Ana Steele Clark

An Oral History Interview
Conducted for the GVSHP Westbeth Oral History Project

by

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Phone Interview
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Interviewee: Washington, DC
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ABSTRACT

Ana Steele Clark worked at The National Endowment for the Arts for over thirty years, serving the organization from soon after its 1965 founding through the administration of President William Jefferson Clinton. Clark served as Acting Chair of the Endowment in 1993.

Clark begins the interview by giving a short history of the NEA, which was launched by President Johnson as an advisory board for art related policy. Clark, who began working for the Endowment three months later, describes the unorganized and catch-all nature of the group's first few years. Clark also describes the parallel rise of The National Council on the Arts. She talks about the compelling leadership of NEA chair Robert Stevens, and the star-studded Council board, with members ranging from Harper Lee to Sidney Poitier. Clark speaks of the passion with which she and the other NEA employees approached their work, and the energy and idealism present in each meeting. She summarizes the early mission of the NEA as "the arts, the audience, and preserving, and then partnering," with a focus on the decentralization of art and public accessibility.

Clark also discusses the NEA's role in the formation of the Westbeth Artist's residence in the West Village. She reads notes from the first two NEA Council meetings, one expressing a desire to help artists obtain studio space, and another authorizing the chair of the council to initiate a project whereby a remodeled loft would become artist's quarters. Clark speculates that Robert Stevens had interests in a project of this nature even before the opportunity to fund such an endeavor was proposed to the Council. Clark is careful to point out that she had little personal involvement in the development of the project, and that her information comes from research into NEA files. She cites the ambiguous, early plans detailed in the 1966-67 Fiscal Report, when the proposed project still lacked funding and formal organization. Clark reads excerpts from multiple reports, which illustrate the development of the Westbeth proposal through timetables, site selection, building specifications, and more. She reads one section which describes the matching grant given by the J.M. Kaplan Fund to aid in developing the project. She finishes with the 1970 Annual Report, which includes details about the opening of Westbeth to residents

Clark concludes the interview by discussing the removal of Richard Stevens at the beginning of the Nixon administration and the subsequent split from the Westbeth project. She describes the subsequent NEA Chair, Nancy Hanks, and the increased number of projects in which the NEA was engaged. Finally, Clark touches on the many contributions of the NEA, and the wide scope of opportunities it offers for all artists.

Q: This is Jeanne Houck, and it is May 17, 2007. And for the Westbeth Oral History Project, today I'm interviewing Ana Steele Clark. I'm interviewing her on the phone. I'm at my home office at 214 North Eighth Street, Brooklyn, New York. And she is at her apartment at 2475 Virginia Avenue, in Washington, D.C. So let's get started. I actually thought it was very interesting, you were just describing that people knew you as Ms. Steele in the 1960s and '70s. Could you just say again that story of your name?

A: Well I went to work for the Endowment in December, Christmas week actually, of 1965. And there were only about seven or eight of us on the staff at that time, which of course I didn't know when I took the job. Because it was a government agency, I thought it must have hundreds of people. But anyway, I went to work there as a clerk/typist, which was all I could manage to land at the time. I had been in New York as an actress, and I had done some Off Broadway work and some summer stock, and I had my Actors' Equity Card, but I was really discouraged and there wasn't a lot of theater, except in New York at that time. So everybody who wanted to be an actress or a director or whatever went to New York. Anyway, when I came to work in December of '64, I was a clerk typist. There were so few people there, and they hadn't even finished or located a real office-an office for the Endowment-yet. With the President having just signed the bill on September 29th of 1965 that created the National Endowment for the Arts, we were three months old as an agency.

I'll get back to that in a second, but I did want, if you don't mind, I want to do a quick history, very quick, because there's still confusion, understandably, about the National Council on the Arts and the National Endowment *for* the Arts. And I did want to clear that up if I could. So I need to go back. I just mentioned that President Johnson signed the bill at the end of September in '64, and that was the bill that created the National Endowment for the Arts. The year before that, in 1965, he had signed the bill that created the National Council *on* the Arts. And that was to be simply an advisory body, advisory to the President with members appointed by the President. They were supposed to advise him on matters of policy with respect to the arts in this country. And that's all there was; a council with no staff, and with no money; just a council written on paper. In fact, the President didn't really get around to appointing them until 1965. So in 1965, legislation finally got through that would create an agency that had money: The National Endowment for the Arts. And the National Council on the Arts, which had by then been appointed by President Johnson and sworn in, and had met twice in 1965; The National Council on the Arts became the advisory body to the National Endowment for the Arts. And functioned sort of like the board of directors, except not quite, because in a strictly legal sense, all the power rested with

the Chairman of the Endowment. And the Chairman of the Council, then Roger Stevens, was also Chairman of the Endowment. So the Council is still alive and well today. It still advises the National Endowment for the Arts, and it's not that one of them became the other one; it's that one of them became the advisory body to the other. They are distinct. One is an advisory group appointed by the President, and the other is the federal government agency whose chairman is also appointed by the President.

