

A TEI Project

Interview of Harwell Harris

Contents

1. Transcript

- 1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (August 15, 1979)
- 1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (August 15, 1979)
- 1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (August 15, 1979)
- 1.4. SECOND PART (August 22, 1979)
- 1.5. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (August 22, 1979)
- 1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (August 22, 1979)
- 1.7. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (August 23, 1979)
- 1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (August 23, 1979)
- 1.9. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (August 23, 1979)
- 1.10. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (August 23, 1979)
- 1.11. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (August 23, 1979)

1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (August 15, 1979)

STONEFIELD

Mr. Harris, I would like to start more or less at the beginning. When you were born and where.

HARRIS

I was born in 1903, July 2, in Redlands, California, the son of two California natives.

STONEFIELD

And your family came before Redlands from where?

HARRIS

My father's father came in 1849 from Virginia by way of Tennessee and Texas and was a part of an overland train that took what was called the Gila Trail. He

arrived in California in time to vote for the constitution of the state that was up for adoption. He went to the mines. What was that grove near the southern entrance to Yosemite? It's the name of a town anyway--Mariposa. [He] spent about three months in the mines, then decided he could make more money practicing law and gave up mining. [He] returned to the East at the time of the Civil War, this time traveling by boat around the Horn instead of across the plains, and worked his way from New York down to Richmond. He was then commissioned to take a group of men to Texas because he could speak Spanish. It was thought the British were taking advantage of the Civil War to injure the nation through [inaudible] the Confederacy. He came through the war all right and then returned to California after the war was over and lived there all the rest of his life.

STONEFIELD

He didn't fight in the war?

HARRIS

Oh, yes. I don't know how many he killed, but he was probably not in the thick of it.

STONEFIELD

Did you ever know him?

HARRIS

No, he died about six years before I was born. He was born in 1824, and I wasn't born until 1903.

STONEFIELD

He was very old then.

HARRIS

Well, he was in his early twenties of course in 1849 when he went to California.

STONEFIELD

He sounds as if he was quite an adventurer.

HARRIS

He was a very interesting person, and there is a book, The Gila Trail, which was written from his notes and his diary, now in the Huntington Library. [The Gila Trail, The Texas Argonauts and The California Gold Rush, edited by Richard H. Dillon, published by the University of Oklahoma Press, 1960]

STONEFIELD

What was his name?

HARRIS

Benjamin Butler Harris. He was interested in a great variety of things. It was a time in the world when it was possible for an educated person to know something about everything, which seems impossible now, so that his interests were very wide, and I'm sorry that I didn't know him.

STONEFIELD

Had he had any training in the law when he decided to take it up?

HARRIS

Yes, yes, he did. One got into such things rather early in those days. He had taught for a year on his way west at some college in Tennessee [Springfield Academy]. And then when gold was discovered in California, and its announcement came, he decided to go on. So he went on and joined a group in what is now Dallas. It was then called Bryan, which was the name of the man who had the only house there. It's an interesting story, the trip overland.

STONEFIELD

I have trouble keeping track of all of his travels in my head. When did he get married and settle down?

HARRIS

That was after the war. He was fairly old.

STONEFIELD

When he came to California?

HARRIS

No, no. After the Civil War, which would have made it after 1865. My father [Franklin Thomas Harris] was born in 1875, all the children were born in California.

STONEFIELD

Where was your father born?

HARRIS

He was born in San Bernardino, California.

STONEFIELD

Oh, so your grandfather finally decided to end up in California?

HARRIS

After the war he came to the southern part of the state instead of the Mariposa region where he had been before. He wrote the first official description of the Yosemite Valley. He didn't enter it because it was too dangerous. There was a tribe of Indians there that didn't let anyone who entered ever return. It was written from descriptions of various sorts. And another interesting thing, he had a case before the U.S. Supreme Court, which he won in 1852. It was on behalf of the Indians who had been driven out of much of their territory by the influx of foreign miners. They were very hard up. The first two Indian agents in the country were appointed then, but the money appropriated for cattle and the other things that were to be provided the Indians went into the agents' own pockets. So this was a suit to recover it. He won the suit, but of course they didn't get anything, any more than [General John] Fremont got damages after winning his suit against those who ravished his country looking for gold.

STONEFIELD

He sounds like the sort of character that the whole family mythology could have been developed upon. What about your grandmother?

HARRIS

My mother's parents came from South Carolina.

STONEFIELD

No, what I was talking about was your grandfather's wife.

HARRIS

Oh, I don't know much about her. She was a native of Missouri, and I can remember her quite well.

STONEFIELD

What did she look like?

HARRIS

I can remember particularly her long curls, which [she] would brush and curl around a stick of bamboo. Her maiden name was Clark, Bettie Clark. But I really know nothing about her.

STONEFIELD

You don't know how they met or when or where?

HARRIS

No, I didn't pay attention. [laughter]

STONEFIELD

In those days it wasn't important.

HARRIS

The Gila Trail, the manuscript for it, is in the Huntington Library. One of my father's sisters was rather interested in these records. I unfortunately lost material that was entrusted to me. One was a large telescoping wallet. It was filled with various bits of interesting things, including handwritten military orders, or notes from a parent that he had received when he taught school someplace, and two Pony Express letters. This and various other things were unfortunately in a box of stuff that I left with my mother. She was living in an apartment, and during the two years we were away in New York she moved. The box had been put in the apartment house garage, and when we came back and I asked for it, she had forgotten about it. It was gone and couldn't be found. This made my aunt very angry naturally. Well, ask me another.

STONEFIELD

Now, your mother's family. What about them?

HARRIS

My mother's father was a colonel in General [James] Longstreet's Division of the Confederate Army in the Civil War. He was a college student when the war started. It was in Wofford College, Spartanburg, South Carolina. He met my grandmother who was a student in a female seminary in Spartanburg. He was in the fighting or in prison the whole four years of the war. I can remember because I knew my maternal grandmother perhaps better than my paternal one. I can remember my grandfather's sword, the Confederate flags and the pictures of my grandfather as a colonel in General Longstreet's division. So both sets of grandparents were Southerners, and, because they were naturalized Californians, they were more Southern [than if] they had remained in the South. My mother was born in Orange County. And she lived in Los Angeles when she was a young girl on a ten-acre piece of property. The house was between what are now ninth and Tenth streets and Hope and Olive--it was then called Hope and Charity [actually, Grand Avenue was formerly Charity; Olive has retained its name]. I can remember her speaking about the time when they were trying to get a population of 75,000 people in Los Angeles. So I'm very much Southern California.

STONEFIELD

Well, when your mother's family came in, they were planning to farm, is that so?

HARRIS

Well, they did farm. I think, that's about all a "Southern Gentleman" ever learned to do, probably didn't learn that very well, I don't know.

STONEFIELD

What drew them to those particular places, to Redlands and to Orange County in particular?

HARRIS

I don't know. Redlands of course is near San Bernardino, where my father opened his practice, then moved quickly afterwards, to Redlands, which was rather new and where there was a great deal of building for a small place. I

don't know why my maternal grandparents happened to go to Los Angeles when they did.

STONEFIELD

At that time, the whole Southern California area must have been composed of separate very small communities. There must have been no focus the way that there is now.

HARRIS

No, there wasn't. A little bit later the Pacific Electric lines tied together places as distant as Santa Monica and San Bernardino.

STONEFIELD

And actually this must have been before the railroad connected.

HARRIS

There was an old--What was it called? It was called the "dummy," I think. It was a small steam train that ran, I guess, between Redlands, or it may have been just San Bernardino, and Los Angeles. I can remember it, and I can also remember it used to stop in Monrovia. There was a horse-drawn car on rails one could see out of the window that met the train.

STONEFIELD

I wonder how your parents met?

HARRIS

Well, my father was working in an office in Los Angeles. And according to his story, I don't know whether it was true or not--

STONEFIELD

Was he living in Los Angeles at that time?

HARRIS

Yes, he was quite young. [I'm] trying to remember the name of the firm, because at least the name still persisted as that of an architectural firm when we lived there after 1922. Anyway, according to his story, he saw a photograph of my mother in a photographer's studio. My mother was a

teacher. She taught for six years and she taught in what is now Watts. At that time it was made up largely of Latin Americans. There was the Dominguez family, which was the most important one, and she had Dominguez children all through the six years she taught there. She drove a horse and buggy to school. What has this got to do with architecture?

STONEFIELD

Well, it has to do with you. I've forgotten to ask you about your parents. You know, their growing up, what it was like, where they came from, and where they did their growing up mostly. Was it in the places where their family had settled?

HARRIS

Well, I can't tell you a great deal more than I have.

STONEFIELD

When were they born?

HARRIS

My father in 1875, and my mother in 1876.

STONEFIELD

Where did they go to school? Did they talk a lot about their childhood to you?

HARRIS

I don't remember any extended talk about it. There would be references occasionally. I probably was too young to be particularly interested. Except there would be occasional things that I would be quite interested in. As an example, in driving up through the Cajon pass, there was a cave in the side of it, and my father remarked that my grandfather and someone else, John Brown--not the famous John Brown, another one--were holed up for three days in there, barricaded against the Indians. So that none of this seemed terribly long ago to me, and of course it wasn't. If we go back to 1849, that would only be fifty-four years before I was born. And I've lived more than that since then.

STONEFIELD

After they married, where did they settle?

HARRIS

They settled in Redlands. Redlands was a very interesting town then. It was a sort of a small Pasadena. It was made up almost entirely of people who had retired or who wintered there. The only business there was orange growing, and so many of the orange groves were surrounded by paved streets on four sides. It didn't take a very big grove to be a very profitable thing in those days. There were two brothers that were twins, the Smiley twins, who probably did more to influence at least the cultural life of Redlands than all others. The park was named after them, the public library was named after them, not Andrew Carnegie as it was in San Bernardino.

STONEFIELD

They paid for the library, didn't they? Weren't they responsible for building it?

HARRIS

Oh, these were gifts from the Smileys, yes. Then there was Smiley Heights on the south edge of town. It was a very beautiful ridge and divided the valley, in which Redlands was, from Riverside County. And it stopped all of the hot winds from Riverside County, most of which was stony and very desertlike, attractive in that way. On this side it was quite lush, and in the lower hills of Smiley Heights [there were] very nice houses at the time.

STONEFIELD

What kind of houses were they mostly? What was the architecture like?

HARRIS

Well, they belonged very much to that time. They were not very reminiscent. There may have been a little bit of California mission in there. There was no Spanish at that time and there was no Georgian. Mostly they were large. Mostly, as I recall them, they were shingled houses, brown-shingled, quite large, large porches, and quite pleasant.

STONEFIELD

They were mostly gentlemen farmers?

HARRIS

These were mostly retired people. They mostly were members of families at least from Chicago or further east. Some from the east coast and many from the Midwest, just as Pasadena was. Just as in Pasadena where one could go down Orange Grove Avenue and name off dozens of national industries, whether it was Bissell carpet sweeper or Wrigley chewing gum or whatever it was.

STONEFIELD

Proctor and Gamble.

HARRIS

Ivory soap. Gamble of Proctor and Gamble.

STONEFIELD

What was it like growing up in a community like that?

HARRIS

Well, I had a switch. While I lived in Redlands, I spent my first four years of grammar school in the old Kingsbury building. I went to kindergarten in a school that my father had designed, the [William] McKinley school. Then there was a bad freeze in 1912. Freezes and depressions and such things mark the history of our profession. They always cause a change. Anyway, my father had designed quite a number of buildings in the town of El Centro which was quite new. W. F. Holt was the developer of that. There was another town called Holtville that he had started earlier. Holt lived in Redlands. I can remember a large watercolor perspective of Mr. Holt's house in the office. There was a porte cochere and there was a carriage with a pair of horses and a driver under the porte cochere. It was what one expected in style, and what we called Mission, then. My father had been down in El Centro on trips for the Holt work there. Then he designed the high school in El Centro. Then, with the freeze, suddenly everything seemed to stop in Redlands, and he decided-- We usually had had one ranch or another, we had several, but only one at a time, I think, all during my life up to that point. My father was always interested in a ranch, although we had never lived on one, except sometimes in the summer. He was very interested in the Imperial Valley, so he bought a quarter section,

a hundred and sixty acres, of which only twenty acres had been leveled, the rest was still in sand hills. And we moved down there. He established his office in the town, El Centro, and we lived out on the ranch there. So I had the years from ten to fourteen on a ranch, which was an ideal time to have them. I'm very glad that I did. I went to school in El Centro. I usually rode with my father in the car in the morning and I waited for him in the Carnegie Library until he went home in the evening. That was between the end of school and that time. It was a marvelous arrangement because the library had no children's division at all. I wandered everywhere, I was my own adviser in everything. And I discovered more things, either because it was next to something else, or possibly for other reasons. So those four years there were very valuable. First of all, what I learned on the ranch. To begin with, the land had to be leveled, and so for maybe six months there was a gang of teamsters with Fresno scrapers leveling the land. It was a job to do it because--

STONEFIELD

What is a Fresno scraper?

HARRIS

Well, it's a kind that's much more dramatic. It's like the difference between riding in a buggy behind a horse or riding on the back of the horse. These scrapers were large. They had runners on them and they had a very long handle with a rope trailing from the end of it. When the scraper was empty, it tipped forward on its runners, with the handle straight up in the air and the rope dangling from it. You had a team of mules in front. The teamster would grab the dangling rope when he got ready to scoop up more sand. And he would pull the handle back and down. He'd take hold of the handle and yell at the mules who would hump their backs and pull to fill the scraper, and then to drag it to the place they dumped it. It was a constant movement back and forth, picking up sand here and dumping it there, and, in between each way, the teamster just trailing lazily along behind the scraper. Well, anyway, there was a whole camp of them, men and animals. They set up camp, did their own cooking out in the sand hills there. I used to go out and spend time watching them. I was ten at the time. In the beginning they had a regular cook, but the regular cook left. So someone else had to do the cooking. There was one they called Shorty, and because he had a sore foot and he had trouble walking,

they let him do the cooking. He knew nothing about it. [laughter] They were accustomed to eating anything. Well, anyway, it was an interesting four years down there.

STONEFIELD

What kind of ranching was it?

HARRIS

Well, it was first of all planting alfalfa and planting corn, milo maize it was called, Indian corn, or mostly that. First of all, the problem was to hold the land. The winds, which were quite strong and constant, would move the sand around. Where there was no sand hill yesterday, there could be one today, pretty good sized one, simply because of the wind and because there happened to be something there, might have been a big tumbleweed or something else that the sand would form around, from behind. So one had to order water, which was delivered by canals, at such times that, when a certain amount of grading had been finished, one could get water on it to hold it. Well, there was the problem of keeping the wind from blowing the sand away, and there was the other problem of keeping the birds from eating the seeds before it could get covered, watered, and growing. Alfalfa was planted in addition to the corn. Then in the last year or two-- Oh, yes, we had hogs at one time, registered Duroc Jersey hogs, and I used to ride over on a sled to a neighboring dairy to pick up huge barrels of skimmed milk there which we would take back on the sled for the hogs. And what else did we do?

STONEFIELD

Your father sounds as if he has a little of your grandfather in him. What makes an architect take up ranching? It sounds like such a complicated change.

HARRIS

Well, I don't know. I suppose he had simply become rather attached to it as a young boy. When he was quite young, I remember, he went up into-- What was the name of that? Hollow something. There was later a dairy there that used that name. It was out near Loma Linda. Anyway, he planted a crop of something or other when he was quite young. He was always interested in it. We had an apple ranch up beyond Beaumont, quite a large one. I can

remember, when I was about six years old, our occasional trips there, usually over a weekend or it might be during the summer holidays, from Redlands up to the ranch. We would get up at two-thirty in the morning so that we could get started in the horse and buggy and arrive before the sun was too hot. We would arrive by about eleven o'clock if we started early. And I can remember trying to pull on long stockings over long underwear and my eyes so full of sleep I couldn't see what I was doing. Anyway, we spent time up there and that was fun too. Then, we had a ranch later out in Arizona, one that I never visited. The one in Imperial Valley, near El Centro, is the only one that we ever lived on. Anyway, this was always a drain on what profits one managed to make from architecture. They never made money.

STONEFIELD

On the ranching.

HARRIS

Yes. Never. It always cost.

STONEFIELD

What was your father like? What did he look like?

HARRIS

Well, he was maybe half an inch taller than I, he was the smallest in his family. His features and mine were very much alike. He grew bald sooner than I did.

STONEFIELD

When you think of him, what are your impressions?

HARRIS

Well, of course, I think of him as my father more than anything else. I don't think of him particularly as an architect.

STONEFIELD

Why is that?

HARRIS

Well, I wasn't the least bit interested in architecture during his life. I wasn't any more than I'd be interested in anything else that went on under my nose in the house and that I saw everyday and found nothing unusual about it.

STONEFIELD

What kind of a personality did he have?

HARRIS

Well--

STONEFIELD

That's hard to answer.

HARRIS

I've had plenty of time to think about it. Well, he was not either an introverted or an extroverted person in particular, I don't think. He was probably no more aggressive than I am. He was very much liked by people.

STONEFIELD

Did he have a lot of friends?

HARRIS

Well, he had quite a number, but they were nearly all persons that he came in contact with in ordinary matters of daily-life living. He didn't travel to speak of. He enjoyed hunting, which I don't care for, at least now. I did a little bit when I was very young.

STONEFIELD

What kind of schooling did he have? Did he study architecture formally?

HARRIS

No. Very few architects in those days had architectural schooling. He had neither architectural schooling nor schooling beyond the high school. His father wasn't at all interested in his-- Even though his father had--

STONEFIELD

Practiced law and--

HARRIS

Practiced law, who had degrees and had taught in colleges.

STONEFIELD

Why was that?

HARRIS

I don't think his father thought it was very important. Probably didn't think--
You didn't get much out of it.

STONEFIELD

Having tried it, he decided it wasn't worth it.

HARRIS

You could learn on your own. I don't know whether that's what affected me. You see, I never went beyond the second year of college. Then I stayed out a year, I was sick, and went to Otis Art Institute to fill in my time; became interested in sculpture; stayed on a year longer; then discovered Frank Lloyd Wright, which was my discovery that architecture could be interesting; then had the transcript to my record at Pomona College sent up to Berkeley; was ready to enter in the fall, when I met [Richard J.] Neutra. And Neutra persuaded me that I would learn more working for him and taking technical courses at night, which I proceeded to do. And I think I did learn more. And I think it was faster in every way, except the matter of getting a license to practice, which, of course, is much more difficult when you don't have a degree.

STONEFIELD

So actually, you agree with your father's--?

HARRIS

I'm inclined to. I think probably anyone is apt to think that whatever he did was the best, regardless of what it happens to be.

STONEFIELD

But how did he get into architecture then? I mean what led him in that direction?

HARRIS

I don't know what first interested him in it. I think he probably became interested in building. I don't know what he may have done that led him to architecture. I can remember some letter, I don't remember whether it was from him to his father or his father to him, while he was in this office in Los Angeles learning the rudiments of architecture. Then he returned to San Bernardino and very quickly married and moved to Redlands.

STONEFIELD

What was your mother like? What did she look like?

HARRIS

Well, she was the smallest in her family. Both were not large families for the time, but larger than most are now. My mother had three sisters and two brothers, so there were six in the family. In my father's family there were three brothers and three sisters, one brother died when he was very young.

STONEFIELD

Did they all live in Southern California during this period?

HARRIS

Most of the time, yes. My mother's oldest brother when he was still quite young went to Bellingham, Washington. He became the owner of a very large department store there and lived there until he retired and came back to Los Angeles. And, let's see, the other brother lived in Los Angeles. I can't remember what he did.

STONEFIELD

Was the family close?

HARRIS

Not particularly, no. Occasionally there would be something, a dinner reunion or something, when they would be together, but not very much. More, I guess, in the case of my mother's family than my father's. It was pretty much a

hit-and-miss affair as far as my father was concerned. My grandfather was rather interested in the family and had traced the tree from the first William Harris who--

STONEFIELD

This was your father's father.

HARRIS

Yes, who arrived in Jamestown between 1680 and 1685. He enjoyed telling that he [the first William Harris] was traded for a pumpkin. He was Welsh and, like others who were kidnapped and brought over as labor, he was kidnapped. Because he was just a small boy, he wasn't worth very much. I don't know how they happened to pick him up, but anyway they did. So the captain, according to my grandfather's story sold him to a farmer for a pumpkin. Anyway, he lived with a family, there were two families, Templeton and Overton. And those two names keep recurring--

STONEFIELD

Where was this?

HARRIS

This was in Virginia. These keep recurring throughout the life of the family ever since then. Two of my father's brothers, one was named Templeton, the other was named Overton.

STONEFIELD

He was an indentured servant then or--?

HARRIS

Yes. But it didn't amount to anything, I think, for a pumpkin.

STONEFIELD

He must have good feelings about them to name children after them.

HARRIS

Yes. He married an Overton daughter.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (August 15, 1979)

STONEFIELD

What about the period after you were fourteen? You sort of brought me up to the time that you were on the ranch.

HARRIS

Well, when the United States entered World War I in March 17, 1917, my father decided to sell the ranch. We returned, not to the Redlands but to San Bernardino, and he opened an office there. I spent four years of high school in San Bernardino.

STONEFIELD

What was that like? What was the school like that you went to?

HARRIS

Well, there was only one high school in town. I believe the population of San Bernardino at the time was somewhere around 30,000; it wasn't terribly large. There were maybe 750 in the high school, just under a thousand. And I had some very good teachers there. There's one in particular that I have talked about. I don't know whether I spoke about him in any of that material I sent you or not?

STONEFIELD

I don't think so.

HARRIS

He was a history teacher. He had retired as a university professor, I think it was from Clark University. That was the university that the psychologist G. Stanley Hall was the first head of. He brought men like--Now my memory is going bad on me.

STONEFIELD

I'm putting you on the spot.

HARRIS

The first and most famous psychoanalyst.

STONEFIELD

Not Freud?

HARRIS

Yes, Freud, and Adler, and Jung. I've seen a picture of them all at one time at Clark. He did a great deal that no other university had done. It always remained small. Anyway, the only thing that affects me is that this man, Professor [Gideon] Knopp, the history professor, had retired and he had come to California to spend his remaining days cultivating a garden. The garden was an orange grove out in Mentone. That's east of Redlands, yes, toward Yucaipa. Whenever I can think of something, I'm so pleased to remember it I can't help saying it, whether it's really important to the story or not. Well, anyway, Knopp very quickly got tired of cultivating his garden, and he left his wife to do that and moved into San Bernardino where he took a job in the high school there. He lived during the week at the YMCA and taught history. The important thing is that history, as he saw it, took in every kind of thing that man had ever done or thought. So the range of things that were talked about was enormous, and he talked about them in a more interesting way than any teacher I've ever had. He was better than any college teacher I ever had by far. He dropped hints, suggestions, all through his lectures. They were done very carefully, and afterwards I would rush off to the library to look up something that he had talked about that sounded terribly interesting. I never read my textbook. I was always reporting on what I had discovered in some other book in the library. And this ran through a great variety of things. It was a most carefully prepared lecture, too. His forty-five minute high school periods were marked by lectures, but they didn't seem like lectures at all. I felt always as though I was accompanying an explorer some place, and as he discovered something I was right there to discover it too. Then as he came to the end of the period, he began going over what we had discovered in this, and so he summed it up in a very effective way.

STONEFIELD

He was teaching you how to discover knowledge for yourself.

HARRIS

Yes, this was the important thing. Then another thing I remember, I had him in U.S. history and I didn't have him either for English history or medieval-modern history. I had him in, what was there, some other course that they managed to work in. We got off, though, into all sorts of discussions that ordinarily we would have found in courses in economics and sociology. The material each week, at least in one of these courses, was put in a paper. Writing these papers was the best exercise in writing I've ever had because I wanted so terribly to make clear what I was saying. And so I am rather disposed to favor the writing of papers, at least when they are on subjects that are important and are not just composition exercises.

STONEFIELD

They involve some kind of creative research.

HARRIS

Yes. You're just trying your hardest and you're thinking about the effect you are making on the mind of the person who will read it, and whether you're making it clear or not. So I really got more, I think, out of English composition in Professor Knopp's class than I got out of composition in the English classes. Although I had a very good English teacher too. Anyway, this was the most important part of my high school, I think, and can really be summed up in that experience, particularly Professor Knopp. I had a chum, Ryland Thomason, who was a year older than I, but he had stayed out of school a year, and so when I became a sophomore he was a sophomore. We went through school together, many of the classes together, and we played tricks together on some of our teachers.

