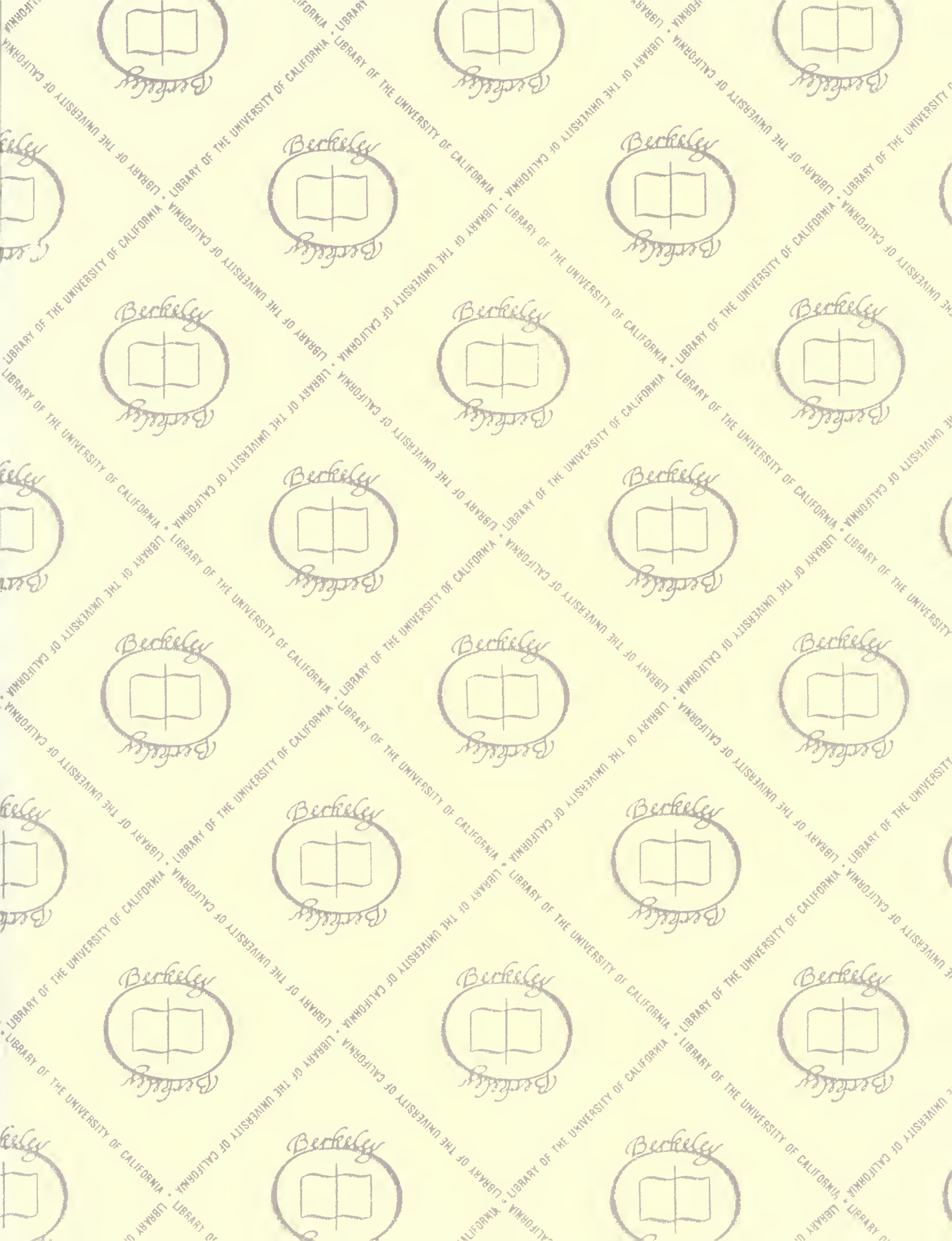


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Berkeley, California

Helen Oldfield  
(1902-1981)

OTIS OLDFIELD AND THE SAN FRANCISCO ART COMMUNITY,  
1920S TO 1960S

An Interview Conducted by  
Micaela DuCasse and Ruth Cravath  
1981

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Otis Oldfield, 1913

*Photo by Pierre Petit, Paris*



Helen and Otis, ca. 1960



Helen and Otis with their daughters,  
Rhoda and Jayne, San Francisco



The Oldfields with granddaughter  
Rachel Haug, Alta Cabin, 1957



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## PREFACE

The Introduction which follows will explain to the reader the origins and circumstances of this oral history with Helen Oldfield. Micaela DuCasse and Ruth Cravath have really performed an important labor of historical love here. The history, by Helen Oldfield, of the Oldfields and of the San Francisco art community, complements the Regional Oral History Office's interview with Ruth Cravath, and the interview with Elsie Whitaker Martinez, Micaela's mother. Taken all together they constitute a solid body of knowledge about the people and the good life of the art world in the period from the twenties to the sixties.

The interviewers took this project on as volunteers. That what would exist only as donated tapes for listening to in The Bancroft Library now has been turned into a usable memoir has come about because of the generosity of Walter Nelson-Rees, James Coran, and Catherine Harroun.

With the sum of money these friends made available, the Regional Oral History Office chose to transcribe the tapes, yet leave them in original form, with what corrections and additions could be inserted by the interviewers and interviewee in reviewing the transcript. Occasional misspellings, blank spots, or incomplete sentences should not seriously disrupt the reader's use of this volume, which has been indexed and chaptered by the interviewers.

We join Micaela DuCasse and Ruth Cravath in thanking the underwriters of this project, and we join them all in thinking highly of this memoir and considering it a very fine addition to the Regional Oral History Office's interviews in the arts.

Suzanne B. Riess  
Senior Editor

January 1982  
Regional Oral History Office  
University of California  
Berkeley, California



## INTRODUCTION

Upon his return from Paris in 1924, Otis Oldfield rejoined the San Francisco art scene and he became renowned as an artist as well as a teacher. He remained consistently an individual in his style and approach to art, never going along with the style changes and trends of that time onwards into the Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s. Nevertheless, he was a colorful member of the Bay Area artists group, numbering many of them as close friends until his death in 1969.

His widow, Helen Clark Oldfield, is an artist in her own right. She shared the greater part of Otis's life from soon after his return to San Francisco in the mid-twenties, until his death. Fortunately, she is able to give us a spirited account in colorful terms of their family backgrounds, their lives as individual artist before their marriage, as well as their life together in the art milieu of the Bay Area in the thirties through the sixties.

This important subject for an oral history under the auspices of The Bancroft Library was decided upon late in 1980. It came about in the fall of 1980 when Ruth Cravath Wakefield, longtime friend of Helen Oldfield's, had been visiting Helen for several days after Helen had returned from a time in the hospital. They reminisced about their earlier association and Ruth was struck by the remarkably articulate and accurate information Helen gave of Otis's and her life in the art world of San Francisco. Ruth knew this would be important to record and spoke about it to Catherine Harroun and Ruth Teiser.\*

Knowing of Ruth's longtime friendship with Helen Oldfield, Catherine Harroun and Ruth Teiser thought Ruth Cravath would be an ideal choice as interviewer for Helen Oldfield. Ruth Cravath felt that she did not have the experience to do it alone and she thought of another longtime friend of hers who had had experience with tape recording procedures while working on a course in the history of California art, Micaela Martinez DuCasse. Micaela was only too pleased to be asked to team up with Ruth Cravath. After a session with Catherine Harroun, Ruth Teiser, and the Regional Oral History Office, and armed with clipboard, tape recorder, and a suggested beginning outline, Ruth and Micaela spent the afternoon of January 14, 1981 with Helen Oldfield in her home on Joost Street, San Francisco, on the first interview.

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\*Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun interviewed Ruth Cravath for: Ruth Cravath, "Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920-1975," an oral history conducted 1974-1975, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, 365 pages.





Interviewing Helen was a wonderful, heartwarming and joyful experience. She proved to be a remarkably articulate and orderly-minded subject. Her almost total recall was such that the information flowed with ease and clarity. She was forthright in recounting family origins, characteristics, and her own and Otis's activities with a gentle humor that suffused it all with a light touch.

This quality of Helen's reminiscences was especially true of her account of Otis Oldfield, his family background, and life in Paris and return to San Francisco, leading up to their life together. It is a valuable document of one of San Francisco's most distinguished and accomplished artists. It could not have been recorded with more truth and completeness by Otis himself. Helen was totally aware of his nature, capabilities and significance in the period of the art of San Francisco and California of the time-span of his life and work. Perhaps as sympathetic observer and full sharer in the greater part of his artistic and creative life, she could give a more candid and well-rounded picture of it than could Otis himself. It is a great tribute to Otis, and to Helen as an individual artist in her own right while being so much a part of him and his life, that she could give an objective as well as a subjective account of their lives and times.

The interviews were spread over a period of three months, with six sessions, from which five one-hour tapes were made. The final session, held March 18, 1981, was to review recordings and add anything that Helen deemed important that had been left out.

Personally, I was enthralled with the interviews, as I had heard so much about Helen Oldfield through the many years of my friendship with Ruth Cravath, and admired her from a distance. I had not had the opportunity of meeting her, as an adult, until the first interview took place. All that I had heard and built up about her in my own mind, was confirmed, and I came away from the final interview feeling that I had gained a friend of great worth.

Very shortly after the final interview was taped, we were saddened to learn that Helen Oldfield had suffered a severe stroke. She is recovering slowly, but we cannot escape feeling that it was providential that we did the oral history while she was well enough to have entered into it with such enthusiasm and interest. For her it was a pleasure to relive her life and that of Otis's, and to know that it was to be documented in a permanent form, as it deserved to be for the enrichment of the total history of California art in the twentieth century.

For Ruth and me, it was not only a labor of love, but a most enlightening addition to our knowledge of California art history. We are grateful for the opportunity of serving the cause of oral history documentation under the auspices of The Bancroft Library's Regional Oral History Program.

Micaela Martinez DuCasse  
Ruth Cravath Wakefield

July 1981  
Piedmont, California



INTERVIEWS ON ARCHITECTURE, ART, DANCE, LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND  
PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

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Also available: BOOKS AND PRINTING IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA series.

\*The earlier interviews of the Regional Oral History Office must be reproduced from a bound volume and therefore cost more to prepare. A cost estimate will be given upon request. For further information contact the Regional Oral History Office, Room 486 Library, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.



Interview with Helen Oldfield, Interview 1  
Date of Interview: 14 January 1981  
Interviewer: M. DuCasse  
Transcriber: Matt Schneider  
Begin tape 1, Side A

DuCasse: Well, I guess we should just begin at the beginning: where you were born, and when.

Oldfield: Have you got it on?

DuCasse: Yes, it's on now.

Oldfield: I was born in 1902 on a farm about ten miles out of Santa Rosa. My father was a hop grower. And I was born on the farm just shortly before the 1906 earthquake. Well, it was several years. I shouldn't say just shortly; that sounds as though it was the same year. But it was 1902, and the earthquake was 1906.

DuCasse: Well, it was close enough.

Oldfield: Anyway, my earliest memories are of sleeping on the lawn outside the house after the earthquake, when my mother was so frightened that she wouldn't stay in the house, after the shaking up we got. The earthquake was very strong in that area, too. Let me see; what else of interest could I tell you.

DuCasse: Maybe a little about your mother and father? Did they come from some other part of the country?

Oldfield: My father was a tenth generation American. His father had come to California during the Gold Rush. My mother had British parents. Her mother was born in Yorkshire, and her father in Devon. They





Oldfield: met in this country--that is, my grandparents--and married in Illinois.

I have been told some things about this early period of my life, which I can relate, but actually I have very, very slight memories. I do remember one grandparent, my mother's mother, the little British woman. She was the only grandparent I knew. The others didn't survive until I was born.

DuCasse: That's the same with me. I never knew my grandparents.

Oldfield: I just knew one.

Cravath: And you had a British mother.

Oldfield: You had a British mother, too.

DuCasse: Yes. In fact, my grandfather was from Yorkshire, too.

Oldfield: I met your mother once, long ago. Maybe more than once. I don't remember her very well. I used to go with a group of students, on your father's invitation, when we were in his class at Arts and Crafts.

DuCasse: I was planning to ask you that later on.

Oldfield: You were a little kid [laughter] with a very dark, dutch-cut hairdo. I remember you as a little girl, and I didn't see you again for many, many years. Of course, there's been a great deal of water under the bridge before that.

DuCasse: Indeed. Well, we'll talk more about that later when we come to your Arts and Crafts experience. But let's go back now to that dear little English grandmother, and we can proceed from there. You started to say she was the only one you knew.



Oldfield: She was the only one of my grandparents that I ever knew, because she lived to be nearly ninety. Or maybe she was ninety; I don't remember exactly how old she was. But she was around ninety when she died. She died in 1935. And by this time, I was married and had a couple of children of my own.

DuCasse: Oh, how lovely for her! So she knew her great-grandchildren.

Oldfield: Yes, she knew two. I now have two great-grandchildren of my own.

DuCasse: Oh, marvelous! Then you lived on the farm. How long were you on the farm?

Oldfield: After the earthquake, which shook my mother up quite considerably, my father built a house on another part of the farm. The house where we lived at the time of the earthquake was a two-story, frame house with brick chimneys that went up inside the walls. Through the bedrooms on the second floor, these brick chimneys went up inside. It happened that my parents had two cribs for their two children, one on each side of their bed, and at the head of each crib went up one of these brick chimneys. When the earthquake came, those bricks all fell into the room, and right over the sleeping children. This, I suppose, is what made it so horrific for my mother. Anyway, she wouldn't live in that house anymore.

So my father built a house for a temporary residence on another part of the farm, a small house. We lived there for a year while he was building what he conceived to be an earthquake-proof house in the town. From then on, he was a town resident, who was



Oldfield: still farming.

The schools I went to were all in the town. I never went to the country schools, except for short periods. In hop picking seasons sometimes, I had to start school at the country school. But most of my early schooling was in the town.

DuCasse: A city-dweller.

Oldfield: Well, compared to my cousins, who were all farmers, you see.

I went to grammar school there, and also there was an early junior high school in the town, one of the first experimental high schools. Because I was an obedient, good student, I got through junior high with some already earned high school credit.

DuCasse: How marvelous! Do you, by any chance, remember the name of that school?