When I went to work there, I was working for the Endowment, which was the staffed out, little bitty budget, two and a half million dollar budget for the first year of the agency. And it was in a grand state of confusion because there was no precedent for a national agency supporting the arts in this country. And there was a lot of creative ferment and a lot of ideas coming from all over the place, including the members of the Council, who were delighted that they were now going to be in a sense presiding over an agency with a budget. I ended up working my way up. Within a couple of years, the woman that I worked for left the agency, and so they gave me her title, which I don't remember. It was a generalist office. They hadn't organized by art form, by discipline or by program yet when I got there because there were too few of us. And so I was put into an office whose job we decided, this lady and I was to do everything that nobody else was doing. And then we found out that that was just about everything, because there was nobody there yet. And so we did a combination of research and public information and Congressional relations. And then we also did record-keeping, books, budgets. And we got a clipping service. I mean we were just the Jack-of-all-trades folks. And the lady that hired me -- didn't hire me, I mean I was hired by the agency – but the lady that I worked for left, and so they gave me her title, but they of course didn't give me her salary. Anyway, I sort of came up in the Agency as Ana Steele. And by the time Roger Stevens left in 1969, and Nancy Hanks came in 1969. She promoted me first to Director of Budget, and then Director of Budget and Research, and then Director of Budget, Research and Planning. I ended up being an Associate Deputy Chairman for Programs. And then I actually ended up being Acting Chairman of the Agency when Bill Clinton was elected, and before Jane Alexander was appointed and confirmed by the Senate and sworn in.

Q: Yes.

A: There was a nine month hiatus in 1993, during which I ran the Agency. I was its Acting Chairman. So during all of that time to the professional world, members of the National Council on the Arts, all of our advisory panels and the staff and everything, I was pretty much Ana Steele. John Clark came into my life, because Nancy Hanks hired him to be her executive assistant.

That was in '73. After what John calls our impetuous whirlwind six year courtship, we got married in 1979. At which time he was still there at the Endowment. I was still there at the Endowment. And we didn't see that I was going to be able to change into an Ana Clark because of the fact that by then I was known probably by hundreds of people, because it's a national agency and we have advisory panels and all the various art forms and disciplines coming in to the agency all the time. I mean I knew hundreds of people. And they knew me. And they all knew me as Ana Steele. So I sort of stayed with the Steele from that point of view professionally. But now that I'm retired, I do Ana Steele Clark. And I know that if people don't know one, they'll know the other. They'll know who I am.

Q: Yes. Well I find it very interesting how you describe such a small office. First, where were the offices and secondly what was the office culture like at that time?

A: When I was hired, Roger Stevens had an office in what I think is now called the Eisenhower building. It was the old Executive Office Building which is the huge gingerbread house, *enormous*, next to the White House, right next to the White House. And Roger Stevens had an office in there, that was a huge honor. Even then. I'm talking '65 when the government was way smaller; he was in that office by virtue of having a title 'Special Assistant to the President on the Arts. And that gained him an office in the Old Executive Office Building next door to the White House. And that's where I was interviewed for my job. When I was hired, which was Christmas week of 1965, I was told to report to 18th and G, which is where the offices were for the whole Endowment, which as I said had something like eight people at the time. And 18th and G was just a couple of blocks from the White House, and was, I believe, the headquarters at that time of the National Science Foundation. And then we sort of went on from there. And so did the National Endowment for the Humanities, which was created the same time we were created. That's where our first offices were.

Within about six months, I would say by the summer, we had probably about thirty people. So that period of time was a lot of hiring, getting to know you, and getting organized and figuring out in fact how to organize. And the Agency decided early on – I don't know why, because it may have already been decided by the Council that met two times before there even was an Agency – to organize by art form, by discipline. And actually when I went to work at the Endowment, I had thought, because I had this crazy idea that this was a huge agency, since you know, it had its own building and it had hundreds of millions of dollars and it was a federal agency, I had thought all agencies were all big and had a lot of people and a lot of money. But the

reason that I went into this generalist office was that they had not yet hired anybody to be the literature program director, or the visual arts, or theater, or dance, music directors. That wasn't done yet. And I thought, because of my background in theater, that I would work in the theater division, department, program. But there wasn't any when I got there. And so I went into this other office, which was this do-it-everything office, which turned out to be quite a blessing. Because I was there for thirty-two years, and I saw not only the Agency live and grow and thrive and get beat up on and all those things, but also I felt responsible to familiarize myself with a lot more than theater. I was in positions that were servicing and helping all of the disciplines. And so I made it my business to go to all the panel meetings I could go to and all the council meetings and get myself educated about dance and about music and about literature and about the visual arts and all that. So I felt lucky that I didn't end up in the theater department, which I might not have stayed thirty-two years in, because it would have been less what? Universal. And I probably would have gone on and done something else probably in theater. But in this way I ended up trying to keep an overview, a birds' eye view of all of the arts all over the country. And I was really lucky; really, really lucky to be in such a great agency.

The culture at the very beginning was fueled a lot by Roger Stevens and the early people that he hired. I don't include myself, or the woman for whom I worked, because we were sort of the generalists. But when he began hiring the program directors, and they began getting assistants – because we were really small – I did share with them the feeling of being present at the creation. It was really thrilling to land there and to realize that you were writing on a blank sheet of paper. And that you were supposed to be dealing with the whole nation and with all of the disciplines.

And so there was a whole lot imagination and creative ferment and personality, Roger Stevens was the absolute perfect ideal first chairman, because at least externally he was the opposite of those things. Externally, I don't know if you ever met him, but he was quite tall; more than six feet tall, and quite big. You know, broad shouldered; and bald-headed. And he had a very quiet voice, and was also well known for mumbling. One of the in house jokes was that you had to listen up when he talks. The Council would kid him about it. They all, everybody loved him. But it was listen up, because he tended to talk so softly that you would miss a lot of what he said unless you knew better. And we all learned to listen up, because he was also about as creative an individual as I've ever known, and as brilliant, and as inventive. And so he was an ideal person to manage a creative and temperamental and inventive and energetic young staff, which was what everybody was who came in there, because he was calming, and he was soft spoken. And

everybody else was the opposite of those things. But he was also full of creative ideas himself. And loved what he called 'making deals'. That's how he used to characterize himself. And would often come into a staff meeting and say that he had just had an idea, which he pronounced 'idee', instead of idea. And he was amazing.

