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TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH FRANK SCHOONOVER

2003 BANCROFT PARKWAY, WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

APRIL 6, 1966

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD K. DOUD

(Mr. Schoonover is an illustrator and student of Howard Pyle)

RD Richard Doud

FS Frank Schoonover

RD This is an interview with Mr. Frank Schoonover at his studio in Wilmington, Delaware, April 6, 1966. The interviewer is Richard K. Doud. I want to start first with your first association with Pyle. It is my understanding that you first worked with him at Drexel. Would you mind telling me a little bit of the background? What were you doing and why you were --?

FS Why I went down there?

RD Yes.

FS That is very interesting. And is this being recorded?

RD Yes.

FS I'll have to go back a little in my earlier life. At the time we lived in Trenton, New Jersey, my father and mother, myself and sister, and it was my custom when I was going to school in Trenton to spend the summers with my grandmother in Bushkill. Bushkill is in Pike County, Pennsylvania, and it's not far from, oh, about eight miles from Fred Waring's bailiwick. In fact, he bought the island from my grandfather where he is now and the golf course, which at one time was a hay field, oat field, wheat field. Well, anyway, I was spending the summers with my grandmother. As soon as school would close in Trenton, which was a semi-private school, not a public school, I went up by train from Trenton to Stroudsburg and at Stroudsburg I got on what they called the stage, mail stage it was called, and it stopped every now and then along the road to take in a mail sack and the postmaster or postmistress would sort the lot and take out the mail for that particular little way station and finally get up to Bushkill. Well, as I say, I went up to spend the summers with my grandmother and we lived alone there in that house and I spent -- you see this connection now -- as I said, I spent most of the

daytime along the stream and I was very fond of walking along up and down little streams, oh, just little narrow streams and looking; I don't know what I was looking for but I loved the water and the streams. So I remember one night I was talking to my grandmother about it and she said to me, "What are you going to do when you grow up?" I said, "Grandmother, I think I should like to build bridges, little bridges, not big ones, little bridges just so you can get across, then I'll always be along the water, the stream." Of course, I didn't know then what was working in my mind. My father was an artist of sorts. His father, that is my grandfather, had a blacksmith shop and a what they called a wheelwright shop, which was a carpenter shop, of course, where they built wagons in those days. And they built sleighs with the high back and the front up like this. And on the back of the sleighs - he was a painter at the time and a striper - with a long brush like this he'd stripe a little gold thing, you know, on the spokes of the wagons, this way. So he would paint on the backs of the sleighs, of all things - isn't that curious - a robin's nest with eggs in it.

RD That's strange.

FS And signed "J.S." - John Schoonover. And I made quite an effort to find one of these sleighs and missed it a couple of times at auctions but I always thought that was interesting. I said to my grandmother, "I'm going to build bridges." I didn't know then that what I would eventually do was to paint the streams and paint the bridges. One day in Trenton in an issue of what was then the Philadelphia Enquirer there appeared a full-page advertisement to the effect that Howard Pyle, outstanding American illustrator would be an instructor at Drexel Institute in the department of illustration. Drexel Institute was at 32nd and Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia. So in the meantime -- my family were Presbyterians, attending a Presbyterian church. The Presbyterian minister, a good, saintly soul - a Dr. Brooks - was intent on my being a minister, a Presbyterian minister. I wasn't certain what I wanted to do and when I saw that my parents wanted me to be a minister, that would be all right with me. I was to go to Princeton and then from Princeton College to Princeton Seminary. All this took eight years. You understand that?

RD Yes.

FS They go through quite a course of sprouts, don't they?

RD They certainly do.

FS All right. Well, I had -- entrance examinations were all right except that I had no Greek and I couldn't take a classical course without Greek, naturally, you know.

RD Sure.

FS The Latin was okay, I liked Latin, I'd had a lot of it, and that was all right. But I had no Greek. So this was in the summertime in Trenton so I went to the pastor and told him about it and he said, "Well, we will arrange to rectify that. We'll manage to." So I went to his dwelling, which was called the manse, the Presbyterian - where the ministers live - now, with the Episcopalians it's the rectory; with the Presbyterians it's the manse, you know.

RD Amhmm.

FS I don't know what you are. You may be a Presbyterian. So I went there one hour every day in July and August. Although I really didn't want to go because we lived within two blocks of the Delaware River at Trenton and we had a boat and I was extremely fond of fishing. Once in a while I'd get a pretty fair bass but generally they were perch or some big sunfish. They were good. I went an hour every day and studied Greek and I used to take this Greek grammar, the beginning of the Greek conjugations; I used to take that book down and put it in the bottom of the boat where I'd be fishing and have my feet on these pages this way and go over amo, amas, amat, and so forth reciting Greek. Greek that is. Isn't that a hell of a thing! I made it. I got through Greek, the Bible, Xenophon to Anabasis. That Anabasis usually takes them a year. I got it. That was the preface. Then one day I saw in the Philadelphia Enquirer a full-page advertisement of the fact that Howard Pyle was to take over the School of Illustration. I had never given up the hope of painting streams and doing something with nature and all. I didn't know then that what was working in the back of my mind was the matter of illustration, see. I didn't get it. But anyway, I went to Father and Mother and I said, "I really think that I'm not really material or fitted to be a Presbyterian minister. I think I'd like to go down and study with Mr. Pyle and be an illustrator." They didn't seem to object very much to it. So in order to get into Mr. Pyle's class at that time -- oh, no, then I went down to Drexel Institute and entered the lowest class, what we call the elementary class in drawing from casts, plaster casts, heads and blocks and bottles and things, still-life they called it. I got along pretty well and moved from one class to another until I finally got up in the life class where we

drew from the model. And one day there was posted on the bulletin board in Drexel Institute a statement to the effect that a number of gentlemen who were interested in the art at Drexel -- Drexel used to be called the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry. Art was first, but it's changed a lot now.

