

An Interview with  
MARY ANDERSON-PICKARD

May 14, 1979

Interviewed by

John Jones

Mississippi Department of Archives and History  
P. O. Box 571  
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EDITOR'S NOTE: Mary Anderson-Pickard was Mary Anderson-Stebly at time of interview. And is referred to throughout as Mary Anderson-Stebly. This was at the request of the informant.

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JONES: This is John Jones with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and I've just been treated to a tour of Walter Anderson's house by his daughter, who I'm talking with today, Mary Anderson Stebly. We are on the Anderson compound, right?

STEBLY: Yes.

JONES: In Ocean Springs it's a beautiful day. It's Monday afternoon, May 14, 1979. Mary, I wanted to ask you if you would give us some of your early background, when and where you were born.

STEBLY: I was born in 1937 in Baltimore, Maryland. My mother was there because at that time my father had had a breakdown and he was hospitalized in Baltimore. So, I was born while she was there. I don't know how long we stayed there. Then we came home and lived in the house that you just visited.

JONES: Your dad was up there for treatment of a mental breakdown?

STEBLY: Yes.

JONES: Well, tell us something about your education. Did you go to school here in Ocean Springs?

STEBLY: Yes, then I went to Delta State in Cleveland, and then to graduate school at Southern.

JONES: What did you go to graduate school in?

STEBLY: English.

JONES: Have you ever taught?

STEBLY: Well, I taught for twelve years, high school, kindergarten, then third grade for six years. I liked third grade, very much. Now I teach art on Fridays.

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JONES: Do you?

STEBLY: Yes.

JONES: Where?

STEBLY: St. Alphonsus.

JONES: Oh, yes.

STEBLY: It's a nice job, you know. You go for one day.

JONES: What do you do around here? Do you give tours?

STEBLY: Yes, I give tours and I take care of the paintings and the drawings and the works. There are an awful lot of works. As yet we have not finished cataloguing the pencil drawings, they haven't even been counted yet. I think I've done about three thousand. But there are still stacks and stacks. It's seldom that I get to work on that cataloguing which I'd like to be doing a great deal more of right now. In addition to that I've been transcribing the, what we call the miscellaneous writings. That part, too, I could spend full time doing very easily. But we have so many visitors now and so many customers that come now wanting to buy a water color or wanting to buy a drawing, and does take a great deal of time. Also we have tours for schools and tours for women's clubs and groups and such as that.

JONES: In your transcribing of Walter Anderson's writing, what form do you usually find them in?

STEBLY: Oh, he wrote constantly. I know he's best known for the water colors now, probably. But I think probably eventually his writings will be given as much attention as the paintings and drawings. He wrote all the same. He wrote epic poems,

he wrote short aphorisms, he wrote short poetry, short stories, essays. He wrote on the backs of water colors, he wrote on the backs of drawings. He sometimes wrote on the fronts of drawings. You know, he was a man... he didn't sleep very much. And I think one of the things that people can't believe is the enormity of what the man accomplished. Most men would give their eyeteeth to have done one-eighth of what he did.

JONES: Was his personality such that he came across as a really driven sort of man? Did he not really have time for other people?

STEBLY: Do you mean when you met him?

JONES: Yes.

STEBLY: No, if he was actually in the process of painting he would just say to you, "Go away." But he never seemed very rushed.

JONES: Tell me some of your earliest memories of your life with him.

STEBLY: My earliest memories of my life with Daddy were at Old Fields, which is in Gautier. I don't really remember much about living here at all before. You see, I was three or four when we moved to Gautier. At that time my brother Bill was born but the other two children hadn't come yet. Daddy had - I won't say he had more time because that was a very prolific time for him. He was really producing. He spent more time with us in a way that later on he was too busy for. For example, we'd go on adventures with him for a day. We'd say, walk down to Graveline looking for Indian things on the beach, or play these wild kinds of games. We used to play - we call it playing Indians. It was very strange to me because he'd

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given me a name and he'd given Billy a name. My name was Imogene. Billy's name was Balboa. And I always thought of those as being Indian names, you know, because we were at an Indian place and we were playing Indian games. We'd hide up on the bluffs behind trees and whatnot and make calls, clues of where we were, and have to find each other. Frequently he'd go off and leave us. Say, if he wanted to go off and look at a bayou, or watch the dragonfiles for a while, we would play alone until he was ready for us to go home. It was quite different from going somewhere with my mother. You know, she would always help you, if you got awfully tired she would pick you up and carry you, or she would slow her pace to suit yours. But my father would go, and you followed, and if you got left behind, rough. But we didn't. We kept up - because he expected us to. I also spent a great deal of time with him - it seems to me it was always in the late evening, say around sunset - on the bluff overlooking the water at Old Fields. Old Fields had a beautiful front gallery that stuck out toward the water. There was a row of live oaks in front of the house. We would sit either on the bluff itself or on the gallery. I must have been about five at this particular time that I'm remembering. He would ask me to make up poems, and he would write them down, as though they were really valuable words. I remember that. He had a way of paying attention to you when you were talking. He was paying attention to you, and you were the most important person on the face of the earth while he was listening to you. He

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cut over land, you know, where the lumber people had been through and left the roots, and we'd pull roots with Jim. Jim was the horse. We would make excursions - those would be excursions when you'd stay all day.