I know from personal experience when I went to work there and I was probably about 26, I was scared to death of him, because he was huge, and he didn't seem very friendly to me. He didn't smile easily. He wasn't a glad-hander or backslapper. He wasn't a charmer in that sense. I was scared to death of him. And I was dazzled by the membership of the National Council on the Arts, because the first meeting that I got to go to was in February of '66. I mean I was looking at people that just made me gasp, because they were so famous and so interesting and so lively. People I never thought I'd ever see. Isaac Stern was there. And Agnes de Mille was there as were Harper Lee and Gregory Peck. That was an amazement to me to see the author of 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and the star of the film 'To Kill a Mockingbird' sitting next to each other. Leonard Bernstein was on it. It was really a pretty amazing group of people. And Roger Stevens was there, and so for a while I feared him and I didn't really pay much attention to him in the meetings of the Council, because the Council itself was so dazzling. And then after I was there about a year, I began to realize that the magic actually was probably at the head of the table, with this guy that mumbled and that you had to listen up to and who was full of ideas and invention, and practicality. And he brought with him his background. He had been a real estate magnate. And he had been a Broadway producer. And then we all found out that he read at least one book a day, novels. He was a fiend for literature. He loved opera. I mean there were those things about him that made him an interesting and well rounded sort of person. I often think about his real estate background and Westbeth and wonder whether that had helped him at all to help that come into being.

Q: Well I think you're giving us a wonderful characterization of these early years. And what I have on my chronology of the NEA in front of me, I have 1966 as representing the first Endowment grant to the American Ballet Theater at $100,000. That I found on the NEA site. And then I see approaching 1967 is the first full fiscal year of operation. And I'm wondering, you're telling us about his character. What were some of the Council meetings like at the time? You've described these amazing people sitting around a table. Was it very lively, for instance?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He was never lively. But he was. There's another thing that I wanted to mention about him was that one also learned that he had a

respect and affection for artists second to none. I mean the man *loved* the Council members. And they loved him back. It was really something. And he would tell anybody who cared to listen to him that he loved being involved in the arts because he had spent a lot of his life to date, and I think he must have been in his fifties, early fifties when he inherited – or not inherited, created, and was the founding father of the Endowment and the Council – I think that he found, he would say that he had spent his earlier life doing real estate and banking and things like that. And he just didn't find the people very interesting. And I don't know, some people think that it was his wife who got him interested in going to theater or other arts. How he eventually started to meet people that were involved in the arts I don't know. But I do know that he found them incredibly interesting and stimulating, in ways that he didn't find anybody else. And so his respect and affection for artists was just palpable. I think it just fueled all of us who felt exactly the same way, because we came from backgrounds in the arts. Program people did, I did, almost all of us did. But it was wonderful to have, at our head, somebody that really loved what it was he was there to serve. Because too often that's not been the case. Too often it's more about managing, or whatever it's all about, but it's not about being in love with the cause that you're in charge of serving, which is an ideal situation. So the Council meetings were full of people who also were full of ideas. And I was told that at one of the Council meetings – I went to all but two of them after I went to work there. They had already had two before I got there. And so I missed the one, at which I was told that one of them threw a shoe across the room at another one of them.

I remember a Council member, Lawrence Halprin, who's a landscape architect in San Francisco, who did the FDR Memorial here and many wonderful pieces. He was on the Council in the early days. And I remember that when he would get agitated at a discussion that he didn't think was going the way he thought it should go, as often as speaking about it, he would stand up and pull out – he had a tendency to keep those big bandana type handkerchiefs sticking out of a pocket. They're this big sort of denimy thing. Would pull one out of a pocket and pace back and forth, back and forth, and back and forth behind the row of people that he was sitting with. And he would just pace back and forth, make everybody really nervous. Because by just doing that, everybody knew what was on Larry's mind, but he didn't have to hold forth and 'yada yada yada', you know, and he could just do it with a physical thing.

I remember a fascinating conversation, debate, discussion that had to do with, it's one of these eternal discussions about the various merits or values that should be put on the creative artist or the originating artist as opposed to or compared to or vis a vis the interpretational or performing artist. It's

the creator and the performer, sort of. And it was a *wonderful*, *wonderful* conversation, because the creative artist end of things was being put forward predominately by John Steinbeck and Harper Lee, and the performing or interpretive artist by Helen Hayes and Sidney Poitier. Now I have to tell you, that was, for somebody like me, just a jaw dropper. It was wonderful! And those were the kinds of conversations because this is a Council struggling to set priorities, to figure out what's the best way to help and who to help, and how to help them. And it was a ferment. I remember Rene D'Harnoncourt who was at that time the head of the Museum of Modern Art talking about a burgeoning movement in the world of the visual arts, and it wasn't as I thought it was going to be about museums. It was about works of art in public places – sculpture being put in outdoor spaces. It didn't take too long for us to set up an area of support for that, for public art. These were Council members that had a lot of ideas, and they brought a lot of information from hands on experience. They were themselves artists or leaders in their communities. And they brought all of that to the table. It was just marvelous.

But they sure didn't always agree with each other. There were a few more, well I remember for example there was an effort to support, probably Larry Halprin, to support an artist activity that was going on in Haight Ashbury in San Francisco. We're in the sixties now. There was a lot of social unrest and anti Vietnam feeling and so on and so forth. Anyway Larry wanted to support an effort that was going on in the Haight. And I think that he read some work that was being written there, and Charlton Heston, I mean Moses; he was really distressed and upset, and disagreed violently with Larry. So there were some of those more sociological or ideological or lower case 'p' political conversations. But in the main, there was none of that. I didn't even actually think about the politics of anything until probably the eighties. It seemed very non-political, at least at the Council and staff levels.