RD It wouldn't be first today, would it?

FS No, no. Art is out today. It's an Institution of Technology, isn't it?

RD I think so, yes.

FS Yes. So these gentleman had contributed the sum of ten thousand dollars, the ten thousand dollars to be expended as ten scholarships, or a thousand dollars allocated to each student to spend the summer in Chadds Ford. The thousand dollars would include instruction from Howard Pyle; board and lodging locally in a hotel or some private home for two months - July and August - a period of eight weeks. I read the announcement and thought that I hadn't sufficient ability or talent at the time to even make an effort. So I didn't. One day I was working quite late after the others had gone because I was commuting at the time from Trenton to Philadelphia and there was a way station over on Powelton Avenue not far from Drexel, and in order to get on that train, which was an express between Philadelphia and Trenton, you had to flag it, you had to stick a flag, you know --

RD Yes.

FS And I'd do that, and every time I did it the conductor would use quite strong language. He'd say, "What! you here again!" I was the only person to get on it, you see, and he'd say, "Do you know how much it costs to stop this train?" And he told me. It was quite a bit. So I commuted. One day the art director of our department, named Clifford P. Grayson, who belonged to the elite society and lived on Walnut Street -- he was quite the gentleman and a very fine chap, I was very fond of him -- as I say, I was working in the life class under him and one day he came in - I was working a little late - he said, "Schoonover, are you going to apply for one of these scholarships?" I said, "No, Sir, I haven't the talent or I haven't anything to show, I haven't gone far enough in my art." Well, he said, "I'd like to have someone from my department entered. I don't want Mr. Pyle to take them all. I'd like to be represented." So he said, "Would you mind if I pick out the examples of your work?" When we finished a draw-

ing we had to take it in to his office and he had a cabinet there with great big drawers, flat drawers, and he'd put it in there and keep the drawings. So he picked out what he thought ought to represent me and he submitted those. I didn't. So one day I was going out of the Institute. The Institute has a big court in the center and you walk around the square this way up, up, up, and I got down to the bottom and I was looking around. They generally had an exhibition there of some kind and a friend came up to me and he said, "Did you look at that list of the successful ones up there?" I said, "No, I didn't look at it." Well, he said, "You better." So I went back, and they had ten -- you see there were ten scholarships a thousand dollars each -- and I was number ten. I don't know whether the skin came off my teeth or not, but I got in. So then I went down to Chadds Ford. We started in July. There were ten of us and we worked from -- for the first time we had a model posing out of doors. I'd never worked from a figure out of doors. We'd always had the figures posing inside with controlled light. Well, out of doors the light seems to come from everywhere and it's very bewildering, it comes all around the figure, you know. But, however, we got along. In the meantime I went up along the Brandywine and painted a landscape and there were three or four of us had our easels along the bank of the Brandywine where we were painting. Mr. Pyle -- we all wore knickers, as they called them, short, kind of baggy trousers that came to the knee and then below were stockings; you know the style.

RD Mhmhm.

FS He did, too. And there were no automobiles in those days so he would come out in the morning early. He was then painting for Harper's. I think at that time he was illustrating a series by Henry Cabot Lodge or Woodrow Wilson, one or the other. And he would pedal up along the bank and give us a criticism. And he usually got there about nine o'clock or a little before nine. And sometimes we were a little late but we'd always manage to get there a few minutes before -- we could look way down the road and see him coming. I remember one morning I was quite late. I got my easel up and I got my palette out and my colors and then I kind of cheated, I took my fingers and palette knife and brush and smeared all over the palette as if I'd been working a long time, you know. Finally, Mr. Pyle came across the meadow, I can see him, he stopped and looked it over and I think that he sort of was a little suspicious but he didn't say anything; he said that he thought the picture was coming along, for me to continue the work; and went on. I was a little up-

set by it, but I went on and I worked on the picture and finally it turned out to be a fair landscape. I suppose if I'd see it now I wouldn't think so. But anyway, we had a little exhibition at the end of the summer in the old mill at Chadds Ford. Well, the old mill burned not long ago, a landmark right across from Washington's headquarters down the road. At that time the road was just a country-made, what you'd call a farmer's road, not a concrete road as it is today, and of course it was very muddy at times. We had this exhibition up in the second floor of the mill with the grindstones and the flour bins, and what not. We had this exhibition. And a woman by the name of Mrs. Waln, it's remarkable how I remember this, a Mrs. Waln (W-a-l-n) from Germantown came in and purchased that picture that I had painted of the Brandywine, the price being twenty-five dollars. And she took the picture with her. Now, let me see, where shall we go from there?