Oldfield: The junior high? Santa Rosa Junior High School, that's all I know. It was also on the same lot as the high school building. It was very close. So I started in the seventh grade taking German and French and algebra, and these were high school subjects. So by the time I got into high school, I already had some high school credits. This accounts for the fact that I finished high school at the age of sixteen.

DuCasse: Isn't that splendid.

Oldfield: I don't know that it was splendid, but it just happened. I didn't do anything except what came naturally.

Cravath: You've always done that, though. [laughter]

Oldfield: Anyway, I finished high school at the age of sixteen. It happened



Oldfield: that my father had had financial reverses at that time, and he couldn't afford to send me to college. I really wanted to go to art school, but my father was opposed to that idea because of things that had happened in his family. He thought that women who studied art came to no good ends. He didn't want me to go into this.

I was an excellent math student, and I was accepted at Stanford as a math major. But at the last minute, he couldn't afford to send me. So it was postponed for a while. After two years, during which my mother had a serious illness, he felt that I had earned my right to do what was my first choice. So he financed me to my first year at art school, which was Arts and Crafts when it was over there on Allston Way. The old building.

DuCasse: Helen, when did you first know that you wanted to be an artist?  
Do you remember?

Oldfield: I really can't remember for sure. I know it was quite early.

DuCasse: Before your high school experience?

Oldfield: Yes. Before high school.

DuCasse: I was interested, because sometimes this is a kernel within oneself that finally comes out.

Oldfield: I knew very early in life. I remember having this awareness when I was in the sixth grade. But I didn't get any encouragement at home, because my father not only felt that women who studied art came to no good ends, he was opposed to it because it was not a remunerative profession. It wasn't practical, and it wasn't a very





Oldfield: dependable way to be self-sufficient. However, he made no objection when I announced I was going to marry an artist.

DuCasse: That was certainly the climax of the whole thing, wasn't it?  
[laughter] Retribution!

Oldfield: Well, he did finance my first year. Or maybe two--I'm not quite sure about that--at art school. I had a friend who was a student at Arts and Crafts, and old high school friend, and I boarded with her family in Berkeley.

DuCasse: Who was that, Helen?

Oldfield: Her name was Edith Broadwell. You could find--although she isn't Broadwell anymore; I've forgotten what her married name was. But she might be in the rolls.

I think I started at Arts and Crafts in 1921.

Cravath: Strangely, that's the year I came to California.

Oldfield: During the time that I was first there, I first met your father. I wasn't in his class at that time, because he was not burdened with beginning students, you know. [laughter] I didn't get into his class until I had been through the water color schedule, and had become quite proficient in water colors. I remember Marty stomping around the room saying, "Why do they start kids on water color? It's a medium for masters!" I knew what he meant; but water color didn't seem to do as much permanent damage. I think that was the reason.

DuCasse: You also learn some good discipline in water color.

Oldfield: I guess so. I became quite good at water color. The teacher I



Oldfield: had was named Miss Rawlings, I think--Rawlings or Rollins. R-a-w. I think it was Rawlings. Anyway, when she had to be absent, she left me in charge of the class. So I got quite a reputation before I ever got into Marty's class.

The first contact I had with him was life drawing. He had all the little prints of Jerome's drawings around the room. He used to get so annoyed with--most of his class were these fresh kids just out of high school. I was always very serious and hardworking, but he didn't have the same cooperation from everyone. He used to stomp around the room, and he'd say, "You don't know who you have for a teacher! Ask any of the great artists who Martinez is!"

DuCasse: Sounds like Marty! \*

Oldfield: They didn't pay any attention to him at all. We did very, very careful line drawings, just a line, a sensitive, delicate line. He wanted no shading or anything except the outline of the figure. It's the hardest way in the world to draw a nude.

DuCasse: Oh, it certainly is. Oh, yes indeed. You can't fudge on that.

Oldfield: You can't fudge on that. But he had the examples on the wall in Jerome's <sup>(studio in paris)</sup>. They were like that.

DuCasse: Yes, they were exquisite. How interesting, because by the time I took his class in '26, he allowed us to do some shading.

Oldfield: Oh, he did?

DuCasse: He had evidently come around a bit to that.

Oldfield: Well, I think it was '21 or '22. I don't remember exactly when I was in his drawing class. Then, of course, I went on to painting.

\*"Marty" is Xavier Martinez. Micaela DuCasse is the daughter of Xavier Martinez and Elsie Whitaker Martinez, subjects of "San Francisco Bay Area Writers and Artists," an oral history conducted 1962-1963, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1969, 268 p.



Oldfield: The painting studio in that Allston Way building was way up in the garret. It was a garret room.

Cravath: You've seen that place. Did you study there?

DuCasse: No, but I was a model for his class once.

Oldfield: In 1926 it would have been where it is now.

DuCasse: Yes, it was. I started at Broadway.

Oldfield: I was a student when we moved to Broadway. The students were-- I was about to say ordered--but we were all persuaded to put physical effort into that move. I remember that I was busy with a hoe, hoeing the weeds around the little area--I don't know whether it was a parking area, or it was right next to the wall. But anyway, I was out on the street, and I was busy with a hoe. Somebody from across the street saw my industry, and came over and offered me a job. [laughter] Offered me a job hoeing, I guess. I don't know exactly what it was that I was going to do.

DuCasse: Nothing could be more practical than that!

Cravath: You see, Helen's always been practical.

Oldfield: Oh, have I? I'm not sure about that, Ruth.

Cravath: Well, maybe not. Maybe that should be qualified.

Oldfield: I got carried away, sometimes.

DuCasse: Well, we all do.

Oldfield: I remember that little studio, way up in the garret. There weren't any beginning students inasmuch. I guess I must have been in my second or third year before I found my way up there. Most of the students were more experienced than I. But I was so dedicated, so



Oldfield: devoted, so intense about learning to paint that I would be there early, and I never opened my mouth, I didn't chat at all. I worked, so Marty used me as an example to the others. I never complained about those old sprouting onions that you had in set-ups, and everybody else would come in and say--

Cravath: The copper kettle--

Oldfield: The copper kettle and the sprouting onions.

DuCasse: I was still doing that when I was there in '26.

Oldfield: The class would come in, and they'd say, "Oh, look at that! Again!" or "Still!" He would point out that I just got to work, I never complained.

Then, later on--you want to do something else before we get into my experiences with Marty?

DuCasse: No, no, that's fine.

Oldfield: I can go on into that. I'm going to jump quite a ways to the time after I met Otis.

DuCasse: Unless there was anything important before you met Otis--you did some work on your own before you met him, did you not?

Oldfield: Oh, yes, I did some work on my own, and I had a job in San Francisco. I kept on going to school for quite a while.

DuCasse: I guess if went through '26, then you would have been there about six years, altogether, wouldn't you?

Cravath: Helen, did you go to the California School of Fine Arts?

Oldfield: Yes, but I don't remember when I went to the California School of Fine Arts. But I know that I was in Bufano's class at the California





Oldfield: School of Fine Arts--night class, because I was working then. I was still living with my parents, whose house was on a little dead end street right across Broadway from Arts and Crafts. There was a gas station on the lot right across from the main entrance. There's a little dead end street called Hemphill Place. It comes up from below and doesn't go through to Broadway. Our house was on that street. So after the school moved, I was very close. I just went across the street.

After a while, I ran out of money, and I had to get a job. I answered an ad in one of the papers, I guess the San Francisco paper. Somebody who wanted what they called a sketch artist to work in a sign company. They made electric signs, and billboards, posters, all kinds of stuff. Signboards--signs that were painted by the sign painter on the board. They did those. So I wrote a letter in answer to this ad. The ad was for a young man. I wrote a letter saying, "Why does it have to be a young man?" and gave my qualifications, and I got the job.

Cravath: Good for you. That was one of the first gestures.

Oldfield: That was when I first discovered about female harrassment. I was very put out when I finally had to decide that I wasn't hired entirely on the basis of my qualifications. The boss's son kept trying to get me to go out to lunch with him. I refused. It was the same old story that's still going on. Finally I decided that I wasn't going to stay there anymore.

By this time, I'd had a good deal of experience. I had not



Oldfield: only made drawings of the project that the salesmen brought in, but I had gone into the shop and laid out the signs themselves. So I had learned what was needed by such companies. So I applied for a job with another one. I just went for one interview, and the fellow that was interviewing me put his arm around me and asked me if I was broad-minded. I never went back.

Cravath: Good for you!

Oldfield: I never went back. I stayed on at that same place until I married Otis.

DuCasse: Do you remember the name of that first place?

Oldfield: The first place was called the Novelty Sign Company. It was on Turk Street. I lived in Oakland, so I used to walk up Market Street to Turk Street, and a couple of blocks out Turk Street to the shop.

DuCasse: You were a commuter on the ferryboats too, then.

Oldfield: Yes. I was a commuter. I loved that.

DuCasse: Wasn't that wonderful?

Oldfield: That was wonderful.

DuCasse: It's a lovely way.

Cravath: We used to get breakfast--those wonderful corn muffins on the--

Oldfield: I don't remember the breakfast. I remember having coffee once in a while.

Cravath: They had the most wonderful corn muffins I've ever eaten anywhere! Southern Pacific corn muffins. I used to love to get breakfast on the ferry.



DuCasse: About how long, then, did you work at the sign company?

Oldfield: Let me see. If I started in '21, I was still going to--Oh, no, I remember now. It was probably about 1923 that I started working at the sign company. I'd had two years of art school. I worked a year and had this experience of trying to find a job with another company. The fortunes of the company where I was working fell off a little bit. They didn't have enough business, I guess--they weren't doing too well. So there wasn't enough work to keep my<sup>E</sup> busy all the time. So I asked for two days a week off. At first, the boss was terribly upset: [gruffly] "I can't afford it; you're not worth it."

I said, "Well, okay, then I'll quit."

He came back and said, [whining] "Well, I'm going to give it to you, Miss Clark." So he gave it to me. I spent the two days that I had off at Arts and Crafts. I think I was painting with Marty, and doing design with Isabel West. Isabel and I were good friends. I used to go to her house in Sausalito all the time.

DuCasse: She would have appreciated the kind of student you were. You were very conscientious, motivated.

Cravath: We didn't know each other in those days. I didn't know you until I knew Otis.

Oldfield: The first time that I remember meeting you was in the Monkey Block, and you were next door to Otis. But we must have been in Bufano's class at the same time.



Cravath: Not if you were in the night class. I was in the day class.

Oldfield: Oh, you weren't in the night class. No, I was only in the night class. I was in his class at Arts and Crafts, too, with Monty.

Cravath: Monty went to the California School of Fine Arts, too, in the class in the daytime.

Oldfield: Yes, but he was at Arts and Crafts, first.

DuCasse: Now, who was Monty?

Oldfield: Ward Montague. He was a sculptor. I remember Monty in that class in Berkeley. It was in a little shed out in back of the building. You know, the building was an old high school.

Cravath: That was Benny's sculpture class.

Oldfield: The sculpture class. Monty had modeled a head, and he put it between two boards and flattened it. Benny asked him, "What did you do that for?"

He said, "I was thinking of a very narrow-minded person."

[laughter] Isn't that marvelous?

Cravath: That's exactly like Monty.

DuCasse: Well, that's one way to accomplish it.

Oldfield: Yes, he just put it between two boards and squashed it.

Cravath: He had that wonderful sense of humor.

DuCasse: And you kept this up while you were working?

Oldfield: No, this was before I worked. This was during my first two years there. I was a full-time student for two years. I think it was two years--I'm sure it was two years. It wasn't long enough to get a degree. During the time that I was a student there, they





Oldfield: started the degree program. Mr. Meyer urged me to work for a degree. But by this time, I had met Otis, and Otis said, "Whoever heard of an artist with a degree?" Sounds like the old-fashioned artists, just going for academic degrees. A degree doesn't guarantee your quality as an artist; you have to earn that otherwise. And everybody knows it now. We think of it as a help.

DuCasse: Well, it's just merely a tool.

Oldfield: A tool, and also it is a credential.

DuCasse: A credential on paper which someone can examine, and can evaluate you.

Cravath: It doesn't make you a good artist necessarily.

Oldfield: It doesn't make you a good artist, and Otis liked to think that it didn't guarantee that you were an artist at all.

DuCasse: This is probably quite true at times.

Oldfield: The paper credential he looked on with scorn. And I guess Marty would have too. I never discussed that with him.

DuCasse: Yes, he did, because he didn't want me to get a degree. They wanted me to take a teaching degree. He just blew his stack. He said, "No, she's going to be trained the way I want her to be trained. She's not going to have to be a teacher, or to be anything. She's just going to be an artist." So, you see, he and Otis were of the same school.

Oldfield: I turned against teaching because I saw that the people I started with--my classmates at Arts and Crafts--were all going to be teachers. I suspected them of doing it because they thought it



Oldfield: was safer. I had been turned off of teaching in my high school days. I had a math teacher of whom I was very fond, and I was one of the best students, so she was very good to me. She was a beautiful young woman, and I looked at her with such great admiration when I first knew her. But she had such problems disciplining her class. And she had a lot of boys who weren't interested in the subject, and they just baited her all the time. They gave her a bad time. Said insulting things in loud enough voices for her to hear, and dared her to discipline them, and so on. So she was so filled with anger most of the time, that as I looked at her, she turned from a very beautiful person into an ugly person. I don't think she changed actually; it was the way I saw her. Because I saw these angry moods all the time, she didn't look beautiful anymore. So I thought then, "It this is what teaching does to you, I don't want any part of it." I think it was in the beginning of her teaching career that she was filled with inspiration.

So this turned me off of teaching, and also my roommate, whose family I was living with, was going into teaching. Oh, and I saw also that after the first two years, they didn't do any more studying of art. They had to learn teaching techniques. They went up to the campus for classes on--

DuCasse: To Cal?

Oldfield: Yes. We were very close; we were just across Oxford Street. I remember Mr. Officer, who taught the mechanical drawing



Oldfield: classes, was in the architecture department at Cal. He would come down. He used to come down from there. My classmates who were preparing to be teachers spent half their time on the Cal campus. They were not present in the drawing and painting classes at all anymore. They had to take things like sewing, and all of the crafts which were offered at Arts and Crafts, because Mr. Meyer was a craftsman, you know. He felt that the crafts were as important as the fine arts, and he stressed them. He offered classes in just about everything you could think of. I guess that's the reason that Arts and Crafts is more dedicated to crafts still than the Art Institute.

DuCasse: Yes, it's more of a technical school. It's always maintained its--

Cravath: And it's tighter, too.