Q: Those are wonderful insights and descriptions of what a meeting would be like for the Council. And so is there a way to, could you summarize the early mission idea behind the NEA? Is there a way to do that? By let's say 1967 or '68, when you were really beginning to give out grants was there a general mission idea that you could describe?

A: I think, you know it's really hard. But I would say that by '67 and '68 I don't know if it was being labeled, but if you analyze what was being done, a major priority was to support artists and to help them however they could be helped.to make quality art work. And that was in a lot of different ways. Westbeth was about helping artists. And so were grants to the individual artists. The first round of them went to choreographers, and then not very

long after that literature and visual arts. They were the creative artists that were given grants early, early on. There's always been a – not always, there is occasionally this misperception that the Endowment was created because of and for the 'major institutions'. And anybody who looks at the record will know that that was patently not the case at all. It was really to help the artist. And of course the institutional world then in the arts bore no resemblance to today at all. You can just look at numbers of theater companies or dance companies, and it's just a whole different world. So I would say that assistance or support for or whatever one could do for artists making work was right up there.

There was a lot of interest and concern and funding starting to go toward another priority, which got worded differently. Some of it had to do with simply using a word like 'touring', an interest right away also in public television which was then called 'Educational Television'. It was also known as 'decentralizing'. It was also called 'making the arts available, more available to people'. So I would say that that was another big one, maybe a co-equal with supporting or helping artists make work. It was about helping artists make high quality work, and helping people have access to work that was being created. The dance touring program was an amazing genius kind of thing that the agency did starting in the late '60s to bring dance around the country. It revolutionized the world of dance, and the audience for dance. It just changed the whole world there.

So I would say that access or availability or whatever you call it was a big one. And then I think there was a lot of interest in partnering. The Council and Roger Stevens who were really interested in working with the private sector, there was a lot of contact being made right away with private foundations. The Business Committee for the Arts didn't yet exist, but it was coming along, and it did get created within a few years of the Arts Endowment. And also there was interest in working with other government agencies. There was a lot of interest in working internationally, so everybody wanted to work with the State Department's educational cultural programs. Right away Roger Stevens made a partnership with a woman in an important position in the Department of Education, which was part of the then Health, Education and Welfare. Her name was Katherine Bloom. Roger Stevens invite Kathy Bloom to the meetings of the National Council on the Arts. And early on, a program was begun starting with poetry in the schools in literature, and then becoming artists in schools. That became a national program by the late '60s and early '70s, and was supported strongly in the early years by the Department of Education, the federal Department of Education, as well as the state education departments and certainly the state arts agencies. So there was a lot of interest in partnering, all of it to serve all

of those missions that they wanted to do, which was to help the artists and help the audience have access to all of this work.

And then there was an interest in preservation also that came along pretty quickly. I think partly because some of the 'don't tear it down' movements were really getting started in the late '60s. And we did have people that were architects on the National Council on the Arts, and designers and people like Larry Halprin. I remember reading that he, I think, he lay down in front of a bulldozer when they were going to build one of the big mega skyscrapers in San Francisco. By the time we started to get involved with museums, and supporting them directly, and this is under Nancy Hanks, then conservation and preservation, climate control, and storage and all of those issues were really important. Also they were important in a sense with the Agency's beginning support for the folk arts, and interest in holding on to the cultures, the various cultures of the country, all over the country. So there was also an interest in conservation or preservation …. So I think that makes four of them, right? I don't know.

Q: Yes.

A: The arts, the audience, and preserving, and then partnering; just bringing more money and more support, moral support, and attention, focus, and spotlight onto the arts and artists.

Q: What you're describing sets the stage really well. So it's 1968, and you just discussed this interest in partnering in a creative way with different organizations, both federal and private. And the JM Kaplan Fund was at the beginning of the idea for Westbeth. That's one of the questions. Is whose idea was it first? Was it Mr. Kaplan or Mr. Stevens to do Westbeth.

A: Let me tell you about the research that I've done, because as I said I wasn't there for the first two meetings of the Council, and also there were two more that were held that I didn't go to. And of course that is (haha) just our luck. But I did look in the reports, the minutes or the notes from that time, to see if I can find the very first mention of his name, which was at the second meeting of the Council, which I found interesting. This is the Council meeting before there was an Arts Endowment. The second meeting was held in June of 1965. And the report on that, under a section headed 'The Creative Artist', the section starts, "The Council emphasized the profound contribution of the creative artist to American life and to the future goals of our society, etc." And under that, different ways that they thought projects might be developed that would help? The first one being grants releasing the artist for creative activity. But the second one, and this is what I thought

you'd find interesting, reads: "Projects that will help creative artists to obtain adequate and appropriate studio space. This should include both individual studios and group facilities. The Council authorizes the chairman to initiate, in the best possible way, an immediate pilot project to remodel an old loft building or buildings into studios for artists' quarters." And that was in June of '65, before the Council had any money actually.

Q: I had not heard this anywhere else. I am so glad you found that. So in June 1965 they recommended one way to help artists is to remodel an old loft building. And so what I know in the story is that at some point JM Kaplan, Mr. Kaplan, and Mr. Stevens together went looking for a building. And within the Kaplan Fund files, there's records that they went down to Greenwich Village and walked around together to look for a building.

A: Do you know when that was?

Q: I can only speculate right now. I don't have an exact time, but I believe it would have been in 1966 sometime.

A: I'll be darned. Because there's one more entry in that report that I was just reading you about that first meeting. It's called The First Annual Report of the National Council on the Arts, but actually covers two years. In any event, I read you that section of bulleted ways to help artists, of which the second one had to do with studio space. Later on, in the same report, there's a heading that reads Low Cost Artist Housing. And can I read it to you? It's not long at all.

Q: That would be great.