JONES: These are your father's names for your trips, excursions and then you would go on adventures?

STEBLY: Yes, he also called them progresses. You probably came across that if you read the Logs. He would call that a progress. You would make a progress.

JONES: Right.

STEBLY: I remember him taking us once on a progress to one of the bayous, and when we got there we hadn't brought bathing suits. I guess we weren't planning to swim, but when we got there we were hot and the water looked very inviting, so we all shed our clothes and got in the water. I remember we sat in the water, and the water came up to our lips, and we would blow on the water and the minnows would come and nibble on your lip. You know, you were disturbing the water so the minnows would come. I remember that.

JONES: How did it happen that Walter took you and the family away from the Anderson compound and moved to Old Fields?

ANDERSON: I don't really know the reason other than the fact that my grandmother, my mother's mother, had died, which left my grandfather Grinstead alone. Of course, there were servants who lived there with him, but my mother went to live with him. Of course, there was plenty of room for Daddy to work. It was a beautiful place to live. I think one of the reasons

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that we were able to accept the way that Daddy was so well, is that Old Fields was very isolated. We rarely saw other children.

JONES: Were you school age at this time?

STEBLY: Yes, my mother didn't let me go the first year. I didn't care for first grade so she let me stay at home. The next year I went back they put me in third grade. She taught me at home the first year. It was while we were there that she began to teach school, too. She taught in Pascagoula, starting I think about 1947, '48. But, my father built his own kiln there, did you know that? He had his own pottery in Gautier.

JONES: Did he?

STEBLY: Yes, he burned the kiln house down. It was a beautiful house. It was the old carriage house that went with Old Fields. He would get in a hurry to get things done. He built his kiln house, but he wasn't careful enough about fireproofing things and the heat he was firing to. Somewhere here I have a piece of paper that is his record of that eventful firing. It begins, like, five o'clock in the morning, "Loaded kiln" and then "added fuel and fired up" and then "Checked kiln at eight o'clock. Checked kiln at nine o'clock - one wall caved in." You know, "Repaired wall, resumed firing" and then at eight-thirty or nine that evening it caught on fire and the whole carriage house burned down. There weren't any fire engines in Gautier at all.

JONES: Was Old Fields an old, old house?

STEBLY: Yes, it was built in 1846, I believe, or 1845, I'm not sure which. It's a very beautiful house.

JONES: It's still there?

STEBLY: Yes, well, now they've divided it all into pieces and there's a great subdivision there. And the house is just very close to everything else. It's not at all nice. Then it was beautiful.

JONES: How long did your mother's family live there? How many generations?

STEBLY: No, not generations. Grandpa bought that house. I think they would live in Pennsylvania during the winter and Old Fields during the summer. But my mother and her sister were both born at Old Fields. Daddy did some wonderful things while we were there. One of the things that I remember was a marvelous play that he did for us. He loved theater, and he got very much into making puppets. So, he built these beaverboard puppets which were as much as, some of them were six feet tall. They were frogs and popping bugs, you know those beetles with the eyes on their backs, and corn and, it seems to me there must have been some birds. But, all these puppets - and he used fishing strings for the guidelines. The fishing strings were attached to ropes that went across the rafters. He did this in the attic at Old Fields. The attic was one huge unfinished room. So, Daddy rigged his puppet show. Well, when he did the sounds and he pulled the ropes, the frogs would dance and hop around and the birds would jump up and make their noise and the corn would grow.

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It was like a spring celebration, and really wonderful.

JONES: How old were you?

STEBLY: Nine, ten. He let us play with them afterwards. He also did some great things. One Christmas, when we were having an ice storm, he had made us Indian teepees for Christmas presents - my mother ordered Indian costumes from Sears and Roebuck. Of course, ideally he would have put them up outside for Christmas morning. Well, there was an ice storm, so Daddy went out in the woods and cut down pine trees and brought them inside and set them up in the hall at Old Fields in an Indian camp. And when we came out in the morning here was this Indian village in the hall. He did things like that. He also made candles for the Christmas tree. Once he burned it down. But, he enjoyed living and he did wonderful things at that time - what you'd call family things.

JONES: How long did you live at Old Fields?