RD I'd like to have you tell me a little bit about how this thing operated. You were there, a number of others, nine others, to be exact, in this Chadds Ford summer school. From what I've read of Mr. Pyle, he wasn't too much of a hand to criticize, say, your painting technique or this sort of thing. He was more interested in how you felt, or how you expressed what you felt, the spirit of your work, than he was in how you put the paint on the canvas and this sort of thing. Could you give me an example of how he would criticize your work.

FS Well, that's quite right. His great theory was, as he called it, mental projection and he based all of his criticism on that. By mental projection he meant to throw yourself into the picture and to eliminate any preconceived ideas of technique, classical rendition or art school technique, but to paint as you felt, to try to read from -- if you were painting from nature, if you were painting trees or a meadow or a stream, he said what you see with your eye, just with your eye as a camera would see it with its one eye, is merely factual. That can be done by a photographer better than it can be done by the artist. But if the artist looks at nature, or the stream, or whatever is -- or the model in front of him and gets the message and paints that, then he uses the power of mental projection to put into the picture the message that nature sends to him. He doesn't copy nature. For instance, he can make a tree, he can paint a tree, he can translate the tree as a messenger of joy, of sadness, or of somberness, or of weeping, all can be translated in the way you'd paint the tree. Or in the same way you can paint a stream, whether it can be quiet, or tranquil, or bubbling along, it can be happy, it can

be joyous, it can be sad. He said we must get the feeling. That's one thing he stressed tremendously, the feeling of the thing. He said you see in the fall an oak tree with the sun on it, and I remember one time we were out gathering chestnuts in the fall and Mr. Pyle said, "Look! Look! Look at that tree!" One side was just golden and the sun shining on it. And he said, "It no longer becomes to you just an oak tree with the sunlight on it, but it is a tree which has golden plates, pure gold plates on one side of it which reflects the light to your eye." That is the way to translate -- one afternoon we were in a little stream out at Chadds Ford in October, or September, I think, and the chestnut burrs had opened and the chestnuts were dropping and Mr. Pyle came down to the studio and said, "Well, boys, let's go up along the streams and see if we can't get some chestnuts. We might get a good many." So we went up along the stream, we had rather a large -- I thought the container was a little too large for our hope, it was a bushel basket, which we eventually filled, but the point there was that this one chestnut tree was growing along a stream, one of the little streams out there, it still flows through the meadows, and we gathered all the nuts along on the bank. And as I say, we got a good many, several quarts, nice big chestnuts the like of which we don't have in this country today. The chestnuts are gone; the blight got them, you know.

RD Mmhm.

FS So we stood on the bank. As I say, he had on these knickers, bicycle suits. After a while he said, "Well, there are a lot of nuts in that stream there in the water. There's only one way to do to get them is to go in after them." So he took his stockings off and his shoes off and being reluctant I think we stood on the bank. Well, he got down the stream and kept throwing the nuts out and we picked them up and put them in the basket and after a while he looked up and he said -- he started to shake, he was getting cold -- he said, "Boys, this is the way those poor devils felt at Valley Forge. They were just as cold there as I am now." And he said, "I'm getting out." So he got out. But we had the nuts.

RD Was most of your instruction there at this summer school in oil painting? I know he did a lot of pen and ink work. Did you people work in pen and ink much with him?

FS Not then. No, not then, not then, because I'll tell you why. Pen and ink, the work with your pen and with ink is a very direct statement and it's very difficult to correct

it or push the masses around without a great deal of erasing. It can be done better by pasting a new piece of bristol board over the old and feathering the edges and redrawing it. So he didn't favor very much the use of pen and ink because of its rigid and compelling technique. But he did favor oil because you can push that around, you can make any corrections. You understand that?

RD Yes.

FS You can scrape it out or you can load it on with a palette knife, or -- it's very much like the plastic medium of a sculptor. It can be pushed around, pulled in and flattened or what not. So he had us work in oil in and around the mill and we generally had a model posing. And he dictated the subject. I remember one of the first subjects he dictated or he outlined to us by sketches was called Home from the War. It represented a drummer boy in Revolutionary costume. He had on short, red breeches and the big homemade white shirt and the belt and drum, a real drum that Mr. Pyle had secured somewhere, a Revolutionary drum. And he was posing in front of the mill with the drum over his shoulder so, and a young girl, the model that we had at the time was posing in the doorway with a pitcher and perhaps a sandwich or something. The title was Home from the War. And it was a subject painting. Mr. Pyle originated the subject and we painted it. I think it's in the other studio. About that time, somehow, I must have made a drawing that gave evidence of what I might do in the future. I'm sure it must have been quite feeble, but, at any rate, Mr. Pyle had visiting him the art editor of Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston, publishers of books. A Mr. Scudder brought a book down and handed it over to Mr. Pyle; it wasn't in book form then, it was what we call galley proofs the printer had in long galleys, and he brought it down and he said, "Mr. Pyle, we'd like to have four illustrations for this book and we'll pay twenty-five dollars per illustration, pay a hundred dollars for the four drawings." He said, "If you'll get one of your students, or two of your students, or even four, we'll be very glad to have it and with your permission to advertise the fact that this book was illustrated by one or two or three students of Howard Pyle." Of course, they were pretty astute there --

RD Yes.