A: It sort of makes the picture we are starting to get become clearer. And I'm now beginning to speculate. It reads:

> "Adequate space which is essential to the artist in his creative activities, is at a premium in most large cities. The artist frequently combines both his living and working areas because of the special nature of his work. Many European cities provide such facilities for artists at low cost."
>
> And then it says:
>
> "The HHFA has indicated a willingness to cooperate with the National Council on the Arts in developing plans which would help to alleviate this problem, which has become acute. Meetings have been held with

> the HHFA" – I'm going to get back to that in a minute – "to investigate the problem, but as yet no detailed plan has been formulated for its solution. Staff are, however, investigating the provisions of the various federal housing programs under which it might be possible to demonstrate that the housing of artists in living/working quarters is as feasible as it is necessary. The remodeling of a loft building as a pilot project may shortly be undertaken to demonstrate the feasibility of such a program."

Now I wanted to go back. That's it for this report. But it says HHFA. I do not know what that is because later they do talk about Housing and Urban Development, and the federal housing, FHA, administration. So I don't know what HHFA is.

Q: I will check on exactly what that means. [The HHFA was the Housing and Home Finance Agency].

A: It does indicate, though, and here's my surmising now, is that Roger Stevens was already going to do this. I mean somebody would tell him that there is this big problem. He would make sure that it was a real valid problem that could be solved. And then he would just sit down and figure out how to solve it. You know? And so it could be, do you know whether the Kaplan Foundation or Jacob Kaplan was already on the case also? In '64?

Q: What I know is that we do have the record that it was Stevens who first approached Mr. Kaplan. But Mr. Kaplan had already also had some experiments of his own in housing for artists on a much smaller scale than Westbeth. So, in a history that the Kaplan Fund has been able to write, it says that Stevens approached Mr. Kaplan, and then together they came up with a matching grant proposal for Westbeth.

A: Okay.

Q: And so you're describing the moment of where the idea is being developed at this Council meeting.

A: It sounds like the Council, and Roger Stevens developed the idea. And I'm not surprised. That's the way it was back then.

Q: What do you remember of Westbeth after that time? Were you directly involved, or do you remember seeing things in the office happening around Westbeth?

A: I think I had mentioned to you that I don't feel that I was personally, I mean it was discussed at Council meetings and et cetera, but I wasn't focused on it, nor do I feel that I remember much, except that it was going on and then there was this big press conference around it.

Q: Yes.

A: What I did was to go back in my files, and I found everything I could, and if you can stand it, I'll read it. Because I wanted to read it in the order in which it would normally come. The first thing that I found was that Council Report, that was before there was any money. It's [Westbeth] is mentioned in the Arts Endowments Fiscal Report, Fiscal Year '67 and Fiscal Year '68 Annual Reports. It's also mentioned in a book that we wrote up called "The First Five Years". I don't mean 'just mentioned'. I mean sort of talked about. But I'm now going to go to these reports, okay. This would be the first of the annual reports, and it's the Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30 1966, that would have been Fiscal '66. And there's this write up, and I'll just read it to you. And I'll read you a few more things, and then we can go from there.

Q: Okay.

A: Some of this is interesting. I wanted to mention, under a section called Variety of Art Forms, I will read you what's under that, but I also wanted to explain the heading Variety of Art Forms. The Arts Endowment always, from the very beginning, did things that crossed disciplines – like Westbeth. But there were a lot of things that were not just music or not just dance or not just theater. And since everything is supposed to be organized and tidied up for budget purposes and reporting purposes and explaining purposes and all that, this little baby called Variety of Art Forms had, I cannot tell you how many names over the years. Sometimes it was called Coordinated Programs. It was called Variety of Art Forms. It was called Special Projects. It was called – and nobody ends up liking whatever that is. Nonetheless, the agency has always tried to find room for it. So that's how come this is in this report under Variety of Art Forms. I find it interesting that in another place it's under Visual Arts. And in no place is it under Literature, because one of your questions had to do with Caroline Kizor who was Literature Program Director. But Westbeth is never under literature in any of these documents. It either appears under a "Variety of Art Forms," or as "Visual Arts. "

Q: Okay.

A: All right. Now, Under Variety of Art Forms, and this is Fiscal '66, which was basically began in '65 and went until the end of the summer of '66, it reads:

> "The National Council on the Arts initiated a program to provide studio living quarters at reasonable rates for artists. A $100,000.00 matching grant was approved to the J.M. Kaplan Fund, Inc., New York City, to develop the program. The project is being designed to provide artists with adequate lighting, acoustics and space, and long-term leases, which are frequently difficult to secure, enabling them to work and live in both practical and comfortable surroundings. The Kaplan Fund was chosen because of its pioneer work in this field. The Council believes that adequate and reasonably priced studio living quarters are among the most urgent need for artists, especially in the field of painting and sculpture."
>
> That was '66. In '67, under Visual Arts, and it's an Annual Report for '67, it reads:
>
> "The J.M. Kaplan Fund, Inc. – Artist Housing - $100,000.00. The National Council on the Arts initiated a program" – and it's pretty much the same write up that was in the '66 Annual Report. It basically says about the same thing. That's in Fiscal '67. And that's about a $100,000.00 grant.
>
> In Fiscal '68, there's a bigger write up. And it's under Architecture, Planning and Design. And the heading is 'The J.M. Kaplan Fund, Inc. Artists Housing Center', and thf number next to that one is $750,000.00
>
> "A project originally recommended at the first meeting of the National Council on the Arts April 1965" – remember, I read you the second report, which was June of '65. This says that it came up in April at the first meeting. So. -- it was finally "launched with a $750,000.00 matching grant, enabling the J.M. Kaplan Fund to set up the non-profit Westbeth Corporation, which purchased the old Bell Telephone Laboratories on New York City's Lower West Side. Endowment Funds joined with those of the Kaplan Fund, as well as Federal Housing Administration financing and other private sponsors."