STONEFIELD

What kind of tricks? I'm afraid to ask.

HARRIS

Well, I can remember a plane geometry teacher. I feel awfully sorry for her now. We called her "Pinky." She dyed her hair. And in class one of us would proceed to demonstrate that the theorem could be proved by another method than the one in our Wentworth text. And we'd go through the demonstration, and we'd get her to agree, "Yes, it can be proved that way."

Then one of us would immediately jump up and prove that it was all wrong, which made her wrong too. This was really tough. Then we were both on the debating team together, and I remember we had a coach that was constantly being confused by us. But we stimulated one another in various ways, not only in the things that we learned together, but also in certain other things. Anyway, these are the two features of my high school years that I remember. Professor Knopp and Ryland Thomason.

STONEFIELD

Were there other friends--?

HARRIS

Yes, but they weren't nearly as important.

STONEFIELD

What was it like being an adolescent in those days?

HARRIS

Well, we never thought about it. We knew the meaning of the word, but--

STONEFIELD

You weren't separated from the rest of the community the way that we now do?

HARRIS

No. Matter of identity, that was something that was a preposterous question. We knew who we were. [laughter]

STONEFIELD

Things were more certain in those days. Wasn't it considered a transition period, the way that it is now? On your way to something else? Not quite one thing or the other?

HARRIS

Well, the world and the country had been through transitions that were so much more striking and upsetting than anything personal could be. See, this was World War I. I entered high school about five months after we entered

World War I, and, although we were slow in getting in, we armed ourselves and got into the thick of it, very, very quickly. We had military training. It's true that we had no guns or uniforms. We drilled in gym suits with wooden wands the first year. The second year we had guns and uniforms, but then the war ended in only a few months.

STONEFIELD

Did you feel as if everyone was personally involved in the war, was that the way it was?

HARRIS

Oh yes, there was no way of escaping that. There were all sorts of drives. Whenever I see this old James Montgomery Flagg poster, "I want you," I always remember it in World War I when it was first used.

STONEFIELD

Did you know people who were actually in the army?

HARRIS

Yes, yes. One was very much aware of that. I had no relatives who were actually in the conflict. I remember, very shortly after the war was over, a hospital train came through town with wounded on it. And someone, I remember it was a fellow student, persuaded me to go down along with others and walk through the train. It's a thing I never would have thought of doing and I don't know why I was persuaded to do it. But I did, and I came across a former student that I had known down in Imperial Valley in grammar school. He'd got in combat. He was terribly young, even though he was a bit old when in grammar school, and he was wounded. Also, I can remember right after the war was over when the train came through with Marshall Foch on it, and I can remember going down to the station to hear him address us in French. I can remember many visitors that we had come to arouse enthusiasm for the war. Some were French and some were British. I can remember a young Britisher. We didn't have as many English people around as one would now, so that if it was a British accent or any other mannerism it would be much more striking to us. And I can remember the high school assemblies for various reasons, but many of them concerned with the war. I can remember

one visitor who was a poet, I don't remember his name. Anyway, he talked about the young English poets. This was the time when we were hearing "Poppies grow on Flander field." James, I want to say James Joyce, no, what was the Joyce--?

STONEFIELD

Joyce Kilmer.

HARRIS

Yes. I can remember his talk was entitled "The New Elizabethans." And I can remember a woman, a miniature painter, who was there and talked. For support of something, she sold little black-and-white photographs of this miniature portrait of, not Foch who was the commander, but who was the other French leader? I can't remember his name now. I can remember her leading us in various songs. There were all the war songs, "Over There" and "Beautiful Katie," and all of these things. I remember the meetings down in the city park. Pioneer Park, too, and singing "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile." I remember all these things. So, the first two years were very much filled with all of this sort of activity going on. No one had time to think about anything personal, we were all in it pretty much together. One thing that I think of with some revulsion, and it was something I experienced at the time, was the anti-German feeling. Germans who had been admired and liked and praised, treated with every consideration, suddenly were the enemy, and nothing that you could say or do seemed to be too bad. How people could change so quickly I don't know. But they did.

STONEFIELD

These were people that you knew in the community?

HARRIS

Yes. Yes.

STONEFIELD

And how were they treated? What happened to them?

HARRIS

Oh, well, they were ridiculed. I remember a person's garden, it was actually a victory garden--Did we call them victory gardens in that war? They had a different name for them in the Second World War. Anyway, driving trucks and things through it, just smashing it up, doing other things, just to express their hatred of the owner with a German name. I can remember attending a reading, we had such things as readings in those days. I don't remember the title of it, but it was anti-German propaganda. Efficiency became a swear word. Propaganda was first heard I think, by Americans, certainly by any that I knew, in World War I, and it was considered a German word. Propaganda and efficiency described Germans, and because it was German, was something that we despised. These are just queer things, but they tell something about the attitude that occurred. Anyway, the war was enough to occupy ourselves. We weren't occupied with our own problems and difficulties.

STONEFIELD

I wonder if, this is changing totally, if your education in high school, did anything towards pushing you towards the arts, the sculpture, the architecture later on.

HARRIS

Not very much. I used to draw cartoons occasionally when I was a high school student. I took a freehand drawing course as a college student because I thought I had time for it. But I hadn't reached the point by the time my father died of deciding what I was going to do for a career. I had been the morning newspaper, the San Bernardino Daily Sun's high school correspondent in my senior year, and I thought perhaps I wanted to be a journalist. But, as I say, I dropped out of college for a year--it turned out to be permanently--because of bad health, and went to Otis Art Institute, now called Los Angeles County School of Art or Institute of Art, I think. It was the old Harrison Gray Otis house that it was in, right where Wilshire Boulevard at that time ended, at Westlake Park, now called MacArthur Park.

STONEFIELD

I think it's still there, isn't it?

HARRIS

It may be. They had once added on to it, but I don't know whether they later destroyed the old house or not.

STONEFIELD

I think it is a new building.

HARRIS

Anyway, I became quite interested in drawing and particularly in sculpture and stayed on for a second year. Something else I suppose I should say, after the war there was a great change. And what emerged was something that had probably been developing underground for a good many years. But it wasn't until the war was over and the surface had been disturbed as much as it had that these things came out. Some of them, of course, were much earlier but were not widespread, whether you're talking about psychoanalysis or literature or painting. I can remember the first reproductions of paintings, the first by [Paul] Gauguin that I saw. Anyway, there was something new that distinguished all the arts and seemed to relate them to one another, relate each art more closely to every other art than to the same art of another period.

STONEFIELD

Did you feel this at that time? Were you aware of it at all?

HARRIS

Yes. Very much so. Very much so. Probably in a very exaggerated way.

STONEFIELD

When did you first become aware of this, when you were studying art or--?

HARRIS

Well, I suppose it was beginning when I was still a student at Pomona College, although it was when I was at Otis that this really became widespread in my own recognition of it. I was then more conscious of other fields, and of course these new expressions were being proclaimed rather loudly. And it was new, that was the important thing, and we were glorying at what was new without feeling any necessity of having to destroy the old. We just left the old behind us. That was our--

STONEFIELD

It was a new age.

HARRIS

Which made it a much healthier thing. There was no combativeness involved in this at all. It was a new age. That was it.

STONEFIELD

Was there any interest in art in your family?

HARRIS

No. No.

STONEFIELD

Did your father have any interest, I mean that was related to the architecture, did he draw or did he do his own--?

HARRIS

Not very much, no. His interest was probably more in construction.

STONEFIELD

Did he do the graphic part of the architecture himself?

HARRIS

Yes, yes. I mean he was a good architect, but he wasn't an outstanding one in any way. He never thought of it as being something that you could be outstanding in, probably. [laughter]

STONEFIELD

How did you feel about the buildings that he designed?

HARRIS

Well, some of them I liked, some of them I didn't think were very distinguished. And as I say, I don't think that it was a subject that he was, what do you say, very strongly interested in. I mean he enjoyed the practice of architecture, but I don't think that he had any thought of making any great

thing out of it. And that may have had something to do with my not being more excited about it. As I've said it wasn't until I had seen a building by Frank Lloyd Wright and before I'd even heard his name. There was a fellow student, a girl in my class, sculpture class, at Otis. She and her husband were building a house and she mentioned this fact and then she mentioned that the architect was Lloyd Wright. I didn't flick an eyelash, and he said, "the son of Frank Lloyd Wright." Well, I didn't know who Frank Lloyd Wright was either. She said, "The house by him up on Olive Hill, why don't you go up and see it?" So, Saturday I wandered up there, more just because I thought she'd ask me if I done it or not. I didn't expect to be interested in it, because architecture is not art. It is just a mixed thing. It couldn't be art. It couldn't be pure enough to be art. But this was the great revelation.

STONEFIELD

This was like your teacher in high school.

HARRIS

Yes. Well, I had had one other great revelation. I don't know whether that was anything that I sent you or not. This was when I was still a high school student. It was during the spring vacation that I was spending in the cabin we had up in the mountains up above San Bernardino. Oh, this ties in again with Professor Knopp, Gideon Knopp. He had got me interested in evolution. But Darwin, and Spencer in particular, were more than I could handle very well. So he put me on to--What was his name? He came to a number of conclusions that Darwin had come to, before Darwin's had been published at all. But he wrote very well, and this was a book called Social Environment and Moral Progress. I'll think of his name in a minute--it was Alfred Russel Wallace. Anyway, this was vacation, and I was sitting on the side of the canyon up there reading the book, when suddenly I saw evolution in a way I'd never seen it before. I mean this was a case in which the heavens opened and you see it spread out in front of you in all its glory.

STONEFIELD

Sudden illumination, right.

HARRIS

I don't remember why I got into this. It had something to do with what I was talking about. Anyway, it was another, oh yes, a revelation, as Hollyhock House had been a revelation.

STONEFIELD

It's exciting when all of these facts come together into some kind of a whole. Instead of being separate and disconnected, then they mean something.

HARRIS

There's meaning. You see a pattern that encompasses everything, whether it's a pattern of thought or a pattern of operation. Anyway, it becomes universal.

STONEFIELD

And you see yourself in relation to it also.

HARRIS

Yes, you see yourself as-- You rather glory in your part in it.

STONEFIELD

Right.

HARRIS

Not just as a soldier in the ranks, but as an organism in a still larger organism.

STONEFIELD

Now this was all in high school that this happened?

HARRIS

That was in high school, yes.

STONEFIELD

When you decided to go to Pomona, what did you study there?

HARRIS

Well, I was taking largely, of course, what one would have to take in the first two years there, although, as I say, I hadn't decided what I was going to do for a career. I took the customary freshman subjects. In this case I added Latin,

which I hadn't had in high school, and-- Let's see, I'll have to jump around, I can't remember the two years very fully. An introduction to general psychology, which was my first. I had a course in sociology as a sophomore, and I think it was probably on account of some of the things that I heard in Knopp's high school class that I did that. Here again we wrote papers every week. This was a large class, as such classes are apt to be.

STONEFIELD

What was large?

HARRIS

Well, at least a hundred. But I wrote these papers-- Oh, yes, and just at this time, I guess it was as a freshman in college, not in high school, I again found something in the library. In this case, I had gone to get a book of Ibsen plays, and next to it was George Bernard Shaw's Quintessence of Ibsenism, which I took. That started me off, as you can imagine, on a whole new thing. I became a very strong admirer of Shaw, tried to write as he did in his prefaces, and this probably had a great deal to do with what I wrote for the sociology class.

STONEFIELD

You said that what sort of ended your career at Pomona was that you became ill.

HARRIS

Yes.

STONEFIELD

What happened exactly?

HARRIS

Well, I had just lost weight, I lost energy. I went through the first year at Otis and then went down to spend the summer with a girl cousin, a married cousin of mine, in the San Diego mountains--she was about ten years older than I--to try to recover from it. I came back and spent two or three months at Otis and then dropped out again and went down to Imperial Valley, where an aunt and uncle were living, and was there until the beginning of summer. I came back and then reentered Otis and went on.

STONEFIELD

Was your father still alive during this period?

HARRIS

No, my father died in my freshman year of college, died in the spring of 1922. I had entered college in the fall of '21.

STONEFIELD

You know I never asked you. Did you have any siblings?

HARRIS

No.

STONEFIELD

You didn't. You were an only child?

HARRIS

That probably had something to do, the fact that I spent more of my life around adults than I would have, that probably--

STONEFIELD

I think that tends to make you find your own amusements a little more readily.

HARRIS

Well, it made me a little more solitary, and it also probably gave me a connection with the ideas, ideals, and manners of a slightly earlier period, too. I know I'm inclined to think of myself as really being nineteenth century instead of twentieth.

STONEFIELD

Not in your work certainly. Now I've lost my train of thought. So that you graduated from high school, you went to Pomona, and then somehow or other you moved to Los Angeles and started at the Otis Institute and that was disrupted. That was actually a big change, from Pomona to Otis. What sort of led you to change your direction that way?

HARRIS

Well, I guess some part in that change in direction may have been owing to the fact that, following my father's death, my mother went to live with her older sister and family in Los Angeles. So I had been going on occasional weekends and vacation from Claremont to Los Angeles to be with her. And Otis was there and the change was done without any particular thought. I suppose it was a convenient thing to do.

STONEFIELD

But you had not had really any art training before then. There must have been some kind of a--

HARRIS

I had had a one-hour course at Pomona. As I recall, it was just a freehand drawing course.

STONEFIELD

Were you just sort of feeling for something that was going to get you excited that way that your high school studies had done?

HARRIS

Well, I hadn't expected it to lead to a career in any way. I had discovered, as I mentioned, a Gauguin, in a reproduction in Century Magazine, it must have been about 1921. And then I discovered in the secondhand bookstores, the Holmes secondhand bookstores in Los Angeles at the time, copies of the-- What's this magazine? It was largely literary. It was the most avant garde of all at that time--Oh yes. The Dial. And each month there was a single colored reproduction in it. A [Paul] Cezanne or [Paul] Gauguin or similar in it. So I began haunting the Holmes secondhand bookstores to buy these things. There was an exhibition in 1925, now this is along toward the end of my time at Otis, that was assembled by the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art out at Exposition Park. It was called the Pan-American Exhibition. I remember I made a design cover for the catalog. It wasn't used. A classmate of mine, Anders Aldrin made the one that was actually used. But I saw there a Diego Rivera, a real one. Now I had seen some black-and-white reproductions a few months earlier in a little Mexican magazine called Arquitectura or El

Arquitecto, that someone had left by accident in Los Angeles Public Library, which was before the library got into the Goodhue building that is now being destroyed I understand. The library then was down in the Metropolitan Building which was across from Pershing Square, then called Central Park. No, it was changed to Pershing Square in World War I, so its name had already been changed. My mother still called it Central Park. Anyway, this copy of El Arquitecto or Arquitectura that I found there had, along with photographs, had--

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (August 15, 1979)

HARRIS

Included in the pages of the magazine were photographs in black and white of Diego Rivera's murals for, I don't think it was the ministry of education, I don't think that had been built at that time. I think it was something else. Anyway, I was very much taken with them, and I took the magazine to school and showed it to various ones, all of whom wanted copies of it. So I sat down then to write the editor of the magazine requesting six copies. I wrote it in my own best Spanish. Then I took it to a South American, a Colombian student who was there, and got him to proof it, and then a Spanish priest came in and so I took it to him. So he put the final touches on it. Well, I got back from the editor of El Arquitecto a request that I become his North American correspondent. [laughter]

STONEFIELD

So you were back in journalism again.

HARRIS

I was afraid I wouldn't have all this help later, so I didn't go ahead with it. But, anyway, I became very much interested. And then I saw my first original Diego Rivera in this Pan-American show. Much later, at the time of the exposition in San Francisco, in '39 I guess it was, Rivera was there and painted a large mural out where everyone could watch him work on it, and I met him at that time. A friend of ours, Emmy Lou Packard; whose father had been an engineer in Mexico and who had grown up practically in Diego Rivera's studio, had us to dinner with Rivera. Then much later, after I had gone to the University of

Texas as director of the school of architecture there, I took a class of twenty-one to Mexico City to the Eighth Pan-American Congress of Architects which was being held on the new campus of the [National Autonomous] University of Mexico. None of the buildings were finished. We held our meetings in the biggest of the front ones there. Anyway, I met Rivera again. Well, then there were others that came along. Then there was the whole-- Well, I'm not following this in a very good order. Anyway, my interest in painting and sculpture slightly preceded my interest in architecture. And--

STONEFIELD

Had you been to very many museums? I imagine there weren't very many around in those--

HARRIS

No, no.

STONEFIELD

In Los Angeles.

HARRIS

No, this show that the museum, Los Angeles County Museum, put on there was the biggest one that I had ever seen. I'd never been in San Francisco at that time. I hadn't seen anything there. So everything was through books and magazines. In the library at Otis, there were some German architectural magazines that gave me a first glimpse of modern European work.

STONEFIELD

The art or the architecture?

HARRIS

The architecture I'm thinking of right now. I was interested. Then in the Los Angeles public library I came across a little thin book by Eric Mendelsohn with those expressionist drawings that he had made during the war years. They had interested me very much as drawings and as shapes. Not as buildings however.

STONEFIELD

Did they not seem possible as buildings or--?

HARRIS

Well, they seemed too arbitrary to work as buildings. Of course there was the Einstein Tower that had come along, but I didn't see that. It was a few years I think after that before it was published. Then when I discovered the Wright building, I immediately went to the Los Angeles library department--I was now familiar with it for other reasons. And, very fortunately, it had the Wasmuth two-part folio of the Wasmuth Collection of Wright drawings. Nothing could have been more perfect for me to have seen at that time. The drawings were every bit as good, perhaps even better, than photographs might have been. And they were just as real as any photograph could be. And the fact they were all drawn in the same way--

STONEFIELD

They're very beautiful too.

HARRIS

This made, yes, made them even more powerful. And then a year or two later the Dutch architectural magazine, Wendingen I think it was called, published very beautifully the Life Work of Frank Lloyd Wright. It was the life work up to 1923.

STONEFIELD

They didn't know.

HARRIS

It was the most important, however, by far. It could have all stopped there and he would have been just as great in my estimation. So the Los Angeles library was a very valuable thing to me. I had discovered other things there too in painting and drawing. I perhaps should have mentioned one thing I have forgot. And that was while I was still at Otis I joined a group called the Los Angeles Art Students League which S. MacDonald-Wright was the head of. It was a very informal sort of thing, and we met in a little room--of course there were two, maybe three, rooms--up on the third floor of a building on North Spring Street, in about the 200 block, I guess. And MacDonald-Wright was-- Who was his sidekick? Morgan Russell. As young boys in 1911, they

went to Europe. They were painters, and Thomas Benton was also along and part of that group. Anyway, they found that to be anybody there you had to establish a school, a school of art. So they established the school of synchromism, painting with color, and Wright was marvelous. It was color that was structure as well as harmony. But he was a marvelous draftsman, too. I mean that in figure drawing one would think that Michelangelo couldn't have done as well. [laughter] Really. Anyway, there was a group of maybe six or eight. There were not always that many. There were some that came and more or less sat around and looked. Usually there were probably about six of us all together. The two best of the group were James Redman and Al King. I think Al King is still living, I'm not sure. Anyway, this was a side matter that I forgot to mention and thought that it should be in here. Then I remember that at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium one afternoon there was a demonstration by Thomas Wilfred of his color organ.

STONEFIELD

What was that?

HARRIS

Well, this was abstract painting with colored light. And he had a rather complicated machine, the clavilux, I believe he called it. It was extremely interesting. I think, aside from the few of us from Otis who went down, there was no one else there. He spoke of it not only as a tool for the construction of abstractions with colored light, which would be the most abstract of course of all, but also its use in the theater to construct a background, which could be done. The unfortunate thing about it I decided as I watched it was that he would build a composition, but he couldn't go beyond a certain point, without first dissolving what he had already built in order to re-use the keys. So you'd see the whole thing dissolving. I thought that was very upsetting. Much, much later he came back and--oh, I don't know, this must have been six years or more later--he came back, and this time the auditorium was filled. It was a night performance, and he had overcome that particular feature of it I had disliked. But this is something that belongs along with synchromism. I suppose there are things that are just as exciting now, but these were the things that were exciting to me at that particular time. And because it was new, and we

thought that something was being realized that had never been realized before. It was something that was happening in all of the arts.

STONEFIELD

A unity of purpose in amongst the arts.

HARRIS

Well, it was simply expressing that unity, which of course is the purpose of all art--to unify, to resolve contradictions and difficulties, to make everything work as in the "harmony of the spheres," I guess. [laughter]

STONEFIELD

When you were going to Otis where did you live?

HARRIS

I lived with my aunt and uncle where my mother was living.

STONEFIELD

And where was that?

HARRIS

That was out near the UCLA [actually USC] campus. Actually the house was one that had been built quite early when my uncle's father and mother and some of the children came from Mississippi to California. His name was Harper, and he took up a quarter section, a hundred and sixty acres of land, as a homestead from the government and which extended from Adams to Jefferson, and from Hoover to Vermont.

STONEFIELD

That's a nice piece of property.

HARRIS

Twenty-ninth Street, which was the street the house backed on, was called Harper Avenue at that time [and] until much later, and the house I lived in was the house that was built then. The millwork came by boat around the Horn from New England. And then it was remodeled in the eighties, the 1880s, and faced a different way then, and was changed some. Well, anyway, I used to

walk over Sunday afternoons to Exposition Park--it was only a few blocks away you see--and I'd go through the museum there to see what was new. There were some permanent exhibitions too. One that became almost permanent--at least it lasted long enough, and I don't know when it finally was ended--had a very powerful influence on me, and this was a Chinese sculpture and painting collection. It was the General Munthe collection. General Munthe had been a Swedish governor of some kind in China, and apparently he had just picked what he wanted. It was an enormous collection, and there were, well, half-a-dozen extremely fine paintings. There was one that I will never forget. And then it had a great deal of sculpture, stone sculpture. It cost so much to move it that it was left there for years. It was put up on the top floor of the new wing of the museum, and I used to go up there with a pad and pencil simply to draw them, simply just study them through drawing them.

STONEFIELD

I have a question. You said that you lived near UCLA? Was this--?

HARRIS

No, USC.

STONEFIELD

Oh, USC.

HARRIS

When I spoke of something near UCLA I was speaking of the house in photographs that we saw up on the balcony, which was the Ralph Johnson House.

STONEFIELD

I see.

HARRIS

Which is, I can't remember what the name of the boulevard is that goes along the north, I guess it goes along the north side of the campus. It's north--

STONEFIELD

Sunset. Is it Sunset?

HARRIS

Maybe it is. Off it runs Sycamore Canyon-- I can't remember whether it's called Sycamore Drive or Sycamore Boulevard. It goes over into the valley. And this house--

STONEFIELD

Beverly Glen maybe?

HARRIS

That is another ravine with a road leading over into the valley. It's not Beverly Glen that I mean.

STONEFIELD

You lived with your aunt and uncle and your mother.

HARRIS

Yes.

STONEFIELD

And you were going to Otis Institute.

HARRIS

Yes.

STONEFIELD

And discovered Hollyhock House. I wonder if you could kind of tell me what it seemed like to you when you first saw it, I mean how it affected you.

HARRIS

I have said this and I've written it so much that it begins to sound rather corny I'm afraid. Well, I took this Saturday to see the building, and I entered on the road that wound up from Vermont Avenue near Sunset. And as I came up I suddenly came on, I don't know whether it was called cottage A or cottage B. There were two guest cottages. And this really stopped me. I had never seen anything like it. It looked so very Japanese to me, and yet it was a flat roof building, plaster with cast concrete ornament. And yet the whole shape, the

whole feeling of the building anyway, was very, very Japanese. Then I went on up and to the top of the hill, and there I could see bits of the main building through the hedge. I would stop, and look and go on, stop and look and go on. I was afraid to go through.

STONEFIELD

It was open to the public at that point?

HARRIS

Oh, no, it wasn't. No. Hadn't been given. Miss Barnsdall still owned it. She didn't live in it very much, but it was still her private property and it was not opened to the public at all. You see it wasn't finished until about 1922.

STONEFIELD

This was 1924?