Oldfield: And that's the reason, because Frederick Meyer, who started it, was a craftsman.

DuCasse: Then his wife was a teacher, she had been a teacher

[end tape 1, side A]



[Begin tape 1, side B]

Oldfield: I remember Mrs. Meyer coming into the classroom and giving us a lecture on chewing gum. She chewed gum herself furiously; but she said, "You can chew gum like a lady." I guess she meant by that you don't open your mouth--that's chewing gum like a lady. But I had been taught that ladies don't chew gum. And I'm sure I wasn't the only one.

DuCasse: A few years later she was going against cigarette smoking for ladies. She graduated. She disapproved of that totally.

Oldfield: She couldn't disapprove of gum, because she was addicted to it herself. So she had her own ploy. But she was such a sweet, generous-hearted little woman. She was so kind to those students. So many of them were hard up; they wanted to go to art school, and there was quite a population of what they called D.A.V. students. Those were Disabled American Veterans. You see, it was right after World War I--

Cravath: We called them Federal Board Students at the California School of Fine Arts.

DuCasse: I remember my father talked about that.

Oldfield: That reminds me of Walt Kuhn saying that Lucien Labaudt was a government whore, because he worked WPA. [laughter]

DuCasse: So you had these fellows from World War I.

Oldfield: Yes, and they were quite a population at the school. I think





Oldfield: that they were very important to the financial stability of the school, because a lot of the other students were people who were either trying to make a living, or earn the money to pay their tuition at the same time that they went to school, or were casting around for scholarships or someplace to borrow it, because they really didn't have any financial background that may have been stable.

DuCasse: I imagine that the Meyers did a lot of work scholarships around the place for the students.

Oldfield: Yes, they did. Louis Miljarick<sup>had</sup> a working scholarship when I was there. He was one of the janitors. He had a working scholarship. That was still going on when Otis was teaching there, after World War II.

But Mrs. Meyer was the one who engineered that. She was so warm-hearted and generous and kind that she couldn't turn anyone away. In spite of her hang-ups about gum, she was a wonderful person. [laughter]

DuCasse: Yes, she was indeed.

Oldfield: I knew Babs as a young girl. She was there.

Cravath: Was that her daughter?

Oldfield: That was the Meyers' daughter.

DuCasse: Babs was such a frail-looking, ethereal-looking girl.

Oldfield: She was in high school, I think. Yes, she was terribly over-protected. But she managed to weather it okay.

DuCasse: She is a sweet person. She's still with us.



Oldfield: Do we go on to what happened to me after I left Arts and Crafts, after I married Otis?

DuCasse: Absolutely, if you feel you've told us enough about your own art student's work. While you were doing your commercial job, and after maybe you had stopped going to classes, were you doing any of your own work while you were working?

Oldfield: Yes, I was always painting. This takes me back to another little incident which involves Marty. I met him one night in the Ferry Building. I had been in his classes at Arts and Crafts for two or three years. I don't think I still was--yes, I had to be, because when I met him, it was in the Ferry Building; we were both headed for the Piedmont train. So we rode over on the train together. I talked to him about Otis, and he said he had met him.

Shortly after that, I was recruited by Otis. I was a night student at the old California School of Fine Arts, up where the Mark Hopkins Hotel is. Otis had just come back from France. That was where I first saw him, as a matter of fact. He used to come up there and recruit students for a private class that he had in the old Artists' Building. It was in a studio which was occupied by Clifford White, and--what was her name?

Cravath: Wasn't it on Sacramento Street?

Oldfield: Yes, it was in the old Artists' Building. Leidesdorf and Sacramento. Carol Wirtenberger and Clifford White had a studio there. Otis had his first San Francisco class in that studio. I remember Monty and Ureska were in the class. Helen Moya, who was Helen Horst at that time, and her sisters--they came, driven



Oldfield: by the chauffeur. I used to go after my day's work. I would go and stop there and paint in that class. I took some of the paintings that I did to Marty's class, and showed them to him. He had already told me he knew Otis, and I thought he'd be interested in what I was doing, and he was. But he looked at them and he said, "Hm. Picasso, but not understood!" [laughter]

DuCasse: He was a man of few words.

Oldfield: I was a little bit crushed, but not totally. I kept on going to Otis' class--

DuCasse: I'm sure Otis didn't tell you things like that.

Oldfield: No, not at that time, anyway. He told me some pretty brutal things later. Not at that time. And of course, I probably didn't understand what I was doing. I remember that Otis had some very weird hang-ups about painting at that time. He liked to paint things that were under a table, because the table cast a shadow, made a half light. He would set up his still life studies under the table. I used to take in the things that I had done on my own. One day I took in something that had a glass pitcher or something in it. I showed it to him, and he said, "Oh! I had a dream about that! I dreamed that somebody painted glass. Don't ever show me anything like that again!" It's so tricky: all those high-lights, all the little intricacies of glass--he disapproved of that. It wasn't direct; it wasn't a simple statement: he didn't like it.

I went on painting on my own. But I still had, until I met Otis,



Oldfield: this hang-up about the sanctity of oil paints, which I got, I think, from having been started out in water color, and prohibited from using oil paint until I was an advanced student. But Otis sure knocked it out of me: he wouldn't have anything to do with water color. He was even worse than Marty. Marty said it was a medium for masters; and Otis felt that it was a tricky, impermanent medium. It was tricky. He was always afraid of anything tricky. Anyway-- I say "anyway" all the time. Your tape is going to be full of those "anyways."

DuCasse: Well, you haven't said too many. It's all right. It's a little predictable.

Oldfield: That's why I say it. But it's a pretty obvious and stupid remark.

DuCasse: It hasn't grated on my ears yet.

Oldfield: You tell me if it does. I'll try to avoid it. Now, where do we go from here?

DuCasse: You were in Otis' class, that special class--how did your romance come about? Was it a long time?

Oldfield: I must tell you the story of the first time that I saw him. It was at the night school in that old building up on Nob Hill. I was in Spencer Macky's drawing class at that time. That was after the time that I was in the sculpture class. But I always went at night until after Otis started teaching there. I went to his classes sometimes with him. But I was always a night student at the San Francisco school, because I was working downtown. I would go at night. The first class that I had was Bufano's





Oldfield: night sculpture class. Then I moved into the life drawing class of Spencer Macky. All the life drawing I had done up to that time was with Marty, and it was just this very delicate line. I had never built a figure the way I learned to do it in Macky's class at all. It had always been that very delicate, descriptive line. It had to be delicate to please him, and had to be meaningful. I don't know that I ever achieved it, but I tried.

Anyway, I was in this night life drawing class; it met three evenings a week for three hours. On Fridays there was a break which was supposed to be for an anatomy lecture. There was an assembly room. Spencer would stand there holding the hand of the skeleton, and reminiscing about how his wife put him to sleep when she read to him in bed. He didn't get to anatomy very much. I had had ? for anatomy, and I knew all the names of all the bones, and all the muscles--their popular names and their Latin names--I had really had a workout in anatomy. So I didn't need to hear what Spencer was talking about at all. He hardly ever touched on anatomy.

One night we went in there--the model stopped posing while Spencer was lecturing. So everybody either sat in an empty studio until he was through or trooped into the lecture hall and listened to him. I went and listened to him, and I went with a group. We walked in, and we saw that there were a lot of people in street-clothes there; it wasn't all students. There were a lot of people in there. We knew some of them; I remember the Blendings were



Oldfield: there, and Gertrude Albright and her husband. A lot of the people that I knew were practicing artists, and not students. So we knew something was up. Sure enough, Spencer got up and said he met this most interesting person who had just come back from a long sojourn in France, and he introduced Otis. That was the first time I saw him.

Cravath: He was formally introduced.

Oldfield: He was formally introduced. So I sat there and listened to him talk. I don't remember a word of what he said, but I remember that at the end, one of the artists who were present, asked him, "Do you mean to say that it isn't necessary to use a brush to paint?"

And Otis said, "No, put it on with an old shoe if you feel like it!" He was way ahead of his time, because after a while they did that. But this was in the early twenties. There wasn't any blob and splash painting around at that time, at least not here.

Anyway, that was my introduction to him. Then after that, he used to drop in to the night classes and talk. Do you remember Frank Dunham ? He was a student in the drawing class where I was, and he and a few others, like Julius Palmer, sometimes, when we didn't go into the anatomy lecture, we would sit around the studio and talk. I remember both of them told me they thought Otis was crazy. They both thought he was crazy because his claims were fantastic to them. They thought that he was



Oldfield: making claims that he couldn't possibly fulfill. Anyway, I remember that.

During one of the visits, when Otis came in he told me that he was about to have a show at the old Beaux Arts gallery.

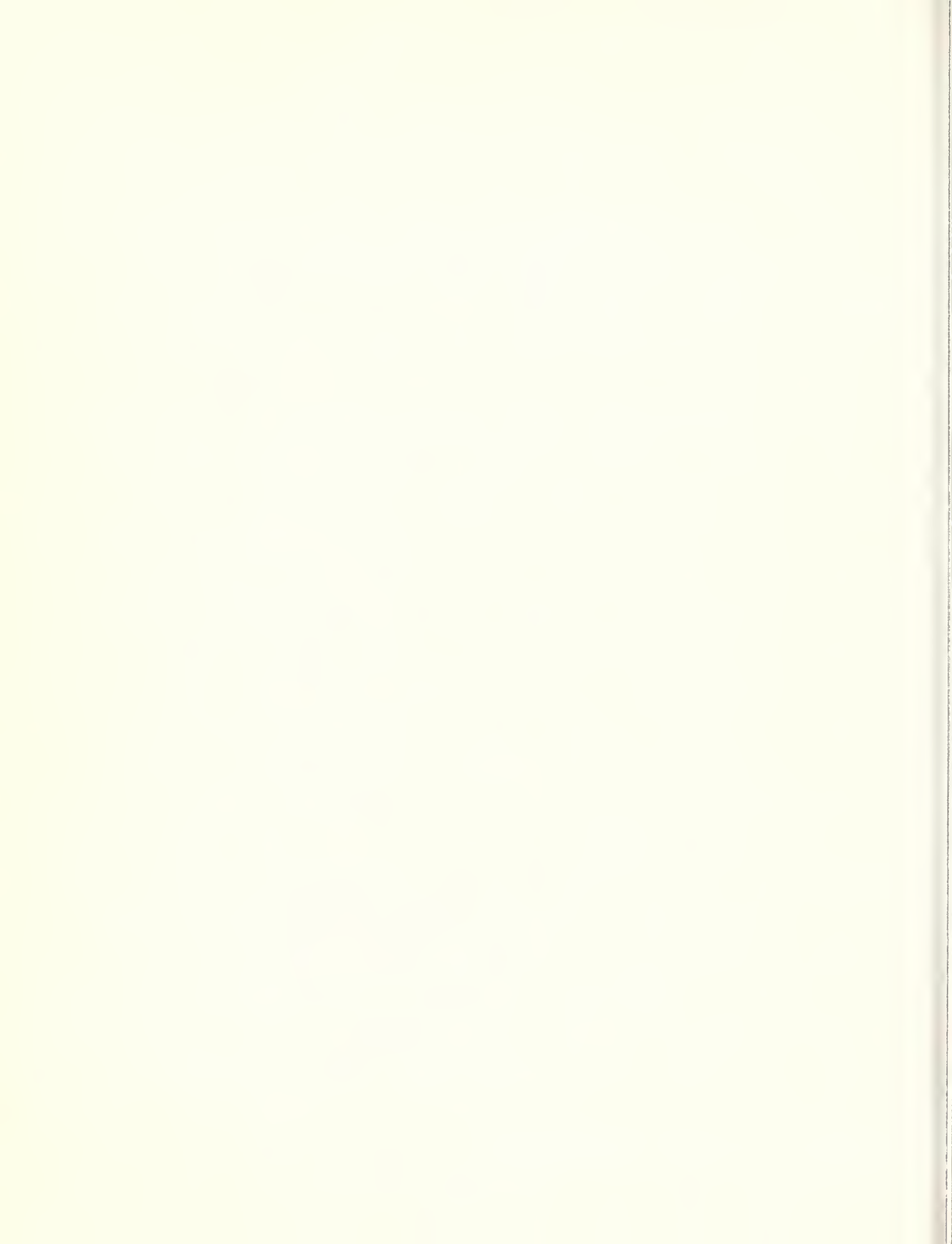
Cravath: I remember that show well.

Oldfield: Do you remember that show?

Cravath: Oh, yes!

Oldfield: I was working, and I worked half the day Saturday. So, on my way home one Saturday when I knew that that show was on, I stopped in at the gallery. Remember there was a little stairway that went up from Maiden Lane, and there was a little landing where Bea Ryan had a little Chinese table and a couple of chairs. When I went in, Otis was sitting there at that little table smoking his pipe. I couldn't get in because the door to the gallery was closed. He said, "Oh, they're talking about me in there; it embarrasses me." That was another thing that I thought was kind of silly later because he never got embarrassed at anything! [laughter] Anyway, he was sitting outside while Bea was talking about his show. He sort of cornered me, like the wedding guest. I had to sit down in the other chair, and he talked and he talked and he talked; I was spellbound. He wouldn't let me go. And, do you know, he didn't remember he had seen me before. He just cornered me and wouldn't let me go in because he was bored: he wanted somebody to talk to. So I never got in to see the show at that time. I saw it later.

Cravath: I remember that show very well.



Oldfield: So that was the second time I saw him; and that time I actually met him. Then I think it was a couple of years--no, it couldn't have been that long--it could have been over a year, anyway, after that before he started writing me notes and inviting me to his studio. By that time he had moved down from Sacramento and had a studio in the Monkeyblock. He used to write me notes, and invite me to come and see the latest paintings. So I made several visits to his studio. I had been his student briefly in that studio of Carol Wirtenberger's; but that had come to an end quite a long while before. However, he had my name and address, I guess, so he started writing me notes. I went to the studio.

Then he started inviting me to go places with him. I remember one of the first dates that I had with him: he had an old car by this time, and we were driving somewhere south of the city, down the peninsula somewhere on a road that was a sort of a back road, a dirt road. He had a flat tire, and he didn't know how to change it. But I did. I told him how to get the jack out and jack up the car. [brief telephone interruption] I've forgotten where we were.

DuCasse: You were talking about Otis--

Oldfield: Oh, and changing the tire for him. I was knowledgeable about it because I'd helped my father many times. He had never changed a tire before. He was aghast! He thought he was going to have to walk to the nearest garage to get some help. I got out and helped him.





