday, sometime we could finish it. And so we let a contract to W.G. McMillan—a contractor who was tremendously invested in the project—and he built it at cost, the basement. And that basement stood there—we moved in and had no money at all for anything else—not a dollar for exhibits or cases, anything—but I went around town to stores that—or replace them—discarded, and it had a sort of a relic of the Middle Ages when we got it together, but we had stuff in it. We filled the thing up, all right—both wings. Well, that thing stood there for fourteen years [from 1936-1950]. We began, then, to—every time the legislature met, we had a bill introduced to get enough money to finish it. And the irony of it is we had, on two different sessions of the legislature, we had the bills passed and signed by the governor, but that was when the Depression was bad, and there was always a proviso—this was to be active if there’s money in the state treasury to do it—they could not go a deficit—create a deficit for it. And when the money—when it was certified by the state comptroller that the money was available within the two-year period—the biennium—then we could let the contract for finishing it. Each time, they had insufficient time to get it done—the comptroller, when contacted about it, said there will not be enough money.

Well, one time he was right, but the other time he was wrong. There was money, and the state was in the black—and would have been in the black with this—but the comptroller erroneously declared that there wouldn't be enough money—I think honestly so, but the taxes just came in a lot better than he anticipated, in time to get the money and let a contract. So 1950, then—no, about 1948—we—the thing had been hanging fire, and the college had a little money in its building fund. And the Tech—another thing that happened meanwhile—in order to keep the thing alive and keep the public interest going, we had a “give a brick” campaign. There were bricks just lying all over town, and somebody had the happy idea that we put on a big “give a brick” and we'd have everybody get one brick and bring it up there, and we'd pile them behind, and we had them build a big sign out in front—“Give a Brick” —and a thermometer with gauge, you know, how many thousands of bricks. And this is right during the very bottom of the Depression, and did you know, this thing just appealed to the people. They needed some project in the town, and that thing went over just like greased lightning. At that time, common brick could be had for fifteen dollars a thousand—that's one and a half cents apiece, isn't it? Yeah. So we said, “Now, if you can't give some bricks, give money.” Well, quite a number of the—nearly every business firm in town sent money, anywhere from one thousand to ten thousand bricks' worth of money. Well, when the thing was over, we had fifty thousand dollars in money and a pile of brick as big as this house—a pile back there. Then we had this, but we found that this would build on the—at that time, we needed about a hundred thousand dollars—for a hundred thousand dollars, we could build it two stories, like it is today. One of these bills was for that amount, and it fell by the wayside. In the meanwhile, prices had gone up. Well, in '49, since we had this cash on hand and this pile of brick, the Tech board, under the leadership of—what was his name? He lived in Paris, Texas—one of the finest directors we've ever had. He's the publisher of the newspaper there—and the editor—I'd have to look it up. Well, let me back up just a little bit. Dr. Clifford Jones, in the meanwhile—he'd served as president from 1940 [1938] to 1944, and then we had Dr. Whyburn from 1944 to 1948, and then Dr. Wiggins came in '48, and this was just after Dr. Wiggins came. Dr. Clifford Jones, at this time, was back in private life, but he'd always been an ardent supporter of the arts. And so he and I conspired together and did a bit of devious, sneaky work. Dr. Clifford Jones, a man of, as you know, a great personality and probably the most influential citizen in West Texas at the time, and so he told me one day, he says, “Let's, you and I, make a little trip, and we will go and visit—there are nine members on the Tech board, and six of them are my good friends. The other three are my bitter enemies. We'll ignore them. We'll go to these six of my good friends, and we'll see if we can't get them—I know Texas Tech has money in the treasury. When Dr. Whyburn was here,”—Dr. Whyburn—who was the most unpopular president we've ever had with the faculty and with everybody—but he's the greatest president we've probably ever had, in his unpopular way. In the first place, academically—he got Tech recognized by the American Association of Universities, something no other one had ever been able to do. Still harder than that, he got Tech recognized and approved, affiliated with the—what is it, the University of Women—

JS:

AAUW?