STEBLY: We lived there from the time I was about four, three or four, until I was twelve. 1947 I think, no, 1948, late 1948 was when we moved over here. I was eleven.

JONES: What conditions had you all move back over here?

STEBLY: Well, there was a terrible hurricane in 1947. You remember I told you how the live oaks were in front of Old Fields? They all fell over the bluff in that storm. And the bluff itself was washed in so that the end of the gallery at Old Fields was undercut. It was hanging out over the bluff. It seems to me at that time my father had taken a trip to China and he was not at home for the 1947 hurricane. My mother was

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there by herself with us and Suzie who was the cook. My grandfather at that time had gotten very old and feeble and was ill and he died shortly after that hurricane. I guess she felt it was too much to stay on at Old Fields by herself, especially with it in the condition that it was in. Later on we had it moved back, that whole house.

JONES: Just picked up and moved?

STEBLY: A firm from Jackson did it. They came down and moved it. But it took, I think, all the money they had left to move it. Then after that I think they could barely afford the taxes. It was a very large acreage of land.

JONES: It's no longer in the family?

STEBLY: No, it's all split into pieces now. You know, there are subdivisions all around Old Fields, and then the rest of the land belongs to different people. It's sad to go there, because it was a beautiful place.

JONES: Well, your mother's father was a lawyer from Pennsylvania and he and his family came down here and spent summers in Gautier at Old Fields?

STEBLY: Yes, well, he lived here full time for a while and, of course, he lived here after he retired, too.

JONES: Tell me the story of your mother and your father and how they met and subsequently married.

STEBLY: They met here at Old Fields.

JONES: Did they?

STEBLY: Yes, my aunt Pat had met Daddy's brother Peter first - she right away fell in love with Peter and they were married. Then when my father wanted to marry, my grandfather, "No,"

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because he was an artist and had no way of earning a living. My grandfather said, "Well, when you can show me proof that you can support a wife, then yes, you can marry her." So my father went hard to work at the pottery and he designed widgets, you know the little figurines? I think he was able to do a projection and I think he was able to convince my grandfather that there was a profit in that and that he would be able to support a family. So, then they were married.

JONES: Did your father ever have a job other than with the pottery?

STEBLY: No, he tried once to work in the shipyard, I guess as a draftsman. But he couldn't do it. He had some very interesting things to say about a man's work. One of the things he said I have, he said, "There's absolutely no sense in supporting yourself unless the action does support you." He also said, "If the average man realized the amount of energy, the amount of work he did in simply repeating going to work morning after morning he would be appalled and would probably stop doing it." But, he believed that the artist has a role in society. He did not believe that the artist just goes off and does his own thing. He believed that the artist owed the public a reasonable, good art work. You know, an affordable art work.

JONES: A social art.

STEBLY: Yes, he did, he believed that. He tried to live by that himself. He did certain work that was for the public - decorating pots, the block prints. I think you saw the block prints in the house.

JONES: I know the block prints.

STEBLY: He did those for the public. He felt that the artist owed that to the public. That was part of his duty to mankind. He also was very, very interested in the kind of art that is now so, I think they're doing it all over the country, the things that I've seen lately are the Chicano murals out around Los Angeles.

JONES: Yes, on the sides of buildings.

STEBLY: Yes, you see Daddy really believed in that. He believed that there should be a public art. When he took the commission to decorate the Ocean Springs Community Center, he meant for it to be a community endeavor. He was hoping that school children or people off the streets would come in and help paint that community house. That was the way he really would have liked to have done it.

JONES: Was your Dad intensely interested in the history of the Indians in this area? It seems to be because the murals in the community house are of Iberville meeting the Biloxi Indians.

STEBLY: Yes, but to tell you the truth, those Indian costumes are not quite authenticated. The thing is that the Indians that lived here on the coast, people don't know enough about them yet. I think he used hairdos that perhaps were from Florida Indians. Walter Anderson researched in the Cabildo in New Orleans. His sources were old French explorers' drawings, probably Natchez Indians. Just now, though, people are beginning to find out more about the Indians that lived here. He probably found every beach site that was to be

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found. He knew probably an awful lot about them that we don't know today. Many sites are already gone. He was a wonderful arrowhead hunter - you know, he would just walk and walk and walk. My mother always went with him then, you know, they both did.

JONES: Had your Dad ever had any formal education?

STEBLY: Good gracious, yes. He was sent away to school when he was eight years old. My grandmother was a busy woman and she didn't have much time for three little boys. Fabie, my grandfather on that side, G. W. Anderson, he was a grain merchant in New Orleans but he was British. He was English. He very much believed in sending children away to school. So, Daddy and Peter were sent away to boarding school when they were eight and ten, in New York state. In fact they didn't even get home for Christmas and I think occasionally even spent summers at school. Then, after Manlius he went to, maybe Parsons, I'm not sure about some of those years in between. He did go to the New Orleans Manuel Training School for at least one year where he did a lot of wood carving. You've seen lots of it. Then he went to the Pennsylvania Academy for five more years.