Oldfield: Some young people drove by--some really collegiate types--and they yelled at me, "Atta girl!" [laughter]

DuCasse: You were very modern.

Oldfield: Yes, I was very modern. It was the era of very short skirts, you know, so I guess I was pretty conspicuous. Anyway, I helped him change a tire. That was the first date we had.

Then we started going on trips to various places, in the country mostly. He charmed me by singing little French love songs to me and all that sort of stuff.

DuCasse: That would make a big impression.

Oldfield: Yes, it made a big impression on me. I was just a kid from the country at that time. The French flavor impressed me to begin with. And he knew all these charming little songs. He didn't sing, but he sang it well enough to get the idea over. I remember once we were sitting in a little family cemetery which was near the farm where I was born--it wasn't on it, but it was in that area--I had shown him this little cemetery that was rather neglected. He afterwards made quite a number of drawings of it. It apparently made an impression on him. We were sitting there; I think we'd brought a picnic lunch, and we were sitting eating the lunch there. He started singing these sentimental little French songs.

This developed into a companionship which pretty much shut me off from almost everyone else for a while, because he monopolized my time. He used to get very angry if I was late to an appointment.

DuCasse: Did you usually take drives out in the country?



Oldfield: Yes. He had a little old Chevy--I have some pictures of it-- it looks like a crackerbox on wheels, by the standards of the way cars look now. It was a little Chevy. It was what he called a "two-and-a-half seater." I mean, there was a little place behind-- there was a bench seat for the driver and one passenger, and behind, there was room for somebody else to squeeze in, but just one other person.

Cravath: They called that a flip seat--or something.

Oldfield: Anyway, he had this. He drove it very recklessly. I had been driving for quite a long while, and it was the first car he had ever owned. Somebody told him when you hit cordouroy road, one that's very bumpy, what you do is step on the gas and hit the high spot. So we were driving on a back road once among some farms, and he took it literally and stepped on the gas, and he hit a little pig and killed it. Oh, he was so upset. Also, he thought that he had turned me off on him for good, because I was upset too. I looked back and saw this poor little thing in the road. This thing of stepping on the gas was so totally wrong!

DuCasse: But he found that out, didn't he?

Oldfield: Yes, he found it out eventually.

DuCasse: How long do you think your courtship lasted, more or less?

Oldfield: We were married in November of 1926. That was a little more than two years after he landed here from France. I don't know how long he had been back that first night when he lectured at the school. And there was some time between that and the time when I started



Oldfield: seeing him quite regularly. So I would say the courtship lasted about a year. I wouldn't, certainly, begin it from the time I first saw him, or even include the time when I sat and talked to him while Bea Ryan was lecturing in the other room. From that until the time he started writing me notes was quite a while. The short period when I was in his class in Carol Wirtenberger's studio came in between there.

DuCasse: So it was more personal when he began writing you those notes. His personal interest began to manifest itself to be a courtship.

Oldfield: Then it began.

DuCasse: After you were married, where did you live? In San Francisco?

Cravath: Let me interrupt here, dear, because that wedding is something that's worthy of quite a bit of coverage. I'll never forget Helen and Otis's wedding in Ralph Stackpole's stoneyard.

DuCasse: Helen, would you like to give us a description of that?

Oldfield: Yes, I can do it. I usually show the scrapbook when people want to know about it, because it's more complete. But I can reminisce about it a little bit and tell you something about it. At the time--it was November 30, 1926--Dorothea Lange had a photography studio in the upstairs studio, which was the studio that Ruth later had. It was Ralph Stackpole's studio. At the time that we were married, Dorothea Lange was renting it, and she was doing photography there. In fact, I have a picture of Otis and me in the bedroom that she took there.

When we decided to get married, my family was a little disturbed



Oldfield: because it was taken completely out of their hands. When Otis announced to Ralph that there was going to be a wedding, Ralph said, "I want it in the studio."

The decorations were by Stafford Duncan and Lucien Labaudt, and Stack, I guess--I don't know who else. There were Chinese banners hanging from the wall.

DuCasse: Think of that, against those brick walls!

Oldfield: They set up a tree trunk which Ralph was planning to carve, that was in the studio, as the altar. Two ribs from an old Gold Rush days ship, which had been excavated there in the early days. Ralph had saved them. So they set them up and made a Gothic arch out of them. From the peak of the arch, they had wired three rusty horseshoes that dangled from the peak of the arch. The altar was decorated with Autumn garden splendor--corn, squash--all very colorful.

DuCasse: Beautiful. The fruits of the earth.

Oldfield: That was when I met Henry Ohlhoff.

Cravath: He was the one that performed the ceremony, wasn't he?

Oldfield: Yes. Henry Ohlhoff at that time was the vicar of the little church of St. Mary the Virgin, which is a fashionable church now. He was the vicar there at the time. He performed the ceremony. It was a high church.

People congregated in Dorothea's studio upstairs. Then there was a rickety old stairway that went down from there to the stoneyard where the ceremony took place. Ellen Dear, with a piano, played wedding march up in the studio, and I came down the stairs with





Oldfield: the one attendant that I had. We came down the stairs, and my father was waiting at the foot of the stairs, and took me to the altar where Otis was. It was eight o'clock in the evening; it was very dark. They had illuminated the yard with Chinese lanterns and brick soaked in kerosene set on fire. It was really a sort of a pagan setting.

Henry Ohlhoff was in his fanciest robe, and the whole thing was the traditional wedding ceremony. I had a granddaughter who was married

[end tape 1, side B; begin tape 2, side A]

Oldfield:                     ?                     at two of my granddaughter's  
weddings.

Cravath: Always worth attending. If you get an invitation, do accept it.

Oldfield: I'm not going to be anymore for a little while.

DuCasse: Why don't you tell us about your wedding dress?

Oldfield: It was black.

Cravath: That's all I remember.

Oldfield: It was black because Otis <sup>had</sup> this disciple, a very devoted disciple, and Chinese boy named Yun Gee.

Cravath: Did you see his show over at the Oakland museum?

Oldfield: Yun 's mother was in China. Yun and Otis had spent the summer



Oldfield: of 1926 on a painting trip into the Sierras. They went to Sutter's Fort, and the southern mines mostly--in Otis' little jalopy. They both painted. Yun, was very devoted to Otis; he couldn't do enough for him. So when he heard that he was going to be married, he wrote to his mother in China, and she wove the silk for the wedding dress. But when it came, it was black. White is mourning in China. It should have been red? Why didn't she make it red? I don't know. It was black, anyway. But she didn't know it was the color of mourning here. So I made my dress of it anyway.

It was just a simple sort of a shift, a little bit shaped, with an off-shoulder neckline.

Cravath: Do you still have it, Helen?

Oldfield: Oh, no, I don't have the dress. I remodeled it and made a maternity dress out of it! [laughter] There's a practical side to everything.

Cravath: I told you she was practical.

DuCasse: Well, that's good. There are not many wedding dresses that can be adapted to that kind of thing. Very good. You were very sensible.

Oldfield: I don't know how I did it, but I did. I put some gussets in, no doubt. And it was still pretty tight at the end, I'm sure.

DuCasse: You had a very beautiful traditional ceremony. Then I suppose you must have had a party afterwards

Cravath: We danced in the Modern Gallery. Do you remember the Modern Gallery?

DuCasse: No, I don't believe I do.



Cravath: It was adjacent to the stoneyard. We danced in the Modern Gallery. It was very fashionable.

Oldfield: And Yun 's paintings were on the wall. The music, as I remember, was a drum, an acordion, and what was the other--a horn, or a violin? There were three instruments. It was loud, and there was a lot of stomping. The pictures that were hanging in the little gallery were all cockeyed by the end of the party. I remember that someone said to Yun , "Doesn't it bother you what this has done to your pictures?"

He said, "Oh, no, it just gives them movement!" [laughter]  
That it did.

DuCasse: Well, you were his good friends; how could he care?

Oldfield: Later, he went to Paris. He went, I think, the next year. I think it was '27. I have recently gotten to know his widow, who is also named Helen, and who came out here for his show at the Oakland Museum. We got together, and she has visited me several times. She told me, I think, that it was '27 when he went to Paris. I remember the day he left, seeing him walk down the street with Otis. He had fitted himself out to be a Chinese carbon copy: he'd gotten the beret; he had a suit made that was as close as it could be, identical to the one that Otis wore most of the time; he'd gotten a cane and a pipe--everything in imitation of Otis. It was very funny--I walked behind them on Montgomery Street on Telegraph Hill the day he left. It was so funny to see this. The beret stuck up on top of that wiry Chinese hair; it wouldn't



Oldfield: fit down on his head at all. The one that he had bought had not had that little thread that comes out of the top, so he got a piece of yarn and sewed it on. He had to have everything exact. And he wore it the way Otis did. Otis wore his beret differently than has been popular since: he pulled it down over his brow to his eyes. Sometimes he would pull it up and back and make a little visor out of it when he was painting.

DuCasse: You mentioned his clothing that his protege copied. What kind of a suit did he use?

Oldfield: It was a very simple suit, and it was made of a fabric which was sort of what you would call pepper-and-salt, only that it was mostly pepper--it was dark. It was, in effect, a very dark, dark grey, flecked with a little bit of lighter color of some kind. But it was a dark suit. It looked like a dark suit.

Cravath: I remember the overcoat Otis wore.

Oldfield: The one he brought back from France.

Cravath: It was big and heavy, and it came back from France, and it had the velvet collar--you remember this?--it was long, and sort of fitted.

Oldfield: Double-breasted.

DuCasse: It looked so smart, I'm sure.

Cravath: I remember him in that.

Oldfield: He had very different hats, too. They had been made for him in France. They were formal-looking. They weren't derbies--

Cravath: This coat was formal-looking--





Oldfield: And they went with it. And he always wore spats--do you remember that too?--and carried a cane.

DuCasse: He must have been quite well turned out.

Oldfield: This was the way he was turned out when I first knew him. But he changed from that, and turned to khaki army pants, and fatigues, and he always wore gloves at first. He came to the conclusion that in America that everything was crude and unfeeling, and he didn't feel that he was going to waste himself on these people. One of the things that did this to him was a story that he used to like to tell about when he first returned from France. He lived with his parents for a short time in Sacramento. He used to like to go to movies. One night he was walking home from a movie, and a couple of policemen stopped him and said, "Who are you and where are you going?"

He said, "I'm just a peaceful citizen walking home from a movie?"

Then they said, "Why don't you dress like other people?"

It made him so mad. He was wearing his French clothes, and carrying his cane, and his spats, and the whole thing. It just made him awfully mad.

DuCasse: I don't blame him. To think that it started that early. Did he wear his dark suit at his wedding?

Oldfield: I think he did. This was the first suit that he had made in this country. His French suits looked so strange he had to discard them. They were fitted at the waist; the jackets were longer than we're used to; and the placket in back went all the way up to the waist.



# STUDENT TO MARRY S. F. ART REBEL



**Helen Regina Clark, Oakland, and Otis Oldfield to Wed in Bohemian Ceremony at Studio**

Cupid took the stand as model in the life class of Otis Oldfield, 36, artistic revolutionary, and Helen Regina Clark, 24, Eastbay artist, and former student of Oldfield. The artists will be married in the court studio of a fellow artist, Ralph Stackpole, 716 Montgomery street, San Francisco.

Oldfield, who lives at 628 Montgomery street, San Francisco, and whose brush has reflected his defiance of the conventional and has caused considerable comment, will not be married in the conventional style.

The arrangements were left largely to Stackpole, and the ceremony will take place in the court decorated with wild cherry and white roses, with candle lanterns and a large bonfire in the center furnishing the light. A Bohemian atmosphere will predominate in all but the actual ceremony, which is to be performed by Rev. Henry Ohlaff of Palo Alto.

About seventy-five guests, nearly all from the artist colony, will see the bride given away by her father, James E. Clark, of 318 Hemphill place, Oakland. She will be attended by Miss Lucille Duff of San Luis Obispo.

Brush, pencil and chisel wielders will revel in Bohemian style and rejoice with the bride and bridegroom.

Following the ceremony, the wedding party will dance at the Modery Gallery which is the building adjoining the court studio, and will be arranged with a distinctly Bohemian atmosphere.

## HELEN REGINA CLARK,

Oakland girl artist, who will wed in a riot of color and Bohemian atmosphere, her fiance, Otis Oldfield, finding the conventional to his distaste. The artist colony is planning a revel.



Oldfield: So it was like a bodice with a little skirt on it. They looked very strange here. So he had to discard them. He may have been wearing one of those when we were married. I don't really remember what he was wearing. I'm lucky to remember what I was wearing! How could I forget?

DuCasse: That was unusual.

Oldfield: One of the society reporters called me and asked for details about the wedding before it happened. And when I told her I was going to wear black, she hung up on me. She thought I was pulling her leg. She did it again when our oldest daughter was married.

Cravath: The same woman?

Oldfield: No. I don't think it was the same woman. But it happened again, this was twenty years later. It happened that when Rhoda and her first husband were getting ready to be married, they wanted Henry Ohlhoff to perform the ceremony again, for sentimental reasons. So I called him and asked him if he would do it, and he said, "Sure, sure. Where are going to have it?"

I said, "We're planning it here at home, a small ceremony with just a few people."

He said, "Why don't we have it down here?" At this time, he was at the Canon Kip Mission. He said, "This chapel is very small here, and there are no chairs, but it's dominated by Ray Boynton's mural." He said, "I would love to have it here, and I'm sure that it would be all right with everybody in your family."



Oldfield: So I talked to the kids, and they said, "Sure, that's fine." They didn't care where it was. So we had it at the little chapel in Canon Kip Mission. There were very few people invited. There was really hardly room for the whole family. Actually, I think the only people who were invited besides the two families were Rhoda's godparents.

Anyway--there we go again--at that time, Pierre Salinger was on the society page of the Chronicle. I think he was the head of it--I'm not sure. Rhoda had a part time job working there. She was going to college, but she had a part time job at the Chronicle which she had gotten through Pierre. So they published an account of the engagement. Pierre, and Eddie Haug, whom she was marrying, were very close friends. So they published a little account of it, and it got into the society editor's hands that way. I received a call, and was questioned about the details of the wedding. And when I told the woman that it was going to be at the Canon Kip Mission, she hung up. [laughter] Thought I was pulling her leg.