WH:

No, it's—AA—that's right—with them. And they were harder than the American Association of Universities—and just the top universities were in that. But these women, now, they were really hard to crack, but he got Tech recognized. But the most important thing, during the war, Whyburn was a shrewd bargainer, and there was lots of money being thrown out in Washington, and he had made a very crafty contracts with the federal government for the pre-flight program.⁵ And when he left here under duress in '48, nobody knew it, except—Whyburn knew it, of course, and Mr. Gaston, the business manager—predecessor of Marshall Pendleton. He left nearly six million dollars in the treasury, and it was Dr. Wiggins who came and spent that money—and I don't suppose six people in Lubbock today know that Whyburn was the one that got the money, and Wiggins got credit for this big building program that they used that money for. He's not responsible for trying to hog it, but it seemed as if it was best not to brag on having that much money that had been filched from the federal government, and so he just didn't tell where the money—he just got busy spending—he spent it rather wisely. But as far as the town is concerned, Wiggins was a great man and Whyburn is still hated. The first thing he did was cross swords with Charlie Guy, and let Charlie Guy know that this was a state institution and that the local people of Lubbock are not running it. You can imagine now where that led to, since—

JS:

[inaudible 38:21]

WH:

That went over real good. So we had this money, and Clifford knew about it. So he says “They can afford to do that, and it would be just about the interest that that money brings in in a year.” So we did, we got on the air—flying machine—and went out to El Paso and saw Mr. White—no, Mr. Price of all the Price Dairies—and then we got in his car and we went and made a circle down the state and we saw the other five of his friends. The one that was from Paris said, “Well, I'll carry the ball.” His name still won't come [Pat Mayes]. Well, at the next meeting, he [Mayes] made the motion and the other five were all set, and they just passed it like that—to finish the museum—and they appropriated a hundred and eighty-six thousand dollars, which, with the fifty thousand—which we had—plus the brick, we finished it. That's the way we got the museum.

JS:

[How about] the mural, how was it [done]?

⁵ Nuances crafty with advantageous.

WH:

Well, this came later. It was planned with the idea that this [rotunda] would be used for art. I, being a historian, had inserted in there that it should be art dealing with historical matters—not just an art gallery, per se, but art that you might call “illustrated historical art.” None of us had a very good concept of just what that would consist of—I’d thought of maybe a number of pictures—maybe four-by-six or something—to put around [hung on the walls]. I certainly did not think of just covering the whole wall up with a continuous mural. And we had a committee, however, and after we got the thing all paid for—and this was going to—we were going to charge for the sponsors—and this was going to be gravy. We’d gotten the college to finish the building, to give us the walls, you might say to have them—and so we decided then that we would try to promote this to get some money.

Break in recording

WH:

Dr. Sasser—Betsy Sasser—was on the committee—

Break in recording

JS:

Side two, Dr. William Curry Holden interview.

WH:

—other side right now. But it was Dr. Elizabeth Skidmore Sasser, who was on the committee, who came up with the suggestion that we cover the entire walls and paint right on the walls, and that we cover everything above the wainscoting. Well, at that time, we didn’t know we were going to use wainscoting, but after we decided on this approach, then we knew we had to have marble wainscoting up four feet high. But still, we didn’t think much beyond that kind of thing, more than “Here, let’s cover the whole thing with paintings.” And I think it was Betsy’s idea, that it be painted right on the dry walls. Incidentally, we hadn’t anticipated this when we were building the rotunda, and the walls had been finished in the conventional way—with plaster—and a very good job by the plaster—and painted with oh, some kind of a—oh, what kind of paint do we—

JS:

Enamel?