JONES: Where he received most of his formal training?

STEBLY: Yes, he won a Packard Prize for his animal drawings and a Cresson Traveling Scholarship while he was there and traveled in France and studied there. I think the thing that affected him most, that influenced him most while he was there were the cave paintings, the primitive art that he got to see.

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He climbed through all of those caves. Once he fell down a mountainside and broke his nose.

JONES: His nose?

STEBLY: Yes, he broke his nose again and again, once playing football and then once falling. I don't know how many times he broke it.

JONES: During your lifetime he made his trip to China, right?

STEBLY: Yes.

JONES: Tell me what his experience there was like.

STEBLY: Oh, you have to ask my mother about that. She'll tell you great stories.

JONES: I will.

STEBLY: But, he did go to China. He was aiming to get to Tibet and he did a walking tour across China. But it was during the war, during the revolution, and there were groups of soldiers just sort of going wild through the country. You know later it got much worse. This was at the beginning of it.

JONES: During the Second World War?

STEBLY: After the Second World War.

JONES: Oh, during the Long March?

STEBLY: Yes, while he was moving across the country - he had done a great deal of painting already, he'd also kept very careful logs, he'd always kept logs, especially when he was going on trips - and he had all his things with him in his backpack. He was walking. In a small town a group of soldiers stopped him and examined his things, you know, asked him where he was going. And they were very, very interested in his work.

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in the paintings and things. Then he walked on and camped outside the town by a little stream of water, I think. He used his backpack as a pillow to sleep on, and while he was asleep he dreamed a water buffalo came along and hooked its horn through his backpack and took off with it. When he woke up his backpack was gone, with everything he owned in it, his money, his work, his logs, everything.

JONES: So there must be some Walter Anderson paintings in China?

STEBLY: Yes, he thinks the soldiers followed him and took it in the night. That's what he always told us.

JONES: So what did he do? He was there with no money.

STEBLY: He had to walk back. They were very good to him, the Chinese people. He said that all you had to do if you were hungry was sit down with your hands open and they would come along and put rice in your hand. He walked back to Hong Kong where he went to the American Embassy and they wired my grandmother who sent him a new passport and money and all.

JONES: What year did he return, do you remember?

STEBLY: No, I have paintings that he did in the Hong Kong harbor while he was waiting. Somehow he bummed paint and paper and he painted the crabs and the lobsters. I believed those are dated 1949.

JONES: Well, he made other trips across America on his bicycle, didn't he?

STEBLY: My mother will tell you with more detail. I remember the trip he took to Texas. I remember him telling us about it. I guess he got awfully hot, you know, bicycling through Texas.

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He would stop and cool off in the ditches, you know, he would just lie down in a ditch and cool off. I remember he used to wear out an awful lot of bike tires. I remember going with my grandmother once to mail him some new tires. He did keep a log of that trip which is still in existence. He also went to Costa Rica. Once he got as far as Washington, D. C. on his bike. He was going to go to Philadelphia, to an exhibit of Henry McCarter, his friend and teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy. I think it was when the American Association of University Women was sponsoring a traveling show of his paintings and prints. It had traveled around the country, and it was to culminate in a show at the Brooklyn Museum. They wanted very much for him to be there. So he started, but I think he got as far as Virginia. It took him longer than he thought it was going to, naturally. He got to Virginia and realized that what everybody had wanted him to be there for had been over for about three days, so he turned around and came back.

JONES: Well, you must have been at an age where your Daddy to get on a bicycle to ride to New York City seemed rather strange. What would your mother tell you about that?

STEBLY: I don't ever remember really wondering about anything that my father did. We were brought up with the attitude that he was a very special person. You see, my mother majored in Art at Radcliffe, in Fine Arts, and when she met Daddy, when she saw his work, she knew what he was. And I'm glad. It took a woman of some education to appreciate Daddy. It must

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have been awfully hard to live with him sometimes. But she did bring us up in a very accepting kind of way. I guess it was a healthy way. It wasn't until we lived in Ocean Springs that I remember ever feeling the least bit uncomfortable about him. And then I think it was more, not when he did things away from here, but when he rode through town on his bike. You know, he always looked pretty disreputable. He didn't care much about clothes. There was a point in my life when I would pretend I didn't see him and things like that, but it was brief, thank God, I will say it was brief.

JONES: During your high school years?

STEBLY: Yes, say, when I was about thirteen, fourteen, that age. I think the people of Ocean Springs thought of him as kind of a bum, really, at that particular time. But when you think about it, the man was working constantly to have done as much as he did. He was a wonderful man.