HARRIS

And this was 1925. Well, here was a long, low building that I could only see bits of at a time, and I had to put the bits together. It was like a long animal for that matter. You get part here and part here, but you know it's the same animal. I finally came to a hole in a hedge where I could actually step through and see it. And I saw it under the most favorable circumstances. It was in the late afternoon, and the sun was getting low, and the walls--which were sort of a golden tan--were very gold in the light of the setting sun. And the building was very horizontal and had wings that came toward you and away from you, this way and that way, and the movement of these wings was paralleled with the movement of bands of repeated ornament. The horizontal bands were just above a vertical break in the wall. It would be just above the window line, there was a ledge, and above the ledge the wall sloped slightly inward. And on this ledge was the hollyhock ornament. I didn't know what it was. It wasn't important that it resemble anything in particular.

STONEFIELD

It actually doesn't look much like a hollyhock.

HARRIS

Well, you have the vertical repetition of blossoms. But I'm glad it doesn't look any more like a flower than it does. Well, this was the most rhythmic thing that I had ever seen. This was sculpture, but it was sculpture on a completely different scale, and I simply couldn't stand still. I just had to move. As the building moved, I moved. That was all. I had to follow its development. And the smooth walls of the building with the intricate cast ornament that here appears like locks of hair on a smooth brow. The ornament would follow around a wing, and then it would come back again on another wing. And then I suddenly saw the ornament on each side of the large opening in the wall of what turned out to be the living room. It opened the living room out to a rectangular pool. I could see this same pattern but now incised, not in relief but in-- What's the contrary of relief? And then I discovered it in the full round coming up out of the center of the building mass, from places you couldn't see from where I was, couldn't see what the ornament was part of, but the ornament was always in pairs. This building was something I had never been able to imagine before. And I was all alone you see. That was the wonderful thing about it. I had discovered the Sleeping Beauty. [laughter]

1.4. SECOND PART (**August 22, 1979)**

STONEFIELD

We left off last time with your description of Hollyhock House, and I was wondering if you could tell me what happened after that as far as your entrance into the field?

HARRIS

Well, this was a very surprising development because I had had no interest in architecture before, and I was still interested in sculpture. So it was perhaps a year before I decided to switch. However, I continued to discover all that I could about Mr. [Frank Lloyd] Wright, and in the meantime I met [Rudolf M.] Schindler and Neutra, and it was out of discussions with Neutra in particular that I finally decided to switch.

STONEFIELD

How did you meet them?

HARRIS

I discovered a building under construction that was unlike any building that I had seen anywhere. It resembled somewhat photographs in European work that I had seen, and the general feeling of it was more that of Eric Mendelsohn's work than any other that I could recall. It was a rather expressionistic building, and I discovered that the architect was R. M. Schindler. I'd never heard of Schindler. I looked in the yellow pages of the book and found his address and without calling went to see him. And he took me in and I told him why I was there. And he took me into the living room, which adjoined the drafting room, and then brought in a stack of photographs and some drawings and put them on the table and suggested that I just look at them, which I proceeded to do. But I wasn't looking always at the picture. I was looking at the room that I was in. It had a cement slab floor. The walls were partly slabs of cement, uncolored like the floor but with a little bit of texture from the casting still on them. They were in panels about four feet wide, and between each pair of panels was a strip of glass about two or three inches wide. And outside light fell on the floor through these. Outside the glass there was ivy growing up it in many places. Walls on opposite sides of the building were tied together overhead at intervals by doubled beams of redwood. The slabs formed the outside walls, not the partition walls. Above the level of the tie beams there were small windows about sixteen inches high by four feet wide that let light in high up. Opposite a slab wall would usually be a wall into a court. There were several courts in the building. This opposite wall was made up, usually, of sliding panels filled with cheesecloth or some very inexpensive, but translucent material. The whole thing was a very inexpensive building done with many temporary materials, some of which, like the cloth, was replaced later by glass. Outside--because I looked through the glass into the garden--there was simply Bermuda grass and hedges of castor bean plants and bamboo. Everything was extremely common, and I was amazed at the total effect of it and decided that it must be magic. The design was done with the most common materials, and the result was so very uncommon. And as I was sitting there, looking alternately outside the room and at the pictures, someone came through the room. It was Mrs. [Dione] Neutra. I didn't know who she was, and, as I remarked in a letter that I wrote to Pauline Schindler only about five years ago, she was barelegged, wearing sandals, and had some loose kind of tunic on, probably made of cheesecloth

or unbleached muslin, or something of the sort. Her hair was drawn back in what became practically a badge as far as she was concerned, with ribbon across her forehead. She simply smiled at me and passed on. As I told Pauline Schindler, she really didn't interrupt my thoughts because she seemed so in character with the building, and all I could think of was maybe I was on Mount Olympus. It was a very simple Greek thing and completely divorced in my perceptions of anything belonging to the year 1927. And then shortly after that Mr. [Richard J.] Neutra came in. He came directly to me and sat down beside me and looked at the pictures with me and talked about them. The result was that a little later when there was a series of lectures by him at the new Academy of Modern Art-- It had two branches, one in the old Chouinard art school out on Eighth Street near Westlake Park and the other in the new Fine Arts Building down on Seventh near Flower Street. I'm trying to remember the name of the man who founded them--Ferenz, F. K. Ferenz. I received an announcement of these lectures and of course I went. I enjoyed very much the lectures because here was an introduction to ideas underlying modern architecture as Neutra understood it, and relating them not only to new technological processes of building production but also to matters of civic planning and other things involved in technology. There I met Greg Ain, who was also there listening. And a little bit later, when the series was over, Greg Ain and I, and two or three others who were at the series of lectures, none of them as interested as we two, undertook to have a little class at the Academy of Modern Art. We began by each designing an individual project.

STONEFIELD

Who was the teacher in this?

HARRIS

Neutra. And we each chose a project. I think Neutra may have made some suggestions. I had been following the progress of the design of the Lovell House-- I have made one mistake in my chronology here. Between the time of these lectures and the beginning of this class, I had worked for a very short time in Neutra's office. I had decided that I wanted to switch to architecture, and I had, as I think I mentioned last time. I had a transcript of my record sent up at Berkeley and had planned to enter in the fall.

STONEFIELD

Is this before you met Neutra and Schindler, or as a result?

HARRIS

No, no. As a result of having--I beg your pardon. It's barely possible. It was after I had discovered Wright, it was some time after that. It was along about this time I guess that I made that decision.

STONEFIELD

To go to Berkeley.

HARRIS

Anyway, it was at about this time that I planned to transfer to Berkeley and told Neutra that. He suggested that I would learn more working for him and taking some technical courses at night. I was persuaded that he was the person who would teach me most that I decided to do that and canceled my plans to enter Berkeley in the fall. I went to work then for Neutra--but for five days only--on the Lovell House. They were the last five days that the Lovell House was in the working drawings' production, and there was no work after that was done.

STONEFIELD

In the office, no work in the office at all?

HARRIS

No, not at all. And then this class, that had grown out of the series of lectures, started. I think there were six of us in it. I have a photograph of us all out together a little bit later looking at the foundation work of the Lovell House. As I said, we chose individual projects. And because I had been working on the Lovell House, I was particularly interested in house construction, and I was particularly interested in the methods that had been used there. So I proposed to design a building that would be a frame structure. It was two stories in height. The frame, however, was reinforced concrete, not steel. And it shows a very strong influence both of the Lovell House and perhaps to some extent of the Garden Apartments, the apartment building that I had first discovered and had thought was Schindler's. It was by Schindler and Neutra, and really it was more Neutra than it was Schindler, as I would have realized if I had known about Neutra and that he had worked with Mendelsohn earlier.

STONEFIELD

I have a question. What was it about him that drew you more to him than to Schindler? Because you were obviously affected by Schindler's house.

HARRIS

Well, it was more the fact that Neutra was interested in me. He was interested in having some disciples, and he devoted himself to me. Schindler was very friendly, but I wasn't invited in to participate in anything. I had listened to these lectures of Neutra. I was very much struck by the influence of technology on design in a suggestive way as well as technology as a means of production. I naturally followed what was most immediate that was also appealing to me. So this was the way it started. And because my work off and on continued on Neutra projects, projects that were only projects to him too, not actual building commissions. My work with Neutra, my interest in his work and his ideas, then dominated my thinking. I continued to look at Schindler's work. I was extremely interested in it. But, not being a participant in it, it didn't go beyond that.

STONEFIELD

I interrupted you; you go on with your discussion of your project.

HARRIS

Oh, well, I remember Greg worked on a design for a penitentiary. I don't know whether Neutra suggested it or not. I know Neutra did talk about prefabrication as the only means of the future for the production of buildings, that prefabrication wasn't just for housing, but even for public buildings, jails, courthouses, all sorts of things. And so Greg took on that. I've forgotten what some of the others took. None of them carried them very far, however, and they dropped out at the end of this period. I think it was immediately after this, soon afterward anyway, that Neutra decided that it would be interesting to use the problems then being used by the modern European--German principally, [as well as] Austrian and French--architects who were then producing projects in connection with the International Congresses for Modern Architecture [Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM)]. Europeans were accustomed to working on projects because they seldom had any actual buildings. They had no clients, with very few

exceptions, and so they worked on projects that were decided on at these congresses. The earlier congresses had to do with housing. This was an important thing, particularly in Germany after World War I when there was a great need for housing-- And I take back that remark that their work was almost entirely projects. It was not. Low-cost housing was one thing that they did have, not as much perhaps as they would like. These projects, then, were exhibited at the congresses. They were discussed, and I guess took the place of the manifestoes that had been the important things before then. So at Neutra's suggestion, [I was] made secretary of the American group which was then formed. [It] included Neutra, Greg Ain and me, plus two or three others in the East who were not very directly involved in this at this time. Anyway, I wrote to Sigfried Giedion in Zurich and expressed our interest in becoming affiliated with it and sent in our dues and received the programs. And so we proceeded then to design group housing. It turned out to be largely row housing and looked very strange in America and in Southern California, the center of the single-family house. But because it was a real problem there, it was an interesting one to work on. The projects were exhibited each year at a meeting of the congresses. And in order to compare our work with theirs and to judge them from the standpoint of efficiency, particularly in space, Neutra suggested that I develop a chart, and he named it--it was a German name--the minimum existence correlation chart. Now minimal existence rubbed me a little bit the wrong way, but I was looking at this purely as a project. Anyway, with this chart one could quickly take any one of several factors that were involved--the number in the family, the income, the number of rooms, the total area, the cost per square foot, the cost per cubic foot. I don't know whether any other things or not. I think there were five factors. Anyway, by beginning with any one of these, one could quickly determine what, according to minimal existence standards, would be the minimum for each of the others. And then, after--I think we worked two years on housing-- and then the next congress was on city planning. And each group was asked to take its own city and redesign it according to the latest standards and theories of city planning. So we took Los Angeles, and we chose what seemed so far in the distance I hardly thought I would ever live to see it, the year 1950. This was to be Los Angeles in 1950 as we would design it, redesign it, based on its present pattern. And of course the most remarkable thing about it was the fact that it had grown up in the automobile age. Detroit was the only other city that even

approached it. Neutra had some ideas about the automobile which proved to be erroneous, such as, if we devoted the entire ground surface of the city, the downtown anyway, to transportation, to cars--

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (August 22, 1979)

STONEFIELD

Where were we?

HARRIS

Oh yes, yes. We found that devoting the entire surface of the downtown area to either streets of parking for cars, we couldn't begin to accommodate all the cars that would need to be there, despite the fact that our buildings were widely spaced and only twelve stories high, which was the building code limitation there at that time. They were thin slab buildings, so every office really had an outside face. There were second-story sidewalks, and the block-long buildings were joined together at intervals by cross-walks and cross streets. Even so, one couldn't begin to take care of all cars, even with this limited downtown population.

STONEFIELD

There was no thought of alternative forms of transportation?

HARRIS

Oh yes, we had plenty of alternatives.

STONEFIELD

Oh, you did.

HARRIS

We were making this, whether we knew it or not, as a part of Neutra's ideal city. Rush City Reformed. That name, "Rush City," always bothered me too, just as "minimal existence" had. But, anyway, that was the name for it, and we proceeded to develop this in drawings. It was the throughways and the overpasses as they came through the town that were my particular part in this design. Well, at the end of this time there was a congress, and Neutra decided to attend it. The Lovell House had been completed. He had received his fee.

He had some money. He had made photographs of the Lovell House, and so with them under his arm he proceeded to Europe by way of Japan, where he gave some talks and where a folio of his work was to be published. One thing that I have neglected to say is-- Well, let me finish this too. Because Los Angeles is so big--what was it? twenty-eight miles I think from the city hall to San Pedro--it was impossible to make our plan at the same scale as those of the other members. We had to use a smaller scale. Even so, it was the biggest of all of those that were exhibited. One thing I forgot to say-- I got mixed up in thinking that we went directly to the CIAM projects from those individual projects. In between there was the design of an airport. This was for a national competition. The Lehigh Portland Cement Airport Competition was its name. Lehigh Portland Cement Company was the sponsor of it. We decided to enter, and, as I have remarked elsewhere, this was really my big learning experience with Neutra. We were designing something that no one knew anything about really. They knew something about planes, the length of runways necessary for existing planes, and that was about all. We read everything that had been published on the subject, and I spent some time out at Mines Field, which was the young airport, it had one runway.

STONEFIELD

Where is that?

HARRIS

Well, it was down the coast toward San Pedro but not so very far. It's the main airport now, it's the Los Angeles airport.

STONEFIELD

Oh, really. It was just, I see, it was just called that.

HARRIS

It was abandoned at one time, and they moved to Glendale, and then from Glendale to Burbank, and then they moved back to Mines Field much later. Well, anyway, at that time there was so little that was known. One thing that Neutra did know that no one else in the competition knew was that airports are part of a much larger design, the design of a region and of a city. It's the connection point between various forms of transportation. It's not simply

between two different legs in a journey by air where you merely change planes. It's how you get into the city, and from the city out to the airport, and how you do it in a short length of time. And so Neutra proceeded to use certain ideas that he had developed earlier in connection with other Rush City Reformed designs, particularly railroad connections to a city transportation pattern. Here we added the airline connections, and Neutra insisted upon our calling it--not an air terminal, which was how the competition described it--but an air transfer, a place where one kind of transportation ends and another takes over. And this was the important feature of our design. We worked on it with great enthusiasm, connecting our Rush City design, which was very much influenced by the design of modern Vienna, where the former city wall became the place for a peripheral boulevard and where there were radiating boulevards and other transportation systems, surface and subway. So our Rush City design, which we developed still further for surface-rail, subsurface-rail, private automobile, and motor bus--All of these then had to connect with the airport lines, and we had to make it as rapid a connection as possible. The assumption was that people who travel by air are in a hurry and that we shouldn't lose time either getting there or in making connections between different segments of the transportation system. So we brought the subway out of the ground as it came to the airport. We carried it up an incline and onto a bridge. It reminded me of a pier stretching out into the ocean. I was familiar with the Santa Monica and other piers. Our pier stretched out into the airfield. Neutra had a horror of the vast reception rooms in which persons waited for their trains to be called. This was at just the time that Union Station was being planned in the old Chinatown in Los Angeles. It hadn't yet been built, but Chinatown was being gradually eroded to make way for it, plans were out. This kind of station was something that we wanted to avoid. We wanted to bring each form of transportation as face to face with the air form as we could. We didn't know how big to make it. Our assumption was, at the time, the planes would get bigger but they wouldn't get huge. A plane wouldn't attempt to carry in a single plane all that a single train would carry on a large transcontinental railroad. Passengers in a hurry would want to avoid long waits between flights. We would have many flights and they'd be with the smaller planes. So we decided, rather arbitrarily, that we would allow for four simultaneous landings and take-offs. We had a length of runway that was recommended at that time, and we just assumed that it would take fifteen

minutes for a landing or a takeoff. So that meant four landings or takeoffs an hour, fifteen minutes for each one, and with four runways that would be sixteen in an hour. So then we proceeded to determine, how large each waiting room for a flight would be-- And it would be as near to the plane as possible, actually it would be above it. The planes would come in underneath this elevated platform and passengers could go directly down to them. One wouldn't suffer from the difficulty of understanding the voice over the loudspeaker telling where and when the plane was leaving. Of course, I can remember very well the old Santa Fe station in Los Angeles, where it wasn't a loudspeaker but a large man with an enormous voice. I was very small. I can remember holding onto my father's hand there as this man would boom out the departures and track numbers. I can remember his picking me up in his arms once. He had a big voice, he was a big man, and all this impressed me very much. However, right now we were interested in making the connections as easy and as near at hand as possible, and, having determined the size of the room for each plane bay and the number of seats in it, we then began to determine such things as the number of seats in the dining room, even the number of sandwiches in a sandwich bar, and of course the number of fixtures in the toilet rooms. All of these things, you see, were based on the plane size. With one of these details decided on in the beginning, you go ahead and each decision determines the next decision and the next and the next.

STONEFIELD

Would you say that his approach to architecture was not that of a technician, but rather that of almost a sociologist or a philosopher?

HARRIS

It was that of a designer, but of a designer of total design. I mean it wasn't just a particular thing. I mean he saw architecture as total design. And the important thing in my experience was seeing where the suggestion, as well as the need, for the inclusion of things comes from and how one thing depends on another, how it's all interrelated. This was what I learned from Neutra and I learned it on this project, and it happened just at the right time for me. So this is what I am most grateful to Neutra for.

STONEFIELD

Do you feel that others of this period had the same approach? Did Schindler have this same approach, or Wright?

HARRIS

It wasn't as related to the region and the city and total technology. It was related in a smaller way, and it was something that one used in a smaller way. It was something that I appreciated in Wright and in Schindler and in others. It was the totality of it and the fact that there was more in a design than was commonly thought of. So this really proceeded the CIAM projects. And, at the end of the city planning one, Neutra went to Europe. He was gone then for almost a year, and I worked on some projects of my own. I got a client, first for a little remodeling job, then for a small apartment building which wasn't built. It looked too much like the Garden Apartments I'm sure. Then on a building for a sculptor friend that went clear through the working drawings. Neutra had returned by that time.

STONEFIELD

What did you do while he was gone? Were you still--?

HARRIS

I worked largely on projects. I had some real things, only one was built, the others were projects only.

STONEFIELD

Your own projects, rather than his?

HARRIS

Yes, yes. Greg Ain and I worked together a great deal of the time. We worked on projects, not the same project, each of us had his own. And we kept our interest up very much that way.

STONEFIELD

Were you working in the Schindler studio and house at that point?

HARRIS

No, no. I only worked there the five days that I was working on Neutra's Lovell House. We worked at the Academy of Modern Art on, I believe, the airport

competition as well as the CIAM projects. It was a very informal class. We paid no tuition and we simply used the facilities there, mostly for Neutra's criticisms.

STONEFIELD

I wonder if you could tell me something about what these people were like, what Mr. Schindler was like, and what Gregory Ain was like. How did they affect you? How did you work with them?

HARRIS

Well, Mr. Schindler appeared to be a very easygoing person, a very genial person, one who had fresh ideas and ones that were expressed in a graphic form that was particularly appealing to me.

STONEFIELD

Did he speak a lot about his ideas? Did he talk with you?

HARRIS

We had very little conversation. I remember once meeting him out on Olive Hill when he was doing some remodeling of the larger of the two houses, the guest houses, and being a little shocked at the way he made changes in things. Things that he had designed and that Wright had designed, although he designed more of the detail of all of the Olive Hill houses than I realized at the time. The larger aspects of it were very much Wright, but the smaller ones, many of the details, I've since discovered were very much Schindler. And Schindler did them in the most sympathetic and the most imaginative way. It was his ability to drop one idea and pick up another fresh one and develop it in a way that one would think that he had been thinking about it for years and years and this was not his first try. This was very surprising to me. And his use of unconventional materials, the cheapest of materials, and extracting design possibilities from them. All of this had a very strong influence on me at the time. All of this, of course, without working with him, seeing him only occasionally. I can remember, while Neutra was away, Greg Ain and I together happened to visit the Elliott House, then under construction. And I can remember Schindler's description of things and why he was doing certain things. His explanation was very interesting, but the building wasn't as

interesting to me because this was probably about the first of his buildings in which structure no longer became the dominating factor as it had in the earlier buildings. In his own house and studio, the walls were cement slabs cast on the floor, upended into place, and tied together overhead. This was the dominating factor. The next building that I became acquainted with, which was done hardly more than a year later, was the court [Pueblo Ribera], the bungalow court, as we called all such things at that time, down in La Jolla, this was done with movable forms, using two two-by-sixteens [to] form the space in which concrete would be poured. So pouring sixteen inches at a time and then raising the boards--which were tied together horizontally and vertically by some guides--became a feature of the design. A building in which not only was [there a horizontal] unit--a four-foot unit had been used in the design studio, it was used again here--but here there was also a vertical unit, a sixteen-inch unit, so that vertical divisions, openings and other major things were multiples of sixteen inches, just as the horizontal ones were multiples of forty-eight inches. It was the directness with which results were achieved and the process, the simplest of processes, suggested the form, a form which visually became very exciting as well as economically and technically advantageous, that distinguished the design.

STONEFIELD

Were you attracted by the way he worked spontaneously on the site with materials? He did a lot of direct supervision of his own work, didn't he?

HARRIS

Yes, yes. He had direct and continuous control over the work on the site, an unusual opportunity because the work was being done usually without a general contractor, so he could modify to some extent the design. This was a great advantage. I don't know that it took this for me to realize that a building is not really designed until construction is completed. The difficulty, of course, in ordinary construction is making a change. It means a change, usually, in cost, and this means reconsideration on the part of the client and all sorts of difficulties. One tries very much to avoid them because changes always increase cost. Even if you take something out, it adds to the cost. So Schindler found this the most advantageous way for him to work. Schindler had not had

the kind of work that Neutra was eager to get, large-scale work, work as far as possible done in the factory and very much standardized.

STONEFIELD

Did he want that kind of work? Schindler? Do you think he would have wanted to do that kind of work?

HARRIS

Well, he didn't get it anyway, and he gave up trying very early. His clients were not persons with a great deal of money. They belonged to a largely bohemian group of which he became a part. And everything was done on a very personal relationship between him and his client. So there was a unity there in the design process, with the owner and the client being very closely associated, since Schindler then became in effect the contractor, although the owner was technically the contractor and Schindler was simply supervising the work for the owner for an additional fee.

STONEFIELD

So Neutra's way of working was entirely different actually?

HARRIS

It was entirely different. Neutra was interested in a different thing. They were together at the beginning, as comes out rather clearly now in Esther McCoy's book. They were students at one time in the same school, and they had a shared admiration for Adolph Loos and for others, including Wright, and for America as well but for different reasons. Schindler [was interested] partly on account of building construction here, which he had heard about through Loos, and partly on account of Wright, with whom he had been acquainted through the Wasmuth publication. Neutra [was] interested for the same reasons, but more for the methods of production in America than was Schindler. There was quite a lot of time between when Schindler came to the United States and Neutra's arrival here. Schindler arrived in 1914, early I guess in 1914, it was before the declaration of war in Europe, and Neutra [not] until--what was it?--1923, I guess it was, I don't think it was '24. So a great deal had happened. [Tape recorder malfunction disrupts conversation] Where was I?

STONEFIELD

You were telling me about Neutra coming to this country.

HARRIS

Yes. And how he and Schindler differed and how Neutra was interested particularly in the technology here. Well, I can go on with that. Neutra, after spending a very short time in New York, went on to Chicago where he met Wright and was invited to Taliesin. He was there for four or five months I believe. In Chicago he worked in the office of Holabird and Roche, which was one of the largest offices in the United States at that time. He worked on the designs for the new Statler Hotel. This was a building that exhibited all of the newest and most technical developments in building at that time and had a very strong influence on Neutra. The result was that Neutra, from that, acquired material to write a book, which he had decided upon perhaps even before he came here, which he called *Wie Baut Amerika* [How America Builds]. Anyway, when Neutra finally came on to Los Angeles he simply moved in with Schindler. (Mrs. Neutra was here by this time. She had come ahead, quite a long time ahead.) And he worked on some of Schindler's work. He designed the landscape, the garden for--

STONEFIELD

Hollyhock House?