DuCasse: Isn't that the strangest thing!

Oldfield: It's rather interesting that it happened both times. It didn't surprise me much the second time. I was puzzled the first time, because I didn't know why, except that I did know, of course, that black was an unusual color to be married in. But why should she think that I was pulling her leg. Anyway, it was obvious that I was not. So there was no coverage of that second wedding. But





Oldfield: there was plenty of coverage of the first one, but it wasn't much in the society page, they were news.

Cravath: I think I still have the clipping; I'm not sure.

Oldfield: Well, I've got a whole scrapbook of them.

DuCasse: Someday I'd love to look at your scrapbook when we have more time.

Oldfield: But you can't do that and do this, too.

DuCasse: Well, we'll do that another time. After your wedding, then, you lived in San Francisco, did you continue working?

Oldfield: Oh, yes. I have always continued working. Not very much some of the time, because I promptly had two children. I remember trying to work while they were napping. They would wake up, and I would be cross with them. My conscience bothered me; I thought it isn't fair to them. So I gave up trying to work when they were sleeping. And there wasn't very much other time. Then I started going with Otis to the art school went he went to his classes. I was free to go anywhere, although he didn't feel that I should I go anywhere. He wanted me to work in his classroom and I usually did, but not always. I was free to go into other classes if I wanted to. But I painted a lot there. However, until very near the end of his life, he consciously tried to influence me to work with oil paints, and not to draw. I eventually came to the realization that what I wanted to do was to draw, and that this was really my medium more than oil paints because I'm a linear person. I like to draw with charcoal, which isn't really linear, but I am a linear person. And he wasn't, and he was prejudiced against the kind of work that I naturally wanted to do.



Oldfield: Eventually, I understood that I should do what I wanted to do.

I started drawing, and I would be drawing in here while he was working in his studio. He would come in, look at what I was doing, "I wish I could do that." And that was amazing.

DuCasse: That was a great compliment.

Oldfield: It was amazing, because he was a fine draftsman, as Ruth will tell you. His collection of drawings are really impressive. He could draw. But he believed in seeing in terms of mass. He was contemptuous of what I tried to do, at least for a long time he was. He was not only contemptuous, he tried to prevent me from doing it. He insisted that I paint. Of course, this was his medium, and he continued in it for all of his life. It was his first love. But he was very skillful at drawing.

DuCasse: Oh, yes. But there's no doubt about it: there's a great difference between the point of view of the painter--the painter-ly painter, who sees things in mass--

Oldfield: Mass and color.

DuCasse: And the linear artist, who sees the beautiful clear outlines, and who perhaps doesn't always feel a need to fill them in. Or if they're filled in, they're <sup>flat</sup> that's probably why you did so well with water color. That's very close to the linear concept, the clarity, wouldn't you say?

Oldfield: I would say that the water color that I did--this woman that taught me at Arts and Crafts was what they called at that time an English water color. It was areas of color. You have to work in the wet



Oldfield: paint, you know. I never even did any defining with line in the things I did in her class. I think I've got a couple of them tucked away somewhere in a portfolio, but it would take too long to find them.

I think that it took me a long, long time to realize that I see in line. I didn't know it; and I don't know whether Marty had an influence on me, because I certainly began with lines under his influence.

Cravath: There's a couple of your drawings hanging in the guest room, so she could see some of your line drawings.

Oldfield: Yes, there's that one of the hippo that's right at the foot of your bed. It isn't hanging there. I have some better ones in the studio, I think, and of course, over there in the kitchen. Everything is in the kitchen of mine.

DuCasse: I can see from here the really--

Oldfield: Of course, that's Otis, that painting. But this one is mine. He not only saw in mass and color, but also volume was very important to him.

DuCasse: You can see that in his work very definitely. He has a sense of volume--very, very much so.

Oldfield: Yes, you can see it in his paintings.

DuCasse: It's interesting the contrast between you both. I think probably that was that marvelous harmony that must have set up between you, because you were so different in a sense.

Oldfield: Yes, harmony and disharmony. But they go together. But the thing



Oldfield: that he did--

DuCasse: I should have said complementary.

Oldfield: Yes, I understand. He did feel that it was quite reasonable of him to influence me. And I was obedient, and also I had respect and admiration for him, and I was easy to influence. So many years went by when I worked under his aegis, and that's why that painting was mistaken for one of his.

I had another little funny experience in that context. I think it was the first summer after we were married--we went on a camping trip down into the Owens Valley. We both painted. And we had some little paintboxes that were just big enough to hold a palette and a small board that you could hold in your hand or set on your lap. His was a little bit larger, and mine was a smallish one. When we came back, apparently I left one of mine in the smaller box, and it was put away, and hadn't been used for a number of years. Then he wanted to use it for something. He took the painting out and set it up on a table or somewhere in the house. I walked into the room and said, "When did you do that?" And it was mine. [laughter] So you see it was a very, very strong influence.

Cravath: You can see it there.

DuCasse: Yes, definitely in that line painting, you certainly can.

Oldfield: If I would show you some of his landscapes of that country, it looks very much--

DuCasse: Well, it's very like the one that you have, Ruth.

Oldfield: The person who looked at it, who was an admirer of his from way





Oldfield: back, came over because she wanted to buy one of his paintings.

I tried to show her some, and for some reason she didn't see one that she liked that she wanted to buy. But she looked at that and said, "I'll give you \$300 for that one. Too bad he didn't sign it."

Cravath: Too bad you didn't take the three hundred.

Oldfield: I've been very sorry since that I didn't say, "Sold."

DuCasse: Of course! She never would have known the difference.

Oldfield: But then she said, "Too bad he didn't sign it." She would have wanted the signature--what would I do? Forge his name, or sign mine? She wouldn't have wanted it if I'd signed mine, and I don't like to forge his name.

DuCasse: I don't blame you.

Oldfield: So it probably wouldn't have been a sale anyway, although at the time I could have used the \$300.

DuCasse: I'm sure you could. Couldn't we all.

Oldfield: Yes, well, \$300 isn't very much these days, but it's something. And at that time, it was quite a bit more than it is now.

DuCasse: Did either of your children have talent?

Oldfield: The youngest one is now in her middle age, starting to be very interested in printmaking. That little thing over there is hers. She didn't do it before because she grew up equating art with poverty, and she rejected it totally. She didn't want anything to do with it. Although she had encouragement from both of us all the way through.

DuCasse: A little bit of her grandfather was coming out.



Oldfield: Maybe. [laughs] The other one married a musician. She has directed her adult interest into music. She was librarian for the Berkeley little symphony at one time. Did you ever encounter that group?

DuCasse: No, unfortunately I didn't. But I've heard of them.

Oldfield: Her husband was active in that group, and he is now married to the ex-wife of the then conductor.

Cravath: Did you follow that one?

Oldfield: It's complicated, it's very complicated.

DuCasse: But that's modern. That's the way things work now.

Oldfield: Yes, well, my oldest daughter is married for the third time. And my youngest daughter has married the same man three times. I don't know which is the cuckoo-est.

DuCasse: All I can say is they're in style. [laughter]

Oldfield: Yes, they're in style, I guess.

Cravath: Anyway, the eldest daughter, I think, landed on her feet with this last marriage. I like him very much.

Oldfield: But she is out of the arts now totally, except for her--

DuCasse: This was the musician?

Oldfield: The musician was her first husband. Her third husband flies for American Airlines. They live in Chicago. Her second husband was a tennis pro. And she still wins tennis tournaments for grandmothers. She has a whole shelf full of trophies.

DuCasse: How was Otis with his children?

Oldfield: Totally indifferent when they were little, but very proud when



Oldfield: they became adults. He looked at them one day, and said to me,  
"Where did these marriageable young women come from?"

DuCasse: Isn't that wonderful? They just suddenly appeared!

Oldfield: They suddenly appeared, and he was very proud of them at that time,  
and liked to show them off. But he was indifferent when they  
were babies.

DuCasse: It's interesting, the different ways that human beings react  
to children. My father was the opposite. He was marvelous with  
me when I was a small child. He was patient, he would take me on  
walks, and tell me stories, and make up all kinds of wonderful  
things for me. When I became a teenager, we were good friends,  
but we were always sort of at loggerheads with each other. I had  
ideas of my own, and he didn't always approve of them. We had  
quite a few tiffs. But when I was a little child, it was just  
marvelous.

Oldfield: He came from another culture. But it's also a personal difference  
too. Of course, Otis was teased endlessly, because when he first  
came back from Paris, he saw Maynard Dixon with two little boys,  
and he saw the Mackys with two little boys. He said contemptuously,  
"In Paris, the artists don't have children."

Cravath: I remember what Otis said in that context, too, that Henry Ohlhoff  
or someone told him that artists always had girls. Otis had  
two girls. So that was just fine.

Oldfield: Moya had two girls, so that justified him in looking  
down on the artists that had boys. [laughter]

Cravath: And Marty had a girl.



DuCasse: And I have two girls. But I have two grandsons, finally.

Oldfield: I have three granddaughters, and two great-granddaughters, and another great-grandchild on the way which may be a boy. That will break the string, because it's been nothing but girls for three generations, although I had two brothers and Otis had a brother. But it began with me.

DuCasse: Oh, you're going to get that great-grandson.

Oldfield: My daughters both had girls: one had two and one had one.

Cravath: I began to think I'd never have a granddaughter. I think that Beth would still be trying to have one if Cindy hadn't been a girl. I have three grandsons--is it three or four?

Oldfield: Three.

Cravath: Wait a minute--Teddy, Robby, Jim, and Stewart.

Oldfield: Oh, I forgot Stewart. Do we need to put anything else on the tape?

DuCasse: I think we still have some left.

Oldfield: Well, we might as well continue talking. Is there anything else you can ask me?

DuCasse: What I'd like to have you think about for the next time: now that we've gone through your life and into your life with Otis, I think it would be great if we could get some of the details about Otis's background. We won't start that today. But just kind of think about it: his childhood, and what you remember of it, and his training, his Paris years, and also we would be interested in the books that he illustrated--things of that kind.

Cravath: His bookbinding.





DuCasse: Yes, and the bookbinding and so forth. And as we draw the details out in the chronology, you can be thinking about these.

Oldfield: Of course, he was thirty-six when I married him. He'd had a wife before, you see. All I know about that is what I learned from him.

DuCasse: Yes, of course. But that's what we're interested. He fortunately was never

[end tape 2, side A; begin tape 2, side B]

[Date of interview: 21 January 1981]

DuCasse: I realized I had not gotten from you--when I listened to them--you mentioned your attendant in your wedding, but we didn't find out who the attendant was. Could you give us the name of your attendant?

Oldfield: Her name was Lucille Duff. She had been my closest friend in my art school days. Well, we'd been students together all the way through. What else would you want to know about her? She was a very beautiful young girl. Her home was San Luis Obispo to go to art school. She had an aunt living here, and she and her sister lived with that aunt. It was way out here in the Mission, and I used to visit their house very often, and occasionally was very late going home at night. I would get a very severe scolding, because she didn't approve of young girls going around late at night alone. I had to cross the bay, because my family lived in



Oldfield: Oakland.

Anyway, she was my only attendant.

DuCasse: That's lovely. I'm glad to get her name. Then I don't remember if you mentioned who stood up with Otis.

Oldfield: Ralph Stackpole. It was in his stoneyard where the ceremony took place. Did we get the story of the wedding finished?

DuCasse: Yes, we got the story of the wedding finished. One other thing I realized afterwards: when I asked you about after your marriage when the children arrived, I said did you still keep on working. I think what you were thinking of was your painting, and you said of course you did. What I meant was did you keep up your commercial artwork.

Oldfield: No.

DuCasse: I just wanted to clarify that one item.

Oldfield: No, that was the end of that.

DuCasse: Okay, now we can go back to where we left off. You had talked about yourself and Otis, your life together, the two children, and we spoke a little bit about Otis's attitude toward the children. So we brought your life together to a point where I think we could then ask you what you knew of Otis's beginnings. What you were told by him of where he was born, his family, and so forth.

Oldfield: Of course, I knew his parents rather briefly. His father died I think during the second year of our marriage, and his mother survived a few years after that. She was absolutely devastated by the loss of her husband. She was a very tiny, fragile little



Oldfield: person, and really not equal to taking care of herself. So she wasted away. It was a few years, and then she died.

He was born in Sacramento, July third, 1890. His mother was of a Southern family. She was born in Mobile, Alabama.

DuCasse: Do you remember what her maiden name was, by any chance?

Oldfield: Yes, it was Lydia Birge. Her family had come to California because it had been impoverished with the emancipation of the slaves, and brought bits of the South along. For instance, there was a caged mockingbird on the mantle of her sister's home, which I also visited. And a twig of cotton with two cotton balls along side of the mockingbird cage. I never got to know very many of the other members of the family, but Otis told me a good deal about them.

His paternal grandmother and grandfather had been British born, and become Mormon converts in England. According to the story Otis told me, Grandpa Oldfield was a bit of a scoundrel. He fell in love with this young Jewish girl, whose parents ran a silk mill in Lincolnshire. . Apparently, she liked him too; he must have been a charmer. But her parents were very much opposed to the marriage, so he published the bans in a neighboring town. Sounds like Shakespeare, doesn't it?

DuCasse: It does indeed!

Oldfield: The marriage took place without the knowledge of her parents until after it was accomplished fact. Otis's father, who was the first baby, was born in England. I guess things got a bit uncomfortable there for the young couple, because they didn't



Oldfield: stay in England very long. They brought the baby to this country. After that, Otis' grandfather, who was apparently a pretty successful operator of some kind, because he was a Mormon convert, had the backing of the church, bringing Mormons to Utah to settle in the promised land. He drove wagon trains back and forth between Nabu and Utah. He settled his young wife in a corner of the wilderness there, and two more children were born. I myself heard Otis' father say that the first language he spoke was that of the Blackfoot indians. He grew up with the little Indian children.

A few years went by until the children were--well, the oldest, who was Otis' father, was about ten, I think. Then Grandpa Oldfield announced that he was prosperous enough; he was sending back to England for a second wife. The girl he chose had been his wife's best friend when they were in England, so she objected.

Cravath: The wife objected.