Q: Yes. Good.

A: Um, where was I?

> "Federal Housing Administration financing and other private funds will permit the conversion of these properties into excellent studio living quarters, which will be made available to artists at reasonable rents. In addition to the 384 units which will house artists and their families, as well as provide working space, this artist housing center will include an almost limitless supply of other facilities for these artists and the community: a theater, film studio, exhibition galleries, rehearsal rooms, sculpture gardens, projection rooms, darkrooms and adjoining park and playground areas as well. Although the buildings are not nearly ready for occupancy, many hundreds of applications from artists have been received at the Westbeth Corporation. A board composed of distinguished artists and cultural leaders who will review all applications and will also decide on the maximum number of years that a tenant may reside in this first major national artist housing center in the country. This project, complex as it has been, is notable not only because it is a first in this country, but also because it has marked an extraordinary degree of cooperation between representatives of the federal and municipal governments, and the private sector. This spirit of cooperation was illustrated by those present on June 21, 1968, at the groundbreaking ceremonies for the center: The Honorable John V. Lindsay, Mayor of New York, Mr. Jacob M. Kaplan, President of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, Inc., Mr. Roger L. Stevens from the National Endowment for the Arts, and representatives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development."

Housing and Urban Development – HUD was the parent agency for the Federal Housing Administration.

Q: Yes.

A: And then it goes on:

> "Late in 1969 or early in 1970, when the center is open, some 380 artists and their families will take up residence, making the project the largest of its kind in the world. And if this experiment is successful, it is hoped that many such centers will be established all over the United States. As the New York Post's Emily Genauer wrote on June 29, 1968" – and then it's a quote – "'The most imaginative, unconventional and in some respects controversial of the many projects instigated by the National Council on the Arts to assist creative artists in all fields at this point looks as if it could turn out to be the most successful.

Artists will benefit from such a program, of course, but there isn't a city in the country where the physical and spiritual life of the rest of its citizens cannot help but be improved through the salvaging of sturdy, unused buildings for artist housing."

So that's in the Fiscal '68 Annual Report, and that's three quarters of a million dollars. And then – I'm almost there.

Q: Great.

A: I will read from an Annual Report that was doing la summing up of things. This is in 1970. Under Visual Arts – we're back at Visual Arts now – and this is quite extensive, and interesting to me anyway.
It's under "Artist Housing" -- under Visual Arts –

"In 1967, when the Bell Telephone Company's Laboratories Building on New York's Lower West Side was put up for sale, the Endowment was able to join with the J.M. Kaplan Fund to act on one of the earliest recommendations made by the National Council on the Arts. Recognizing the critical need of all artists, particularly painters and sculptors, for reasonably priced working and living space, the Council hoped to launch a pilot effort which might provide a partial solution to the problem, and more importantly might offer a model for similar projects all over the country. The Bell Laboratories seemed a perfect opportunity. The J.M. Kaplan Fund and the Endowment each provided grants of $750,000. And, with the aid of these funds, the property was purchased by the Westbeth Corporation, a non-profit organization created for the purpose of converting the laboratories into working and living quarters for artists.

Three hundred and eighty-three studio living units were constructed within the main building at Westbeth. Remodeling costs averaged $12,000.00 a unit, in contrast to the $30,000.00 which would have been required for new construction. Rising costs and the necessity of expending an additional $900,000.00 for the purchase of a leasehold on the site led to a request for further financing. This was provided in part when, in Fiscal 1970, the Endowment made a $500,000.00 Treasury Fund Grant, half of which was private money. Federal Housing Administration financing was, at the same time, raised to a total sum in excess of $10,800,000.00. The design and construction of the studio living units in Westbeth were completed within a very short span of two years. The issuance of a Certificate of Completion in December 1969 permitted the units to be occupied by artists and their

families at rentals ranging from $110.00 to $190.00 a month. Applicants were selected by a committee on the basis of merit and need, and were limited to those who were professional artists with incomes of no more than $11,750.00 a year. The 383 units were quickly occupied, and the waiting list had grown to over 1,000 by the time the first tenants moved in. The project was dedicated in a special ceremony on May 19, 1970. A reporter for the New York Times examined the tenants' roster at that time, and concluded that there were, in residence: "A hundred and fifty painters, forty-nine sculptors, twenty-seven photographers, twenty-nine writers, twenty-six musicians, thirty-eight actors, eighteen dancers, fourteen filmmakers, eleven playwrights, seven poets, nine composers, seven architects, seven stage directors, seven printmakers, three designers, four graphic artists, five craftsmen, four theater producers, hundreds of children, and a lot of pets."

Q: That's great.

A: Isn't that marvelous?

Q: Yes, that's marvelous.

A: That's to die for! I just think, this is a goldmine. I'm glad you got me looking. I've spent a little time.

Q: Are these files in your office?

A: They're at home with me.

Q: Yes?

A: Yes.

Q: That's great that you could pull them for us.

A: It's a mishmash, because what happens is that you have to dig and you read a hundred things to find one, but nonetheless. Can you stand one more?

Q: Yes.

A: This is actually, and it's getting a little repetitive, but I thought this might be of interest. This is from something called the National Council on

the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts During the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, Volume One, The History, in November 1968, which was when it was sent to the LBJ Library in the Austin, Texas. This document is down there in their library. We wrote it at the Arts Endowment. In fact I wrote a lot of this. It's been wonderful to go back now, because I've sort of forgotten all the work I did. Now we are talking about one of the meetings that I did not get to go to. Okay? It's the ninth meeting of the National Council on the Arts.