HARRIS

Not Hollyhock, I think it was the house for Lovell, not the beach house, I believe, but a house in Fallbrook, which I have never seen. I don't know why I haven't, because I have lived in Fallbrook and have built two things there, one for myself and one for a client, and didn't realize that there was this building there. Of course it may have been so remodeled by this time that I wouldn't have recognized it if I had seen it. Anyway, then there was the announcement of an international competition for a design for the League of Nations building and Neutra persuaded Schindler to enter it with him. This was a project that took all of their energies for a great deal of time, and it's hard to know how much of the design was Neutra and how much was Schindler.

STONEFIELD

When they worked together, how did they work? How did they divide up the responsibilities?

HARRIS

Well, there was practically no work I believe on--

STONEFIELD

Well, when they did projects like that how would they have proceeded?

HARRIS

I don't know. And apparently Pauline Schindler was only aware of the fact that they were up all hours of the night, working on this for months until it was finished. The drawings that I have seen I think were made by Neutra because they have the look of his drawings, his renderings. And--

STONEFIELD

Do you think that they were, I mean how compatible were they would you say?

HARRIS

Well, probably about as compatible as two persons each with strong ideas of what he wants; as compatible as such could be. It wasn't something that could last. Neutra simply used the drafting room there as his office. He used it all during the development of the Lovell drawings, which one can't help but consider a little heartless, since he had stolen Lovell away from Schindler. Anyway, their cordiality diminished, Schindler's did, as this continued. So when Neutra left to go on his invited lecture tour of Europe in the spring of 1930 (although Dione stayed on until July), Schindler I guess decided that he wanted to keep the place for himself and that he wouldn't invite Neutra back. I don't know whether Neutra was aware of it at that time or not. Anyway, when Neutra did return in 1932, it was probably the spring of 1932, he didn't even attempt to move in there. The first day he was back I drove his car, which he had forgotten how to drive, it had been in storage the whole time he was away. Dione didn't return until some time later. [I] took him house hunting, found a place for him up near Elysian Park. Anyway, this ended not only their collaboration on projects, but their association in the same drafting room.

STONEFIELD

Esther McCoy implied in her book, the recent book, that Neutra had not treated Schindler very well.

HARRIS

I think that's entirely true. I'm quite aware of it as I consider the past that I am aware of. And all I can do is say that the intensity of Neutra's enthusiasm for certain things made it easy for him, or possible for him, to override some feelings of nicety, probably. So that it was a case of the ends justifying the means.

STONEFIELD

I wonder at this point, before we get into discussing your own projects and your own work, if you could tell me about other influences on your work and your architectural philosophy? Anything that preceded your meeting with Schindler and Neutra.

HARRIS

Well, certainly whatever character my own work has is very much affected by what I saw and experienced in the twenty years before I met Neutra and Schindler and Wright. I'm probably a little bit more aware of what these influences were as I look at my own work now and as I look back on Neutra's and Schindler's and even Wright's work and pick out what features of their work affected me. However, I am most aware of the fact that I grew up in California, particularly Southern California, and that it is very much a part of me. And I'm aware too, particularly now that I've been away for some time and California has changed a great deal, that the California I'm talking about is a place and is also a time. It was a California then, in the first quarter of the century in particular, that was remarkable for its remoteness from the rest of the country. It was the whole of the country, almost, in my mind as I thought of it then. It is also remarkable for its physical characteristics, for nature as it exists there. And this nature was marked by a great deal of variety. There one finds the highest peak in the United States, Mount Whitney, and the lowest valley in the United States, Death Valley. The longest coast line probably of any state and the biggest ocean just outside it. Marvelous deserts, the Mohave in particular, and the spectacular valleys, too, like Yosemite. Giant

trees, the sequoia. Beautiful lakes. Lake Tahoe. And, particularly at that time, the vast carpets of wild flowers that covered valleys and foothills as far as one could see. The orange groves that covered the valleys and the foothills, looking like a chenille bedspread draped over these forms. The tall palms--and I can remember those particularly--usually in rows or in pairs, with their round tops elevated on long sticks above the round tops of the orange trees below, at that time usually marking the entrances of a driveway to the house to which the orange grove belonged, at other times in long lines. They were used as street trees a great deal then, too. The tall, plume-like eucalyptus, the citriodora [eucalyptus maculata citriodora]. The bougainvillea, which was like a giant red scarf over the water tower that belonged with the--What was the house there in Pasadena right near intersection of Orange Grove and Colorado Street?

STONEFIELD

Not Wrigley?

HARRIS

No, the Wrigley is further south. This is near the corner. He was a great benefactor of Yale University and [the one] some Yale buildings [are] named after. He was arrested, or he was cited, not arrested, cited by the police in Pasadena at one time for driving his horse and carriage at too rapid a pace. Well, you wouldn't remember it. It was later turned into, I think to an art center, and it was there that the industrial design school that was a joint project of Caltech and Occidental College at one time-- Anyway, I can remember the bougainvillea that used to spread over its tank house. Bougainvillea spread over hillsides too. These are all things that are very strong in my mind. The contrasts and differences that I haven't seen in other places. The variety in nature is something that is very much a part of me and something that I like to take into account as far as possible in any building that I do. So that certainly is an influence of a California that I grew up in.

STONEFIELD

Did you feel growing up in California was different from the standpoint that man was a relative newcomer to the area?

HARRIS

Well, I think so. Because we thought of nature as there first, and, although there was great development there, the development for the most part hadn't been at the expense of the environment. We were building and doing purely man-made and artificial things within the natural setting, but it didn't seem to be destroying the setting as a whole in any way. It was a gentle nature to begin with that one could expose himself to, didn't have to protect himself from. And it wasn't a nature that had to be dominated. We didn't feel that we had to tame it. It was something that didn't require taming. It was simply something to accommodate oneself to and to develop in what he built as a means of making more complete and general living possible, but not something to be excluded in any important way. We thought of it then, or a little bit later, as a place and a climate very similar to the Mediterranean, but, as I discovered later, it's really more South Seas than Mediterranean.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (August 22, 1979)

HARRIS

Well, this nature was not only various, in great variety, but it could be very gentle and it could be very abundant.

STONEFIELD

The buildings didn't need to be in any way protecting man from a hostile environment.

HARRIS

No. They didn't exclude so much. You provide some shelter from sun and some from rain, but you didn't close it all out. It was still out there, close by. Sometimes nature could be brought in and the two interlocked, but one didn't feel that he was shut off from it. He didn't feel that it was something to be excluded, something that he needed to protect himself from. And the fact that it was so abundant made him eager to share in it. This was something I think that the settlers early discovered, this variety and the opportunity for what could be done--and, if you had some water--for what more you could do. This allowed these new settlers to consider how their new life there could be a more abundant life. With such nature and such opportunity they luxuriated in this abundance. Their minds, then, were more on the new things they could

do as a consequence of all these new things they discovered, and not so much upon reproducing or holding on to the older things that they had been simply on the east coast of the United States or whether it had been in Europe or, in some cases, of course, even the Orient. These settlers were from many parts of the world. They were there because they wanted to be there, they weren't born there. With the exception of a few Chinese coolies who may have been shanghaied and brought there, the others were there because they wanted to be there. Many of them came there to escape something. Many of the Germans, in particular, and Central Europeans came there after the 1848 revolution throughout Europe, and were there because they were democrats escaping from an antidemocratic homeland. And others were there, of course, on account of the economic opportunities there. Gold was discovered and that brought many. Most, however, were from other parts of the United States. Silver, however, brought others, it brought many from England. It brought people who were capable of more than simply panning gold, wielding a pick or doing something of that sort. These were business minds, largely because silver mining became a much more technical thing and it involved much planning. And although the silver wasn't in California, it was in Nevada, that wouldn't make any difference. In effect, Nevada was a suburb of San Francisco at that time. And so that [inaudible]. What was his name? Schliemann? Anyway, this is the man who was largely responsible for the excavations in--

STONEFIELD

Schliemann, Heinrich Schliemann, wasn't it?

HARRIS

Schliemann in Crete. He came to California to hunt for his brother who had disappeared there and who, I guess, had come for gold or silver. He stayed to make a fortune in silver and then used his fortune for these other things. Then there were all sorts of other persons there who became philanthropists in various ways. [Leland] Stanford, the founder of Stanford University, of course made his money in railroads, I guess almost entirely.

STONEFIELD

Did these people view this California that they came to in a romantic way or were they basically interested in things that functioned and were practical? I'm talking about buildings and--

HARRIS

Well, I think they very quickly became rather idealistic when they discovered the kind of life that was possible there. And most of them then used the means, the wealth, that they acquired there to a very large extent to develop those things. [James] Lick with his observatory--Well, there are lots that I can't remember, but they stayed there too. They didn't take their money and go away, for the most part. They were struck by the kind of life that could be lived there. They saw it as a place in which the future could be realized here and now. It wasn't perhaps heaven on earth, but it approached that as compared to many other places. I realize I'm idealizing all of this too. but, anyway, it's that idealization that sticks in my mind, and, I suppose, affects what picture I have of building and development of all that goes with building.

STONEFIELD

I'm thinking of the fact that the California bungalow, for example, was an attempt to provide a good kind of a life for ordinary people. You know, it was like a prototype for that.

HARRIS

Yes.

STONEFIELD

And the fact that Schindler's house, for example, had all of these health features to it. All the sleeping porches and the connections with the outdoors were an attempt to make life better for people. Was it in answer to what these people were seeking when they came to California?

HARRIS

Yes. Now, the native Californians lived in a very simple way. They lived largely outdoors, usually around the court, [with] a sheltered space made by extending the roof of the building over a portion of the court. And they went into the real interior probably only at night and on other occasions. What building had been done of a more ambitious nature in the case of the

missions, which pretty much followed the same thing, too, was done with more permanent materials than many of the California houses. This was the background, and was certainly the background of Mr. Bandini, who was the very early client of Greene and Greene, who came to them with a request for a California house. They asked him, "Well, what do you consider a California house to be?" And he described just this thing. It was done with redwood boards, which was the simplest thing that they could find. It was not very large, but it was largely open to a court. It was enclosed partly by building, partly by garden wall. And it was probably in this building that they saw the particular character that a California building might have, because their Georgian work--and that was what their earlier work there had been--certainly hadn't found any point of design departure, really. They had made the eaves a little wider and a few things like that. But the Bandini House was a real eye-opener to what a truly simple house in California might be. Jean knew the son of Bandini. An interesting thing, too, is the fact that Charles Dana, the Two Years Before the Mast man, visited California, and he reported on California. And he spoke of the primitive character, the rather low-class character, judging from the tone of his remarks, of Californians, and he used Mr. Bandini as an example of that particular low-class character, or at least the low estimation in which he held them. There was some tradition of wood building of the very simplest sort, and the board and batten building was that. I can remember when I designed the Chinese restaurant, I used something that was still called "California construction." It was then illegal according to the requirements of the building code at that time, as it was the vertical boards which actually carried the load. I saw quite a number of early houses that were built of wide vertical boards, their ends resting on the floor nailed into the side of a floor plate and carrying another plate at the top where the rafters began. A single two-by-four formed a girt around the building midway up the wall, usually right underneath the sill of the window. This single board wall carried all the roof load and was an extremely simple thing. No further material or space was necessary. At that time insulation for coolness was the only thing that they really thought much about, and we got that by shade and ventilation. So, I think this "California house" had a great deal to do with the beginning of the Greenes' interest. The California bungalow as it developed was influenced very much by this early Greene and Greene work, although

most of those who designed them and built them and lived in them had no idea who Greene and Greene were or had ever heard their names.

STONEFIELD

Had you ever heard their names by the time you got--?

HARRIS

No.

STONEFIELD

You never had. Had you seen any of their buildings even?

HARRIS

I think I had, but I hadn't inquired. And I didn't think of this as architecture, you see. This was the surprising thing. This was just natural building, that was all. And I liked it, I preferred it and disliked so much of the pretentious, largely Georgian, at least in its reminiscences, that we had there.

STONEFIELD

What about other influences before you got to Neutra, were you aware of architecture as possibilities? Or weren't there any at that point?

HARRIS

Well, these are the ones that I think of. There are other things that belong to that period, and have something to do with the sense of newness, of freshness, of abundance and of great possibilities, and also the liking of nature. John Muir had interested [Theodore] Roosevelt, had started the first interest in the conservation movement and got Roosevelt to--Maybe not directly, although Roosevelt and [John] Burroughs and others visited him out here--in the establishment of the first national forests. And then there was Luther Burbank, that we all knew very much about as schoolchildren because of his development of new species of plants of all kinds. The fact was that many people, an uncle of mine included, imported seeds from Egypt and the Mediterranean, which they planted. And arboretums were established, private arboretums. The fact that anything, almost, could grow in California if it had water made them very eager to try all of these things. So there was a sense that almost anything could be done, that progress was illimitable. And

therefore there wasn't such complete adherence to the past in all of these things that there would have been for anyone building in a colonial part of the country, as the eastern part was and still is.

STONEFIELD

Did you know at all of [Louis] Sullivan?

HARRIS

What was that?

STONEFIELD

Did you know anything about Sullivan at that point?

HARRIS

I had never heard of Sullivan, although I'm sure I had seen something of his, because it looked familiar to me when I did see his work later. It was not until, as a student at Otis, [I] went into the office of the director on some matter or other, that Karl Howenstein shoved over a typewritten sheet for me to read. It was something he had written for a magazine, and the occasion for the writing was the death of Louis Sullivan. I read it and didn't forget it, and, less than a year afterward, [Sullivan's] *The Autobiography of an Idea* was published. Howenstein spoke in his piece about the influence of Sullivan. He had worked for a short time for Sullivan, but in Sullivan's much later years. He talked, I remember, in this piece for publication about the influence that Sullivan had on draftsmen in various offices. So that I had that knowledge, but I didn't see, even in photographs, for some time any Sullivan building, and I didn't see an actual Sullivan building until I went up to Minnesota to see the Owatonna bank in '57. But I did read *The Autobiography of an Idea*, in 1926 I guess. I was very much taken with it and became a great admirer of Sullivan. And then when I saw the first Wright building, I thought of Sullivan, because this is what I thought Sullivan would have done.

STONEFIELD

Did you see other--? I know that you saw the Wasmuth portfolios.

HARRIS

Yes.

STONEFIELD

And the Wendingen.

HARRIS

Yes. Those were the only two books on Wright that I saw, the only two that I was aware of at that time. I did see work in some of the magazines. In the Architectural Record there was a series called "In the Nature of Materials," written by Wright. It was a development of something, a further development of something that he had written in 1908. An interesting thing is [what] I learned much, much later from Douglas Haskell, who died only a week or two ago and who was editor for many years of the Architectural Forum. He had been of the Record before that, and much earlier than that he had been the architectural editor, if they could have had one, of The Nation. He had been sent out by the Record--he was just a free-lance writer--to interview Wright for this 1928 series called "In the Nature of Materials." One of the stories he told me that I remember so well was that he was walking around the garden there at Taliesin with Wright. There were some visitors coming, hopefully a client, later in the day. He remarked that Wright reached up and pulled some flowers off of a tree and took them out and scattered them over the water in the pool there, and then he turned to Haskell, smiled and said, "Rubbing Aladdin's lamp."

STONEFIELD

What was the direct influence of Wright's work on you, I mean aside from propelling you into this interest? How did it affect the works that you produced?

HARRIS

Well, first of all, I guess it was the sculpture of the buildings that struck me so forcibly at the very beginning. Because here was form that was new and fresh. It had no associations, there was nothing worn about it. It was fresh and it was something that I could feel myself into. I projected myself into these forms, and I couldn't help but move and stop and turn in rhythm with them. It was a rhythmic character produced by forms that were fresh and that spoke to me as forms that had nothing that would repel me or confuse me with other associations. I think that is the first thing. And it was the realization that

architecture could be art. And then I guess plan as form was the next thing that I first discovered in Wright. I saw that very clearly of course in the plans that went with the perspectives in the Wasmuth publication, and I saw the relation of plan to outward form in such a very, very clear way there. So I then felt myself into the form of the plan, the form of the interior, not simply into the form of the outward mass. Certainly Wright has been the most continuing and strongest influence on me as far as plan goes. Plan is form and is the very beginning and essence of all form it seems to me in a Wright building. Everything grows out of that. And, of course, it was the continuity of this, as I discovered, as I saw more of Hollyhock House, the continuity of a form idea carried throughout all parts of a building, into all the details, even into the furniture, movable as well as built-in. It was the product of one mind, one sensibility, that produced it.

STONEFIELD

Did you ever meet him?

HARRIS

Oh, yes, but not for many years, and I avoided meeting him for many years because he was such a god in my mind that I didn't want to take any chance on finding that he wasn't a god. So that [in spite of] my first meeting with a building of his and the continuing influence on all of my thinking after that, from 1925 until 1940, I hadn't met him, although I did attend some lectures of his. The first I remember was, it must have been 1929, because the drawing, a perspective drawing in color in the Architectural Record, his Saint Mark's in the Bowery, was published just at that time. That was very much in my mind when I went to this lecture, which was in the evening in the Philharmonic Auditorium with not a very big crowd. Mr. Wright gave the most persuasive talk. He wasn't arguing about anything, he was earnestly trying to say something very, very clearly. He talked very much about Taliesin, and this only added to my enthusiasm for him. I don't think that I heard him talk again until, it must have been 1940, and he was in Arizona at the time building the--or planning, it never was built--the San Marcos in the Desert there and of course building their own camp there. So he was asked to speak at the dedication of use's new School of Architecture building. This was a very amusing talk. And he manipulated the crowd so beautifully. He had driven up himself from

Phoenix that day. He had gone to his son's, Lloyd's house, had bathed, changed his clothes, had put on a dinner jacket and, with his glasses on a black ribbon around his neck, he walked onto the stage in a very jaunty manner. The dean of the school of architecture there, what's his name, [Arthur Clason] Weatherhead, must have been forced into having Wright. He knew very little about him. He had no admiration for him at all, and he was something of a dunderhead anyway. He introduced--the president of USC, what was his name? [Rufus Bernhard] von KleinSmid, who in turn introduced Mr. Wright. Anyway, von KleinSmid I'm sure had not heard of Wright until that morning, and both introductions were very feeble things. Von KleinSmid was very much a stuffed shirt in appearance as well as in action. When Wright rose, he acknowledged the introduction as by Mr. KleinSmid. He left off the von. Nearly everyone in the audience I think knew that von KleinSmid's brother, who was the president of the University of Arizona at the time, did not use the von. So, anyway, it was a very amusing talk in which Wright proceeded to tell the audience that he didn't believe in schools of architecture. And he went on to tell them why. He said things that began to get a little bit under everyone's skin. You could just feel the temperature rising in there. And then, when it got to a certain point, Wright said something, something amusing, that just dissolved all opposition, and everything went back and was fine. And then in a little while I realized that the same thing was building up again. He did it three times, and then he said, "Well, the encouraging thing about this is that I can say what I have said here this evening and not be thrown off the stage." Anyway, it was an extremely interesting talk. But I still didn't go out to meet him, and it wasn't until, well, it wasn't much later. It was still in 1940 I guess that Mrs. Paul Frankl called me--it must have been 1940, because Jean was living up in Berkeley at the time and the [Weston] Havens House was under construction--and asked me to come to dinner that evening. She said, "Mr. and Mrs. Wright and Iovanna are coming to dinner, and I want you to pick them up at the Beverly Hills Hotel and bring them." Well, this was quite a long while ago, and I had an old DeSoto roadster. DeSoto was made by Chrysler at that time, and this was a roadster, a blue roadster in two tones of blue. It had a rumble seat, but there was no cushion in the rumble seat, and the front door on the right-hand side had a tendency to fly open when I made a left turn rather quickly. The idea of having Mr. and Mrs. Wright and Iovanna all in the front seat with me just paralyzed me. At this time, if you rented a car you

rented a seven-passenger limousine with a driver in uniform. That is, the driver himself came along, and it didn't occur to me that you could rent just a car. So I told Mrs. Frankl that I couldn't do that, but that I would be pleased, very pleased, to come to dinner. She had begun by saying, "I know your feeling of reluctance to meet Mr. Wright. But forget it." [tape recorder malfunction interrupts conversation] Well, Mrs. Frankl asked a girl at the office to pick them up and bring them, and I went alone and was there before the Wrights arrived. I stayed in the back of the room when the Wrights entered. Frankl had started to introduce me when Wright said, "Oh, I know Harwell," and came across the room and put his arm around me and said, "Harwell," he said, "you're a great artist. And someday, when your hair is as white as mine, you'll be a great architect." Then he went on to mention two or three buildings of mine, [at] which I was amazed. Well, it was a very interesting dinner. We were not quite in World War II then. And Wright had been talking against our entering and had been writing what they call "The Square Papers." But his son Lloyd, with whom they had been to dinner the evening before, was a very ardent anglophile, and it turned out during the conversation that Mr. Wright and son Lloyd had argued until way after midnight the night before over the war. So when Frankl asked Mr. Wright some question that touched on the war in some way, Mrs. Wright immediately interrupted and said "No, no, no," and then she mentioned this argument that had gone on so long the night before. So nothing happened. Well, anyway, after dinner Mr. and Mrs. Laughton--Charles Laughton, Elsa Lanchester--came in. Wright was quite familiar with the Laughtons' films, and, I think, owned a number of them. And Laughton knew Wright at least by reputation and somewhat by buildings I'm sure. And so they fell into a very animated conversation. I found myself sitting with Elsa Lanchester and Mrs. Wright. Elsa Lanchester I had not only seen in some pictures, in Henry VIII she was, was she Anne of Cleves?

STONEFIELD

I think so, yes.

HARRIS

And then at the Turnabout Theater which at that time was very new, and where she used to give some performances and readings, things that were

hilarious. Anyway, very soon in their conversation, Mrs. Wright, probably just to make conversation, said something about the weaving, the handweaving that they did at Taliesin, and Elsa Lanchester made some very disparaging remark. It turned out, I discovered later, it was because as a very poor girl, in a very poor family in London, she had to wear handwoven things. Anyway, each one turned her back on the other very quickly. So then I had to move over to the other group for conversation. [laughter] Laughton was very pleasant. He had some Renoirs, and when I mentioned my admiration for Renoir he immediately invited me to come see his, gave me his unlisted number. But I never went, for some reason I cannot understand. Anyway, it was an extremely interesting evening. [tape recorder malfunction interrupts conversation] Let's see. Oh, yes. Charles Laughton. Well, anyway, it was very pleasant to watch two persons who admired one another in different fields, where they could admire one another without any difficulty, doing so. I saw Mr. Wright a number of times after that. During the war, when we were in New York, I had lunch with him and Howard Myers once. That was when they were making the preliminary plans for the Guggenheim Museum. Mr. Wright invited us to stop at Taliesin on our way home to California, so we spent a weekend there with Mr. and Mrs. Wright at the end of 1944. Then, let's see, I saw him again in Mexico City--in about 1952 I think--at the Eighth Pan-American Congress of Architects there and asked him to talk to the twenty-one students from the University of Texas that I had with me. He was very obliging, posing in pictures with them. And Gropius would not, he was there too.

STONEFIELD

Why was that?