WH:

No, not enamel. It’s a plaster. It’s a water [based] paint, anyway—a water-based paint. Then, the question came up, who would do it? Some of us knew Peter Hurd, and Pete had come by here a

time or two when we were still in the basement, and gotten acquainted with him. And we didn't know too much about him, but we did know that he was an outstanding southwestern painter. I believe that we fairly well crystalized on him. Betsy Sasser—no, Mrs. Hubbard had known a man in Taos, and she held out for him. But we finally brought the thing to a vote, and the majority were in favor of Peter Hurd, and I was designated—my present wife and I—to contact Peter Hurd and to see if he would be interested, and kind of make the original negotiations with him. And so we [**Fran Holden and I**] did—we went over to San Patricio and told Pete what we had in mind, and at that time—or up until that time—the artists had been starving, pretty much, in the country, and any kind of a job sounded good to them. So I believe, before we got too far along, Pete came over here and looked at the thing, and he suggested that he'd be very much interested in it, but we should use true fresco instead of painting on the drywall—that could scale off very easily, or scratch and you couldn't do anything about it. So he suggested that we used the true fresco on it, which was the oldest medium known, and the most lasting. Perhaps you recall that the [**first**] frescoes—well, it even goes back to 2000 B.C., in Crete—

JS:

Oh yes.

WH:

—at the Palace of Knossos.

JS:

That's the bull-baiting—

WH:

—the bull-baiting folks, and so on. That was true fresco, and it had been enduring, now, for four thousand years. When they uncovered it and cleaned it up, it's as fresh today as it was then. Do you understand what fresco is?

JS:

Not really.

WH:

Well, fresco comes from a Latin word with means “fresh.” It means “to paint on fresh plaster,” and the technique is that you put on a coat of plaster, maybe a quarter of an inch thick—rather thin, but already on a good base, and then you let it dry. You put on just what you can do in a day—what the artist can map out to do in a day. Maybe it's just the head of one man, wouldn't be over two feet in diameter—or if it's a piece of sky, maybe ten feet in diameter—but whatever he can map out to do that day, he has a plasterer to do a wonderful job of plastering. Then he lets that sit maybe an hour, two hours, until it's fairly firm but still moist. Then he paints on that with

pure mineral pigments mixed in nothing but distilled water. He has to work rather fast, and he can't correct anything. He has to be extremely careful. And then it sets—the mineral sinks in—

JS:

—and becomes a part of the—

WH:

—and then the whole thing turns to limestone. So what you have there is inlaid limestone, and the longer it sits and stands, see, the more solid it becomes. It's the only enduring medium there is. Oil on canvas won't last over five hundred years without—then, some of the old masters, they had a way of backing up the canvas, and so on—like Michelangelo and that—but five hundred years is a pretty good lifetime for oil. The fabric in the plaster will just disintegrate. And watercolor, it will only endure the lifetime of the paper it's on. Fresco, really, is the only enduring thing. It'll last forever, I suppose, if you don't have an earthquake. Fire doesn't hurt it, smoke doesn't hurt it. You could have a big fire in the building and it could be completely black with smoke, and you get in there with water and brushes and clean it up and it'll be as fresh and vibrant as it ever was.

JS:

No danger in taking the paint off in the process?

WH:

Oh, you can't take it off; it's inlaid. So that's what Peter **[Hurd]** wanted. Now, during the Depression, you know, we had the WPAs.

JS:

[inaudible 48:12]

WH:

Oh, is it? During the Depression—and during the WPAs, in order to keep the artists alive, they had projects—and Pete had had several post office projects where he'd use this fresco technique. The only one that I know of—Tom Lee, I know, had a lot of those, but he used oils and canvas **[and attached it to the wall]**.

JS:

He did one in Odessa.