JONES: How did your relationship with him change over the years? As you got older, did you find that you were growing away from him?

STEBLY: Yes, the only time I was really close to Daddy was when I was very, very young, maybe until I was ten. Then, when we moved over here we always lived separate from him. He lived in his studio, in his house, the house we just went to. He had another studio that he built himself down on the beach. That washed away in Camille. But he lived by himself in that house and we lived in this one. He would come down for meals or we might take food down to him. But at the same time he was beginning the trips to Horn Island, which, of course, would be stays of three weeks or four, and during that time

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we'd see him not at all. Then, when he'd come home from the island he'd usually be quite social for maybe two days and two nights. He would come and show us things he'd done and read to us from his logs. To share. I think that the man had so much to do. He was driven, certainly he was driven. A number of people have said - and I still think she probably helped a great deal - a number of people have said that he would not have been able to do the things that he did had he not been married to my mother, you know, if he'd been married to someone else. But my mother says that that's absolute nonsense, that he would have done what he had to do no matter. Nobody could have kept him from it. I think she probably made it easier for him though.

JONES: There was never a time that you could recognize that their relationship was strained?

STEBLY: Oh yes, indeed. There were many times. I think several times she was to the point where she just wanted a divorce or wanted to be separated from him. In fact she was separated from him several times briefly. I wonder at her wisdom. I've recently read some of the material that she's working on about her life with Daddy, about the beginning of her life with Daddy, when I think she initially realized what an artist, what a genius, and what a man apart he was. At that time I think probably her family was encouraging her to leave Daddy - this is before I was born - but, I think she recognized a need in him. They sent her off to Chicago, but she came back and went back to living with him.

JONES: Was it living with him?

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STEBLY: At that time it was.

JONES: When did he begin his trips to the islands?

STEBLY: Well, I think he always made trips to the islands. He was sailing out to the Rigales when they still lived in New Orleans. He did a lot of sailing. I can remember him coming back to Old Fields when I was like six, coming home from having camped out on Chandeleur or Horn Island with treasures. He would bring a blanket roll full of wonderful shells and pieces of driftwood and great things that he'd found. To begin with, though, when my mother and father were first married, she would go with him.

JONES: In a rowboat with him?

STEBLY: At that time he was sailing. One trip they made was with a motor. But Daddy never got along well with motors. He would forget important things like gas and oil. He didn't have any patience at all with motors. He was terrible at driving a car.

JONES: Did he ever try?

STEBLY: Yes, he always insisted on driving, but he would go into ditches. He would drive into trees and break the lightbulbs and things like that. I remember one Christmas day when we were coming over here from Old Fields to spend Christmas here with my mother's sister and her family, we went by to take a Christmas present to old Bella, who was a black woman who had worked for us at Old Fields. She had a deep ditch in front of her house and we went into the ditch. We were late for Christmas dinner. He was not a good driver at all. My mother will tell you if you ask her about how he hit a cow once. I should think it

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would be pretty hard to hit a cow. I wasn't born then so I won't try to tell it.

JONES: Didn't he have accidents sometimes on the way to the islands?

STEBLY: Yes.

JONES: What was the atmosphere at home like when he was gone? Was your mother ever fearful?

STEBLY: I think she gave him usually about three to four weeks, then if she didn't hear from him in some way, or if she began to get worried, she would send the Coast Guard out, which he hated. But she would send them to check up on him. And, say if there was a hurricane warning she would make sure he knew about it. Not that he would always pay any attention.

JONES: Were you here during the hurricane when he strapped himself to a tree?

STEBLY: Yes.

JONES: Do you remember what your mother was like?

STEBLY: She was very worried, or course.

JONES: Did the Coast Guard just not get out there in time, or did he just refuse to come in?

STEBLY: Oh, he refused to come in.

JONES: And he actually did strap himself to a tree?

STEBLY: Yes, well, he tied himself.

JONES: Was it a bad hurricane?

STEBLY: It was Betsy, which hit the Louisiana coast terribly. It wasn't so bad here. It was very bad on Horn Island. You know, I think the whole island almost was covered. Only a couple of the dunes and the highest trees were up. You know, the backbone of the island was still not submerged. But, after

the hurricane was over he did a great many paintings to show what the island was like afterwards - the enormous amount of sand that had been moved, the new configurations of the beach. To me it was always so ironic that he had to die in a hospital of cancer because of the...

JONES: Close brushes that he had.

STEBLY: Marvelous close brushes that he had so many times. He was bitten by a moccasin once on the hand. Many times he capsized in his little boat, or was swamped and had to hang on or swim like twelve miles. He was a terrific swimmer.

JONES: He must have been an incredibly strong individual physically.

STEBLY: He was wonderfully strong, wiry.

JONES: How tall was he?