HARRIS

I don't know. Just the difference in the two persons. Then I introduced Wright at a meeting in Houston a little bit later. The meeting was the National Convention of the Cut Stone Contractors and Quarrymen's Association. The public relations firm for it had decided that they should try to interest the architects in this and that the easiest way to interest the architects would be to have Mr. Wright talk. So they got him down there for that and then they proceeded to invite the deans of all of the schools of architecture, all five of

them, in Texas, to come as guests and bring their senior classes. And so I went down. Before I left, Karl Kamrath, who knew Wright and was very much influenced by him, called me and asked me to stop by their office and we would go to lunch together before the meeting. When we were in the car headed for lunch, he informed me that I was to introduce Mr. Wright. I gave up all thought of what I was going to eat or what it would taste like, trying to think of what I was going to say. After lunch we went up to Mr. Wright's room, it was in the Shamrock Hotel. The Shamrock Hotel had been the scene of the AIA [American Institute of Architects] National Convention a few years before when Mr. Wright was given the AIA Gold Medal, and Karl Kamrath had driven Mr. Wright out to the hotel on that particular occasion. It was in the evening. The hotel was outside of town a bit. And Karl said, "You see the lights over there, Mr. Wright? That's the hotel we're going to." Mr. Wright looked and he said, "I see the sham, but where's the rock?" Anyway, the town and the newspapers in Houston, were still buzzing with some of the insults that they felt they had received at the hands of Mr. Wright when he was there on that occasion, and so the headlines in the paper had to do with Mr. Wright on this particular earlier occasion. I remember the hat-check girl in the lobby of the hotel, when we were waiting for something and Mr. Wright insisted on walking up and down the room with his arm around my shoulder and his cane up in the air. The hat-check girl, when we stopped to talk to her, was very eager to talk to Mr. Wright. She had no prejudices against anything that he had said at all. But anyway, we went up to Mr. Wright's room. Just as we got to the room, the door opened and out he came, and he said he thought he should have a shave so he was going down to the barbershop. So we went down to the barbershop and sat there while he had a shave. And then he said, "I ordered some coffee sent up to the room, so I want to have that first." So we went back up to the room. He had ordered a lemon with the coffee. Well, neither the coffee nor the lemon came. So after a while he called again, and then he said, "Harwell, you're too young to introduce an old man like me. I'm going to introduce you, is that all right?" And naturally I said yes, wondering what he would say. Well, anyway, the coffee and the lemon did come. He explained that Gurdjieff had told him that if you took lemon with the coffee the coffee wouldn't hurt you. While we had been sitting in the barbershop, the loudspeaker had announced that everyone was to go into the Shamrock Room and Mr. Wright would be along shortly. It was then rather late even

then. It was forty-five minutes later I guess when we finally got there. The place was filled, and we went up onto the small platform. The president of the association introduced the chairman, and the chairman then proceeded to introduce me. And as I got up, Mr. Wright got right up with me and put his arm around my shoulder, his cane straight up in the air. Lockstep we walked up to the center of the podium, he brought his cane down quite hard and then proceeded to talk about me. And everything he said was correct. That was the amazing thing. He didn't say University of Houston, it was the University of Texas. And the other things were all quite correct. But I had of course prepared my introduction, so, when he was through introducing me, I introduced him. And as I would mention certain things, Mr. Wright would bang his cane on the floor and he would say, "He's talking about Gropius" or "He's talking about Le Corbusier" or something else, making it a very interesting occasion.

STONEFIELD

Did you like that?

HARRIS

Yes, I liked it. I was prepared to like anything he did. Well, anyway, the Houston chapter of the AIA, when it found that Mr. Wright was going to be in town, moved the date of its monthly evening dinner to the date Mr. Wright was to be there and asked him to speak. Well, he wasn't very eager to do that. He wasn't being paid for that. And so he spoke for not more than fifteen minutes at the most, and then, without sitting down, he just picked up his hat and coat and started out. But before he had gone very far, the president of the chapter was saying to the audience, "I'm sure Mr. Wright will be glad to answer any questions you may have." Mr. Wright was halfway to the door by that time, and he turned around, still clutching his cane and coat and hat, and said, "If they're intelligent questions." There was great silence. But one young fellow who wrote specifications for Mackie and Kamrath stood up and said, "Mr. Wright, I think I have an intelligent question." And Mr. Wright stopped and looked at him and said, "What is it?" He said, "Mr. Wright, what is your religion?" Well, Mr. Wright turned around, came back, put his hat and coat down and talked for half an hour I think, and it was a really good talk. We wouldn't have had a good talk at all if it hadn't been for that question. He

thought that it was a serious question and he gave it a serious answer. And so many of the things that Wright has said and done were [done] simply so that he didn't have to listen to someone's foolish remarks and questions. And, well, then I've seen Wright on other occasions too, and I've had some correspondence, Christmas cards and things from him. So, from being a god that I keep on a pedestal so high that we don't communicate except by buildings and things like that, he became more than that, and when--

1.7. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (August 23, 1979)

STONEFIELD

You left off yesterday talking about your experiences with Frank Lloyd Wright, and before we go onto anything else I have a question to ask you. You made a very tantalizing comment in the first session about the fact that as far as you were concerned all the work after 1923 that he did wasn't anything to you compared to the work that he had done prior to that. And I wondered if you could tell me a little bit more about that.

HARRIS

Well, really I would not feel that we had undergone any great loss in the quality of his architecture if he had done nothing after 1909. To me everything really important had been done, at least in the materials and with the clients and the building situation at that time. In later work it was simply a translation to a later time with different materials and a different class of client that really makes the distinction. As far as any real change in either form or material that occurred after that, the textile block is the thing that stands out in my mind. It was what he used in California, immediately after his return from Tokyo, first with the Millard House and then with the Stoner House and then with the Freeman House and, still a little bit later, still in the early 1920s, with the-- what's the name of the shoe manufacturer, although he wasn't that--the large house up on the hill--

STONEFIELD

Ennis, the Ennis?

HARRIS

The Ennis House. Those were all very exciting things to me. They were buildings in which one is less conscious, perhaps, of the form of the life to be lived in them as a determinate of the building than of the process, material and process, itself. I think it further demonstrated the necessity of having something very definite and particular on which to begin a design. And if you don't have a client that is particularly interesting and interest[ed] in the design program and things of that sort, then a system of construction or a material can be very valuable. That, of course, was true in the earlier work of Schindler, where systems of construction were the starting point. And in all cases, and particularly in the case of Wright, no matter where he started, the design spread to take in all sorts of other particulars which arose and didn't make it any less livable, any less suitable for human occupation and use, and yet never seemed to be the beginning point. Anyway, the freshness of the design was partly due to the newness of the textile block system, which he didn't invent. It was really invented by Walter Burley Griffin, the architect who worked in Wright's office in the very early days, and who later married Marion Mahoney, and who won the competition in 1913 for Australia's new capital city, Canberra. He called his unit "Knit-lock." Anyway, this was something new, and the use of the small unit was important not only as a structural but also as an architectural feature. Except for the Guggenheim, I can't believe that the other later work added anything particularly to it. And I think the fact is that it became more and more the work of a fellowship that never seemed able to really invent, but only to elaborate on what Mr. Wright had already done, and elaboration that impressed one more as mere elaboration rather than something truly simple yet highly decorative. I would not feel that architecture had lost very much if there had been no work after that.

STONEFIELD

I wonder if he had the same quality as a teacher as Neutra seems to have had in inspiring his disciples to go out and develop their own talents to any extent?

HARRIS

Well, I don't know. In each case the teaching was incidental to the disciples watching and helping in the development of a design idea that the architect, whether it was Wright or Neutra, was engaged in. As I remarked, I think in connection with the airport competition, our learning was in being ringside

watchers and participants in the leader's thinking. Although we were not the leaders in the thinking, we were there to watch and hear Neutra weigh the factors to be considered in any decision and had the feeling that we were engaged in that thinking, participants in it and contributors in some small way, too. Anyway, it was a way to follow through the development of a design from the inside in a very, very rapid way and an exciting way. It was so very different from learning in the customary school of architecture, whether it's Ecole des Beaux-Arts or [some] other in which students work individually on projects of their own to later submit to a jury, having only occasional conferences with the instructor. Working on one's own is good, but it takes ten times as long to go as far. It depends, of course, very much on who the architect is. One has to be enthusiastic about the architect, not just as a teacher but as a designer. One understands what he does because you see it born before your eyes. You're not simply looking at something completed and without understanding all of the considerations that went into making it. And I think that one is then much less inclined to look upon it simply as a finished, completed form, standing alone, something born full-blown. Here one sees how it developed, realized it could have gone this way or that way, that this was just one of a number of possible solutions, all of which might have been equally good. This is the reason that I think this is the best way to teach design.

STONEFIELD

You worked during this period with Gregory Ain. What was the kind of relationship that you had?

HARRIS

Well, our work together was almost entirely on projects with Neutra. When Neutra was away we worked on individual projects of our own. I got my first job--This, however, was after Neutra's return and after Greg Ain had gone to work for Neutra in his new office, which he built on his return. Greg lived in a room on the lower floor there. He was married at the time and housekeeping facilities there were extremely limited. And Greg worked there for some time. However, Greg became somewhat disillusioned with Neutra. He saw other aspects of him. And he left in, I guess it must have been early in 1933, the beginning of 1933. And we worked together then. Because he had no work to

begin with, we agreed that each would help the other, but only the name of the person whose job it was would appear on the plans. Ain did the working drawings on the house and shop for the De Steiguers over in Pasadena. Later he got the Edwards House. However, he insisted upon doing all the work himself on it. And, although I followed the design's development, I really didn't work on it. Our association was more conversation about the work, criticism of one's work by the other, and general encouragement of one another, I think, more than anything else. We enjoyed working together, and I think that we felt ourselves to be a group of two, quite separate from everything except Neutra and Schindler.

STONEFIELD

Your styles were different though, your ideas were different.

HARRIS

Yes, that is true. And they became more different as time went on. Greg had worked some for Schindler. He had met Schindler even before I had, although he hadn't worked for him at that time. And I think that continued to influence him somewhat. I think the big difference between us occurred in the design of my first job to be built. You can see in the drawings of two earlier unbuilt projects, how much more like Neutra and Schindler and Ain my earlier designs were. I can probably find a perspective sketch of an early version of that first project that was built. And here comes something that really belongs to influences; not simply persons, but building and loan companies. When my first project could not be financed, looking as it did, I proceeded to change the material, to change the shape of the roof, and to change the specifications of what went inside. It was a change that I was able to make because it was changing to a roof that resembled a Wright roof and made some of the other features of the house now look a bit more like Wright. It was not either Spanish or Georgian and yet it looked more like a house, and it was acceptable to the Pasadena Building and Loan Company. And, particularly in those days, banks and loan companies had a very strong influence on the design of buildings, particularly residential buildings.

STONEFIELD

Were you and Ain different right from the beginning in your attitude towards the aesthetics, or did you diverge at some point because of something that happened?

HARRIS

I don't think so. I think we had sort of suppressed the differences. Although Ain admired Wright, his work never showed, at least in its outward form, any real Wright characteristics. In planning I think there was something of the sort. And although my first love and strongest love is for Wright, rather than for Neutra, still--as I think I remarked--at the time, Neutra, whom I very much admired, was present in the flesh and I was able to follow him and enter into his work. It was easy for me to devote myself more fully to his manner than to Wright's. But after I had been away from Neutra, gradually, not suddenly but gradually, I found more things of Wright creeping back in. It was a very fortunate circumstance that I had Neutra rather than Wright at the beginning, because I might have become so overpowered by Wright's personality that I would have not have escaped and would have become simply one of the apprentices. And I'm very glad that it came in this order. In my later work there is very much of both Wright and Neutra, and yet I think what I chose went together without any difficulty. There were no contradictions, and what was selected of each combined easily with the other.

STONEFIELD

In other words, you were free to pick and choose what went into your frame of reference.

HARRIS

Yes. And when you reach a certain point, somehow you don't think you're picking and choosing. It is just that one thing comes up in combination with something else or calls in something else. And it happens without your really stopping to think of where it comes from or thinking whether these are compatible or incompatible ingredients.

STONEFIELD

Were you aware at all of the work of Irving Gill?

HARRIS

I became aware of it first of all through comments by Neutra who had discovered Gill. I think Neutra's discovery was on some visit of Neutra and Wright together to something of Gill. Anyway, I can remember Neutra's remarking that he had told Mr. Wright that Gill was someone that should not be overlooked, that he was very important and they should make more of it. Gill had worked for Sullivan in the earlier days when Wright was also there.

STONEFIELD

Oh, they knew each other.

HARRIS

They knew one another. Gill had come to California earlier. That is, he had come to stay. And the fact that Wright already knew him probably caused Wright to dismiss him more readily than he would have otherwise. Gill was no discovery to him. But Neutra was very much struck, principally by the fact that here was an American architect, a contemporary of Loos, whose work resembled Loos's in its great simplicity of form. The flat, unbroken wall, the flat roof, and the apparent devotion to form that expressed only the needs of the space enclosed or the structure. The one thing that perhaps bothered him some was the fact that Gill oftentimes used the arch form. This was probably a wise thing as far as attracting clients is concerned, because that was one feature that distinguished the Mission-style work, which was not considered modern and therefore acceptable. I think it was a very good feature. It was something that I've always admired in the missions. The repetition of the form. It's a unit that is repeated and repeated and so the box loses something of its boxiness. I think it also takes on a more human scale, and it provides a horizontal movement that simply squares punched in a flat surface do not.

STONEFIELD

Were you aware of the Dodge House?

HARRIS

Yes. The Dodge House. Then I saw the La Jolla House for the newspapers heiress, Ellen Scripps. I was already rather interested in that because, when I was a student-life reporter at Pomona, I was assigned to interview a faculty member of the building committee for a new biology building that Miss

Scripps was giving the college. She gave some other things later. So perhaps I first heard of her there. I may have seen her house in La Jolla and then the Bishop's School there on my first trip down to see the bungalow court, Pueblo Ribera of Schindler's. I don't know whether it was at that time, but I saw the Scripps House quite early and I was interested. But I wasn't as overpowered by it as I was by Wright, and at the time I was perhaps more interested in the newness that I saw in Schindler and Neutra.

STONEFIELD

You didn't know Gill?

HARRIS

I never knew him. With Greg, I remember visiting a small apartment building in Santa Monica. We were inside the building. It was the first Gill building I had been inside of and I know I was rather struck by the way windows were used. And then later, this was quite a little bit later I think, I saw the--Oh, what was that, rather larger court, it was housing, presumably for lower middle-class workers. It wasn't Sierra Madre, where was it, it was out--

STONEFIELD

Was it Pico Rivera? Something like that?

HARRIS

I don't know what it's name was. Yes I do. It's Sierra Court.

STONEFIELD

I know which ones you're talking about.

HARRIS

I remember Fritz Gutheim, the architectural writer, the critic among other things, wanted to see it, and so we went out together to see it. I don't believe that I had seen it before that time. So I was aware of Gill, and I admired what I saw. I wasn't as emotionally aroused by what I saw as I was by the best of Schindler and Neutra and, of course, Wright. But he was certainly one to be respected and, as anyone at that time who seemed to be somewhat free of the prevailing traditions, he interested me.

STONEFIELD

How did you come to begin your own practice, to leave Neutra and go out on your own?

HARRIS

Well, that simply happened because while Neutra was away I acquired a client.

STONEFIELD

How did that happen?

HARRIS

Well, my best friend got married. That's the way such things oftentimes happen. He had been a fellow student at Otis. He married. His wife was somewhat older than he. She was the buyer for the French Room at the new Bullock's Wilshire. But, as far as taste in architecture was concerned, maybe in other things, too, it was largely the husband's in this case. He was making very little money as a sculptor, practically nothing at all, and he was working for the Paul J. Howard nursery at the time.

STONEFIELD

What was his name? Your friend?

HARRIS

Clive Delbridge. He was a Canadian. He and I and one other sculptor, George Stanley, were a trio. George continued as a sculptor, and, unfortunately, the piece of his that is best known is that very ugly Oscar statuette. He did a number of things at the time that may have brought him that job. He was doing a portrait, I remember, of the daughter of an MGM producer. And he got involved in some other things at the studio and--What was the name of one of the most prominent directors--Cedric Gibbons, who fancied himself something of a sculptor and made a rough sketch of what he wanted George to make. I can remember when George was working on it, and I can remember my criticisms of what he was doing, which he did not deny at all. Anyway, the three of us, throughout two years of Otis, saw a great deal of one another. Clive and I read a great many things together, at least we were always telling

one another of some book and recommending to the other what we were reading. So it was natural that he would want a house by me, and so this was the way it started. In addition to his taste, which was influenced very much by the oriental, principally the Southeast Asia sculpture--India, Bali, Java, and what's the country that was overrun by the Vietnamese?

STONEFIELD

Cambodia?

HARRIS

Cambodia. We were both very much struck by Cambodian sculpture. I can remember our reading many things together. I can remember reading Count [Herman Alexander] Keyserling's Travel Diary of a Philosopher.

STONEFIELD

Did you feel particularly drawn to the oriental?

HARRIS

Yes, very much so. As sculpture, I think it interested me, perhaps more than any other. We were both of us, and I, especially, I suppose, influenced by European moderns to some extent, [Aristide] Maillol in particular, also [Georg] Kolbe, I can't think of the others right now. Not very much by [Alexander] Archipenko. I think we both found ourselves more impressed, more emotionally involved, with Asiatic art. I was very taken by the Chinese. Perhaps the Chinese drawing had a great deal to do with this, but so had Chinese sculpture. I think I mentioned in our first talk the General Munthe collection of Chinese work that came to the museum [Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art] and that I studied and enjoyed for quite a long while. Anyway, this was--

STONEFIELD

I was just going to ask when you first became aware of oriental architecture and involved with that?

HARRIS

I don't think I can remember the exact time. I suppose that it may have been the Japanese house, first. But so much of this acquaintance was through

books, rather accidental juxtaposition of books, whether in a library or in a bookstore, that led from one thing to another. Anyway, Clive and I shared these enthusiasms. The Lowe House, which was my first house, was influenced first of all by Frank Lloyd Wright's plan forms, next by Neutra or Schindler exterior developments--which were later dropped in favor of an exterior that resembled much more Wright's work, as far as roofs go--then by Japanese interiors with their simplicity and sliding panels, and matting on the floor. Now, with this part of the Japanese we're getting into something else you asked about and that is Carl Anderson's influence. Carl Anderson, whom I had met along with others who were a part of the S. MacDonald-Wright group, which was called the Los Angeles Art Students League--and, in passing, let me remark that S. MacDonald-Wright at that time was very much interested in Chinese painting-- It's these asides that get me off track and I have trouble remembering where I was-- Oh, yes, Carl Anderson was a member of that group. He was furniture designer at the time. But he had built a little house for himself. He had remodeled a little mountain cabin built on a hillside on the same hillside in Fellowship Park in which my own house was later built. In fact my first acquaintance with Fellowship Park was visiting him. He was finishing work on this cabin. He was gradually changing it from this rough stone and wood cabin of very nondescript design into a Japanese building. He was using this matting on the floor. It was not a Japanese matting. I mean it was not a traditional Japanese matting. These squares were made in a number of places at that time. The best were made in Japan out of the sea grass, others were made out of hemp in the Philippines, and still others, exactly the same form and size, were made in the Caribbean, and the Caribbean is the poorest quality of all. Anyway, this was a way of covering the floor wall to wall in the same way that Japanese matting would do. It was very inexpensive at the time, we could buy it for ten cents a square foot. And you could walk on it in shoes with heels, you didn't have to take them off as you would with a Japanese mat. So it was a practical thing. It was a very attractive thing. It was exactly a foot square, it could work in with my unit system. At that time I was using a three-foot unit, which was exactly the width of three squares and, incidentally, the width of the customary Japanese sliding panel. So, aside from photographs, Carl Anderson's house was probably the thing that really interested me in the Japanese house. In plan, it couldn't be as simple as it would have been if he had started from the beginning. And I

proceeded to be perhaps more simple in my plan than he could be. It was because he had introduced me to the details of the sliding panels, to the matting on the floor, and because he had some chairs that he had designed-- And they're right down there, those two low rattan chairs. I was designing a room in 1938, or 1939 I guess it was, for the New York World's Fair. I suppose I was representing California. They had only twelve rooms altogether in this "America at Home" exhibition at the fair. I wanted to use the matting and I wanted to use the chairs, so I asked Carl Anderson to be associated on it. He designed nothing for it, except a chaise-longue of rattan to go with the chairs, and, yes, he designed two tables (I don't know whether he designed them or I, they were not his sort of design) and one of them is that old wreck that is out there in the garden room now. These were laminated bentwood and there were two of them that went together. There was some hardware to lock them together, and that one still has the hardware on the other side of it.

STONEFIELD

How did you come to collaborate with him on buildings?

HARRIS

Well, that was all the collaborating we did. I wanted to use these things that he had already designed, with the exception of the chaise longue. And so I simply gave him credit for it.

STONEFIELD

I see.

HARRIS

He did not design the room. He designed the furnishings, which were a very important part of the room. He lived near me there on the hill during the time that we were doing this. He sold the place and moved away later, and we sold and moved away too.

STONEFIELD

But you didn't work with him on the Bauer House?

HARRIS

No.

STONEFIELD

You didn't?

HARRIS

Again, I used the same matting and sliding glass panels.

STONEFIELD

I see. So you just gave--

HARRIS

And I felt that I owed him the credit for these particular features of it.

STONEFIELD

I see.

HARRIS

I don't think he ever saw the Bauer House.

STONEFIELD

How do you feel about collaboration? Obviously you haven't done it very--So that you must not feel it necessary.

HARRIS

It's a little hard to separate parts of design. I've never had partners but twice, and neither for very long. The first one was an engineer in Fort Worth. That lasted not more than a year, and he didn't attempt to enter into anything more than the engineering aspect, engineering and some business aspects. The other was a former student of mine who was working for me in Dallas in 1961 or '62, David Barrow. He was a good designer all right, but the preliminary design and a great deal of the other design was mine. It's the only way I think that I can work satisfactorily, and I think it's the best way. It was the way that I worked with Neutra. I gave myself over completely with him. I never thought of trying to introduce anything that I didn't consider was his. And then when I was away from him, then I was completely free.

STONEFIELD

I see.

HARRIS

But to work for someone and constantly fight that influence is a very destructive thing I believe.

STONEFIELD

What happened, how did your practice progress after these initial projects?

HARRIS

Well, very slowly. If I could have one job a year I was doing pretty good. It was the depression as you know. The first house was designed in 1933, built in 1934. Then through a friend of mine, a seismologist at the Carnegie and Caltech seismological laboratory there in Pasadena, I got a job designing a house for a professor of economics at Caltech, Professor Graham Laing. The Laings were friends of the Neutras, and I first met them at Neutra's, but only once there. I don't think they remembered me. But I couldn't forget them.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (August 23, 1979)

HARRIS

The Laings were friends of the Neutras and I think the reason that they didn't go to Neutra for a house was that, although they admired his design, they were afraid that he would dominate them too much in what they were going to do. And, as so often happens, you try to take someone that you think will give you the same thing but won't force it on you. I've seen this happen. This happened with me when someone who has worked for me has been chosen for the same reason. I understand it very well. Anyway, this was my second house, and I had a little more money on this. The first house cost \$3,720, and the Laing House cost \$5,000 and was perhaps a bit more Wrightish in its details. The eaves were a little bit broader, there was a fascia band running around the rooms at doorhead height, the walls were stucco. And, then, that summer, after the Laing House was practically finished, a cousin of mine in Bakersfield wanted to add a room and do a little remodeling to his house. So I went up there and spent two or three months doing that. And then the Lowe House owners--My friend Clive Delbridge and Pauline Lowe were now

separated, and she didn't like the way the Japanese panels rattled in the wind, wanted them removed and hinged, screened doors put in, which I did. The contractor sold me the panels for a dollar apiece, and with then I proceeded then to design this little pavilion up on the hill for ourselves.

STONEFIELD

Fellowship Park House?

HARRIS

Yes. And about that time, 1936, I was asked to design a house for Edward and Margaret De Steiguer. Do you want to go into the details of these things or not?

STONEFIELD

Well, if you feel that they're particularly--

HARRIS

It was a house on the south side of Colorado Boulevard, and the little shop that went with it-- Even though it faced on Colorado Boulevard, it was in a district that was residential, and the planning commission of Pasadena insisted that it was not for business buildings, not even this crafts shop that the De Steiguers wanted to build there in connection with their own residence, which I was designing at the same time. So we had to get a variance for that. In working out the shop to make it look not like a business building at all, I hit on a roof which I later developed more fully. I brought in lighting through the roof from the south so that the windows, which were show windows in the north wall, would not become reflectors merely of what was passing in the street. And, to avoid the customary shed roof look, I carried the lines of the hips up and over with wide ridge-boards, and then turned the roof down slightly again, paralleling the slope on the other side, which I liked, which I still like. So there was no great change happening in these two or three years. I don't remember immediately what the next job was, but they came slowly. There was very little being built that wasn't residential, and I happened to like residential work. The modernists that I was admiring and following were residential, at least at that time, beginning with Wright, and that was all that

Neutra had at the same time, all practically that Schindler had. So I became very much settled into house design.

STONEFIELD

Was there a lot of contact between you, socially and otherwise, and other architects during this period.