FS They were going to sell the book on his name.

RD That 's right; they were.

FS So he said, "All right." Well, they left the manuscript and one day Mr. Pyle came down. I remember we had a long fence there. He went over; he said, "Frank, come on over here a minute." So I went over there and he said, "Now I have a manuscript of this book in printer's galley proofs," and he said, "Houghton Mifflin want four drawings and suggest that I might get one, two, three, four artists," but he said, "I don't favor that. I don't think there would be a continuity of thought in it." He was right.

RD Amhmm.

FS He said, "So I'm going to turn the job over to you, it pays you a hundred dollars," and he said, "That's a pretty fair price." Oh, it was then. Forty or fifty years ago it was a big price.

RD Yes.

FS So I made the drawings. They seemed to be very successful. In fact, Mr. Pyle came down one day with a letter from Mr. Scudder saying, "These drawings have been so well received that we'll send you another manuscript." So just think of this, what I said to Mr. Pyle. It was the right thing but I wondered if I had the courage. I said, "Mr. Pyle, I don't want it. I don't want it." I said, "I'm still immature" -- as a matter of fact, he had helped me a lot with those drawings -- and I said to him, "You know that some parts of those drawings are not mine and I don't feel able." Well, I think he liked that, the honesty of it, you know. I said, "What I would like to do is to stay after the summer school closes at the end of August, take some of this money and pay my board and stay on here and paint, paint landscapes." Well, he liked that, too. So I did; and that's how I got there. Now let me see, what would be next?

RD Well, how long did this summer thing go on? I'm under the impression it did last for two or three years. Is that correct?

FS Well, I went there for two years.

RD Amhmm. Then Mr. Pyle finally left Drexel and came to Wilmington?

FS I'll tell you why he left there.

RD All right. I wish you would.

FS He came up on Mondays and Fridays to lecture in what he called a composition class. You conceived of a picture. It must be an original idea, not a copy or anything, an original idea of something that you would like to paint, and on a sheet of charcoal paper, you know the size, about so by so, about twenty by thirty, something like that, twenty by twenty-eight, you would in charcoal indicate an idea that you originated yourself. And these compositions were handed in every Monday and every Friday. And Mr. Pyle lectured in the afternoon of each day and then returned to Wilmington. I made a composition; I made a picture, originated a picture for this class week after week, month after month. Mr. Pyle would pick out ten, would take them all into his office and pick out ten and criticize the ten. I never had a picture put up all that time. I never succeeded in hitting it, but I kept on and finally one day, one night -- as I said, he criticized ten, picked out ten. I remember in the front row were a whole lot of women attending this lecture. They never brought anything in, they were just there to kill time. This is one of the basic reasons why he left there. They would sit there and knit, and in the back row on high stools sitting up in the back were the students who really wanted to make it a life's profession. In the front were the knitters.

RD Yes.

FS Well, it finally got Mr. Pyle. He just couldn't talk over those white heads there in the front that were using their needles all the time. I can understand how he felt.

RD Well, certainly!

FS Yes. So he went down to the president. Dr. McAllister was President of Drexel, a nice old fellow; he went down and explained to him that he couldn't go on; and he told him why. And Dr. McAllister sympathized with him, thought he was right. So Mr. Pyle resigned. But before he resigned he came to some of us and said that he would open a school; he would build a studio building which is over on 1305 Franklin Street now, he would start a school in Wilmington. And I remember he wrote to Scribner's and wrote to Harper's and asked them what they thought about it. You've seen that book, haven't you?

RD Which -- the Abbott book?

FS The Abbott book.

RD Yes.

FS And they favored it. So he had this building constructed which is over on 1305 Franklin Street, and started there with this, oh, I don't know how many he had; there were a good many for a while. Stanley Arthurs has now passed, and myself, had the studio all the way back. There were four units, the two middle ones were turned into one unit, so originally there were four students with a workroom about twenty by thirty with a little what they call a model room up above; you went up steps to a dressing room. Arthurs and myself had the end studio and the student body and drawing from the cast in the middle studio, and there were some girls in the end studio. That was the makeup. Well, Arthurs and myself were sort of considered by the neophytes as high and mighty, you know. Mr. Pyle about four o'clock would come out of his studio, we always could tell when he came out because he had Dutch doors the same as I had here, and he'd close the upper section and we could hear the door knocker go like that (imitating sound), you know; then we'd hear a rustle in the ivy at the side of his porch, little porch coming down and we knew he was hanging up the key, that's where he left the key to the studio. Then he'd come along under our windows and come in and he would sit down on the bench, a long bench in front of the long steam pipes, and talk to us. And those talks were among the most precious among my budget of memories. I remember he came in one day with a huge volume of Heaven and Hell. You remember? You know the fellow was transported temporarily - Swedenborg was his name. There's a Swedenborg Church here in town.