STEBLY: Not very tall, about five nine.

JONES: Weighed about, 160 maybe?

STEBLY: I doubt that he weighed that much, but you can ask my mother.

JONES: He would capsize and swim?

STEBLY: Yes, my mother might not remember to tell you this. I think one of the fascinating things that he did at Old Fields was with the bulrushes. He got very interested in bulrushes and what you can do with bulrushes. At one time he harvested I don't know how many, and he would lay them out on the floor of the attic at Old Fields and then he'd put these reed mats down. They smell nice, really, really nice. I forgot to tell you that and I thought my mother might forget.

JONES: How regular were his trips to Horn Island?

STEBLY: Do you mean while we were at Old Fields or when we were here?

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JONES: When you were here.

STEBLY: They got more and more regular. He would stay in for say, three weeks in order to decorate enough pottery to get enough money to buy his supplies to go out again. All seasons of the year, he didn't skip, you know, the winter, the coldest winter, he still would go. He slept under his boat. It gets awfully cold on Horn Island.

JONES: Was he from time to time bothered by hunters and things like that?

STEBLY: Yes, it's strange now how those same hunter will come and say, "Well, we knew your father on Horn Island." I wonder sometimes how they knew him.

JONES: Was he close to anyone outside the family?

STEBLY: I think most of the friends that I know of - yes, he had friends - but most of the ones that I know of are left over from his art school days, who would come here and visit. Now, Harris Brister, from Jackson, Bishop Bratton's grandson was a close friend of Daddy's. Daddy loved Harris. I'm trying to think of specific people; Peter Bryant, Frank Baisden. Frank Baisden was an artist who went with him to the Pennsylvania Academy, lived in Florida. These are people who would visit and he would visit them occassionally. Ask my mother about that because I'm probably leaving people out.

JONES: You were born in '37?

STEBLY: Yes.

JONES: When you were going to school and you were achieving your education and you came to realize different things about your Dad, were you ever able to sit down and talk with him.

STEBLY: Not very often. He was interested always in books, in any kind of book.

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JONES: And you were an English major.

STEBLY: Yes, he used to come down and borrow my books and we would talk briefly about books. Later on when I had children he would come to paint my children. He loved to paint little children and babies. I remember talking to him once or twice then, but not really. You know how you just, just pleasantries, not really talking. In fact, obviously, again and again, the man had so much to share. But during his life I think it was just that he was so busy. I feel so lucky to have all that writing. I feel now that I might even know him better than many people who know their own fathers, you know, really well, and talk to them a lot, because the writings are so revealing. I'll see things and I'll say, "Well, look at that! I'm like Daddy."

JONES: But you were never able to make him come and sit with you and talk about ideas or his art?

STEBLY: I used to have him to supper over at my other house, and he would talk - no, not much about art, mostly about books. My husband was interested in history and I remember they talked about history. He was fascinated by art history and had done translations of art history books from the Spanish which he'd never even studied. He taught himself.

JONES: Why do you think Horn Island was the place where Walter Anderson could find what he needed?

STEBLY: I think he said it in the Logs.

JONES: I'm interested in your interpretation of it.

STEBLY: Well, I understand what he means when he talks about man,

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you know, he said, "Why should man live? To be a justification for the little black and white ducks." It does seem that this world, that there is so much that is there, you know gratuitous. I do think that that might be one of the reasons why we are here. Horn Island is a place where you can see things without interruption. You can look and you can digest, without being distracted. If you look at Daddy's art you'll find that it moves in stages. There are images that are recurrent. For example, say a pine tree that he'll reduce at first. In the Old Field period he reduced everything to motifs. It's very, very stylized. Then he carries it further and it becomes almost realistic. Then again he does it and you see the light and the way the wind moves it. On Horn Island he was able to do that to a number of things, you know, trace them all the way through and live with them in a way. You know I had a marine collector here. His name is Jack Rudlow and he runs a specimen company down in Florida. And Daddy painted marine creatures of every kind. Most of these the public doesn't see. There are things like jellyfish and sea slugs and peculiar little forms of life out of the sea. So the general public wouldn't be too interested and wouldn't know what they were looking at if they looked at them. So, I thought great, this man - he loves Walter Anderson to begin with, he'd come here having seen, I don't know, a copy of the Logs, I think and maybe a few paintings that belonged to someone else. He'd come here to see Walter Anderson things. So, I showed them to him and he looked and he looked and he couldn't talk and then finally he said, "Not only has the man painted them

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beautifully, but he's captured," what he called, "their essence. Actually the personality of the sea slug." So, when you can go that far. I mean, you have to know something very well before you can paint it like that, I think. I don't think that as long as you're in a place where you're distracted by other things, it would be very difficult to carry our art that far. When he said that about bringing art and nature into one thing, that part of it, I think. And then, of course, the fact that images succeeded each other as he said in the Logs. He fed on that. That powered him, the images he saw. It gave him strength.