HARRIS

No, hardly at all. I hadn't known them beforehand. I hadn't come up the usual way, either through an architectural school, where I would have known others as students, nor had I worked as a draftsman in anyone's office. So I knew none that way. All that I knew were by having them pointed out to me, being told that this building or that building was by them, and of course hearing some stories. So, I was quite apart from all of those, and it was only quite gradually that I came to know others. In 1930, well, let's see, in 1930--Well, let's go back a little bit. The Lowe House I decided to enter in a House Beautiful competition. And I won honorable mention. And, to get photographs for it, Carl Anderson took me to Fred Dapprich, who had photographed his house. Dapprich agreed to photograph mine for nothing and to charge me only if I won a prize. Well, I won a hundred dollar prize so I was able to pay him for the photographs. He photographed most of my work after that. Then, that same house I submitted to Pauline Schindler when she was editing a 1935 issue of California Arts and Architecture devoted to modern work in California. And then, a little bit later in the year (and this was what made me acquainted with other architects or made other architects acquainted with me more than anything else) was the General Electric competition for the design of a small house. It drew a great many entries because none of the offices had any commercial work to do. This competition was won by two young architects, [Paul] Schweikher and [Theodore Warren] Lamb, who had built practically nothing at the time. The plan that they submitted, which was published in Time magazine when announcing the outcome of the competition was almost an exact reproduction of my plan of the Lowe House, even including some just incidental things like a screening wall that ran out three feet beyond the intersecting glass wall of the living room, and which was a hangover from the time when the house was designed for a wider lot and we had a garage there and the garage went back three feet further than the living room. When

we moved the house onto a forty-nine foot lot I had to take off the garage and put it around in front, which improved the whole thing really. But because the living room glass then came right to a corner, which I thought was awkward, I just decided to let that piece of wall remain. Well, even this was in the winning Schweikher and Lamb design. And then, more striking still, was in the Time magazine account of it, which gave two sentences from the winners of the competition that were word for word from the House Beautiful publication. There were two publications by this time. The first was House Beautiful and the next was Pauline Schindler's—

STONEFIELD

Her article.

HARRIS

Yes, California Arts and Architecture. Well, a little bit later when Forum published the whole thing, we found there were altogether seven sentences taken almost word for word, as well as the floor plan. So suddenly I became well known. To have my work stolen was the most fortunate thing that ever happened to me.

STONEFIELD

Really?

HARRIS

And years and years later I would meet people in other places, particularly magazine editors, architectural magazine editors, who would begin immediately talking about the steal. Anyway, this rather helped. Now, John Entenza, who was trying to make a place for himself as a composer of scenarios for the movies and living in a house that his father owned but didn't live in, but had to have in this district because he had been trying for years, and continued for years afterwards, to be elected to Congress from this particular district. And John happened to read-- Oh, yes, I've lost another step. When I saw this in Time magazine-- I saw it because a friend of mine called me up on the phone and said, "I see you've won the General Electric competition." This was for designs, not for things that had been built. And I didn't think it was worthwhile entering the competition. I knew I wouldn't win

anything. And I said, "Oh, you're kidding." And he said "No." He said, "You look in the last issue of Time." So I got a copy and looked, and there it was. I was convinced then. So then I called George Oyer, who was the publisher of California Arts and Architecture, and I told him about this, and wondered if he would be interested in it. And, although he hadn't been particularly interested in the house when it was published before in California Arts and Architecture, he was very interested now that it had been copied. [laughter] So he decided that [in] the forthcoming issue, which was just about to go to the press then, he would include this story. And he set up two pages, two facing pages, one with their design and one with mine, and the heading was something about "California architect wins national competition but" (I've forgotten) "somebody else wins the money." The \$2,000. Of course, \$2,000 was practically the cost of the house.

STONEFIELD

They didn't get to keep the money, did they?

HARRIS

Oh, yes, they did, I'm sure they did. Anyway, he ran off proof sheets of this and then sent them to all of the architectural magazines before California Arts and Architecture was off the press. Neutra, when he saw it, wrote a letter to the architectural adviser for the competition who was also the editor of Architectural Forum. Well, anyway, John Entenza saw this issue of the magazine, and he was so interested in it that he simply came to see me. And it wasn't until, well, at least a year and a half later, that he came back, this time to ask me to design a house for him.

STONEFIELD

What kind of a person was he? How did you feel about him?

HARRIS

Well, he wanted to be a writer. He was a graduate, I think, of the University of Virginia, and his father was an attorney, and, as I think I started to say, John was living in a house that his father owned. He was living there rent free. And he was writing campaign speeches for his father and doing things like this. And he was a bachelor, remained a bachelor. He was a very interesting person to

talk to. As a consequence of this bit of architectural and literary plagiarism, I suddenly became a fair-haired boy as far as California Arts and Architecture was concerned. And then when Mr. Oyer died, which wasn't a great deal later, his assistant, Jerry Johnson took over, and so everything that I did was immediately published in the California Arts and Architecture. And then, suddenly, Jerry Johnson was going to have a baby, and the question was who was going to run the magazine while she was away. And we suggested John Entenza. And so he came in as temporary editor and remained as permanent editor.

STONEFIELD

And acquired the publication?

HARRIS

Yes. This is something that I don't know how much I can truthfully say. He acquired it with very little money, just as he built his house with very little money. Largely on account of the pressure that his father, and particularly his father's partner, a young woman, I've forgotten her name for the moment, for whom I also designed a house which wasn't built. For her I did move a house that Neutra had built as an exhibition house. Anyway, they were able to put pressure on various ones, whether it was on a contractor to build a house for John or on others to acquire the magazine for him. It was our feeling that Jerry had really been cheated in this. That caused our break with John. So when a little bit later he was starting his Case Study program and asked me to design a house for the magazine, I refused to do it. We've seen him occasionally since, once, about twenty years ago I remember we met at Columbia University, and he was there talking to Jimmy [James Marston] Fitch. Saw him down here in North Carolina once. We're on speaking terms, all right, but not as cordial as we once were. Saw him also once at a convention in Chicago. He had ability, there was no question about it. We were annoyed at the fact that he proceeded to drop the California part, not only in the name but also as the primary interest of the magazine. Our feeling was that it was a regional magazine and that had been its strength. It had started as a combination of two magazines. One was called California Southland. I remember the editor of that, Mrs. Sears. I met her when I was working on the model of the Lovell House for Neutra and she came over to see it. It was hard for her to take, to

accept the design, and I can remember her speaking about proportion. She hoped, of course, that that would save it. She couldn't see anything else that would. Anyway, these two magazines had combined, and it was, at the beginning, the official publication of the Southern California chapter of the AIA [American Institute of Architecture]. Later it grew strong enough to do without it, but yet it devoted itself so fully to California architecture that it was just as good for the chapter, perhaps even better than the chapter had been editing it itself.

STONEFIELD

And then he changed the name. Did he change the quality of it, too, or--?

HARRIS

Well, he wanted to make it an international magazine, national, anyway, if not international. I can understand his ambition to do that, but I thought it was a mistake to do so as long as California was as distinctive as it was then. We had discovered this when we began to know the editors of other magazines, of Record and Forum and directors of the Museum of Modern Art to whom we introduced John Entenza. It helped him quite a little bit at the beginning too. These other magazines would spot things. They very carefully read California Arts and Architecture, and if you had something in California Arts and Architecture that was any good, you'd immediately get a call or a letter from the editor of one of the national magazines. It fed the national magazines, and it seemed to me that that was its principal function. It was distinctive that way. John made a very good magazine out of it. It finally failed. He telephoned us one evening here in Raleigh, he wanted to sell it. We weren't interested then. He knew that we had been very interested in the magazine at one time.

STONEFIELD

What did you think of the Case Study program?

HARRIS

Well, I think it was a good one. And I don't see that that was at all in conflict with the California theme.

STONEFIELD

That came after he had changed it, though, and started to make it more--

HARRIS

Well, it came along with the other changes that came about, not instantly but rather soon. It must have been a couple of years at least, maybe more before the name was changed.

STONEFIELD

How was he as a client? You designed his house.

HARRIS

He was a very good client. He was the client I have quoted as saying--He came to see me about a house and I took him out to the Fellowship Park House, which wasn't even built, of course, when the plagiarism proposition came up. He's a large man, and he looked rather large, and I don't know whether the floor shook when he walked or not. But, anyway, he said, "This is the kind of house I don't want. But if you can design this house, I know you can design the house I do want." It was a remark that was easy to remember.

STONEFIELD

The house that you did design for him was very different from all of your other things.

HARRIS

Very different, because he said he wanted a different house. First, it had to be a small house, a very small house, because he had no money. And it was built of definitely less fragile materials. It was on a different site. Whether you could call this more masculine or not I don't know, but I know that others, [David] Gebhard in particular, talked about it as an International Style house. I didn't think of it that way at all, but you can pick out a flat roof, a plain wall, and perhaps the semi-circular driveway and the semicircular edge of the roof over the driveway as International Style trademarks, although I didn't think of them as that at all. The curve came entirely from the fact that I had only a fifty-foot lot. It was on a steep slope, it was at a blind turn in the street, and it was on filled ground, free from the Roosevelt [Pacific Coast] Highway, which had just been finished. We put it partly on stilts and as close to the street as we could. I didn't want to back out into the street with this blind turn. With his 1935 Ford you could make a complete turn in a fifty foot circle if you never

straightened your wheels. So we made a semicircular drive so you'd come out head first onto the street, onto Mesa Drive. And then, having made this semicircular drive, it was just an instinctive reaction to make the contrary curve in the roof over it. And then that led to a semicircular end on his bedroom at the back, where you could get a much wider, a sweeping view down Santa Monica Canyon. I considered that the flat roof would be cheaper. It also enabled me to be a little freer with the plan, and it was a change for a client who was also a change.

STONEFIELD

He must have had very strong feelings about how he wanted everything to be.

HARRIS

Not a great deal. He was a bachelor. He was going to do his own cooking. I had a very small kitchen. We had no room for a dining room. We had a living room that was twenty-four feet long and I think only fifteen feet wide. And I put the refrigerator in the kitchen up high. Refrigerators weren't quite so big then, and I believe we had the compressor and other freezing mechanisms in the top. Anyway, I raised it up enough so that a table, a standard height table, could sit in front of it and yet the door could swing over it. And that table, which I designed, was the dining table, which was part of the kitchen when it wasn't used for dining. Then the wall between the kitchen and the dining room, the whole wall, in contrast to the other walls, was a wood panel wall, and in it was a sliding door. So that guests would come into the living room, see no provisions for dining whatever, and then, when Entenza slid the door back, here was the table already set and on wheels, and he simply pushed it out into the living room. I don't know that there were any other things that were particularly affected by his way of living. The living room was not large. We had a very large hearth to make the fireplace seem even larger. And we tied into the hearth a built-in sofa, which I also designed. It could even be used as a guest bed. And above that we had clerestory openings, quite high up, through which one could see the line of eucalyptus along the top of the ridge on the south. And on the north, one looked through two pairs of sliding glass doors which filled an eighteen-foot-wide opening. That left three feet at one end for a glass door which was a hinged with a screen door over it and could be used for ventilation, and at the other end the three-foot-wide opening into the

bedroom. This way no screens were necessary over the large sliding door openings, and they then gave direct communication without any change in floor level to a deck, which was made up of spaced two-by-fours which allowed the rain to go through. The doors were on barndoor hardware, which was very cheap and had wood which made them much cheaper than the metal that we would get at that time. So the fact that it cost only \$3,120 isn't so terribly surprising, despite the fact that it was hillside construction. Anyway, John lived in it for quite a long while. And then later, Charles Eames and--

STONEFIELD

Are you thinking of his wife?

HARRIS

I mean the Finn.

STONEFIELD

Aalto?

HARRIS

Mo.

STONEFIELD

I don't know who you're talking about.

HARRIS

His father won the second prize in the Chicago Tribune Tower competition in 1923, came here at the invitation of an industrialist and established the school up in Michigan. He was a great planner. The son was a graduate of Yale, designed many things for Yale. He designed the Dulles Airport. Go on--

STONEFIELD

Oh, Saarinen.

HARRIS

Saarinen, Eero Saarinen. I had met Eero Saarinen when Charles Eames had brought him into the office one day when he was out there. Eames was

designing a studio for the sculptor daughter of--Oh, what was her name, was it Annette Kellerman? No, it wasn't. She was a very famous woman swimmer of the time. Well, anyway, John met Eero through Eames, who was not living there at the time, wasn't married at the time, or wasn't married to his later wife Raye. They did some Case Study houses I think, and then they ended up by designing a house for John out there in the canyon, somewhere near Eames's own house.

STONEFIELD

When you think back on your list of clients, what characteristics would you say would make a really perfect client?

HARRIS

Well, a perfect client is an intelligent client with a lot of imagination who wants a great deal and has the money to pay for it. [laughter] What I'm trying to say is that it takes a person who wants more than just what his neighbor has to make a good client. It takes a person who makes the architect stretch himself. He needs to want a lot and he needs to demand a lot. He simply has to demand it intelligently is all. He comes more nearly to being a perfect client than the one who says, "Here, you have this much money, design whatever you want." He's the poorest client of all because you have nothing to begin with and nothing to jolt you out of design thoughts or habits of your own past.

STONEFIELD

What happened--this is a complete change--what happened, when the Second World War started, to architecture in Los Angeles?

HARRIS

Well, things didn't close down quite as quickly there as they did in the East. I can remember various visitors, architects from the East, such as Carl Koch, accompanied by his father, who came to see me. Everything had closed up in Massachusetts sometime before, and they were very pessimistic. I was still quite optimistic. But, to most architects, we were still in the Depression. I had started in the Depression, so depression was normal as far as I was concerned. I continued the office until it was quite obvious that things were going to close down completely.

STONEFIELD

When was that?

HARRIS

Well, we closed the office in 1943. It was actually when jobs under construction had been entirely finished. Some had started at the very beginning of the war. The Havens House was started just before and it was finished just a week or two before Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. And I had under construction at that time the Birtcher House in Los Angeles, the Lek House in La Jolla, and the Treanor House up in Visalia. And when those were done, I don't think I took on any other work, nothing of any size or interest that I can remember. So we simply decided to see the East, which I'd never seen, and we went to New York. We stayed there from about April, 1943, until about December, end of November, '44. We were there almost two full years. And by that time, the war was over in Europe but not in Japan, but it was obvious that it was going to be over very, very shortly, and I was very eager to get back into practice. While we were in New York I was a visiting design critic part of the time at Columbia University. I worked half a day most of the time for Donald Deskey, an industrial designer, on architectural projects, various ones. The one I think that was most interesting was designing a utility core. Deskey was convinced that when the war was over the airplane manufacturers would be without anything to do. With all their equipment they should be building prefab houses. He had already designed a prefab ski shelter that had been an exhibit in the New York 1938 [actually, 1939-40] fair. "Ski shack" I think is what he called it. Anyway, he was not busy with the prefab house. There were two aspects of it. One was the building itself, the structure, and he had Robert Davisson busy on that. And the other was a utility core around which the house would be built. I came in simply because Howard Meyers of the Forum had recommended me to Deskey, who put me on a project that was just starting. Also on this project was Lawrence Kocher. Lawrence Kocher had been editor of the Record back in the late twenties and thirties. He was the editor of the Record when our airport competition was published. He was also, incidentally, the uncle of the contractor who built John Entenza's house. Before he had been on the Record, he had been dean of architecture at the University of Virginia. He was Swiss by ancestry, although American born. He was born in Stockton, California. He was an extremely

likeable person. While he was on the Record he became very interested in the Rockefellers' desire to rebuild Williamsburg, and he devoted two issues of the Record to that subject. It was rather strange, because he was a committed modernist and yet he was quite interested in this. And when all this was over, later, through with this work there, he retired to Williamsburg, to some kind of a job there, and did some further guest teaching I think in the College of William and Mary there. Anyway, he had been thinking about this utility core and decided it should have a prefab fireplace in it, a woodburning fireplace. I was very skeptical that we could make a decent plan around the core with a fireplace, because it meant that we not only had to have a wall of the core connecting with a kitchen, a laundry, and a bathroom but also a living room. The circulation problems that one would get with all of this right there in the middle seemed too difficult. So I sat down first to design some floor plans of buildings to go around it, buildings, that might [be] prefabricated as well. And, to my great surprise, I worked out three plans very quickly that kept the circulation outside the center and they all worked fine. So then I was all for it. I did most of the design work on it. It became a rather large core because it not only had to provide for the fireplace, which was recessed in it, but [also] connections for the kitchen, the bathroom, and the laundry. But we got them all in. Since it had to have periphery enough to space all the plumbing fixtures, it was large. I forgot whether it was eight or ten feet square. I think we got it down to eight feet. But, anyway, it was a bit big. We had some vacant space inside, so we put the water heater and furnace in there. And then, because it meant not only the fireplace, but the kitchen sink, the laundry equipment and the bathroom fixtures were in the building's center, they were far away from any windows in outside walls. So then the problem was to see if we couldn't light them through the roof. So around the chimney I put a light shaft that gave daylight into each of the four rooms. Well, the war ended shortly after I got back to California. I was very eager to get back because I wanted to get back into building design. I had no sooner arrived home than Joseph Hudnut, who was dean of Harvard and who had brought [Walter] Gropius there to begin with and then [Marcel] Breuer and, what's the name of the planner. Englishman who had been editor of British Architectural Review, I think he still lives in New Haven, Tunnard, Christopher Tunnard. Anyway, Hudnut telephoned and offered me an associate professorship at Harvard. If he had done that before we left New York for California, I undoubtedly would have

taken it. I'm glad, though, that I didn't, really, because I did get back into work, and the work I could do in California I wouldn't have found the clients for in the East. And then there was a call, almost immediately after that, from industrial designer Donald Deskey who said that he had a client for the utility core. His proposed client, the one with whom he had been talking all of this time, was the aircraft manufacturer, Glenn Martin, down near Baltimore. Anyway, the war was over and Glenn Martin had plenty of orders for airplanes. All the companies found that to be the case and they didn't have to go into prefabrication housing as some of the others like Consolidated Aircraft [Company] down in San Diego--it later took another name. General Dynamics, and moved to Fort Worth. So Deskey had to go elsewhere for a client, and he went to Borg-Warner, and Borg-Warner's subsidiary, Ingersoll Steel and Disc Company, bought the utility core design.

1.9. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (August 23, 1979)

HARRIS

So I came to a meeting in Chicago with Mr. Ingersoll, the president of Ingersoll Steel and Disc Company. We discussed the utility core's influence on housing, and I was delighted to discover that Mr. Ingersoll was not interested unless what he was going to build and do was something that had more than mere commercial value. He decided that they would build examples of houses using the core, and we would have a variety of houses. Donald Deskey chose the architects, and, because I had designed it, he gave me the largest of the houses to do. It was unfortunately too large in my opinion, because it had to have three bedrooms, and you needed more than one bath to have three bedrooms. However, we went ahead with it. Others that he had there who designed other ones--Ed [Edward D.] Stone designed one. He had the smallest one. He put it up on stilts, and then when it was well along he said, "Isn't it a shame to waste all of this ground down here?" So they let him close it in. So his actually came out to be the biggest. And--What's his name in Midland, Michigan? His father, or his family is the chemical company there. Oh, Dow, Alden Dow. There were five of us I think altogether and the Forum ran a special issue with all five houses in it.

STONEFIELD

These were never built?

HARRIS

They were built.

STONEFIELD

Oh, they were?

HARRIS

They were built. Mine was built out of very poor material. It was redwood with a natural finish. The redwood was full of sap-wood and it looked like the lining of those old cedar closets with the narrow boards, part red and part white. I never saw the house after it was finished, only the photographs.

STONEFIELD

Where was it built?

HARRIS

It was built in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

STONEFIELD

We never have really discussed your wife, who has strong architectural interests. I wonder if you could tell me when you met her and what her background was?

HARRIS

Well, when I met Jean she was a social worker. She had done some other things. She had been assistant to the physician for women at UCLA--then called SBUC [Southern Branch, University of California]--when it was out on North Vermont Avenue, and she had worked for the Travelers' Aid. But she wasn't really interested in any of the work that she was doing.

STONEFIELD

She had gone to Berkeley she said.

HARRIS

As a student, yes, she had entered Berkeley in 1914, must have been, because she graduated in '19. She took a degree in economics because she was convinced that that was something she could never teach, and she was afraid that if she took something that she could teach she would end up teaching, which she didn't want to do. She went to New York directly after graduation from Berkeley, without even going home. She went to New York with only thirty-five dollars in her pocket. Her ambition was to work in every industry in which women were employed and maybe become the first woman Secretary of Labor. Anyway, she lived a part of the time with friends, the Gumberts. Emma Gumbert she had met when she was in college. Emma had married a Russian who was an adviser to Chase National Bank at the time, an adviser on all things Russian. He had participated in takeovers of banks and all sorts of things. Anyway, she lived with them part of the time and part of the time in Greenwich Village. But her great interest was in the labor movement. She was advised to go into the garment industry because that was where she could do the most good. And so that was her interest up until the time she returned to Los Angeles when she went into this other work. She was married during this time in New York to a labor leader. They were no longer living together. When we met, we were the only two sober persons at a party and that drew us together. Her interest in architecture really began after that. She was acquainted with the Schindlers. But it had been not on account of architecture, but the Schindlers' parties which included people of all sorts, radicals of every kind. But the start of our acquaintance--

STONEFIELD

Was it at a Schindler party that you met?

HARRIS

No. No. I don't think they had any drunken parties at Schindler's. This wasn't particularly drunken. I'm trying to remember the name of the girl whose party it was. Anyway, she became interested in architecture on account of my interest. We were not married for two or three years. She had met the Neutras at the Schindlers. In fact, she had met them the second day after Dione had reached this country. So she really knows more about the early parties at the Schindlers than I do because they really preceded my part in them. I had met Schindler, but I was not in on these other things. Well, it was

really before I met Schindler, I guess, because that was at least '26, if not the beginning of '27, and it must have been '25 when Jean first met them.

STONEFIELD

What kind of work did she do when she became interested in architecture?

HARRIS

Well, she continued as a social worker for the county of Los Angeles up until the time she gave up work altogether and we managed to make it on the one commission a year that I would get.

STONEFIELD

That continued to be the pattern of your practice, you would have one major thing--?

HARRIS

Well, that was about all. They increased, but that was about all at the time.

STONEFIELD

Even after your notoriety?

HARRIS

Well, maybe we had two that next year, I don't know. No one had any work. Work in all of the offices was very slow, most of them were closed.

STONEFIELD

California architecture during the twenties and the thirties held tremendous promise, producing a different kind of building than what was going on in the rest of the country. David Gebhard, at one point, commented that he felt it had never really fulfilled its promise. Do you agree with that?

HARRIS

Well, I--[telephone rings]

STONEFIELD

We were talking about your wife, Jean, and her involvement in architecture.

HARRIS

Well, when we went to New York Jean had nothing particular to do and she became interested, then, in food. I don't know what had preceded this to make her particularly interested in it, not that she wasn't a good cook. But now she became interested in it as history, although perhaps not so much at first as history as a system. When we returned to California, this interest continued, and Elizabeth Gordon, the editor of House Beautiful, whom we had met in New York when she published the Havens House in the summer of 1943, at Jimmy [James Marston] Fitch's suggestion, asked Jean to consider writing a column, becoming the first food editor of House Beautiful. This Jean did for a year and a half or more from Los Angeles, not from New York. So she had to learn rather rapidly then. Before we had returned from New York, Jean remembered a remark of Mr. Walter Webber about Greene and Greene, and so she decided that we would look them up when we got back. If they were still alive we would see if there wasn't something that could be done to give more recognition to their work. Jean found that Henry Greene was living in Pasadena with his daughter and [her] husband. And we called on him. We asked about the drawings. I think we talked about this once before, didn't we?

STONEFIELD

No, we talked about [inaudible].

HARRIS

Anyway, we gathered him in the car, he was in his middle seventies, and we went hunting for the house in which he had lived before he moved in with his daughter. It was a house that he had designed for his wife and himself and his wife's mother. It was a duplex house and the mother-in-law's part was the largest half of the duplex. The drawings had just been left there in a cabinet that was out in the garage. So Mr. Greene got out the key to the cabinet, and, after wandering around a bit, because we couldn't find the house immediately, we found it and went to the door. The woman who answered wasn't very helpful. Mr. Greene explained that he was the former owner of the house and that he had left in the garage, when he left the house, a cabinet with drawings in it that he would like to have and showed her his key. She said, "Oh, yes, yes, I remember them. We've been talking about clearing out the garage and clearing out all those things." So we were actually just in time.