> "Several rather urgent items were brought before a special meeting of the Council, the ninth it was to hold. This time in Los Angeles on July 17th, 1967, the Council recommended that the first grant from funds…."

Well I'll skip that, because it has to do with something else. Okay, and then go on:

> "Chairman Stevens then reported that the old Bell Telephone Laboratories on New York's Lower West Side had become available."

And this is July of '67.

> "That they were ideal for a national artists' housing center, and that the project needed only the Council's recommendation on funding to enable the purchase and conversion of these properties. The Council promptly recommended awarding such funds as might be necessary to the J.M. Kaplan Fund for this purpose, and further resolved that the center, when complete, be named 'The David Smith Center' in honor of this great sculptor and Council member who had died in May of 1965."

Did you know that?

Q: I had not heard that before.

A: And it never happened. It was never named after him.

Q: No, it didn't. That's interesting.

A: Okay, I'll keep going.

> "Three weeks later, on August 7th, 1967, Roger L. Stevens announced that the long search for suitable properties had ended, and that the J.M. Kaplan fund had received a matching grant from the Endowment

> to launch the first major national artists' housing center in the country. Commenting on this announcement, Robert C. Weaver, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which was to assist with the project, stated, "I am very happy that the Federal Housing Administration's program has proved flexible enough to house both people and the arts. This is in keeping with our emphasis on developing cities which serve the soul as well as the body." Once again, two federal agencies were to join hands, this time with considerable private resources as well, to benefit America's artists.
>
> Mayor John V. Lindsay was present for this announcement, and gave his enthusiastic endorsement of the project. Senator Robert F. Kennedy also sent a statement regretting his inability to be present, and saying, in part, "The fact that this imaginative and creative project is becoming a reality is a concrete and encouraging result of Congress's enactment of the National Arts and Humanities Act. It is tangible evidence that legislation created the governmental concern for the arts, which will make a great difference. And it is evidence, too, that the drafters of the act were right when they contemplated cooperation of private foundations in the projects which they authorized."

So, that's poignant, actually, reading about Senator Robert F. Kennedy, because…

Q: Yes, I think that's an amazing series of entries you just read.

A: I've been spending a lot of time, and you have to dig. But unfortunately, I didn't bring everything. And it's all over the place. But it's so, it's like a goldmine.

Q: I find it very interesting.

A: So now we can go to your questions. I just thought I might as well get all this stuff in there.

Q: I'm very happy you did, because there were some things that I haven't seen anywhere else that you described. And now we have a record of it, and we know the sources. So that's wonderful to have.

A: Right.

Q: And I think one of my questions was how did Westbeth fit into the ideals of the NEA at that time? And a lot of the language you just read fits...

A: Like a hand in a glove, right?

Q: It really describes how Westbeth fit with NEA ideals, I think.

A: Absolutely.

Q: It was a very idealistic time, wasn't it?

A: It really, really was. Boy, you look back.

Q: How would you characterize that idealism, if you can? That's a very big question.

A: Almost impossible. Everybody, it was a whole staff of idealists working ridiculous hours, seven days a week. I mean, it was *ridiculous!* Including Roger Stevens. We were in there every minute, all of us. We were in there on weekends; we were in there late at night. And he [Stevens] also was on the road traveling because the creation of the state arts' agencies was a big movement that was helped along by the Endowment. And he was running the National Endowment for the Arts and chairing the National Council on the Arts. He also was Special Assistant to the President on the Arts, and he also was the Chairman of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Q: That's right.

A: You do that in your spare time, right? I mean it was, in a way, when Richard Nixon was elected and Roger Stevens was not reappointed, it's a presidential appointment, and his four years had run, and there was a lot of talk about getting a reappointment for him. And when he was let go, it was totally, you know, you're a Democrat, you're out of here, which just made people crazy, because the Arts Endowment had never been characterized as having anything to do with politics. You know they might have said something more graceful, like, "The President likes to have his own team," or something. But...

Q: Yes.

A: But, "You're a Democrat, you're out." In any event, the staff, was heartbroken because we just loved this man. And we felt that we were just cooking, you know? There were so many things popping at the same time that Westbeth was popping. There were just a whole lot of creative energetic

ideas going on, and things being set up or figured out how to organize. And then he was gone. But in retrospect, when I look back, I think first of all it probably saved his life, because the Kennedy Center was going to become a reality. They were beginning to build it. And you can't sit on top of that and sit on top of the National Endowment for the Arts all at the same time and live. You know? And I also think probably long-term vision would have told me that Nancy Hanks was going to pay more attention to the organizational issues that surround an agency like ours, and of course she helped it grow tremendously. And so those organizational issues became more and more crucial. And so my thought has been that they, both of them, were the perfect person, the right person at the right time, in the right place. With Roger Stevens followed by Nancy Hanks, it was a perfect sort of succession for the Agency. But it was a heartbreaker to lose him because he was really something. And he a lot of, he had a lot of ideas to help a lot of different fields. There were so many different things going on at that time. And to see him go was just, "Oh, dear!"

Q: At The National Council of the Arts….?

A: It's 'on'. I'm going to correct you, it's the National Council on the Arts.

Q: The National Council on the Arts. Thank you.

A: And the National Endowment for the Arts.

Q: Oh, it's "for the Humanities" and "for the Arts." Okay. Thank you. You've spent many years correcting people.

A: It's true. It's like saying 'Ana with one 'n". You know. You get used to some things.

Q: But the NEA pulled out of supporting the project at a certain point, which was at the same time that Roger Stevens left the NEA. So it seems, do you have any feeling about the sense that the work had been done, that it opened and the artists came in, and was there any feeling about the end of that relationship?