RD Yes. Right here.

FS So he came in one afternoon. "Boys," speaking to Arthurs and myself, he said, "you have no need whatsoever to worry or think or ponder about the future, your future life." He said, "Emanuel Swedenborg has it all here." He said, "He was permitted, you know, to experience the future life temporarily and when he returned to earth," he said, "he wrote this treatise of Heaven and Hell." He had the tome there, a huge book. And he said, "Here, I want to read you a part here; it has to do with your work, work of the artist, creator." He said, "Here on earth you're translating your ideas by the use of tinted muds, pigment we call it, paint, but it's just tinted muds, not vibrant at all." "But," he said, "when you're translated and when you carry on your work as an artist in your future life, according to Emanuel Swedenborg, instead of having this white color on your palette which is a white pigment, you'll have real sunlight." He said, "You'll dip your brush in real sunlight so that your picture will

have a glow in it." "Oh," he said, "I have a further dream about -- Emanuel Swedenborg said 'When I was admitted into the celestial paradise I walked along, I traveled along a path of blue tiles and on the edge of these blue tiles was a long row a tile's width, [whatever that might have been in the hereafter], of a rose madder color so that the rose and the blue united to give to the observer walking along this long path a feeling of vibrating purple.' "Well, I walked down" - this is Mr. Pyle speaking now -- "I walked down the path to the steps and went up. At the top of these steps I was directed to turn left and I turned to the left and there was a long gallery with open arches on the right to a garden, and on the left was an exhibition, what we would call an exhibition wall, and on that wall were a number of pictures, as I recall, nearly thirty pictures of subjects that Mr. Pyle wanted to paint before he was translated, that is before he died. Now why did he take me in there? This is what he said to me, "These are the subjects I wanted to paint while I was on earth. I want you to make a note of each picture and its subject and I want you to paint them." So I did, but I know now it was a dream, it was all a dream, and when I awoke I couldn't recall any of the subjects, although they were wonderful, I'm sure. So I didn't paint Mr. Pyle's pictures.

RD Well, it 's my understanding that this Wilmington school that Mr. Pyle was operating was sort of a free school, that --

FS After Mr. Pyle's class was taken over by the aging knitters he resigned and, as I say, built the studios over there and came down here and limited his school very much. In one year he had over fifty applications to enter the school, they came from all over the country, a great many from Chicago; but he didn't take them. He was very honest about that. He said he couldn't give a thorough criticism without entering into the individual, into the young artist and trying to look at that picture from the young artist's standpoint, and not from his own. That was his great success. He tried to enter your thinking mind whether it was conscious or subconscious mind. And he was very successful in that in approaching it not from his well-developed and very fortunate standing of the creator of pictures; he viewed it from the viewpoint of the neophyte, of the youngster.

RD Well, why would a man like Howard Pyle offer instruction to these people without charge, as I understand he did here, anyway?

FS Oh, no, he never -- the only expense connected with the student was the obligation to pay Mr. Pyle the nominal rental of twenty-five dollars a month, which we all did. I remember Arthurs and myself each paid our half -- twelve dollars and a half a month -- we made our checks over to Mr. Pyle. And I don't know if Mr. Pyle's signature is of any value or not but I have a great lot of those checks that he endorsed.

RD Well, was it just that he was dedicated to the idea of helping people that he would do this sort of thing?

FS Never charged a cent. Never! Wonderful, wasn't it?

RD It certainly was. It's really unique, as a matter of fact. Well, I'd like for you to sort of, if you would, tell me just what kind of a man this person was, this Howard Pyle. How did he impress you?

FS Howard Pyle was physically a large man, big, broad-shouldered, and he had a kind of shiny head; he was, I think, prematurely bald. But anyway, he had a very commanding presence and he stood up with the light shining down on him deep in his lectures when they put the lights on late in the afternoon. All I can say is he was so impressive. He had a personal magnetism about him that was sort of infectious. We were not only impressed with the great ability of the man to help us in our work but we actually grew to love the man. There was a great affection between the student body and himself.

RD Something that went beyond his ability as an illustrator, as a teacher?

FS Yes.

RD Well, what about this group that you worked with here? Could you tell me a little bit, something about the people who were here. You mentioned a Mr. Arthurs, I think. Was this Mr. Parrish --?

FS Maxfield Parrish - I remember when Maxfield Parrish in Philadelphia at that time was studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, or he was instructor there, I don't know which. When Mr. Pyle started his composition lectures out at Drexel, as I say, we had students from every place. There was Jessie Wilcox Smith, Violet Oakie, Elizabeth Shippen Green, all big -- Maxfield Parrish. I remember the afternoon that Maxfield Parrish -- he's a little fellow, you know, a little bit of a fellow and tubercular.

RD Ch, I didn't know that.

FS Yes, he was tubercular. The front of his studio was open. For instance, if this was his studio, there wouldn't be any wall there, that would be all open to the air and he'd work in here, you know. He died recently, didn't he?

RD Yes, I think within the month.

FS Yes.

RD Quite recently.