WH:

Yes, and one in El Paso. Pete did one **[in fresco]**, by the way, in Big Spring, and one at Alamogordo, one in Dallas—I guess he did, altogether, a half dozen—and he had learned, by the

way, this technique—well, he had read about it and was cognizant of it. When Diego Rivera was at the height of his time and doing those public buildings in Mexico, Pete went down there and watched him and fraternized with him. Pete is bilingual, you know, and got along fine with him. So he was probably the only man in the United States that knew about this—who had sufficient knowledge to do it. So he said, “Now let’s do it in fresco.” Well, in order to do that, then—the plaster that was on there was three coats that had been put on with gypsum cement plaster—with a gypsum base instead of limestone—lime, in other words, pure lime. He said “Now, our big job is going to be, we’re going to have to remove every bit of this plaster, back to the ceramic tile—the brick tile,” —and then they were laid in Portland cement-type plaster in the layers—he said, “We’re going to have to size those so that that won’t bleed through, and then put on three different coats of plaster made out of pure—purest of all lime,”—and it had to be slaked in the old-fashioned way, by burying it in the ground for a year, and so on—letting it mellow. Then that was mixed in marble dust for the plaster, see, nothing in there now except marble dust and the lime. And so that wasn’t too expensive. It cost us probably four or five thousand dollars at the time to get ready for him. Then it took us two years—Fran and I made a number of trips over with Pete to make the—what we were going to put on it, the theme. It was Pete who came up with an idea that “Let’s tie all of this together with a horizon line,” and we started with that idea. Then we had sixteen panels, and we were going to pay to make it—pay its way with the profit by charging seventy-five hundred dollars for each panel. That amounted to a little over a hundred thousand dollars, you could see. So then we decided that the background should be historic. Well, we began to build up this idea of history, you know, so we began to collect pictures of things in this country. We got together hundreds and hundreds of pictures, some of which y’all now have in the Southwest Collection, but still some in the museum. Then we had the problem of getting over those doors—the four doors there. Pete saw to that by putting mesas, or maybe over two of the doors, second stories of houses and so on. He has quite a technical prowl. So then, when we’d had all of our ideas, then he took this brown paper and laid it out to scale, long enough that, stretched out, it would go entirely around **[the rotunda]**. Then he took charcoal and he just began to deal **[sketch]** in with forms and masses. In that way, we just gradually evolved the—not only the theme, but the pattern. Then, it took him—from the time we started, it took something like two and a half years to do all of this.

JS:

Was he living here in town **[Lubbock]**?

WH:

No, we were doing all of this over at San Patricio—Fran and I would go over there every week or two—or weekend—we’d work a day—or two or three days. Meanwhile, we were thinking and getting more ideas and things. Of course, he was doing other things, but we were thinking about this all the time and bringing our thoughts up to date. Finally, we got to—after we got this what you might call “pencil sketch,” only it was with charcoal. We then built a model—a scale

model, exactly like the thing [**rotunda**], everything to scale, round—or, in the same shape, where you could stand inside of it and you could get the perspective. Then, in—I've forgot what medium—he painted these things with considerable detail, and brought that over here, then, to have it approved by the committee. We've got that thing in the museum, there—the scale model. It's not bound—it's in four pieces, but it'd still be bolted together—and with Peter Hurd's present prices, that thing is—

JS:

—worth a fortune—

WH:

—worth a fortune now. Finally, we were ready to start. In the meanwhile, we'd gotten the plaster, the lime—the pure lime—which we slaked ourselves, the old-fashioned way of slaking your own lime and mixing it, and then we buried it out behind the museum in a big box. We built a great big lime box about ten feet square and about three and a half feet deep, and just filled it full. You know, unslaked lime comes—it's not fine—it comes in lumps. When you pour water on it, it boils and bubbles and you finally get it all nice and smooth like buttermilk, and we filled that thing. Within a year, that had firmed like clabber—like good, real good clabber—about the consistency—it looked like clabber. Then we had—we ordered from Austin a great big truckload of marble dust from Edwards Limestone down there—all ground—yes, it was what they caught when they were—you know, where they sawed the marble?

JS:

Uh-huh.