The key fitted the lock. However, we really didn't need a key because the back was completely off the cabinet. Water had got in, things were badly stained, crumpled and mice had got in. And because mice seem to like paper, they had eaten through everything that was paper or had paper on the outside. This included most of the prints, which were paper. However most of the drawings were on linen, not on paper, and so there wasn't a great deal that was destroyed. Anyway, there was an enormous amount of material there. I can't remember the number of rolls. I can remember the jobs went up into the four hundreds and something. And I can remember one job sheet numbered 105. While it was a small sheet it's true there was a great deal of material and it was all wrapped in tight rolls. It had the smell of mice that lasted for years and years, and the car in which we carried it smelled for years afterwards, too, on account of that. Well, the older brother--

STONEFIELD

Charles.

HARRIS

Charles Greene was living in Carmel at the time, and so we finally decided that we would like to bring the two brothers together and, if possible, have a photograph of them and talk about what might be done with their material either in magazine articles or a book. And so we made the trip up there. I had arranged for Edward Weston, who was living in Carmel, to photograph the two. Cole Weston actually did the work. We proceeded to visit all of the Greene and Greene buildings that we could find that were still standing. In very few were the original owners still living in them. In fact I'm only sure of one, and that was the Gamble. Oh yes, there was another, the Blacker. Then, because Jean was writing architectural pieces also for House Beautiful, she took this material to Elizabeth Gordon, and Elizabeth Gordon became quite interested in it. So I guess the first pieces on Greene and Greene that had been written in years were these in House Beautiful. This was followed with articles by Jean both in the Record and in the Forum.

STONEFIELD

The Greenes had been generally neglected for a long time.

HARRIS

Yes. You see, World War I had closed them out. There was very little work that was done by them after World War I. They officially closed their office in 1915. I don't remember just what year Charles moved to Carmel, but the only thing of any size that he had done there was the--I don't remember the name of the house. It was a large stone house, unlike any of their wooden houses in the south, running down the cliff into an inlet there, [and with] great buttresses. The original owner was still there. It's the James House. And that was where we photographed them together. Then later Charles came down for a visit, and then one of Charles's two daughters--one lived in Carmel and was interested in horses and had a livery stable, and the other was married to a Brazilian. The second daughter was home on vacation and she also came down and we had long conversations with her.

STONEFIELD

How were they generally regarded by other architects and by their families and--?

HARRIS

Well, they were no longer competitors in any way, so other architects could look upon them with favor. But I don't think any of them thought of them as being anything more than simply something out of a past that was entirely gone.

STONEFIELD

Was their architecture considered relevant to anything that was going on, for example, then?

HARRIS

No, I don't think so at all. Now of course there were some others, like [Bernard] Maybeck. But he too was thought of us almost as much a part of the past, although he had been more involved with people in Berkeley and this had kept alive their interest in him. Then there are a few things, like the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco and the Christian Science church in Berkeley, which were more in the public eye than private residences would have been. So I don't think he was quite as much forgotten as Greene and Greene.

STONEFIELD

He was still working?

HARRIS

No. Any work that he did was not for anything to be built at all. I remember Jean visiting him once and he had his drawing board out in the yard. He lived in a little house that had been built with walls made with gunnysacks dipped in Bubblestone, which was a material that he had suggested to an engineer, with whom I later talked, as something that might be used as a substitute for wood in places where wood was no longer available, parts of the world that he had been reading about. Bubblestone was a lightweight concrete and, as far as I know, the first of the lightweight concretes. I first heard about it when I was designing prefabs, projects only. But I was designing in every material and with this lightweight material I was casting thin slabs with metal-lath reinforcing and with edges of sheet metal that would enable them to interlock like a tongue-and-groove in boards. After I had heard about Bubblestone, I wrote to Berkeley to the engineer, and I was sent five or six little cubes of it, varying in weight from 30 pounds a cubic foot up to 90 pounds a cubic foot. Ordinary concrete is 140 pounds without reinforcement. At this time I had no idea that Maybeck was involved in it at all. Anyway, he lived in this little house with walls made by simply dipping sacks in it and hanging them in shingle-like fashion over a wood framework where they hardened. He had a drawing board outside which he worked on, and on this particular occasion he was making drawings showing the Palace of Fine Arts loaded on barges and being ferried down the river for farmers to use. He had no interest in it anymore, he declared.

STONEFIELD

Farmers to use for what purpose?

HARRIS

Oh, I don't know, barns I suppose. But, anyway, there was already at that time some talk about preserving the Palace of Fine Arts, and he refused to get interested or excited in it. And this was probably just a demonstration of his lack of further interest in it. Jean got into the work on Maybeck through Gerald Loeb. He was a senior vice-president of E. F. Hutton [&] Company and was living in New York. [He] saw the Havens House in the Forum when it was

published and called George Nelson, who was an associate editor of the Forum, and asked him to speak to the architect of that house and ask for permission for Loeb to see it when he came next to San Francisco. George said, "Well, you can ask him yourself. He's here in New York right now." So he called me and I had lunch with him. He told me that--But I'm getting into another subject altogether. He told me, anyway, that he had a farm out in Connecticut near Redding, and there was an old farmhouse on it, an eighteenth-century farmhouse that he had remodeled some, and that he wanted to build a modern house there. He had written to Frank Lloyd Wright and almost a month had passed by and he hadn't heard from Mr. Wright. And if Mr. Wright wouldn't do it would I do it? Actually, I was flattered with that and said yes, I would be glad to do it if Mr. Wright wouldn't do it, but, if he could get Mr. Wright, he surely should, because Mr. Wright wasn't going to live much longer and it would be worth a lot more if Mr. Wright did it. Of course 1943 was quite a while before 1959, when Mr. Wright died. Anyway, we became well acquainted with Loeb and then they did get started on this thing. In every trip that Loeb made to California (he made about four of them a year) after stopping in Phoenix to confer with Wright, he would call and stop and see us in Los Angeles. So he kept us up to date on everything that was happening. And when he found that-- Oh, yes, and another thing that happened at this first meeting, Mr. Loeb said, "When I was seventeen years old, that was in 1917, my mother built a house and she let me handle all of the negotiations with the architect. And the architect was Bernard Maybeck." He said, "It was a very fine house, and I had a great deal to do with it." Then he said, "But it would have been a finer house if I hadn't had so much to do with it." Well, no remark could melt one more than that did me, and as a consequence of that, I'm sure, he gave Wright a completely free hand, which was a mistake really. Wright simply knew that he had a man with a lot of money and a large site and he simply proceeded to design what he would probably have done for himself. He included a large orchard enclosed with a wall, he had stables--and Loeb, who was crippled from polio when he was a child, never was on a horse in his life--did all sorts of other things there. Made a magnificent design, but--And if it could have been built immediately, it would have been built. But the war was too far from over for one to have the facilities and the permission, even, at that time to build something of that sort. All that you could build, at least in California at the time, was a house for

a veteran, and it couldn't cost more than \$10,000. So, anyway, that design proceeded at that time. But when Loeb found that Jean was planning articles and a book on Greene and Greene, he immediately suggested that she do the same thing with Maybeck and that he had some money, a grant he could make for it. His first proposal was to give the money to the Museum of Modern Art. But Jean objected strenuously to that. Although we were very friendly with the Museum of Modern Art, still it was so completely out of character, its sympathies anyway, with the sort of work that Maybeck had done that she persuaded him to give it to the university at Berkeley. And the interesting thing was that the provost there who was in charge of it was one that Jean had had as a Latin teacher back before 1919. So, on the basis of that, she started some research on Maybeck, too. And I'm quite certain that it was the new interest that was aroused--an interest not simply in Berkeley, but nationally--by it that led to Maybeck's receiving the AIA Gold Medal.

STONEFIELD

Did this awakening of interest that Jean had in Maybeck and Greene and Greene affect your work at all? Or had you already drawn from them in their work all that there was for you to get out of it?

HARRIS

Well, I don't think there was very much in the way of particulars. I don't think you could say there was any in the case of Maybeck that you can point to in the design. In the case of Greene and Greene I think that there is. The regard for the site, the interest in the garden, the attempt to make one as congenial as possible for the other, these I think, together with perhaps, yes, I'm sure of this, carrying the stick-and-board character of Greene and Greene further than I had before. Along at this time I became very conscious, from the experience that I had had with what I had built, of the behavior of wood as the weather works on it, not just its color, but the way it twists and shrinks, the way parts separate. And I became very conscious of the destruction of continuity that is got by simply butting together the ends of boards ten, twelve, sixteen feet long when trying to make something thirty or forty feet long. Continuity would be very much damaged if you see joints opening up and if two butting boards change color differently and if one twists this way and the other that way and if the nails that joined them together mark them with rust. I suppose in seeing

all of the separate sticks that made up a Greene and Greene house, I realized that the way to get continuity was to work not with unbroken lines but with broken lines, broken at regular intervals, and preferably rather small intervals, then one wouldn't be conscious of the break. It's simply a step in a journey. I began playing up individual pieces in other ways as well. In the Wylie House I carried it to considerable length. There, above a gable facing south in which I wanted the glass to go quite high and from which I wanted to shade the sun without darkening the room too much, I simply carried on with open rafters beyond the solid roof. This was a thought that came to me having looked at Greene and Greene roofs, not with rafters going that way, but with the ends of rafters sticking out beyond the edge of the roll roofing at the eaves. I realized that one could expose structure like that and I simply exposed it this other way. [telephone rings] So I found myself thinking always of the structure in terms of the available lengths of pieces of material, with the joint between them made a very prominent feature, located always where it became a part of the design and making more joints than might be necessary otherwise in order to make the repetition of the joint an integral part of the design. This was the way I found I could get continuity, unlimited continuity, with short separate pieces of material. There are other ways of course in which Greene and Greene had an influence on me in addition to that and the harmony with the landscape. There was also the unified character of total design, of the imprint of one mind visible in every part of the building, everything in the building and in the garden and, in many cases, the objects selected for it, all the way from rugs and curtains and fabrics, well, to the piano case which they designed for the Gamble House.

STONEFIELD

Did you have the opportunity to do that kind of total design when you were doing residences?

HARRIS

Not very much. First of all, no one had the money for it. And either they had no furniture, or they had no money to buy furniture, or they had to use what furniture they had. Most of my clients in those earlier days were comparatively young. They didn't have a lot of heirlooms, and so I was relieved somewhat from that. And I did design some furniture. I designed

some chairs and a great many sofas and quite a few tables and some movable cabinets. That's about as far as it went. And they had to be pieces that could be built in an ordinary mill or by the carpenter on the job. They were not done by professional furniture makers, so I learned to think of furniture designed in terms of that kind of production. And it had the advantage, I guess, of making the furniture a bit more in character with the building than it might have been otherwise. I know in describing Schindler's Kings Road House, I described the furniture in it as looking as though it were an offspring of the house. That's sort of the way it was. You felt that it grew out of the house and wasn't something that was just assembled in the house.

STONEFIELD

Mrs. Neutra was interviewed as part of this oral history project and at one point stated that that house was a house made for an ideal world, not a real world, and that it was an uncomfortable house to live in because of the lack of privacy and so on. Did you feel that way about it or--?

HARRIS

Well, it was designed for a way of living, as well as a way to get the most for the money, and it fitted in very fully with Schindler's idea of living. Now just before they built this, RMS [Rudolf M. Schindler] and Pauline went on a camping trip in Yosemite. They had just finished, I guess. Hollyhock House. Anyway, that job had reached a point where they could have their first rest. And, as you will notice in reading one of the letters in--

STONEFIELD

Esther McCoy's book.

HARRIS

--Esther McCoy's book, the great pleasure they had in it. Sleeping out in the open in a tent and the simplicity of life appealed very, very much to them. I think maybe almost as much to Pauline then as it did to RMS. Anyway, they came back and decided to build this. And he describes it somewhat, that is, their decision to build, in a letter to Neutra written just after that. So it was to be as simple as could be. Of course it couldn't be fully built to begin with. They had cloth instead of glass in the frames making their windows and doors. An

uncolored cement slab was the floor. The bathtub was simply made out of tar paper, roofing paper, to begin with. Later they were able to make it out of cement. I noticed when I visited Pauline about four years ago that there was tile over the cement tub now. But it was all extremely simple. Sleeping outdoors was something that Schindler picked up, I think, from this trip. Anyway, it certainly determined him to make that a feature of the house. So the bedroom was what he called a "sleeping pod" on the roof of the house, and it left the ground floor room clear then for the work that each was to do in it. That is, you realize from the description that was given, each person, RMS, Pauline, and then the other couple that were there, had his own room in which he worked. There was a kitchen that was to serve all four of them, and one wife did the kitchen work one week and the other wife another week. This was a completely different kind of house. Now if one tries to live in that house the way he would live in an ordinary house, it would be quite difficult. But this simplicity is another feature that it has in common with the Japanese house. There is form to living and form to building and they are made congruent. They have to be forms that don't conflict with one another. And so the Japanese have a formalism in their behavior that is simply a part of their joy of living in the house, in acting in accordance with the form of the house. The two forms coincide with one another, and it's the pleasure of that coinciding, just as two partners in a dance, the pleasure that they get of moving together. That was the nature of that house. It was one of the great pleasures of it, the joys of it, and the thing that a person who wants to live as he would in an ordinary house would find infuriating. To some degree one finds the same thing true in a Frank Lloyd Wright house. Regardless of how large or expensive or elaborate it might be, it is designed for a form of living. And as long as that form is one that you are in agreement with, that you enjoy following, then the fact that the house is made for that form means that you sweep along in it with the greatest of pleasure. And if you don't do that, then you are infuriated and, as many clients or residents have done, their anger at the building and at Mr. Wright is taken out by destroying the building in all the various ways they can do it, getting back on the building.

STONEFIELD

Mrs. Neutra also made some kind of a statement, I believe, that this house was Schindler's interpretation of what California living was supposed to be. Do

you feel that it was made possible by the fact that California has a benign climate?

HARRIS

Well, it was his particular form of California living. And, as I say, his real introduction to it I think was this trip. Now he had been west once before, he had been in New Mexico and other parts of the West. I think he may have come as far as California, but he didn't spend much time here. And he was impressed with various things. He was impressed with the largeness and the openness of the landscape. He was impressed with the simplicity in form of the native Indian building, the--

1.10. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (August 23, 1979)

HARRIS

What Schindler discovered in California, particularly in this first opportunity to explore it, to see more than just what you could see from the top of Olive Hill, was this trip. And he never got over it. The pictures of him when he was a younger man, you see him in a conventional suit with a stiff collar and a tie and closely cropped hair. All of this disappeared then. He became much more casual. There was the influence of the bohemian crowd, probably, that he was with, but I think it was primarily the feeling that the natural life, the normal life here, was one in which buildings and clothing were all very much simplified. And the fact that he continued to live in the house until his death, in the way in which he had originally planned it, convinces me that this was entirely determined by choice and not by anything else.

STONEFIELD

To what extent do you think this represented California architecture?

HARRIS

Well, like the landscape, I think California architecture is an extremely varied thing, much more varied than it would be in an eastern U.S. or any other climate where one is much more restricted in what he can do. It's the extremes of all sorts that are here and all nearby, and which can be either, at least in one's experience, can be mixed [or] each can be enjoyed for itself. One

doesn't have to feel that whatever this is, it's forever: it's from now on, there's no release from it. This, I think, is a characteristic of California. It was true about the landscape and the climate. It was true in the earlier days about the people, because they too were extremely varied. It was a very cosmopolitan place. Everyone was new there. No one was born there. They came from such a variety of racial and national and social and economic backgrounds and they were all there because they wanted to be there. And most of them were delighted with what they found there and they were eager to exploit it and make more of it if they could. So this I consider was the character of California at that time. It was great variety, it was abundance, it was beneficent climate, it was opportunity that they had not experienced elsewhere. And it's this character of opportunity that is the most stimulating thing as far as design goes. This is something that strikes a newcomer in a way that it doesn't strike an oldtimer, probably. That is, that there are still newer things to be discovered and still newer things that can be done with what is there.

STONEFIELD

I asked a question earlier that we never really got to about a statement that David Gebhard had made recently about the promise of Los Angeles architecture. Southern California architecture, that was really never fulfilled after the war. Do you know what he was talking about and do you agree with him?

HARRIS

I'm not sure. My assumption is that directions that were being taken before the war weren't picked up after the war, and that almost invariably happens when there is any great interruption, particularly a war, [and] to some extent a depression. And there have been a great many interruptions in California's very short history. Some of them were made simply by the great influx of groups of people from different places at a particular time. This happened every few years it seems to me back in the eighties and nineties and early 1900s. And when large groups came, as for example the Iowans. They came right after World War I. They suddenly had money, they were escaping from the hard winters, and they came out there in droves. I can remember the state picnics, and the Iowa picnic was the largest one. There would be over five thousand people over in Sycamore Grove there at such a picnic. And they

brought with them habits that they didn't get over quickly. So mere numbers had a great deal to do I think with stopping some things. However, the stop that I imagine, the change that Gebhard is referring to, was the one after World War II. And this lasted a bit longer I guess than World War I. Anyway, things were done in a larger way that made a greater interruption. And there were many new people there [who were] unaware of what the state had been earlier and who saw certain opportunities, largely economic ones. So their rush to realize these possibilities obliterated others.

STONEFIELD

What had been the direction before the war and how did it change afterwards?

HARRIS

Well, World War I really marked the end of the nineteenth century. And the latter part of the nineteenth century was sort of the apex of European civilization, which was being realized even more fully in the United States probably than in Europe. It was a belief in progress, no doubt about that, that we would go on to better and better things, a very strong belief in education, which was a national one--it was partly international I know, too--that came at that time. That was a very important thing it seems to me. It was a new world in the sense that nothing had to be destroyed to do something new. You simply left it behind as if it weren't there and--

STONEFIELD

What I'm trying to get at is where was architecture going in Southern California before the Second World War?

HARRIS

Oh, I see.

STONEFIELD

How did the Second World War change the direction and perhaps destroy the flow of it?

HARRIS

Well, the depression starting in 1929 and '30 stopped all construction for a time. And it started up very slowly. Only a year or two before the Depression, Neutra and Schindler couldn't find clients because the fashion for, well, the Spanish in particular simply was so widespread so that no deviation from it really was possible. It was only a freak who would think of deviating and somewhere--I referred to Schindler's client[s], and Neutra's to some extent too, as "raw-fooders." Really, many of them were. And nature dancers, all sorts of things that were rather far out, and they lived completely apart from the life of the community generally. And when the war came along everything stopped. Other ideas had a chance suddenly to poke their heads out, and our look at Europe during the war--and that look continued after the war some--then made us much more conscious of modern European work. To begin with, Wright was just as ignored immediately before the war as anyone else. And Maybeck and Greene and Greene were just little local phenomena, they had no general significance at all. So that it was the break, first with the Depression that stopped all building and gave people a chance to think, and then World War II that followed it, which made it even more complete, made us aware of Europe and then ended the Depression. We'd been crawling out of it gradually, but now there was work, there was money, there was lots of building to be done after the war. And we simply rushed into it without much look at the past. I don't know how good an answer this is to your question.

STONEFIELD

Well, it is. I was wondering who got that work to do? Did any of these people that had been working in California, whose work you would have considered to have been in any way quality work, did they get this new building work?

HARRIS

This is World War II now that we're talking about?

STONEFIELD

Right. At the end of the Second World War when the building boom started in and there was a tremendous need for housing.

HARRIS

That took a little while to get underway because of the lack of materials and the great need of housing for war veterans that we were very eager then to satisfy. I remember someone remarking about a new office building downtown that this was the first tall office building in Los Angeles in twenty-five years. That was because everything had stopped with the Depression, it had been held up by the war. There was a lot of money after the war and it was spent without a great deal of thought as far as architecture went. And it's true that Neutra had some work, more work than he had had before.

Schindler I don't think had because he had given up hope of having any clients of that sort and was devoting himself entirely to small, largely residential and shop, buildings for the people who came to him. He didn't go out after them. Then, of course, there were those who had laughed at Neutra earlier who now proceeded to follow him as far as the pattern of his buildings went, not in any very fundamental way, but in other ways. This had started a bit earlier, after the earthquake in 1933 in Long Beach, when every school building in Los Angeles--and they were nearly all brick--had had at least the cornice above the entrance to the building, if not whole walls and other things, shaken off. And Neutra, who had tried for years to get his ring-plan school built, and had been refused by the state board of education, turned down in every case, suddenly was given a job of designing a school out at Bell. It wasn't a ring, it wasn't a school in a straight line. And not so big, but it had all of the elements of the ring. And this had very quickly followed the use of tent houses on the school grounds immediately after the quake. I should have mentioned earthquakes as well as wars and depressions as--

STONEFIELD

Determinants.

HARRIS

As, yes, as opportunities, design opportunities. So Neutra got this one school, and then every new school that was built then was pretty much modeled on it. It was a finger, then you got fingers branching from fingers. And now they were one story buildings, whereas they'd been two and three-story buildings before. And they were now willing to give up a little bit of ground and playspace for building. I can remember, in the commentary by Henry Russel Hitchcock in the catalog of the Museum of Modern Art's show with which it

introduced its department of architecture, the--Well, I guess it wasn't Hitchcock's comment. It was the comment of a school administrator in the catalogue who was asked to comment on Neutra's design and who spoke of how impractical it was. It was spread out, administration was difficult, and things of this sort. Well, administration became a very minor matter now. They spread, and the finger plan school became a very popular form that went on for years and years. There have been changes since, but it was a big thing. Neutra had a few other things that came along. I'm trying to remember which ones were after the war and which were before. Because he was getting work before 1941 and--

STONEFIELD

I was wondering, obviously there was a lot of interest in housing after the war, and the Case Study program was designed to influence the direction that the design took, to keep it at a high level. And as I drive around California, Southern California, and look at those housing developments that appeared after the Second World War, I don't see any reflection of that in them. Do you know why that would have happened?

HARRIS

Well, I don't know. For war housing Neutra designed that project down near San Pedro, down near Rolling Hills. It was right below the Chadwick School, which I had designed, also the Palos Verdes College. The Channel Heights project, it was. It was generally thought of as probably the most-- It had held more promise for group housing than anything else that had been done during the war. He made very good use of the site. It was a very irregular site and yet he managed to accommodate a very large number of units on it and did it in a very unmechanical sort of way. He received considerable praise for that. Then Neutra got some other housing work, not just housing. There was a project in Puerto Rico which was housing and schools and hospitals. Rex Tugwell--I'm trying to remember his earlier history--was then governor-general, or whatever he was called, of Puerto Rico. He was a strong FDR man, and this was a New Deal thing really. This must have been after the war, or was it before? It may have been really before the war and during, it was so close to that time that I'm not positive. Anyway, Neutra designed some very simple structures there, using natural means of shading and cooling and ventilating

these buildings. Schools with whole walls that were really overhung garage doors in character and would swing up and out, opening the room to the outside, little things of this sort which I think were quite good. And Neutra was very much involved in the design of the buildings then. He gradually seemed to lose interest in that and began to spend more time talking about biology and living in a technological age and designing particularly for it. More and more work was done by others in the office, and the work became more like other work. It was called modern, but it wasn't so distinctively Neutra and it didn't have at the heart of it a particular design idea that would distinguish it from all other buildings that he would do, as well as what others would do, which the earlier work did have.

STONEFIELD

He was doing less of the designing actually himself?

HARRIS

I'm sure he was. He was concerned much more with writing and lecturing and things of this sort. And the office was really much more-- The same thing happened with Wright of course.

STONEFIELD

Did you ever get involved in any large-scale projects like that? Would you have wanted to?

HARRIS

Well, a little bit. I did design a housing project in San Bernardino, which didn't get built. But we went through a lot of it. We went through the various loan agencies-- I'm trying to remember what the loans were called, 608, or whatever it was. But this was back in '42 mostly, '41 and '42, and the thing was complicated. I didn't have a license either at this time. So I was rather timid when it came to applying for things of this sort. Clients came to me and I didn't go to them, and I didn't have public work.

STONEFIELD

When did you get your license?

HARRIS

I didn't get it until I went to Texas.

STONEFIELD

I have been meaning to ask you all through this, since you really didn't serve an apprenticeship for any length of time--

HARRIS

No, I worked these five days for Neutra in his office and that's all I worked in an architect's office.

STONEFIELD

Where did you pick up all of your technical skills?