FS That afternoon Maxfield Parrish was in the class and I thought Mr. Pyle was so generous. He looked down and he said speaking to us young neophytes on the high stools in the back row, he said, "We have a new member of this group or I might say a visitor to the class, Maxfield Parrish, the painter. You're all acquainted with his work, especially with his achievement of color." His Parrish blue, you know, it was known as 'Maxfield Parrish blue.'

RD Mmhm.

FS So he said, "Mr. Parrish, I'm deeply honored by your being here but I want to say this to you and to the others. In some ways I think our positions should be reversed. You should be here talking and I should be there listening to you." I thought it was a very nice gesture.

RD It certainly was.

FS Yes. Well, Parrish didn't -- Parrish only appeared the once. I saw him and that's about all. I had no acquaintance with Parrish in any way. I remember he was of small stature. But he was a master of color. His workshop was a machine shop.

RD Ch, really?

FS Absolutely. At one time in my early career I was working for The Curtis Publishing Company as a -- well, I think I was what you'd call second office boy; I wasn't first office boy; I emptied the wastebaskets; I was number two boy, that's about it. Mr. Pyle was illustrating at that time and he painted some pictures for the -- I don't think he ever painted for the Post but he did many pictures for the Ladies' Home Journal. And he painted a picture -- I remember my first acquaintance -- he painted a picture of the werewolf, this historic -- you know, the werewolf

appeared in New England, the hanging of Mary Dyer (D-y-e-r). I'm going to tell this story about Parrish, the one who recently died. He had sold a cover to the Home Journal of a beautiful figure of a sexless creature in a swing blowing bubbles, great soap bubbles, beautiful bubbles, beautiful color. Well, accompanying that original that I remember unpacking was a little box like a box oil colors come in and in the box were a lot of balloons beautifully painted with an air brush, all different colors, with a little note saying, "if there are not enough balloons in the picture, pick out the ones you want and stick on the picture." The art editor, being a man of limited vision, threw the box in the wastebasket. And I said to myself, "Hal Me for the balloons!" Well, when I took the wastebaskets out to dump them the box was gone. I don't know who got it. I didn't.

RD Let me turn this over and if you're not too tired, we'll talk a little while longer.

FS Yes.

END OF SIDE 1

SIDE 2

(Side 2 opens with Mr. Schoonover discussing the importance of Harper's in the field of illustration)

FS I think that the magnetic pole if there could have been one in New York was centered around Harper's.

RD Yes.

FS Because Mr. Pyle was certainly connected with Harper's more than any other magazine. And I had the great privilege of being a young student here and having convinced Mr. Pyle that I was entirely earnest in what I wanted to do and I wanted to make it my future life, future profession -- Mr. Pyle at that time was painting a set of pictures for Harper's every month, every week, one picture a week. He had a contract with Harper's, who guaranteed him the sum of ten thousand dollars a year, or at the rate of a divisional amount per month, they'd send him a check per month covering that twelve-month period -- what would it be? eight or nine hundred dollars a month?

RD Around -- yes -- would be.

FS Yes. And he worked on that. He had that contract with Harper's. Well, as I say, there was a period of some years when nearly all of his pictures had to do with medieval days, medieval subjects, legends, stories. And he'd make a set of pictures every week and pack them up, and I don't know whether it was Friday I'd take them - yes, Friday. Friday morning I'd go over to his studio and the drawings would be there and they'd be wrapped up and instead of expressing these pictures - while the express company, of course, performed their obligation as best they could - there was always the uncertainty of delivery, of getting it there on that date that Harper's had to have it to go to the engraver's. Well, I would take the drawings over for him. And I would go over to the house and the drawings would be wrapped up so I could carry them and he'd hand me five dollars. The return fare to New York was somewhere between -- no, I'm wrong, he'd hand me ten dollars, that's right -- the return fare was five dollars Wilmington to New York and back, so that was my carfare. Now, he said, the other five dollars is for you, yes, it was for me. And, he said, I would advise you if you want a very good dinner to go to the Cafe Boulevard. Do you know it - in New York?

RD No, I don't.

FS It's where they play that marimba stuff or something - what is that --?

RD Marimba, it might be.

FS Yes. He said, your dinner will be five dollars, and he said you must be sure to order a basket of fruit. I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, that's their what we call pièce de résistance. They're noted for it." Well, I did it, but I didn't -- I think I ate an orange or something. It was everything, oranges, grapes, banana, you know, you see them down here in stores here in town in the window, a basket of fruit.

RD Yes.

FS So I think what I spent amounted to, oh, maybe a couple of dollars, no more than that. So when I came back to Wilmington and reported to Mr. Pyle saying that I delivered the drawings all right - I want to come back to that, though - I handed him the change. He said, "What's this?" "Well," I said, "I spent less than two dollars

for my dinner." I handed him the change, you know. He took it, and, you know, I think that made a great impression on him. Well, when I was taking those drawings to Harper's, they, of course, gave me an introduction to the big brass, the editor, and the art editor, and to Harry Harper, who was the last of the clan of the Harper family and was still there. And I appeared there a good many times, as you can well imagine. There was a set every week.

RD Every week you went up?