WH:

They just caught—like sawdust—and they'd catch that and sell it for things like this. Then, it took Pete, altogether, nearly two years [**to do the rotunda**]. He would come over and do three panels at a time, and usually it would take him about month. But he went through all the different steps. After the small model, and that was all passed on, then on what he called—oh, he got great sheets of paper, six, seven feet wide [**fourteen feet long**] that showed the dimensions of each one of these panels. Then he enlarged this to that in outline form with charcoal, I suppose. And what did he call those? They have a name, too. Cartoons. Well, when he would get ready to put it on, then, he had a way to do that. He'd put on what they were going to plaster that day and paint, and he would have—they would take a little sewing wheel, you know, that you—people—it's a little wheel with little points on it that they used in some kind of sewing—dress-making and so on—and making patterns—perforated—you run it up and you perforate the paper [**Tracing wheel**]. So he'd run this around the outlines of everything—the men and the horses and everything. And then he had charcoal—very fine charcoal—in a little bag, and he'd pounce that, then pull the cartoon back, and there was the outline on the plaster, so he could work fast, right to it. Well, it

took about two years, then, to finish them up because he was under such strains while he'd be doing a section of this, it'd take him six months to get over it. Meanwhile, he'd paint other kinds of pictures. And so, finally, we got it all together and got it on there.

JS:

Did Manuel Acosta help paint some—?

WH:

Manuel Acosta was one assistant, and Johnny Meigs the other. Manuel was the plasterer, and he would prepare the plaster. Johnny helped him with holding things—he had him doing all of the accessory work—putting it on the walls. Manuel put the plaster on and Johnny was the one that would help him—his assistant, you might say. And also, Johnny was awfully good at architectural drawings—even better than Pete—and, like a house, Pete would let him put the outlines on, but Pete put every bit of the color on, himself. There's the thing about that thing. We paid Pete, I believe, about forty-four thousand dollars—and it was his price—we didn't try to beat him down—we took his price and paid it. We had left over, after paying our incidental expenses, about—over fifty thousand dollars—which we kept around, and used some of it, and kept a lot of it in the Tech Foundation, allowed it interest. That money has been used to pay a lot of the bills—the preliminary bills—for this new plant [**museum building**] that we're going to put over, be on the railroad. We've spent it all, now.

JS:

Back to the mural—

WH:

Let me add one more thing—I want to add—and then I'm through with the mural. It costs forty-four thousand dollars. I calculated the other day, with Pete's prices—which have gone up about a hundredfold almost—at his present prices on a square-foot basis, that mural today is worth about two and a half million dollars. It's one of the most precious things we have on that campus.

JS:

And it will become more so every year.

WH:

Yes. Pete, no doubt, is made in his lifetime. A lot of artists are made, but they never get to enjoy any of it, but Pete is already recognized, and he's now getting twelve thousand dollars for a portrait.

JS:

Well, even some of his students are doing quite well—like Acosta.

WH:

Yes. Acosta is—he used to be just delighted to sell a picture like—oh, let us see—that one, yonder, for two hundred and fifty dollars, and now he asks five thousand for it.

JS:

One of the murals is, as you well know, is that of the chroniclers. I wondered if you'd tell us a story about—

WH:

Oh yes. There's a story to that. In selecting these categories, we rather arbitrarily took the preacher and circuit rider and the newspaper man and so on for two reasons. We did have another committee to pass on the eligibility. We started out with a certain set of standards—that we wouldn't put—we wouldn't commemorate, in a categorical way, a person who had been known to be a horse thief, for instance. Now, if he'd been a horse thief and kept it to himself, we didn't probe into that too much—but we did have some standards, and each one of those people had to qualify. Well, naturally, a lot of good people who should have been on it could not be on it because either they didn't have the money, and this—heavens knows, it's costing money—or their families or friends didn't have money. Rollie Burns probably should have been on it, and I tried—I moved heaven and earth to try to get together enough money to sponsor him. And Frank Wheelock, who was the superintendent of the old IOA Ranch, should have been on it. We could probably name twenty others who should have been on it, but there was no way to do it without money. So what we really had to get down to, eventually, was to find the persons who could qualify, who had money, because it was going to take this much money to bring about the results that—to pay for it in the first place, and to have a little bit left to do something else with in connection with the museum. Now, Peter Hurd, when we got all the categories together—we had thirteen, I believe it was—now, let's see, how many—?