Oldfield: The wife objected, yes. This was in the day of the Avenging Angels, you know. She couldn't leave. The church okayed it; it was her duty as a good Mormon to just journey heavenward by being agreeable to this arrangement. But she couldn't take it. So she made an arrangement with somebody who was driving a wagon train across the desert--to Ogden or somewhere--to meet her out of the settlement somewhere on part of his route, I guess. Anyway, she had one baby in her arms, one a toddler, and a little boy eight or nine or ten years old. Three children. According to the story I have been told, they pretended that they were playing a game.





Oldfield: The little boy was throwing rocks, and then they would go and pick them up. But instead of coming back they kept on going to the point of rendezvous. The wagon driver picked them up and took her to the nearest railroad, which I believe was Ogden at that time. Anyway, she didn't have a cent; she put herself at the mercy of the conductor on the train--she was a very beautiful young woman, I know from the pictures I've seen of her, and also I knew her when she was in her eighties. A very beautiful old woman she was, and I thought very superficial: she was loaded with junk jewelry. But she was elegant--she was erect and white-haired, with pink and white skin--she was still beautiful at eighty-some.

Anyway, the conductor on the train let her ride with her children as far as Sacramento. And that's how the family became a Sacramento family. Otis' father grew up there.

DuCasse: Which was Otis' father? Was he the eight-year-old?

Oldfield: He was the eight-year-old, yes, he was the oldest one. According to the story that Otis told me, later on, after the second wife had died, old Grandpa Oldfield turned up like a bad penny in Sacramento and asked his oldest son to take care of him, which he did. Otis grew up knowing this grandfather who was never very much admired by him, according to what he told me.

Otis went to school in Sacramento, and he was the youngest of three children. He had an older brother and an older sister. The older brother went off to work on a cattle ranch in Nevada one summer. This inspired Otis' imagination. He wanted to do



Oldfield: it too. He was a little young at the time, of course, but eventually, he got to the place where he was going to get out somehow or other. He tried to join the Navy, and they wouldn't have him because he wasn't tall enough. He became more and more dissatisfied--all this, you understand, is what he told me--I wasn't around, of course. Eventually, he said, he threw his books in the gutter and took off. This was after the Navy had refused him, and quite a few years had gone by, of course. I don't know how old he was, but he arrived in Paris when he was nineteen. And this had to be several years before, because he'd done a lot of other things in the meantime.

DuCasse: That would have been nineteen--

Oldfield: Nineteen-nine when he went to Paris. Before that, he had worked on this cattle ranch for a while, where he got diphtheria, and passed it around to all the people, all of the men in the bunkhouse, and was very unpopular on that account. Then he got a job--I don't know he got to Montana, except that it's close enough, I guess. I don't remember any stories of how he got there. But eventually, he was a fry cook on the--what is it--Missoula, Coeur de Lane--

Cravath: Missoula is in Montana; Coeur de Lane is in Idaho.

Oldfield: Well, there was a railroad that ran between the two places, and he was a fry cook on that railroad.

Cravath: Northern Pacific.

Oldfield: I guess it was Northern Pacific. By this time he knew that he wanted to study art. He was scribbling. He'd made up his mind. Also, his imagination was probably fired by someone he met on that railroad run who talked to him about an art school in Portland.



Oldfield: So he saved his money and he got to Portland. When he got to Portland, the art school didn't amount to anything. They told him he had to get to San Francisco. So again he saved his money, and he came down the coast on one of those little coastwise lumber schooners and got to San Francisco, where, of course, he didn't have any money; he had to get a job.

By this time he had learned to take advantage of his short stature, and he got a job as a bellboy in the old Argonaut Hotel. It was around Fifth and Market or Fifth and Mission or somewhere there. There was a resident physician there whom I later met (Charles Grant) years later, and there was a very well known painter, a painter of ships, well-known at this time, whom he met there. The painter encouraged him in his ambitions to study art, and the physician took care of him when he fell down the stairs with a heavy tray once and had to be hospitalized. I can't tell you exactly how long this bellboy job lasted, but eventually he was hatcheck boy at the old Cliff House. He was there one New Year's Eve when all the Spreckels family, and what was her name--the queen from the Hawaiian islands--

DuCasse: Hakelami?

Oldfield: Yes, something like that. [laughter] Anyway, there was entertainment, and a lot of booze, and the people at the tables were throwing five-dollar gold pieces to the entertainers. After the evening was over, Otis, who was very young, hadn't indulged in the champagne he could get, and the waiters were nearly all drunk, so that at the end of the



Oldfield: evening, Otis searched among the serpentine and confetti on the floor, and raked up five hundred dollars in gold coins.

So he took that home to Sacramento, and his father, who by this time was a master coach painter in the shops of the Southern Pacific in Sacramento, got him a pass to New York. With his \$500, he bought a ticket--I think it was the Lusitannia--I have a record of that--but I think it was the Lusitannia, because this was before the war, and it had to be before she was sunk, you know. He went to France on the Lusitannia and landed there.

Oh, I left out a little important item. While he was in San Francisco, while he was working both as a bellhop and hatcheck boy, he had gone to art school at night at the old Best Academy.

DuCasse: Do you remember where that might have been located?

Oldfield: Yes, it was Franklin and Bush, I think, in one of those old Victorians that's still there. It was run by a man named Arthur Best, and it was the art school that he found after he came down from Portland.

DuCasse: Arthur Best rings a bell.

Cravath: Is he the Best that was the father of Virginia Adams? She was a Best. The family in Yosemite that had an art gallery?

DuCasse: That could be. I'll bet that was. That's where the connection was coming from.

Oldfield: I'm not sure that he was her father--

Cravath: Well, she was Virginia Best.

DuCasse: I'm sure that was probably the one.

Oldfield: Anyway--there I go again--he went there to school while he was





Oldfield: working at night in these other places. Among his fellow students was a young Frenchman who was going back to France--I don't know when, but in a short time--so they made an arrangement that he would meet Otis and show him around when he got there. Otis counted on this, but when he eventually arrived there, there was no one to meet him; he spoke not a word of French; he had no passport; and he was just stranded in a foreign country. And he was young: he was only nineteen.

DuCasse: And without too much money by that time, I would imagine.

Oldfield: I think it took most of what he had. He told me many tales about how he lived on french bread with a slice of onion on it. That was all he had to eat. He shortly acquired a typical art student's outfit: a cordouroy suit with a norfolk jacket, and baggy trousers which fastened around the ankles to make them kind of blousy. I bet Marty wore one of those.

DuCasse: He certainly did.

Oldfield: He said that he lived and slept in that thing, because he had no bedding; he had no bed. Eventually, a couple of the other students that he met at the academy--he must have had a little money to enroll, because he enrolled in Academy Julien. He met other students there, of course, and eventually some of them invited him to share their digs. But all they had was just a bare floor. So he slept in that cordouroy outfit on the bare floor. He also had a cape, and the cape was warm and helpful too, I'm sure.

Quatre

He used to like to tell about the first Art Ball he attended.



Oldfield: He wore the cape to the door and took it off. That's a typical-- I don't remember all of the art student stories he told. He had a whole hoard of them, and about the shenanigans in the street the next day. They didn't want to quit, and they just kept on going. People kept on calling the police, and they kept on being hauled in, and then they'd get out and go to it again.

And there was always someone among those art students who had influential relatives, you know. So they got them all out, time after time. But instead of behaving, they went back to doing it again.

Now, let me see--where do we go from here? I've got him as far as going. He arrived there, and registered at the academy, made a few friends, and moved in with them.

DuCasse: How long did he stay there, do you remember?

Oldfield: How long did he stay altogether? He came back in '24, and he left in 1909. That was twenty five years.

Cravath: He was in Paris twenty-five years?

Oldfield: No, fifteen years. Of course, he came to make French friends. In fact, one of the French boys who was one of his first friends took him home with him for the first Christmas holidays. There he felt at home, was very, very happy, and promptly fell in love with the boy's sister, who rejected him very brutally because he was--they called him a savage, the American savage.

DuCasse: Yes, that's what they called my father, the savage.

Oldfield: Savage, yes. He claimed that his reputation was enhanced by his



Oldfield: claim of being a Californian. They didn't think that Californians were quite as savage as the general run of Americans.

DuCasse: I think the aura of the gold age still clung to California.

Oldfield: Yes, and California had been a Spanish province at one time. I don't <sup>know</sup> why they called Marty a savage; he was not really that kind of an American.

DuCasse: Perhaps he behaved a little bit like one. [laughter]

Oldfield: Maybe he did. All I know about this part of Otis' life is what he told me. The story was that after he was rejected by the sister of the friend who had taken him home, their mother was very, very concerned about him, and very sympathetic, and showed him a lot of compassion and interest, and eventually she became his common-law wife. He lived with her until she died, and then he came back to California.

DuCasse: How did he support himself all this time? Did he do any work, or did she take care of him?

Oldfield: She had a millinery shop, and she was quite prosperous, apparently. They made hats in those days, and they made babies' bonnets. It was a good business. She ran quite a large shop and employed quite a number of girls. Also, his family sent him a little money during those years. He said, rather unkindly, I thought, that it was "cigarette money." He felt that it was such a small amount that it didn't contribute very much to his--but he was provided with a studio, a place to live, and food, and what he needed. But he didn't need very much money.



Oldfield: Anyway, during the war his brother was an American GI--did they call it GI in those World War I--

DuCasse: Probably not, but I don't know what they called them.

Cravath: Federal board students when they went to art school.

DuCasse: Of course, in the second world war they called them GIs. I don't remember what they called them after World War I.

Oldfield: This was when they came back. Well, this was in Paris.

DuCasse: It would be interesting to know what the title for them was.

Oldfield: Doughboy was what they called them. So my brother-in-law was a doughboy. So he was in Paris as an American soldier, and visited Otis and got acquainted with his way of life, and brought the tale back to his parents, which they found pretty disturbing. Anyway, it didn't bother him very much, I guess.

Anyway, he came back when she died. Surveying the field, for some reason or other, he chose me. I have no real knowledge why, except that I know that he had lived with a woman who was old enough to be his mother for quite a long period. I think he wanted a young girl. But why he chose me instead of one of those French girls that Lucien Labaudt was trying to push on him, I don't know.

DuCasse: I think he'd had enough of the French, perhaps.

Oldfield: Maybe he'd had enough of the French.

Cravath: Well, he certainly chose wisely!

DuCasse: He had learned a great deal, and he knew who to choose. That's the reason.

Oldfield: Well, that's very nice of you. Anyway, he did. Didn't I tell you





Oldfield: a little bit on the last tape about his courtship? Pursuing me with little French songs, and all that stuff.

DuCasse: Yes, and the lovely picnics that you took.

Oldfield: And appearing at my parent's door in his French get-up with a bouquet of roses behind his back, held behind him, and all of my parent's neighbors peeking out of the window to see what in the world I had picked up. He was really conspicuous.

I remember when we went to buy wedding rings [brief tape interruption] and we went to one of the jewelry stores, and he ordered the ring. Then the clerk who was taking the order asked him his name and his address. He said, "Oh, you don't need that. Just take one look at me: you'll never forget me." [laughter] I was so embarrassed. He was so cocky about it, and he wouldn't give him his name.

Cravath: Was that your wedding ring or engagement ring?

Oldfield: The wedding ring. We had to leave it to be engraved and everything, so the man needed his name and his address and a little bit of identification. "You don't need that. Just take one look at me."

I remember another time I was embarrassed. We went to the First Parillia. Do you remember it at all? The one at the art school?

Cravath: Oh, do I remember that. I certainly do.

Oldfield: I had made him an elaborate costume--he embarrassed me so many times; I'm just beginning to remember them. [laughter] I had sewn raveled hemp on a pair of long underdrawers. He went as Pan. He had two



Oldfield: little red wooden horns, and he shaved the hair

[end tape 2, side B; begin tape 3, side A]

Oldfield: I was on the First Parillia, wasn't I?

DuCasse: Right. And you were just finishing his costume.

Oldfield: Yes, I made his costume, and of course he got first prize for the costume. I was pregnant; I really didn't even want to go, but he insisted. So I got up something for myself, some cover-up type of costume.

DuCasse: A Roman matron costume.

Oldfield: Right, something like that. Anyway, we went to the door, and there were some students there, of course, collecting the tickets or the admittance fees. Otis refused; he didn't have a ticket or tickets, and he refused to pay to get in. He said, "You're lucky I've come."  
[laughter] "You ought to pay me!"

Cravath: Was this after he won the prize?

Oldfield: No, this was before he won the prize. They didn't know what to do with this little guy, so they let him in. I sort of crept in after him. I was so embarrassed. I'd never been with anyone before who was like that. I was absolutely embarrassed. We got in, and right inside was Edgar Walter, who immediately went into ecstasy over Otis' make-up and his costume. He said, "Take me back to Paris."



Oldfield: And he took him in charge, and then they couldn't do anything about him. I guess Edgar was probably on the committee that awarded the prize. I remember Ureska was Cleopatra, and she was sure she'd get the prize, and she didn't. They gave it to Otis.

DuCasse: Well, it was more original.

Oldfield: My next embarrassment was the prize <sup>which</sup> was a hundred-dollar merchandise order on the Emporium. So my next embarrassment came when we went to spend the money, and we bought a double bed. Otis, in a very expansive mood, said to the clerk, "The first thing I think that married people should have is a bed, don't you?"

The clerk looked at me; I was obviously pregnant. He was thinking, "Well, you didn't need it, I guess, anyway." [laughter] Anyway, that was my second embarrassment, connected with the Parillia. Now, let's find our continuity again.

DuCasse: I know what I wanted to ask you: why did Otis particularly come to San Francisco. Was that because he had studied there before he went to Paris?

Oldfield: No, he tried to go back to Sacramento. His parents were there, and he told me, "I couldn't believe it. They had grown old!" He didn't recognize his parents. It was quite a stretch: it was fifteen years. But his parents weren't old when I knew them, not really old. Anyway, he was singularly lacking in imagination in certain areas. He just had not prepared himself for the changes that he would find there.

Anyway, he tried to adjust himself to it. He came down to



Oldfield: San Francisco to visit, and renewed his acquaintance with Ralph Stackpole and met through him a few other people.

Cravath: Did he meet Ralph in Paris?

Oldfield: In Paris. Ralph was over there during his divorce. Otis said that he found in the catalogue of one of the French exhibitions the name Adele Stackpole, because he was looking for Americans. He found Adele Stackpole, Sacramento, California. So he looked her up and became acquainted with her. Then when Ralph came along, Ralph looked him up, because it had something to do with--the sculptor who did the lion--Putnam. Arthur Putnam had been Ralph's teacher.