A: I found it an interesting question. And my thought had been, because I don't find in the record anywhere, any mention of an ongoing commitment…

Q: Yes.

A: that this was a pilot, the first in the nation, you know, a model getting all these partners together; so when you asked me that question, I went and reread everything again to see whether there was any conversation a) about being in an ongoing relationship, or b) about cutting one off, because that would be the other side. It would be, "Okay, was there a meeting at which," and this would be presumably when Nancy came in at the end of '69, when she raised with the Council that, "I know you did this, and it was brilliant, but…and, something, something, something." And I can't find any record on either of those fronts.

Q: Well that's helpful to know just because it's just a little vague in the record.

A: Yes.

Q: I have not seen reportage in the news about when the relationship finally ended at a certain point.

A: The agency did engage in startup projects which were just start-ups, that's all it was supposed to be. Also in startup projects which there was an ongoing commitment to. But this is one that, since it's silent on the subject altogether, I'm assuming that no long term commitment was assumed, at least at the NEA. Does the Kaplan Fund have a record that they were expecting continuing support?

Q: I wouldn't know that.

A: You don't know.

Q: I have not researched that.

A: I can't help either. It doesn't look from the Endowment side that there was an intention of continuing support, or that the Kaplan Fund even expected it. It seems that would be in one of these minutes or notes. I don't find it. Doesn't mean it didn't happen, it's just that I don't find it.

Q: I think one of the things I'd like to ask is, well first I'd like to tell you Westbeth is still around, as you know.

A: Actually I'm going to go down and walk around down there.

Q: That would be great. And the neighborhood's changed a lot. Now it's a very desirable neighborhood. And there's still a community of artists there, many people stayed. They ended up not having a rule that you had to leave.

A: Oh, I didn't know that.

Q: And that changed the concept that you described in an early meeting, that there would be a determination of how long people would stay. So it's still there and has survived, and I was wondering how you think about the legacy of Westbeth, or all the projects of those three or four years before Mr. Stevens went on to new projects?

A: I mentioned the dance touring program. If I had thought about it, I could sit here and reel off things like that, like the Vietnam War Memorial, and Maya Lin. I mean there were just so many things that, had it not been for the Arts Endowment, would not have happened. We can't, it's not that we did it all, or even that it happened because of us, but there was definitely a change in the landscape, in the culture of the country. And it coincides with the Arts Endowments first four or five, or even first fifteen years. I mean the impact on the landscape has been just *enormous*. I can speak personally. When I graduated from college, I was going to go into the theater. Well there was no theater to go into. You know what I'm saying? When I finished college, which was in 1958, I was nineteen. I was going to go and be an actress. And there was, at the time, I think the Arena Stage was here, in Washington. And the Alley Theater was in Houston. And I think maybe the Guthrie was in Minneapolis, and there was the Cleveland Playhouse, which was somewhere between an amateur and a professional, you know, the notion of non-profit professional theater really hadn't grabbed hold yet. There was almost no place to go if you wanted to be professional, that is, as a living. I didn't intend to make a lot of money, but I thought I could make a living doing what I thought I was good at and did best, which was to be an actress. But that was then. And this is now. And now you see that there are, you know everybody argues about how many non-profit professional theaters there are around the country. But I bet you there's more than eight hundred. Eight hundred! And there were a handful back then, you know, when the Endowment was started.

And *dance*. I mean, dance just blossomed! That is of course that there were extraordinary people doing the art, but the Arts Endowment was there to encourage and support. And I think that the effect of pulling together the panels from different parts of the country that were involved in these different disciplines and art forms had an effect that we may never know. But there was a lot of generation of ideas and information going on, and to

live and work in the Arts Endowment was thrilling because there was never a day that there wasn't a panel meeting somewhere on one of the disciplines in one of the rooms somewhere. The meetings were constant. And if you wanted to find out what was happening in the country in architecture or design, or in music or in theater, or whatever, you'd just go into a panel meeting, look at the applications coming into the agency, and listen to the panel members. It was just absolutely stunning.

Q: It sounds very exciting.

A: And the world is totally different now. People growing up now do not know. Several years ago I was invited to do a talk with some interns. I think at the American Symphony Orchestra League. And I was walking down the hall thinking about what I was going to say to them. And it was one of these, "Duh" moments where I stopped, and I thought, "My God! I bet these guys don't have any idea what the country was like before there was a National Endowment for the Arts." Because they're so young! You know, they have grown up in a country which has all of the richness. All of the resources. All over the country. It was not there. It really wasn't. It needed nurturing and attention and affection and protection and support. And the Endowment, at that time, had a galvanizing effect on local communities, because somehow, you know if you got an Endowment grant, even, and those days the money was small. Well everything was a lot lower, the cost of living and everything. But a very small grant to an organization in a city or a town or a community was galvanizing! It was looked upon as a wonderful thing, and it meant that the professionals in the country in the field respected and valued what you were doing. And the private money would then be forthcoming. It was a big boon to private sector giving to the arts. There was the entry and growth of the state arts agencies, and then when state governments began to contribute to the arts, the mayors got involved, in the cities and towns.

And if you went back to 1963, say, or '64, when the Council was first meeting in 1964, and you looked at the picture of any of the disciplines or art forms, or any of the involvement of private sector, corporate, foundation, individual giving, or any of the involvement of state or local governments, then compared to now? I mean look at it! It's just stunning! So I think the legacy is just delicious. And of course I'm very proud of it. I spent thirty-two years there, and I think it's a fabulous, wonderful, magical place. It's been through some very, very hard times. But…

Q: I'm so glad we've had a chance to talk today. This is a wonderful interview.

A: Good, oh I'm glad. I hope I didn't talk too much. I probably did.

Q: No, that's the idea.

END OF INTERVIEW