JS:

Sixteen panels—

WH:

Yeah, sixteen, that's right. Peter Hurd said “Now, here, we've left out one type of person, and that's the people” —oh, he used the word—“the people who have promoted culture.” We searched a long time to find a name for it, and finally, we decided on “chroniclers.” You could chronicle the history as an artist or as a musician, as a folklorist or as an anthropologist or a historian or whatnot. Pete said, “No, I will donate that panel. That will be my donation to this,” and that way, we got all these poor devils on it. Then, after he agreed to do that, the museum board, then, said “Now, Pete, we know you're not going to like this, but art needs to be represented, and there's nobody better qualified to represent it than you. So you're going to be in it.” And he demurred, because Pete is really not a self-centered, egotistical person. He's a very

self-effacing person, really. But finally he agreed. Well, of course the committee, then—I know they—trying to pick out these people—somebody said “Well,” speaking of me, he said “Now, you’ve got to be in it.” Of course, I—like Pete—I demurred, hoping to hell that they’d go ahead and do it. After I’d saved my manners real good, I finally agreed to being—and then—we had no trouble on [John] Lomax, with the folklore. Let’s see, historian—[J. Evetts] Haley—Yeah—and incidentally, we had a little trouble with Evetts. We propositioned him about being in it, and this, now, was gratis, and these other fellows—all the other panels, they’re going to have to pay seventy-five hundred dollars, but old Evetts was—he’s a little bit holdout-ish on you—said, “Well, I’ll tell you. I’ll think about it, but I want to know who the others are going to be before I agree.” Well, when we finally worked it out and submitted to him who the others would be, he wasn’t too excited, I think, about Tom Lea, because Tom Lea was a good friend, at that time, of Frank Dobie’s, and Evetts considered—although, at one time, he and Frank were just that close together, just as thick as two thieves. But when Frank began to take a little interest in politics, on the liberal side, and Evetts was way over so far to the right that he thinks Goldwater is a communist. They came to a parting of the ways—at least, Evetts took off. There was never a time when Frank Dobie didn’t almost—well, I’ve seen tears run down his eyes when he was—would talk about Evetts Haley because he just thought he was his boy, and he never reconciled himself for Evetts leaving him [politically] like he did. So Evetts finally agreed to be in it, so he went out to Pete’s house and posed for what they call the—anyway, it’s the pencil sketch. There’s a name for it, and all of them were alimented. Tom Lea—we were there when Tom Lea came, and his wife—so they did him. And we went—and Lomax was dead, so the family, then, found somebody the size of their father who posed for part of the picture, from here down. And then he used some photographs to get the head on him. Two or three he had to do like that—for instance, the circuit rider—the family chose me to serve for the body and he did the top—and Hansel was dead, and Dupree, the school man, was dead, and his son went and posed for the bottom. Sid Richardson was still alive, but he was so wrinkled and decrepit that the family decided to get someone, and George Sloan posed for him, up to here, and they used a photograph to get his head.⁶ But Sid flew out here one Sunday in his private flying machine and got on a scaffold—and he was the most wrinkled man I ever saw—and posed—Pete just worked on the—it was actually when he was putting it on, by the way—and he used him for coloring and for expression in the eyes and all of that kind of thing. But the portrait represented Sid Richardson thirty or forty years before—earlier than the time than he sat on the scaffold. He must have been seventy or seventy-five when he came out to sit on the scaffold.

JS:

In the mural, he looks like he’s about thirty-five, thirty-eight—something like that.

WH:

About the time he hit his first oil well and brought in the Slaughter Field—wildcatted that thing.

⁶ Corrects Sloan to Long.