DuCasse: He went to Paris in 1911, I think it was, or sometime after that.

Oldfield: Otis had gotten in contact with Arthur Putnam because he was an American and he was having problems with Spreckels. Spreckels was having his sculpture reproduced with a view to bestowing it on the city of San Francisco. Putnam was having problems with her about paying the founder and stuff like that. So he was feeling a little bit irate at the time, and Otis, because of his identity as a Californian, somehow or other got mixed up in it--

Cravath: This all took place in Paris?

Oldfield: This all took place in Paris. So when Ralph arrived there, he got to Otis' name from Arthur Putnam, and looked him up and visited him in his studio. Otis told me that he, when he met Ralph, said "I've just met another Stackpole from California." This was putting his foot in his mouth, because this was the woman who was divorcing





Oldfield: him, and he'd followed her to Paris. So this was how that friendship began, and Otis renewed it when he came back to Sacramento and came down to visit San Francisco. He renewed the relationship with Ralph then.

DuCasse: Did he also with Adele?

Oldfield: No, I don't think so. I don't think he ever saw Adele again, not that I knew about. By this time, by the time he came to San Francisco to live, Adele and Ralph were divorced, and he was already with Jeanette. So it was old, and they were not seeing each other. Also, she had moved to Oakland, and Peter grew up there.

Anyway--there I go again with the anyways--

DuCasse: There are very few of them really. [laughter]

Oldfield: Through Ralph he met Piazzoni, Maynard Dixon, and the various other people who were conspicuous on the scene at that time.

DuCasse: And most of them who also had been in Paris.

Oldfield: Yes, practically all of them. Did I tell you the story about the first time I saw him at the art school when he made the speech?

DuCasse: Oh, yes indeed you did.

Oldfield: Well, this occurred on one of those visits to San Francisco. Then he used to come and visit the acquaintances that he had who were night students at the art school. On one of those occasions he told me about his upcoming show at the old Beaux Arts gallery.

Cravath: I remember that so well.

Oldfield: I don't know how much of that story I told you, but that was my next meeting with him after the lecture.



DuCasse: I don't think you told too much about that. I think we might go into that.

Oldfield: Did I tell you about his having been asked at the end of that lecture: "Do you mean to say that you don't have to paint with a brush?"

And he said, "You can put it on with an old shoe if you feel like it!"

DuCasse: Yes, you did.

Oldfield: It was after that that I went to see his show and met him sitting in the foyer. That was our meeting. Then I must have told you that. I know I went on then to being in his class and--well, let's skip that. That overlaps.

DuCasse: That's all right, so we don't lose anything that we should keep in the story. Was he teaching at the Art Institute after you were married?

Cravath: The California School of Fine Arts?

DuCasse: He was teaching there, was he not?

Oldfield: Yes. He was teaching there before we were married. What happened was that he conducted this little private class I told you about all the time sort of being the bohemian-about-town, you know, and seeing the other artists who were working a great deal. This happened to be just at the time that the present building was in course of its construction.

DuCasse: Yes, after they moved from Nob Hill.

Oldfield: They sold the property at Nob Hill, but it took some time to build



Oldfield: the new building.

Meanwhile they set up the school in temporary headquarters down on Market Street, Market and California. The regular staff, of whom Otis was not one at that time, didn't want to conduct the summer school. So they offered Otis the opportunity to have the California School of Fine Arts' summer session under his management and control, and to keep for himself whatever he could make. So he had a friend who had a studio in the backyard that he had built for his wife many years before, because she had been an art student when they married--he was a medic, and he just wanted to indulge his wife. So he built her a studio in the back yard of their home. I don't remember where it was, although I was there once. It seems to me it was out Jackson Street somewhere. Anyway, it was a fairly good-sized room, and Otis conducted the California School of Fine Arts summer session there. I don't think he had to pay any rent even, because it wasn't being used. They just lent it to him.

Apparently the administration of the art school was pleased with what he had done. So at the end of the summer he was offered a job teaching regular session. That was how he began.

DuCasse: Did he teach painting only?

Oldfield: He taught painting. I don't think he ever taught drawing. He began with still life, and I believe his first classes were night classes. Then he had Saturday classes.

Cravath: And you were in that night class, weren't you Helen?



Oldfield: No. After we were married, I used to go with him.

Cravath: I thought maybe you were in his class.

Oldfield: No. The only class of his that I was in was the one in Carol Wirtenberger's studio. That was long over by the time we were married. Of course, all the newspapers said that I had married my teacher, but I really didn't even think of it that way. This was a very informal little group gathered in a fellow student's studio. I remember he used to pass his beret around, and we would each put a dollar in it or something. He was very hard up at that time. He told me, although I don't remember it, that Maynard Dixon used to give him jobs working on mural commissions that he had. He worked for Maynard under Maynard's direction. He did that, and then he had this little class where he got a dollar a head from his students, which didn't provide very much. But, you know, a room in the Monkey Block at that time cost ten dollars.

DuCasse: Good heavens! You didn't have to have too much to subsist.

Oldfield: You didn't have to have too much. And also, he set himself up as a bookbinder.

DuCasse: Where did he learn bookbinding, do you remember?

Oldfield: In Paris. This was on the advice of his French wife. She felt that every artist should have a craft to fall back on, a practical craft. So she encouraged him, and arranged for him to have very good training, I believe, because he was a good bookbinder. But he was not a naturally good craftsman. He bungled things, and I learned all the French swearwords in the book when he was doing





Oldfield: bookbinding.

DuCasse: And that's a very precise kind of art. It really is a craft.

Oldfield: Yes, and it requires control. This was something that he had no patience with. He used to look at me and say, "How can you be so patient? It's indecent."

DuCasse: Oh, patience is a great virtue, there's no doubt about it.

Oldfield: He felt that he didn't have it, and I did, and he taunted me with it.

DuCasse: Incidentally, before we go too much further, I don't think we ever got the name of his French wife. Do you remember what her name was?

Oldfield: Yes. Her name was Roche. She was Madame Roche. Her son was Marcel Roche.

DuCasse: Do you remember what her first name might have been?

Oldfield: Yes. ~~Jehanne~~ He called her "Jane." That's one reason for our daughter's being named Jane.

DuCasse: Well, think of that! So he helped to support himself with his bookbinding, even though he had some problems with it! [laughs]

Oldfield: He had problems with it which I remember. He was very, very proud of his skill and his knowledge of the craft as a French craft. He was a French trained bookbinder, which had a certain distinction here. He did some very beautiful things. He went through a period when he was doing bindings of erotica for Hollywood personalities. This was when we were still living on Telegraph Hill. They would send him the books, the unbound books, and he would try to make some kind of exotic bindings which would go with what he knew was the content, although he never bothered to read it. Then he would mail them back.

I remember one of the men was Von Stroheim that he made bindings



Oldfield: for.

DuCasse: Oh, Erich Von Stroheim, the director and actor.

Oldfield: And actor. He had a collection of erotica. Otis bound them usually in velum. But then he got the idea that it would be so much more exciting to have some human skin in those bindings.

Cravath: Oh, that I'll never forget!

Oldfield: So he had a student at the art school who was also a medical student at UC Berkeley, and he got him some--it was a paper shopping bag full of skin off of a cadaver.

Cravath: Sounds like Leonardo when he was doing his nefarious things--

Oldfield: It wasn't as successful for Otis. Anyway, I remember going out with him and sitting in the car while he went in and came out with this dripping shopping bag.

Cravath: This was after you were married?

Oldfield: Yes, oh, yes. Quite a long time after we were married. He brought that out, and we took it up to our little Telegraph Hill flat, and he was sure that he could cure that skin. The only experience that he had had with working with human skin was in Paris. One of his closest friends, and I think really his longest friend from his Paris days was a poet named Noel Bureau. Noel had had a sweetheart or a mistress or something, with whom he broke up, and she subsequently drowned herself in the Seine. He was also a medical student, and her body came up on the dissecting table, and he recognized her. So he took, secretly, a little piece of skin from between her breasts, and he harbored it and treasured it for years until he



Oldfield: got himself with another woman. He gave the piece of skin to Otis. And Otis used it to bind a book. It's only a little piece; it's just the backing of the book.

I have seen that book many times. In fact, it's around here somewhere, except I can't put my finger on it. I don't know exactly where.

Anyway, this is what gave him the idea of binding these erotic books in human skin. He was sure he'd be able to do it because he'd handled human skin before. He didn't know, I'm sure, how much work had been done on that piece that he had before he got it. But he thought he knew how. Also, he gave instructions to the man who arranged for him to get it, that it should be the skin from the inside of the thigh, because this would be the easiest to handle and the finest textured of any skin on the human body.

When we got it up to Telegraph Hill, it turned out to be the whole abdomen, with all the fat and the tendons and the thickenings stuck to it. I remember trying to help him. He put that skin over stovepipes, and we tried to scrape the fat off of it. We put it in formaldehyde. We tried to scrape the fat off of it. We tried to scrape the thickened parts away. Finally, it got to stink, and I refused to work on it anymore. Eventually, he put it in the garbage can. [laughter] I don't know why we weren't arrested for murder!

DuCasse: Well, they didn't inspect your garbage.

Oldfield: The garbage man came, and he got rid of it.

Cravath: Oh, Helen, I never heard that story!



Oldfield: He never did bind a book with human skin.

Cravath: Oh, he didn't? I thought he had because I heard--

Oldfield: It was just that one little one, this little back. I am quite sure that Bureau had cured that skin before he gave it to Otis, because he kept it for a long time.

DuCasse: There must have been a secret to it.

Oldfield: Well, if I could believe what he told me, he knew all about it. He had learned. And maybe he did participate, but he certainly didn't know how. And, of course, he got the skin from the wrong part of the bodies, besides, which made it more difficult. But anyway, that was the reason that he had it, because he had in mind these erotic books that he was being sent by a friend in Los Angeles who had a little bookstore. A little bookstore, I afterwards learned, that had a very dubious reputation. It was called The Satyr, and it was a perfect title. The man who ran it bootlegged the printing of Chick Sayles' The Outhouse.

DuCasse: Oh, yes. And to think that that was ever considered pornographic! [laughter] That innocent little book.

Oldfield: Hardly pornographic. Anyway, oh, it was a big seller, you know, when it came out. He printed it privately, without any authorization, and he got caught, and they sent him to jail. That was just one of his little tricks.

I remember he used to come up to see us on Telegraph Hill and bring jewelry for our little girls. He was a quite a lavish type of guy. He liked to make a show of such things. And I know both of





Oldfield: our kids thought he was great. His name was Stanley Rose. I don't know what happened to him. He eventually did get out of jail. I don't know whether he went back into the book business or not. [laughter] But he was the one who made these contacts with these movie personalities and sent Otis the orders.

Otis would bind these books and send them back to Stanley, and Stanley might have added to the price, I don't know. He was totally unscrupulous about things like that.

DuCasse: Did Otis ever get paid for his work?

Oldfield: Yes, he got paid what he asked. But he didn't ask very much considering what he was doing. He was sending this pornographic literature with pornographic bindings in the mail. He might have gotten caught, too.

DuCasse: It shows how many things get by, just through--

Oldfield: He was just sending them parcel post. They came that way, and he sent them back that way.

And he always had very strange ideas about the value of money. It was never realistic. He never really changed from francs to dollars. And every dollar was so much to him that he always underpriced his work. Now, when I have an opportunity to sell something, I multiply his prices by five.

DuCasse: Of course you would have to, naturally. And then you would have to multiply them because everything has gone up so much.

Oldfield: Everything has gone up so, and his were so modest. But you can't believe how unrealistic people are about the value of artworks, that often prices them too high, even that. Something that he would



Oldfield: ask fifteen or twenty dollars for is now a hundred dollars.

People often think that that's too much. It was such a little thing, you know, such a little thing.

DuCasse: I think many of them did that. I know my father never charged the proper amounts for his paintings. I think there was only one painting that he ever really got the right amount.

Cravath: I never have charged the proper amount.

DuCasse: I think most artists, when they price things themselves, don't do themselves justice. This has to be done by an agent or by a gallery.

Oldfield: But at the time the paintings that he priced at two to four hundred dollars were considered overpriced by some people. I remember Whedie said that. She said that artists would be able to sell more if they didn't overprice their paintings. She was running a gallery at the time.

DuCasse: When you speak of pricing and so forth, did he exhibit a great deal? Did he have one-man shows?

Oldfield: Oh, yes. He had one-man shows every year for--we used to go on safaris during the summer. I think I told you the story of finding one of my paintings and asking him who did it. He did this every summer for, I guess, about the first ten years that we were married, and had a show at the Beaux Arts gallery as long as it was there.

Cravath: Sometimes he had a show at The Modern Gallery, didn't he, on Montgomery Street.

Oldfield: Yes, I think he did. But that was after it moved upstairs, and Whedie was running it. But not when it was in the original



Oldfield: location.

He, of course, sent to juried shows all over the country. And after we moved to Telegraph Hill, he became interested in the activity on the waterfront, and the activity of the hill: the kids and the inhabitants of the hill: the bohemians, the kids, and the others. At that time, Montgomery Street wasn't paved: they were two levels, but they were dirt. And Julius' Castle was there, and just beyond where we lived.

DuCasse: You were on the east side, weren't you?

Oldfield: No, we were on the west side, but it was way up. We overlooked the east side totally, you see. We overlooked all the hill that went down towards Sansome Street.

Cravath: Is that building still there, the one where you lived?

Oldfield: Yes.

DuCasse: That must have been quite close to Coit Tower, then.

Oldfield: Yes, the tower is above it.

Cravath: We ought to go up and take a walk up there.

Oldfield: Yes.

Cravath: The building where we had a studio on Filbert Street, too.

Oldfield: Yes, that was Russian Hill.

Cravath: No, it was Filbert Street, right up near the school.

Oldfield: Oh, yes.

DuCasse: There's one little fact that I wanted to correct, something that I said when we were discussing the California College of Arts and Crafts and Marty and the Meyers and so forth. I had erroneously



DuCasse: said that I went there in 1926. I went there in 1928. I was anticipating a little bit.

Oldfield: I was wondering, because that was very shortly after I left. I was there until 1925. I don't remember whether I was a student there during '26 at all. I may have been, because I wasn't married until--yes, I was there as a student very close to the time when I was married, because

[end tape 3, side A; begin tape 3, side B]

DuCasse: When we were talking about the bookbinding, I was reminded of the books that he illustrated, the two books that he did (at least we know of two books). One was McTeague, by Frank Norris, and the other was his journals, his Alaskan journals. I believe that McTeague came first, didn't it?