FS Yes. So Mr. Pyle had the right idea there because, as I say, the express company did as well as they could but there were drivers, there were wagons, you know, in those days and you couldn't depend on exact delivery and they had to have it, so I kept it up for quite a while. One day I was in Harper's and had delivered a set of drawings and the editor, Mr. Dunika, I think his name was, a man of the Beau Brummell type with a high, stiff collar that ran right up into his chin here -- You know those old-type collars?

RD Yes.

FS Very high. He looked at the drawings of Mr. Pyle; they were okay, of course. He turned around to me and he said, "You've been in here a good many times." I said, "Yes, Sir." He said, "Did you ever do any work for us?" I said, "Oh, no, Sir." "Why," he said -- he called to his assistant named Tom Wells -- he said, "Tom," -- Tom was about as far from here as I am from you. He turned around and he said, "What is it?" "Well, now here's a young fellow that's been in here every..." "Yes," he said, "I know. He brings Mr. Pyle's drawings over, yes." "Well," he said, "why don't we give him a job?" Turning to me, he said, "You've painted illustrations, haven't you?" I said, "Yes, yes, I have. That set up there, that series on the Revolution," I told him. "Well," he said, "I don't see why he couldn't make a drawing for us if he does this other work." And he said, "You know, Howard Pyle will have a good look at it." About two-thirds mine and one-third Howard Pyle's.

RD Sure.

FS For the price of a Schoonover, what?

RD Yes.

FS Schoonover twenty-five dollars, Howard Pyle three hundred

and thirty-three. Quite a difference.

RD Quite a difference! That's right.

FS Anyway, they sent me a story. They didn't go down in their jeans right that day and pull a story out of the desk, but one day a story came. Here it was a story by a woman named Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, and it had to do with Canada. In the meantime, I had made a trip or two to Canada and I was interested in the Indian life. It had to do with a camp along a Canadian river that had been organized and established by a group of sportsmen that put up a log camp and a cookhouse and they would go up there to fish, fish for trout. So this story that they sent me was called "His Other Engagement." And it had to do with a fellow who was a member of this fishing club and took with him this young girl he wanted to marry and her mother up to one of these lodges. And he fished. Well, he was due back at noon at the little church at Tadousac, which is up there near Cape Trinity and Cape Eternity on the Saguenay River. Probably you've been there. Well, he hooked into this big salmon and he got interested in chasing the fish down and finally realized that he won't make it. He doesn't get back in time and this intended wife, intended bride left a very curt note. It said, "I don't know what detained you, but our engagement is at an end..." and so forth and so on. Well, that was the story that Harper's sent me. Well, I don't know, I guess it was by the grace of God and the help of Mr. Pyle and a few Marines mixed in with it I seemed to have made some impression, and from that time I worked for twenty-five years, over twenty-five years continuously and was made a member of their quarter century club. They only had about half a dozen members who were there twenty-five years. Ah, yes. And here I am sitting here.

RD Well, what do you think is the most important, oh, impression, say, of Mr. Pyle on American illustration? How did --?

FS Mr. Alden, who was the editor of the magazine and book department closed his remarks about his story saying that the world will never see his like again. He, Mr. Pyle, left upon the illustrative art of this country and, in great measure, of England, so Abbey admits, the greatest imprint of any man who ever lived. Remington left his influence, too, upon it, but not as great as Pyle. I think Pyle was certainly the father of American illustration.

RD Was this due, do you think, primarily to the spirit in

his work or to the detail, the honesty, or maybe all of these? Perhaps it was the quantity of his work?

FS I think you've covered a great many -- he was particularly insistent on the honesty of the dress of the period. For instance, the author in many cases would say, "And our hero was dressed in the typical dress of the period." That doesn't mean anything.

RD The author probably didn't know what it was.

FS He didn't know.

RD That's right.

FS I remember making some pictures for Edgar Rice Burroughs' story called Tarzan. He was a great storyteller, Edgar Rice Burroughs.

RD He must have been. He had quite an output.

FS You heard of him?

RD Oh, yes, certainly.

FS So I received this manuscript from a publishing house in Chicago called "The Princess of Mars" and Burroughs conceived of a life on the planet Mars and he writes a story describing the men and the women on the planet Mars. As he said, there were the green men called the Tharks, who had four arms, and there were the red men of Helium, and the Princess of Mars herself who was named Deejathaurus, and the head green man was Tars Tarkis. So I got this story and I was fascinated with it. So I said I've got to make some -- and it seemed from Edgar Rice Burroughs' description that the people were dressed mostly with belts, had belts and things. So I made up a little what you might call dictionary of costume or compendium of costume.

RD For Mars?

FS Of the people who lived on Mars. And I made a lot of drawings of the belts and their faces and their four-armed creatures, you know, and a picture of Deejathaurus, the heroine, and sent it on to Burroughs and asked him to make notations, corrections. And he sent it back. I got it all back almost immediately, although it had to go to California. He sent it back and he said, "You know as much about them as I do and that's nothing!"

RD In what I've read, and you mentioned a short while ago in

Mr. Pyle's discussion of your work, the students' work, he seldom went into technique or this sort of thing, he was more interested in the spirit of the thing --?