He brought in a number of fields. I know the day that he was here was on a Sunday, and we kept the museum locked—just us concerned in it were there—and it was the most interesting day I've ever heard. He sat there and told these wonderful stories—and he was always the butt of his own stories. He played the part, always, of the country bumpkin who was always being taken for ride. I know—I think I asked him—I said, “Mr. Richardson, you've been pretty lucky in finding oil. Did you use geologists, or how did you do it?” and he said, “Yes, I used geologists. I'll tell you how I did it. I never paid one in my life. I kept up with them, and everywhere they said oil wasn't, I went there and drilled and got it. That's been my secret.”

JS:

So Haley was not too happy about being on the mural. What about the others in the mural on the chroniclers, such as Lea—

WH:

Tom was very grateful to be included. He's never seen the mural—never been to Lubbock. No, he's astay-in if there ever was one. He's never been to Lubbock, and I've been at him for years to come over and look at himself. He's seen pictures of himself—pictures of—he knows what it's like. The Lomax family were delighted that their—and by the way, his daughter, who is now one of the house mothers here in one of the dormitories—Mrs.—oh, her husband was a skin doctor, and died years ago—Mansell—Dr. Mansell. I believe she posed, partly, for features of her father. I know Pete used her and her brother and photographs to get the head of her father. And then Pete's in it, and his wife drew the drawing of him. So that's Henriette's contribution to it. And Evetts went over there—although, he was a little suspicious of Pete, because Pete is a little bit on the liberal side, and he's just slightly left of center—not much—at that time. Today, he's a little right of center, since he's got money, he's moved over to the other side of the center. But he's not—he's never been rabid either way—and Evetts had reservations about him, but it went off beautifully. He went over there and stayed two or three days, and Pete's a good storyteller, and Evetts is a good storyteller, and Evetts liked Henriette—he was real fond of Henriette—her mentality, her mind, and all of that. And it went off beautifully; they just very carefully sidestepped politics. They just bent over backwards not to mention it. Well, is there anything else about the mural?

JS:

No, you might mention a little bit of the original organization of the museum once you got in to the building—what you tried to do—everything you tried to convey—

WH:

Well, of course, we—for our general museum, our idea from the beginning was that we'd be a general regional museum. With that in view, one of our first things was to build what we called a South Plains Gallery—the most local thing—and that's the east gallery. On that, as you know,

we started in with the prehistory, and the elephant hunters and the Folsom people and the Lubbock Lake Site, and the coming of the Spaniard, the horse, and all of that—on around to the water problem—we ended up with the water problem—windmills and things. Then, we wanted to have art represented, so we saved one gallery as a changing art museum, which is upstairs in the east wing. And then we felt the need—in fact, Fran and I visited scores of museums and talked to the—modern, progressive museums, not the old junk-type that they used to have, where they'd bring in all the old horse collars and pile them in that corner, and all of the old wagon wheels and put over there—but the modern museum philosophy, which holds that a museum should tell a story. It's not just a depository for all of the odds and ends you can bring in and stack around. That's like Woolsworth's windows—it simply confuses people. And the new philosophy is that you should tell a story, and all the relics—don't use one unless it adds to the story. The whole museum should be like a book, and each gallery should be like a chapter, and you shouldn't have—in good writing, you don't have a single word in there that you can eliminate, and the items are the words, you see. So we went throughout the north and east, and even to the west coast, conferring with museum directors and with their—the people who did their exhibits, and so we had the advantage, I think, of having a good concept before we started about what we wanted to do. Then, also, we had found that if you're going to have a dynamic museum, to be used by the schoolchildren and all that kind of thing, you've got to have an auditorium. So we had to take one of our precious rooms for an auditorium, which has turned out to be one of the best decisions we ever made. Then, we had—we decided to keep one of the basement galleries for storage and workshop and the other one for historical things. We decided, then, to have one gallery devoted to Earth and man, and it took us about five years working on that to determine what we were going to—and to get the money. We figured it would cost about twenty-five thousand dollars to make the installations. It ended up that we did it for, I guess, about twelve thousand by cutting corners. Ms. Roscoe Wilson, I know, gave the five thousand, and then we passed the hat and one way and another—to pay Peter we robbed Paul, and all kinds of things, but we finally got enough that we got an ole boy from Albuquerque [**Paul Wright**]—pretty much, he was starving at the time—to come over and to make installations, along with a carpenter. And he was the one that did the mural up at the top—have you noticed that one? —way up above the cases, all the way around—