HARRIS

Well, I did take, as Neutra had suggested, some technical courses at night. And I did get structural engineering. It was very good and I had a very good teacher there. I mentioned him I think. He was an English architect and engineer. He was in Los Angeles, and he got a job teaching architecture, which had just been a drafting course, I guess, at Frank Wiggins Trade School. This was the only school in which one could get such technical courses. I took a short course, it was really nothing more than technical drawing, at City College in the summer and then entered Frank Wiggins Trade School. And I really spent-- Did I spend two years there? I guess I spent only one year there. And then M. T. Cantell, who was the head of it--he had one assistant teacher--Cantell was a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was a very poor designer. He was a very good engineer, and an excellent teacher. From him I learned much that I haven't been able to use to any great extent--the complicated engineering design of rigid frames and other things that the professional engineer at the time didn't really come across until four or five years later. We used his reinforced concrete text, which was all in English measurements and symbols, which made it a little bit difficult then to substitute American symbols in his formulas. I got a great deal out of that. At the end of the school year he decided to open a school of his own where he would be more free. So he rented the second floor of a little building on Sixteenth Street--or, rather, another name, Venice Boulevard--out beyond Western Avenue, and called it the Los Angeles College of Architecture and Engineering. And he took his one

assistant with him, who had been a student of his in England years before and who had been working in Los Angeles for a number of years for the Pasadena architect Myron Hunt. Then he invited me to come along also as an unpaid assistant, which I did. This was just at the time that Neutra left for Europe. So I went out there. I took classes part of the time and then I taught some classes there during that year. When Neutra returned from Europe, he stopped in the East. He spent some time in New York and he spent some time working for the White Motor Company designing a motor bus. And while there he was interviewed by a new museum that was being started and to be called the Museum of Science and Industry--a name that was later used by a museum in Chicago that was a different thing altogether. It opened in Rockefeller Center. Neutra wrote me, I think--I don't think he telephoned, no one telephoned in those days--from there and said that the museum was going to open and it was going to open with an exhibition built around the history of the human habitation, from the cave dwelling to the present. And the present was to be represented by the Lovell House. And would I go to Conrad Buff, the painter, and get from him the working drawings of the Lovell House, which he had left with him when he went to Europe. He wasn't leaving anything at--

STONEFIELD

Schindler's house?

HARRIS

Schindler's. And make a model of it. And then he added that the museum was allowing five hundred dollars for the model. Five hundred dollars! That knocked me over. Why you could build a house for that, not just a model. And then, because the house was metal, I decided the model should be metal, too. So I went to Harry Schoeppe, who had taught metalwork, jewelry, and things like that at Otis, and asked him if he would help me make it out of metal. Which he agreed to do. So we made it in the garage of his house over in Altadena, and we spent at least three months on it. He did all the metalwork; I did everything else on it. Neutra returned just before we shipped it, I believe; I think he saw it before we shipped it east. The funny thing is that within just the past year I had a telephone call from someone at the Hirshhorn Museum saying that they were getting together an exhibition of immigrant art. They were including architecture in it and they would like to have the model of the

Lovell House, could I tell them where it was? Mrs. Neutra had told them that I had worked on it. She hadn't been there when I had done it, she had never seen it, but she did remember that much. Well, I had no record of it at all. I found some newspaper clippings from the Times and the Express describing it. They tried, and they finally notified me that they, the museum, had traced it from Rockefeller Center to, I think, Baltimore, and then it disappeared entirely. So I don't know. If the model is still in existence, it's either in somebody's attic or it's some children's plaything, I don't know. So I sent them photographs. I photographed the model that I had made before we sent it, so they simply enlarged that photograph and used it in the exhibition there. This is an awfully big aside here.

STONEFIELD

You mentioned immigrant architecture, and I was wondering if you had had any firsthand experiences with any of the architects who came over from Europe during the Second World War and before?

HARRIS

Not in a design way at all. My meetings and connections with them were in New York in 1943 and '44, when I think there were eighteen members of CIAM [Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne] in or around New York on war work of one kind or another. Very, very shortly after we arrived in New York, I had a call from Sigfried Giedion. Giedion remembered that I had been the secretary of the American branch of CIAM back in 1930, '29 and '30. So I had luncheon meetings at least once a week for a couple of months I guess with him and with José Sert. José Sert was not at Harvard at the time. He had lectured there. He had come over for these lectures, just as Giedion had come over to lecture there, and both had got stuck by the war. And Giedion, as godfather I guess he could be called, of CIAM, was very eager to get something going again on it and thought with all of these European members here it should be possible to establish a chapter which we called the American Chapter for Relief and Postwar Planning. I had met Sert earlier, I think, when he was working with Paul Wiener, and together they were designing an airplane-age city. It was a city in Brazil. It was being built from the start, and it was where the manufacture of airplanes was to be the big thing. Anyway, we had these luncheon meetings. I very quickly found out that the reason that I

had been called in was that anything of this sort, with anti-German feeling running as high as it was, had to be handled carefully, and they wanted someone who was American and blue-eyed, of Anglican ancestry. And in the mere fact that I had been secretary there was sufficient additional feature to call for it. I saw that very quickly. But I was extremely interested in what I was learning through this. I had read at least parts of Space, Time, and Architecture, which was just published at that time, I guess, and Giedion was working on another book called Mechanization Takes Command. He and Jean had great arguments over that. I was delegated to write letters to all of the former CIA[M] members in this country and invite them to a meeting. And the meeting was set, it was well in advance then, at ten o'clock on a Sunday morning in the New School of Social Research in New York. It was the hottest Sunday I can remember. But lots of things turned up during our conversations on this, because there was talk, not to me, but in front of me. They weren't trying to hide it from me, they didn't realize how shocked I was by some of these things. First of all, or at least one of the things, was who are we going to have for president? Now, both of them [were] Europeans, and Giedion [was] a German, a very bombastic professorial type who was particularly concerned that everything be official. That was the reason for the organization. It was to be for relief and postwar planning, because they felt certain by this time that the allies were going to win the war. The United States would come out in the best economic condition and would be in a position to influence work in the rebuilding of Europe. And if this organization were official, what they hoped to do was what had been done earlier in Europe. The one example I can remember was in Spain where Sert, who was hardly more than a student at the time, with others protested loudly because an important building was given to some very old and stuffy traditional-minded firm. They called in the CIAM, which was an international organization, it wasn't just a little local thing, to speak in their behalf. And they got the commission that way. So this was what they were trying to do here. They thought. "We're going to win the war, the United States is going to win the war, it's going to have the money and it will be available to dictate what is going to be done and who is going to do it." Their idea was that the CIAM, then, would be a sort of reservoir of talent that would be used by those in authority here to say--whether it is in Romania or Czechoslovakia or Germany or wherever it is--you can have this to do this, and this is the man that will do it. Well, I knew that was impossible.

But it was a lot of fun anyway. We had the meeting, and it was only because I was so terribly innocent that I came out of it as well as I did. I had assumed that all of these CIA[M] members, who had been buddies in promoting modern design throughout Europe for fifteen years or so, were all good friends on best of terms and had worked together in agreement. Well, we hadn't been in the room, I hadn't even called the meeting to order before I realized that it was full of all sorts of tensions. There were all sorts of jealousies and animosities of one kind and another there. And I began to tremble in my boots at this. Well, we called it to order. They were not all there but most of them were there. Gropius was there, Breuer was there, [Ludwig] Mies [van der Rohe] was not, and Otto Wagner (who was out in Chicago) was not there. There were a number of others there that I didn't know at the time. And we made the proposal for an American chapter for relief and postwar planning. Oh, one thing I forgot to say. In these conversations at the luncheons, in discussing who the officers might be--and they weren't limiting themselves just to those who were there in America at the time, although that would help--they couldn't have Le Corbusier because he had been collaborating with the Germans. They made no bones about that. They assumed that everyone knew it, apparently. And they went on speaking of others in the same way. And my hair was just standing on end, and my eyes must have been bursting, but I didn't say anything. I wanted to hear all that there was to be said.

STONEFIELD

Well, tell us. Were they really being very specific about those kind of choices?

HARRIS

This was the point. They would plan all of this ahead of time. We were to have a meeting that would simply okay it, you see. That was their idea of it. They--

STONEFIELD

But there wasn't very much agreement amongst the members?

HARRIS

No, but I'm only talking about this committee of three at this particular time. So when I began to see what they were really up to and [that] they wanted an

American, I said, "Well, I think the person who would do this best is Wally [Wallace] K. Harrison." He was later the architect of the United Nations building. I had met him when I first came to New York. I had been down in Washington. I had met him there when he was, first, deputy and, then, director of inter-American affairs. He was a friend, had been brother-in-law, of Nelson Rockefeller, and when Nelson Rockefeller left--What did he go to? He took over something else. Harrison then took over his job there. Well, Harrison then took over his job there. Well, Harrison by this time was back in New York, and I said, because I knew of his ability to work with government officials and things of this sort, "He's the only one I can think of who might be able to do that." So I was delegated to go and talk to him. And I did, and he said that the aims were good but that he was too well known for his other connections to get into this; his motives would be questioned. How true this was, I don't know. It probably was true, but even so I think he didn't want it.

STONEFIELD

Were their aims, were their motives pure and noble? I mean were they trying to keep up the level of architecture all over the world? Or were they just interested in money?

HARRIS

No, no, they were not. They were interested in architecture, but they were interested in their own kind of architecture. There was no question about their self-interest in it. And this reminds me of something else. This came up at a party. I remember it was a party at [Alexander] Chermayeff's in New York City during the war. This was a bit earlier than the CIAM meeting, I think. There was a lot of talking going on and a lot of it was about the war, and suddenly Jean said, "Oh, I wish this war were over." There was sudden silence. It was startling, this silence. And then someone said, "Well, not too soon." I mean the war was something they were using. They were using the war to promote their architectural futures.

STONEFIELD

Was this true of people of the caliber of Gropius and Wagner and Mies?

HARRIS

I think it was. It was quiet, but I think it was pretty widespread. Much so. I remember--

STONEFIELD

How were they doing that?

HARRIS

Peter Blake was there, he was one of these too.

STONEFIELD

He was one of those that were--?

HARRIS

Well, I didn't hear him protest.

STONEFIELD

Oh. But how were they using it? I mean they had had to leave their homes and come and start all over again in the United States. How were they--?

HARRIS

Well, anyway, the war having started and they having got into it, they were making the most that they could out of the situation.

STONEFIELD

I see.

HARRIS

And this is the way they were going to go about it. When I wrote these letters to the various members, I wrote to some others that we wanted to include. One was George Howe, whom I knew slightly. I had met him in California a few years earlier when he had come out, and I had shown him around there and I have seen him, I think, once or twice in Washington. I remember I got back two replies. One was from Otto Wagner--

1.11. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (August 23, 1979)

HARRIS

Wagner wrote back that he would have nothing to do with that--I've forgotten what he called Giedion, but, anyway, it was some bombastic something or other. And I got a very similar letter from George Howe, who I always had found a very mild person and genial. He would have nothing to do either with anything that Giedion was involved in. Well, I think we've spent too much time on this particular part. But this was my principal connection with European architects, whom I had known by reputation but had not known personally. I had met both Gropius and Breuer when we first came to New York in 1943. We were invited to a party just for us in Lincoln, Massachusetts, where Gropius's house was, where Breuer's house was, and where James Ford [and] Katherine Morrow Ford, who was later the editor, architectural editor, of House and Garden, lived. Their house was designed by Gropius. We had three afternoons there, each time we were invited back by another of the three for an afternoon party there. So I saw something of them then. Gropius is a person that I never got the least bit close to. He was not one that I found one could. From what one hears from some students, I think he may be quite different. Breuer was quite different.

STONEFIELD

How do Gropius's students describe him?

HARRIS

Well, I don't know. I don't remember any remarks of theirs that fit in very well with this offishness that I found. When I was in Mexico City at the Eighth Pan-American Congress of Architects and had just finished asking Mr. Wright if he would speak to my twenty-one students, I asked the same thing of Gropius. Gropius wouldn't comply at all, all of which surprised me very much. Gropius appeared to be a good teacher. The work of his that I admired was quite early work, Fagus factory and earlier things mostly, and--But let's have another. Let's get on from this. I don't know what else you have there.

STONEFIELD

I'm interested in, was there any effect on your work of what you knew of the International Style?

HARRIS

Not a great deal. There was some at the beginning, but it was more as it came through Neutra and, to some extent, Schindler. Somehow I never thought of Schindler as being really European, despite the fact that his forms were completely strange. The work that I saw, whether it was Le Corbusier or Gropius or some of the others--I'm even forgetting their names now, ones that were much more prominent then because Le Corbusier and Gropius hadn't become so prominent that everyone else was blotted out. But to me they weren't really buildings. That is, they weren't buildings in the sense of something made to accommodate some kind of a life within, life or work or anything. They to me remained more rather odd abstract sculpture. And, as I have remarked before, for sculpture I preferred the sculptors to the architects.

STONEFIELD

Your background was in sculpture.

HARRIS

Yes, it was.

STONEFIELD

How did that relate to the work that you did?

HARRIS

Well, it may have made me a little more critical, I don't know. I was very interested, from a theoretical standpoint particularly, in abstraction. But the mere fact that something was called abstract didn't make it any more attractive to me. And most of it was not an abstraction, it was simply a nonrepresentational thing. It was an abstraction of nothing. There was nothing to be abstracted. But it was the fact that the forms were not alive to me as sculpture which made it unsatisfactory, and as an architect--

STONEFIELD

You're talking about the International Style?

HARRIS

Yes. And as far as the interiors went, I didn't find [in] what I could see from photographs sometimes anything that began to compare with what I saw in Schindler and especially of course in Wright and some others. These things

were not alive. Most of the forms seemed very arbitrary. And they seemed to serve only one purpose, they didn't have the versatility that I felt that true architectural form had. I came more and more to see architectural form, not simply as plastic form, but as something that grows up around the form of an activity, and the activity has to have form of its own or you can't have architectural form. This is why you can have manners in building--because you have manners in people. Architectural form was enlarged a great deal as I found more and more particulars involved in an architectural situation. For example, if we walk into a building, it's one thing as we see it from a standing level, it's another as we see it from a sitting level. It's one thing when the light is coming from one side, something else from another. Then there are all sorts of more subtle things that come out only as you use it and as you find provisions that were made with foresight, knowing what you would want to do and providing things that invite you to do it. You do it and then discover that you were led to do it by the building itself. There are other qualities that are part of the design, and the design includes everything. It includes not only the sculptural aspects of it but also the functional aspects in the more ordinary mechanical sense of the term. Their effect as a whole is a sense of having anticipated one's wants; of realizing one's needs, emotional as well as others; of providing both protection in one way and freedom in another; as well as variety and all sorts of other things that become a part of the design. It's such a various thing. And this is something that a client seldom realizes to any very full extent. He thinks of the building as one or two things, and he thinks of it naturally only in terms of what he has already seen in a building. And so what he asks for in a building is only what he has seen before, and he doesn't begin to ask for the things that might more truly suit him if he knew what he wanted. So the first problem of the architect is to help the client discover what it is he truly wants. And it happens only as the architect puts himself into the place of the client in every way, in a feeling way, an emotional way, as well as other ways. And because he is not limited in his thinking by merely what he has seen, but knows that more things are possible than he has ever seen, and maybe different from anything that has ever been done. Because he knows this, he gives himself much freer rein. One may start out, usually the best way with a client to start out is by taking exactly what he asks for and what he says. Then you do it and show him that so much more could be done and how far short this falls. You try to get him then to really open up and think what he

really would like to have or what he would like to do. Then you can tell him what more he can have. And when he thinks, "I can't have this, because if I have this I can't have that," then you work to discover how he can have this and that both. You resolve these mutually exclusive views that grow up out of his more limited experience in architectural thinking.

STONEFIELD

Do you see architecture then as having possibilities for improving the quality of life in general?

HARRIS

Yes, I think so. I don't think that one does it by teaching only. It's only when you are opening up, inviting, relieving one of his anxieties, stimulating his adventurousness in thinking and, in general, simply giving him the support and the freedom and, where you can, the direction to develop according to his own nature--that's the only way you can do it. It's discovering his own nature, which the person himself seldom can do in these particulars. He limits his picture of himself, and of what he wants, entirely by what he has already seen and had and done. And the architect's principal job is to get him to go beyond that. You don't know, yourself, but you're sure that it must happen. When the wife brings in a stack of magazines and pulls out various things and says "This is what I want," you don't say, "No." You begin asking why it is and what it is in particular about this that she likes. You very soon discover that it is really something entirely different. You find that the only reason she brought them in was she didn't want to come in empty-handed. She felt a little ashamed to not have anything more than what was on her mind. So she borrows, whether it's from her friends or what she reads or something else. And it's necessary to get beyond that. Sometimes it's hard to do it, and you can't do it with some people at all. But I have found that taking a client's first suggestion and not saying no, but simply trying to carry it further than he has, you can then ask him why he wouldn't prefer this better means to get it. You add something more, something else. And then of course the whole thing gets big and they think, "Well, it's out of the question, the cost of such a thing would be enormous." But then you discover that each of these isn't something that has to be solved separately in a building, all by itself, but these are things that can be combined and--

STONEFIELD

In Peter Blake's book *Form Follows Fiasco*, he says that the Internationalists tried to do this on a large scale and really failed to do it. I wonder if you agree with that, or why they would have failed, was it that they misread human nature?

HARRIS

Well, I don't know just what it was they said that he was referring to. I have not read the book. I am inclined to think that on the whole they weren't asking the client so much as they were telling them. Certainly in their designs that was implicit. The brave new world was pretty well outlined in their plans, and their means were ones that the architect felt pretty certain that he already had. It wasn't a matter of cultivating a person's capacity to see more than he had seen. It's not telling him what to see, it's more a matter of relieving him of views that he has acquired through his ancestors a way back or from his neighbor next door. It's trying to discover what he most wants, unconsciously maybe, and is not determined for him by any architect.

STONEFIELD

Do you think it's possible to improve on the quality of life through architecture on such a large scale, or do you think it has to be done in a personal way?

HARRIS

It has to be done in particulars. I think it begins with these little particulars, and that is the only way it can go. It's the only way most planning can be done effectively, too. And it's the only way that the architect can work successfully, realistically; it's the only way that the architect can grow and be satisfied with himself. It's finding particulars, of which the client is probably the most important, but there are a dozen other important ones in it-- what things are to be selected, to be developed, what things belong, what things don't belong, and getting this down into a form. Part of this is through the architect becoming the client, projecting himself fully into the client's situation, just as if he were an actor he would be projecting himself into the character he's portraying, and for the moment to think and act as though he were that person. That's the only way. The result is that he enlarges himself by it and he comes out with something that he didn't have when he went in, for himself as

well as for the client. There are large things--we're talking about California [for] one thing--that exercise an influence over vast numbers of people simultaneously. But, in addition, there are all these other things that are so small, that are individuals. And the surprising thing is that if you want to do something large, usually you have to begin with some small particular. And as you work with that and see its ramifications and how it relates to others, suddenly you get the key to the large thing. But if you try to develop the key in some general terms first and then try to carry it down to particulars, you're going the wrong way entirely.

STONEFIELD

Do you like to do that kind of thing?

HARRIS

Yes. Yes.

STONEFIELD

You wouldn't mind doing large-scale?

HARRIS

No, not at all. The difficulty is that one has very little control on large things. First of all, the client is a very amorphous one. It may be a board, at most a committee, usually. Behind that there are other boards and committees and imaginary persons that have to be considered. And it's just very, very difficult to take them all on. And they are, for the most part, boards and committees, afraid to take responsibility for a decision affecting a large building. If you can get some one person, whether he's the chairman of the board, the president of a college, or whoever he is, who will stick his neck out and say, "This is what we want, this is what we're going to have"--Not in every particular, of course. You know he's going to make the decisions finally. You are helping in every possible way, you make suggestions, you may change him a great, great, deal. But at least you have one person there. Working with the average representative of some large concern, you find he's most concerned with not being blamed for some possible mistake. He wants first of all to have an architect who has done something that everyone seems to approve, someone that his competitors have had and approved, and that he can point to if he is

criticized and say, "Well, he was the best there was." That kind of client is never going to get the best building.

STONEFIELD

Would you say that you prefer to work on any particular scale? Do you find--?

HARRIS

No, I don't think it makes a great deal of difference. Now when I was in North Borneo seven years ago-- I went there to design a hotel and some cottages. Well, it ended up I designed a whole resort and it was an entire island. And I had no more difficulty in designing the entire island, with an eight-story hotel with four hundred and fifty rooms and with all sorts of things in it that an international hotel would have, plus other things that the region had, together with-- Let's see, we had a Malay theater, a conventional movie theater, we had a Malay restaurant, we had a Chinese restaurant, we had a casino-- Anyway, I went on with the whole thing, with a pond--well, it was a huge lagoon. It took two dams, one over a half mile long, to enclose the space between the island and the mainland for water sports. We had a floating restaurant in it. We brought everyone across by ferry, and I had one of these little trains that they use in expositions and on boardwalks, that picked up the guests at the airport three miles down the road and brought them up and drove right onto the ferry. Then it drove off the ferry and right through the lobby of the hotel, between the desk and the orchid room. We had things that I didn't care for very much like bowling alleys and things of this sort, swimming pools, discotheque. I put everything in separate buildings that I possibly could, so that we had gardens between them all. The gardens were designed with every bit as much care as any room in the building. And I had a working farm there with rice paddies, water buffalo, and other things, because I knew that most of the visitors wouldn't get out into the country and see these things. And all of this was very easy. I did it all in three months' time with no trouble at all. Much, much faster than if I had had help. Much, much faster without any handbooks. The only time I felt the need for a handbook was when I didn't know the length of a bowling alley. That was the only time I needed a handbook. For everything else I did without it. I don't think the scale matters once you get the idea, and the idea works. It's just as much work to design a small house as it is to design an island, a resort, almost a city.

STONEFIELD

Several of the modern architects, twentieth-century architects, have had Utopian schemes that they have developed. Are you thirsting--?

HARRIS

No, I'm not, because I don't think it can be done.

STONEFIELD

You don't.

HARRIS

Everything that I have designed in years and years and years has been something that has been based on the idea that it's going to grow, that it's going to change, and that all of the elements have to be ones that can be added to, can be shifted, can be changed in various ways. And it all grows out of some kind of a center that is--[tape stops] This of course is the organic view of a design, and I found it stimulating, both as a parallel to what happens in nature and as a working method which comes up in different ways. One's design undergoes changes while he's making it. Even when the preliminaries are finished, other changes are going to occur in the working drawings. And this concept of parts, more or less independent but all taking part in the dance of the whole, enables one to make these changes with the least destruction to the design. I found in working on an existing building to remodel it that when it's a good building with good design, and has the character I have described, it can be remodeled rather easily. This was my surprise, or pleasure anyway, in working on the remodeling, and to some extent the restoration of, Sullivan's Owatonna bank building [National Farmers Bank Building]. Then, years later, I remodeled it again, remodeling now what I had put in earlier but had put it in a way that made it now possible for me to remove or remodel them very, very easily. Banking practices had changed. Things that were essential in 1958 were no longer called for and something else was needed in their place. The segmental character of what I did, the part's similarity in character, the fact that these things fitted together and were almost interchangeable made it possible for me to make these changes without any difficulty. I was more pleased with the result after the second remodeling than the first.

STONEFIELD

Getting back to the Utopian schemes, you don't feel that it's possible to set up a certain life-style for a large group of people, to establish it and then to modify it gradually as things change?

HARRIS

Well, I think a picture of what at the moment one considers to be the ideal is very important, but I don't think that one should design it in such a way that the construction becomes fixed and therefore a prison if one's plans for it change at all. I found, as I said a little while ago, that something that is well designed can be remodeled very well. And something that isn't well designed can't be remodeled well at all. And so it goes for planning and building a Utopia. Everything that one does should be for a Utopia. If it is properly designed, change is possible. One isn't stuck if he anticipates change and designs for the future changes that he doesn't yet know what they will be.

STONEFIELD

Before we end this interview, is there anything that you would like to add?

HARRIS

I don't think so. I don't think [that out] of the notes that I had there probably is anything.

STONEFIELD

Any glaring omissions that--?

HARRIS

I don't think there's anything glaring here. I don't have notes on everything, but we've covered in one way or another most of the things that I had noted down here. So I think this is a good place to stop probably.

Date:

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