JONES: I hate to keep returning to small details and things like that because I don't think Walter Anderson was too much concerned with things like that, but I think it is important for us to establish a few things. What was Walter's life like when he was here? What did he do here during the Horn Island period?

STEBLY: He worked hard, he worked hard. He didn't sleep much. He read a great deal. He painted principally still life and landscape while he was here. Some magnificent still life paintings come from that time. Many of them he would paint not once, but, say, four times from different points of view and from different distances. I have a painting that he did of a conch shell on a window sill looking out at pine trees. In one painting the shell itself is most important. Oh, I think there is a vase with some azaleas with the conch shell. The orange inside of the conch shell shows, plus the magenta

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azalea, and those two colors - I don't think most artists would put them together. They wouldn't work. But, somehow he managed to do the orange conch shell, the magenta azalea and the Indian-red trunks of the pine trees with purple. In one the conch shell is most important. In one the blue pitcher and the azaleas are the most important. In another the pine trees outside the window are most important. When things are blooming around here he would sit out here, say under that huckleberry bush, and paint azaleas. Anywhere up and down the road you might see him painting ferns or a rabbit or whatever.

JONES: Just worked incessantly.

STEBLY: Yes, he would sit just inside the door to his house and paint through the window, what he was seeing through the window. There are two trees that have a certain angle, the trunks went like that, and I think there are maybe six or seven paintings of different lights on the trunks of those two trees and the grass and the vegetation around them, probably at different seasons of the year, too. Turtles, paintings of turtles from that time. We have a good friend in town, Myrtle Keyes, who runs a dry cleaning place and she grows fruits and vegetables, beautiful fruits and vegetables. I don't know, I think maybe she keeps chickens too, and she uses that fertilizer. Her vegetables are almost exaggerated they're so beautiful. And she would save things for my father, and save him things like turkeys, too. She would loan him turkeys to paint. He would go by her dry cleaning place and

collect whatever she had at the moment that he could paint. Of course, every day he would spend a portion of that day decorating pottery for the showroom. Let's see what else, painting block prints, printing them and painting them. Daddy would go into something, he would attack something. If he were woodcarving he would do nothing but carve wood for so long. After one of the great hurricanes, a great oak tree fell outside of his house and he used the oak tree up. He used every bit of it. He made a stool, he made The Swimmer, he made the Father Mississippi figure. There was an Indian across the road, a dancing figure of an Indian. That is gone completely. There's not even a photograph of that. But she stood down there on the bank there, Ferns, it's property that belongs to sister now. But what was he like? You'd hear him dancing at night. We didn't see a great deal of him. Like I said, he was busy. We'd watch him draw. At that time he was drawing with India ink and one of those nub pens, you know. Hour after hour he would draw chickens and pigs and cats and flowers and whatever. He did it so rapidly, when he drew it was like magic. The thing would just appear on the page and there was never a mistake. And to a child who's tried to draw with ink and knows how it blobs and drops, that was like a miracle. I used to think that the drawing was inside the page and he just sort of touched it somehow and it came out. He drew very rapidly. He had a tendency at that time, if he drew one guinea hen he would draw seven in line, stylized.

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There are so many of those. While we were at Old Fields too was the time that he was doing the illustrations. At night he would read and turn pages with his left hand and draw with his right. The pictures that he did at that time are not as much illustrations as much as they are direct translations of the words to pictures. For example, for Don Quixote there are 2,000 drawings. For The Iliad, for the battle when Hector is knocked down on the battlefield, there'll be a drawing of when the spear hits him, a drawing of Hector in mid-air falling, and then one flat on his back. So, you know, they are just unbelievable. There are so many of them.

JONES: Let me ask you something about his general demeanor, his personality. Was he generally a good-humored individual?

STEBLY: Oh, yes, and he saw humor in everything. You knew his mood. Usually you heard him whistling or humming while he was working. He would hum Beethoven, or whistle. For the most part I think he had a tendency to avoid people.

JONES: Yes.

STEBLY: But it wasn't because he didn't care for them. It was because he had other things to do.

JONES: I have read, though, about how funny he would be if he felt good. About how he could be good company. About how healthy his wit was.

STEBLY: He had times that he could be very social. He had very beautiful manners always. I think one of the schools he went to, the motto of the school was, "Manners Maketh Man." He had that kind of courtly manner.

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JONES: Old southern gentleman?