JS:

Oh, the display cases, with the—

WH:

No, in the Hall of Earth and Man, which—you know where the old Southwest Collection used to be, in that—?

JS:

Yes.

WH:

Well, the hall right on down from that. Today, it's the Hall of Earth and Man—and incidentally, that thing has been recognized all over the nation as one of the great exhibit halls. They know about that hall all over the United States. Fran and I worked on the concept and what we wanted to tell—and then we got Paul Adams, I believe his name was, to come over and execute it. And then we designed this mural, which is from the eight-foot marker on up to the fourteen—it's six feet high—to start with the evolution of life, and portray it in stylized business progress right on around the man, over on the—start here with the very—one-celled animals, and on around through the lizards and the dinosaurs and the mammals and on up, and have man right over here. It's one of the things we're going to lose when we move because it's painted on dry plaster. There's no way to move it. It's a wonderful thing. Well, anyway—Wright—Paul Wright is the boy's name—I said Adams. Paul did a wonderful job on that thing, and we did it the hard way by making our own cases and saving every dollar that we could. Just going out and turning it over to a bunch of designers to come in and do it and execute it would have cost twenty-five thousand, but we did it for about twelve.

JS:

Did you have any difficulty with any of the local people over displaying fundamental—displaying the evolutionary scene?

WH:

We expected to—that's a good thing to ask—we expected to, really, because we're right here in the greatest hotbed of fundamentalism in the United States.

JS:

That's why I asked.

WH:

We simply went from day to day with fear and trembling that we were going to have somebody come out here with their little hatchets and their hammers and wreck the place—and we've never had a word.

JS:

That's amazing.

WH:

I think one reason is that the people who would object most have never been here. They don't believe in museums, they're not interested, and I think a lot of them can't read. They—let's see, we're about to run out, there.

JS:

Yes. We've still got a few minutes.

WH:

Downstairs, you remember that we have the evolution of the mammals? We start over here with monkeys and come on up to primitive man, and then we end with this beautiful skeleton of a girl in the corner. It's one of the most graceful and beautiful skeletons I ever knew. I fell in love with that skeleton—it must have been a girl, about twenty years old. We—since the whole thing was just as plain as the nose on your face—every phase here—the same bones you find in all of these things, right on up. And we were just scared to death that the Church of Christ people or somebody was just going to come out and take us on. Then we thought, Well, how can we disguise this thing? And so we thought and thought, and finally, I thought of a quotation we'd put up there. Now what is the quotation? Whatever it was, it was a masterpiece, and we put it in quotes, just as if it came out of the Bible, and as my wife has told a few people, that it was all by "Saint Curry." And so, one day Conny Martin came out here. She wouldn't—we tried to get her to be the installer—she was thoroughly qualified—but when she saw that evolution was the theme, she wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. And so they had a new preacher come into this Broadway Church of Christ, and Fran was out there and saw him come in—and she knew that Conny was bringing him out to have a last word. And she marched him down there, and he stood there a long time, and Fran came along and hid around behind—see and hear. And Conny, you know, she was just laying the law down—and he looked at it a long time, and then he studied the motto, and he says—finally, he says "You know, I cannot find any quarrel with this." And Conny shut up and that's the last we ever heard.

JS:

Wow. That's wonderful.

WH:

So that—we passed the test. How much more do we have on that one?

JS:

Go ahead with the Southwest Collection, if you'd like, Dr. Holden.

WH:

Well, the Southwest Collection has a long and devious—

End of recording