FS You mean did he actually work? Very seldom. You mean demonstrate with a brush?

RD No, no. In his criticisms I say he didn't comment too much on how you applied your pigment or sort of --?

FS Oh, no, it was the thought back of it.

RD But I wanted to ask you this in relation to this now. I noticed in some of your earlier work similarity in application of paint, in some of your work there's sort of the same impasto application, in some of your work there's the same sort of subdued palette that Pyle often used.

FS Oh, yes, you're quite right. I have them in here, you'll see them.

RD How much did he influence you in how you painted, not in the spirit of your work or in your subject matter but actually in how you worked with your paint? Do you feel he had much of an influence, or is this coincidental that I notice a relationship here?

FS At that time when we were students, his technique, his tonal quality was rather dark, I would say quite sombre and subdued. He did paint in black and white because it was easier for the engraver at the time. There was no half-tone then.

RD Yes.

FS But he did add a little color to enliven his work and to amuse him as he was painting he added red, and then he added a bit of yellow, and from the red on his palette and the yellow on his palette there eventually evolved color, a green and a blue and black. So his progression from black and white into color was very slow, limited by the reproducing -- well, it was due to the lack of proper reproducing methods. Most of his work in the early work was reproduced by wood block. They didn't have an engraver. Wolfe was an engraver. And at one time Mr. Pyle had Harper's send down an engraver to work under his direction in the studio. That was not very successful. The engraver was working under stress and was not free to cut the lines he wanted to cut on the block. Of course, Mr.

Pyle, I presume realized, but maybe not fully realized that an engraver has to work backwards.

RD That's right.

FS Has to reverse everything he sees.

RD That's right.

FS Or it wouldn't print right. Well, that's really an art in itself, isn't it?

RD Very difficult, I should think.

FS Yes.

RD It certainly would be.

FS I happened to be in Paris in the Louvre when Timothy Cole was reproducing a portrait, there was a series of Timothy Cole's portraits in the Century magazine and he was engraving this picture and I told him who I was but that didn't mean anything to him, but of course mentioning Century and Harper's meant something to him, but not me individually. No reason why I should. But I watched him. He was cutting the block with his tools, graver's tools, and he would sometimes start off here and bring a line down over the cheek and on down into here one line pressing it deep or lightly whether he wanted a light print or a heavy print. But in reverse. And I thought it was a marvelous achievement.

RD It is, I'm sure.

FS Timothy Cole, wood engraver. Of course, the wood engraver passed out with the advent of the half-tone. Well, this man who came down to engrave one of Mr. Pyle's pictures - I think Mr. Pyle was -- I don't know whether he was dissatisfied with his reproductions or not, but anyway he thought maybe he could - I'm sure he was prompted by a feeling of a generous approach to the engraver hoping for a result that would not only be a credit to the engraver but to the artist as well. But it didn't work out. The engraver was an independent soul and so was Mr. Pyle.

RD It was bound not to work.

FS Yes, everything clashed.

RD Well, do you feel that Mr. Pyle's general technique then had much of an impression on people like yourself, N.C. Wyeth?

FS I'll tell you about that. When we first started to study or to work with him our work naturally was somewhat of an echo, I mean you couldn't help it. His personality was so great and so strong that we were -- well, sort of youngsters that couldn't break through the shell, and like chicks, you know, still in the shell. But gradually I think Mr. Pyle realized that and I don't think that it worried him very much that all our work looked like his and all our work looked somewhat alike and was all very dark in tone, sombre.

RD Yes.

FS But when we left Mr. Pyle and got our own studios -- I was in a different studio here in town than this one for a while down on 8th Street -- until we had these built. And gradually, however, that period, that sombre, dull period eventually left and I think we kind of broke out like that gold-plated tree in the "Song of Arong." I don't think that my technique now looks like Howard Pyle --

RD I don't think so.

FS -- at all, do you?

RD No. But I was struck by your early work -- how much it did resemble his and it seemed to me that Mr. Wyeth's work resembled Pyle's quite strongly, his earlier stuff. I was wondering if you were conscious of that fact at the time or if you were trying to do anything about it or if it bothered Mr. Pyle at the time.

FS I don't think we were too conscious about it. In fact, I think we were kind of proud of it.

RD I expect you were. I see why you would be.

FS Yes.

RD Well, do you think that Mr. Pyle's presence here in Wilmington really did much in, oh, say, a lasting sense to awaken an art appreciation here?

FS No. I don't think that Wilmington ever accorded him the proper adulation or recognition due to him at all. The prophet, you know, not without honor...

RD Why?

FS Why? Well, he was a local boy.

RD Looks like all the more reason to be proud of him.

FS Doesn't it, yes?

RD Strange, isn't it?

FS Isn't it?

RD It certainly is.

FS Yes. I remember when I first came here I might be invited to a home for supper for some reason or other, and they'd say, they'd ask me what I was doing here and I said, "I'm a student studying with Howard Pyle." And they said, "Oh, yes."

RD A shame.

FS Yes.

RD Well, I think we've covered about everything I had in mind. Do you have anything you'd like to add about --?

FS No. If you shut that off I want to show --

END OF INTERVIEW