STEBLY: I don't know. He wasn't southerny at all, I mean, what you'd think of as southern. No, I wouldn't have called him southern. My grandmother was such a funny mixture because she was as liberated as a woman could be for a woman from her age, and yet, she was southern. She went to school in New York state and she'd go there summers and all and she was pretty well-traveled and awfully well-read. She was a socialist. Mahatma Ghandi was her great hero. And yet, if they played "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in church she would walk out. Isn't that funny? See, she could remember when General Butler occupied New Orleans, or she could remember being told about it, I'm not sure. Her father was in a prison in Mobile. I remember her telling me tales about the Civil War. When her father was in a prison in Mobile her mother sewed gold inside her petticoat and put a pair of man's shoes on over her shoes so that she could take him a pair of shoes in prison.

JONES: And gave him the gold.

STEBLY: Yes, you know, when General Butler was in New Orleans he required the women to get off the sidewalk when he walked. That kind of thing. She used to tell good stories. I guess it was her cousin who was in the Confederate Navy and picked a bomb up and threw it off a boat. He was quite a hero. But, she was a strange mixture. There couldn't have been a more liberated woman. And yet she had that strong southern...

JONES: And you didn't find much of that in your father, that southern way of thinking?

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STEBLY: The courtliness you think of as being Southern?

JONES: Well...

STEBLY: Or is it a school because the school that he went to was in the North. The school that did the manners and things.

JONES: The gentility that we were talking about I always attribute to a southern upbringing.

STEBLY: Yes, I think part of it was just a part of his personality because I've seen the same thing in my brother Johnny who never even was that close to Daddy, my youngest brother, has that sort of manner that's a very charming kind of politeness. But I don't think many people have it anymore.

JONES: All of that I think of as part of what we're taught in the South, yet you say you would term him Southern?

STEBLY: Possibly. I never thought of him as being Southern. You ask my mother and see what she says. Maybe she'll think that he was Southern.

JONES: Let me ask you, you are educated in literature, do you think Walter Anderson had any training in writing or was he just an instinctive writer?

STEBLY: No, he didn't have formal training in writing, he just wrote. I think he was as driven to write as he was to paint.

JONES: Do you really?

STEBLY: Yes, I do. Who knows what he destroyed? At many different times he was writing everyday, everyday. Have you ever seen the journal that he kept at Old Fields that's a picture journal? It's very beautiful. He drew a picture everyday that had something to do with what happened that day.

JONES: I have seen examples.

STEBLY: Yes, I think they went three years. But at the same time he wrote, too.

JONES: You think he had a literary form, a literary gift that will last?

STEBLY: I do, although, who knows what he destroyed? Much of what he left and what survived is in incomplete form. Many times when I'm doing the miscellaneous writings I'll come across one stanza of a poem and maybe one line of the next and obviously it's a piece of something longer. But, you see, those things were just thrown into closets any whichaway. One piece might be on the back of a drawing and you might come across another piece of the same thing buried in another box of papers. That's why it's such a job, such an enormous job to try to fit all that together and see what there is there. If it is in a condition you might want to publish. When I chose these - I think there are about sixty selections in these excerpts - when I chose these it was almost an arbitrary selection because there are that many more that are as good as this or better than only, I went by what seemed to go together with an idea that I was trying to get across at the time. So it was really almost an arbitrary selection. There are four, five, six times that many more of the same quality.

JONES: He certainly seemed to have a style as unique in his writing as he did in his painting.

STEBLY: He has about three, I think. When I put these excerpts together I did it to be a reading, not for one person to do

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but for three people to do. The matter-of-fact things were to be read by one voice, a man's, the really crazy, far-out things were to read by another, and then I was reading what I call the feminine-sounding things. It read very well like that. But, there are at least three distinct styles that I can see. Then, of course, the regular journalistic thing is another one. I think I used the matter-of-fact voice to read the journalistic.

JONES: Yes, I think we've about interviewed long enough for one day. But, I wanted to ask you, how did your father die?

STEBLY: Lung cancer.

JONES: Were you here during that time?

STEBLY: Yes, he was planning, I think, another trip to Horn Island at the time just before he went into the hospital. But he had not gone out that fall. He'd been too weak, he hadn't been well enough. A man who lived close to me over on Holcomb Boulevard raised game chickens and Daddy would ride past my house everyday on his bicycle going out to paint the game chickens. And frequently I would see him rolling his bicycle, which meant he was feeling really low that day. He would not even feel that he even had the strength to ride. That's the main thing that I remember of that time.

JONES: What is something that you have in your memory that you will always keep about your Dad? Do you have a special memory?

STEBLY: I don't know. There are so many things. There are a great many things that I remember about him. I feel very lucky that he left so much of himself that not only I will benefit

from but my children and their children. I think that that is the thing that stands out in my mind right now.

JONES: I want to thank you for the tape for me and for everyone who will learn from it and tell you how much we appreciate it.

STEBLY: I enjoyed doing it. I think it's a good thing to do.

END OF INTERVIEW

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