Oldfield: McTeague was really just illustrations, although his illustrations were just chapter headings, line drawings of chapter headings. You know what McTeague is. It's the story of a dentist in San Francisco in the early days who was ill-prepared for what he was doing, but hung out a shingle anyway. It's just full of San Francisco atmosphere. Otis' drawings were just drawings that were recognizably San Francisco silhouettes, you know.

DuCasse: Do you remember who the publisher was, by any chance?





Oldfield: Yes, it was Jane Grabhorn, and Bill Roth. They called themselves the Colt Press.

DuCasse: Do you remember about what year that might have been?

Oldfield: It was in the early years of the war, early forties, maybe. After Pearl Harbor, but not too long after, but not too long after, because I remember--

DuCasse: Forty-two or '43, probably.

Oldfield: Yes, maybe. It was during the time when we were still frightened of being invaded, and we had blackouts. We were at a cocktail party which had something to do with the publication of this book. I think it was the publication of it.

DuCasse: Maybe it was an autographing party.

Oldfield: Yes, it was a cocktail party, and it was on the top floor of one of the downtown buildings. As I remember, it was Geary Street somewhere. I don't remember which building it was.

Anyway, we were at this cocktail party when the sirens went off. And all the lights went out. We had left our two children, who were at that time maybe twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old, studying while we went to the cocktail party. We thought they were old enough to stay, and so did they, without babysitters. So we had chanced it, and this siren went off.

So we thought immediately of them. We were frightened--especially I was frightened. We got out into the street, because all the lights went off on the top of that building, and we had to walk down the stairs. We got out in the street; there were no street



Oldfield: cars running, there were no lights. I remember walking up Stockton Stockton Street through the tunnel to Chinatown, and then up Union Street to where we lived with my heart in my mouth. I was so afraid that they had been terribly frightened. They studied like all kids did, with the radio on. Of course, that went off. And the lights went out. We got there, and they were just as cool as they could be. They had found candles, and they thought that it was a failure of the PG&E. They were not disturbed at all. They were just going on with their studies. I thought it was great too. But such an unnecessary panic on my part!

DuCasse: And at such a time, too, when you were really supposed to enjoy that evening.

Oldfield: It was a cocktail party, and I imagine it was pretty much over by the time this happened, because it was totally dark when we got out on the street.

DuCasse: Did they approach Otis--Grabhorn and Roth?

Oldfield: Yes, Jane Grabhorn did. Jane was Robert's wife, you know. Otis knew the Grabhorn brothers very, very well from the beginning. He did binding for them. He bound their edition of Leaves of Grass. He had done a number of other things for them.

DuCasse: Did he do other illustrations for them? Do you remember?

Oldfield: No, he never did any illustrations for them. Mallett Dean was doing all of their illustration. It wasn't until the Grabhorns separated, and Jane started up this Colt Press with Bill Roth that he was asked to do any illustrations. So he did those. He did



Oldfield: a drawing for each chapter heading, and also Colt Press Logo was a pony. Afterwards, they published an edition of Kipling, which had to do with his visit to San Francisco, and that poem about "East is east, and West is west. . ." and all that stuff. I don't know whether I can find it or not, but I think it's up there on that top shelf. She sent Otis an autographed copy, saying that she had never found anything better for San Francisco, and that she used some of the same drawings as headings in that book.

DuCasse: So he didn't do anything especially for that.

Oldfield: It was just what she had left from the--a very interesting thing happened to me years later when I was teaching at the Hamlin School. Part of my job was helping one of the seniors who was on the staff of the school yearbook to make her drawings, which were to be headings like that. The yearbook at that time was printed by the Grabhorn Press. When the students took their drawings for that yearbook, Ed Grabhorn saw them, and he thought Otis had done them.  
[laughter]

DuCasse: Isn't that something?

Oldfield: Imagine--through me! Otis never even knew what the book was, never saw it. Somehow or other, not consciously, I maneuvered this child into making line drawings that were so much like Otis' that Ed Grabhorn was fooled.

Cravath: She must have been pretty gifted then.

Oldfield: Well, I don't know. I don't know whether she was gifted or I was!



Oldfield: I didn't do the drawings, no. I didn't do the drawings. And she didn't know Otis or anything about him, and that's really in that book.

But I am conscious that I knew that those line drawings were very simple and effective. She had been directed to make line drawings--no, she had been directed to make drawings for the headings of the various sections which had to do with various areas in San Francisco.

I remember once we went out to the Legion of Honor, and that's one of the things that he had in there. And one was the Coit Tower--you know, all various parts that are easily recognized symbols of areas.

So without having her see the drawings that he had made or know anything about them, I guided her into doing these drawings that fooled Ed Grabhorn.

DuCasse: I think that's extraordinary.

Oldfield: It was really ridiculous. It was a little irritating to me at the time, because I was having too much trouble to escape this dominance anyway.

DuCasse: Yes, I can understand how that wouldn't be the happiest thing for you.

Oldfield: I didn't want to do it. I did it unconsciously.

DuCasse: Now we hear that Otis took this trip to Alaska. Did you go with him on that trip?

Oldfield: No.

DuCasse: Roughly when would that have been, do you think?





Oldfield: That was in 1931. He, by this time, had had two or three shows in New York, the first one exceedingly successful. It was of drawings.

DuCasse: Do you remember what gallery it was?

Oldfield: Yes, Montross. It had been arranged by Walt Kuhn, who visited us here when he was in San Francisco. I guess it was '28. The first show was in '29. Walt had seen the drawings that Otis was accumulating of the happenings of the hill: the activities of the kids, and the herd of goats that went past our window every day, and the goat woman who carried a bundle of green grass on her head had herded the goats back to their stable, which was in--

Cravath: Can you think that San Francisco had that sort of thing?

DuCasse: Isn't it wonderful to think of?

Oldfield: It was in Castle Street. Do you know where Castle Street is? A little alley off of Union Street, right across from where Rudolph Schaeffer's school was at one time. There was a stable; they had a stable in there. Every day, when there was anything for them to eat, they herded those goats up to Montgomery Street, and down there to where the green grass grew.

It was often very, very muddy at that time. I remember standing there at the top of Union Street, and seeing those goats being brought home, and skidding because Union Street was paved. They would put on all four brakes, and they'd skid down to Castle Street, they were so muddy. So Otis drew all these activities.

Cravath: I can't remember that.



Oldfield: Well, you didn't live there, dear.

Cravath: No, but even so, I would have thought I would have been aware of what was going on.

Oldfield: Anyway, these drawings were sent to New York. The next year, Otis went back there. He was very disappointed, because the show had been a sell-out, but the gallery hadn't collected. They had delivered the drawings, but hadn't collected. So Otis got the addresses, and went around and knocked on people's doors and asked for him money.

Anyway, he came back after that. The next year, '29, he had the opportunity to make a trip up from Sacramento--I think it was to Red Bluff, or maybe Colusa--on an old stern wheel paddle schooner named the Dover. He brought back a collection of drawings--or he made them after he got back--he brought back the notes--from that trip, which he again sent to New York. It was shown in the downtown gallery. I can't remember her name, but the woman who ran that gallery really took advantage of the fact that he wasn't there. She had them framed, and she shipped them back with all the glass on the frame in such a big crate, such a heavy crate, that when it arrived at our studio on Telegraph Hill, we didn't have the money to pay the shipping charges. Not only that, they weren't all there. There was about half of them.

So this turned Otis off on New York from then on. He never had another show in New York. He didn't want anything to do with those New York galleries.

DuCasse: I can't blame him if they treated him that way.



Oldfield: Well, the first time, he had to collect himself. The next time, he didn't get his drawings back. And also, he was out the money that he had to find to pay the shipping charges. They came back by railway express in a huge big case. And it was all glass, because the frames had glass! Anyway, that was one of the unpleasant experiences that turned him off on being a New York artist.

Another thing was that when he was there during the time of his second show--he went in '29, I remember, and he was only gone a couple of weeks, and he was gone at Christmas time. So he went during his Christmas vacation from the art school. They told him while he was there that he had the opportunity to become a well-known and conspicuous New York artist, but he would have to come back there and live without his family. But that time, he had two children.

So he came home and said, "I've decided to be a provincial artist."

[laughter]

DuCasse: Yes, Marty was pretty much the same way. He didn't want to go to New York either. Macbeth wanted to represent and have his work, and he just wasn't interested in having to move himself across the country. I can understand that.

Oldfield: Helper was her name, the woman who ran the downtown gallery. She had a gallery with that name on it, too, at one time, but I've forgotten the continuity of it.

Anyway, he came back. After he made the trip on the Dover, he had a show of the drawings that he made from that trip here before he went. I don't remember where it was, whether it was in the



Oldfield: Beaux Arts gallery or at the art school. Anyway, he had a show, and it attracted quite a few buyers here. One of them was a man named [pause]--I can't remember right now.

DuCasse: Maybe it'll come to you as you go on.

Oldfield: Anyway, he was the president of the Stock Exchange Club, and vice-president of a company called the Union Fish Company, which ran boats to the Bering Sea to fish for cod every year. So he had bought--Bertram Allenson was his name--he had bought several of the drawings that Otis had made from his upriver trip. So he arranged for one of the Union Fish Company ships to give passage to Otis the following year. Otis was invited by the company. I wasn't invited. There were no women on the boat. They considered it bad luck to have a female aboard even. So there was no question of my going.

So Otis took time off from his teaching job in the spring of 1931, and he made this trip. There again, before he left, I met the captain and the mate, and I had them to dinner up at our little flat on Telegraph Hill. Otis reported when he came home that every time anything interesting happened on deck, they would rout him out and the captain would remind him that he had promised his wife he'd produce five hundred drawings on that ship. I don't remember making that request at all! But he was largely responsible for some of the things that Otis got. When they had all hands on deck to reef all the sails in a storm, they got him up on deck and they lashed him to mast, and made him draw.

DuCasse: Good for them! He didn't miss a trick, did he?





Oldfield: This was very rewarding for him. That was the source of the book that you mentioned, the other book. That was printed by Grabhorn Hoyeme, which was Jane Grabhorn's husband and Andrew Hoyeme. That wasn't Grabhorn Press, really at all, although Bob Grabhorn was still around at that time.

DuCasse: Were those illustrations pen and ink, or--

Oldfield: They were charcoal drawings, defined by pen and ink, and tinted with water color. What is left of them is framed on the wall in other room, if you'd like to see it. There are about twenty-five, or twenty-eight maybe, left, because a lot of them were sold. They were shown in San Francisco first, and then they traveled all around the country.

DuCasse: Did they ever travel up to Alaska?

Oldfield: No. They aren't really concerned with Alaska, because they're all on the ship. The only time they were anywhere near Alaska was in Dutch Harbor, and Otis left the ship there, and didn't know how he was going to get back. He hadn't made any arrangements to come home. He just went on this ship without knowing how he was going to get home.

I was staying with my parents on the farm at Santa Rosa with my two little kids. I remember I was very worried at one time. I remember being in the kitchen with my mother, and the farm kitchen had an old, woodburning cookstove. I remember I was feeding wood into it--we were cooking something. She was upset about something that was going on there, I don't remember what



Oldfield: it was at this time. I remember saying to her, "What are you kicking about? For all I know, I may be a widow!" [laughter]

DuCasse: You were really feeling sorry for yourself! Did you get any communications from him along the trip? Did he ever have a chance to--?

Oldfield: No.

DuCasse: Probably they didn't stop at any ports or anything until they got to their destination.

Oldfield: I was on the farm, you see. I wasn't at home. He couldn't get me by telephone. The first thing I got was a telegram that he sent from Seattle--no, he sent the telegram, I guess, from Dutch Harbor. I got a telegram, and I remember coming down to San Francisco and calling Bill Gerstle and telling him that I was worried because I'd had this telegram, and I didn't know where Otis was or how he was going to get home. He said, "No news is good news; don't worry. We don't have any news. We don't know where the Louise is, but we expect that she's up there in the Bering Sea, fishing for cod." And he didn't want to stay there for fishing, you know. After he saw the trip, he didn't want to stay there anymore.

So he got off at Dutch Harbor. It happened that a Bureau of Fisheries tug was coming home from the Pribilof Islands--that's what the name is, isn't it? Isn't that right? Pribilof Islands--they're somewhere up in the Bering Sea--bringing an American schoolteacher home at the end of a stint. So the company--I don't know whether it was the Alaska Commercial Company or the Union



Oldfield: Fish Company--they arranged passage for him on this Bureau of Fisheries tug.

DuCasse: That must have been a rough trip.

Oldfield: Yes, it was very rough. He was seasick all the way, he said. It was a small boat. They got down to--it wasn't Anchorage, it was one of those other Alaska towns--

DuCasse: Juneau?

Oldfield: It might have been Juneau, but it was a port. Anyway, the captain of the tug died on the trip between Dutch Harbor and the Alaskan port. They had no way of taking care of him, so they put his body on the top of the cabin--it was freezing cold, you know--and they froze him and carried him to--Juneau's not a port, is it?

DuCasse: Maybe it's not.

Oldfield: I can easily check it. [brief tape interruption]

DuCasse: Seward?

Oldfield: Seward. When they got to Seward, they held the funeral for this captain. Otis was so impressed by the fact that all of these Eskimo women had silk stockings and fur coats. They were so dressed up and it was so fancy, that he was inspired to buy me a pelt. He brought home this big fox pelt which I never really enjoyed wearing, because I don't like to wear animal skins.

DuCasse: I'm not a fur person either.

Oldfield: Now, I've lost track again. He got to Seward. This, I believe, was where he sent the telegram. So I got that, and I didn't hear anything more from him for such a long time, and I began to



Oldfield: get worried. I figured--I think he had probably said that he was on his way home. That was when I worried that I might be a widow. I got back to San Francisco, and called Bill Gerstle. He said not to worry. They didn't know what had happened, but no news is good news, and all that stuff. So I went back up to the farm. Eventually I got another telegram from Seattle. He was coming down on the train. He had gotten to Seattle. I don't remember how he got to Seattle.

DuCasse: It was probably by boat.

Oldfield: By boat I'm sure. I don't think--and he wouldn't fly. So he probably came down on boat from Seward.

DuCasse: That must have been a fascinating experience for him.

Oldfield: Yes, actually he was so involved in it that people used to tease him because he talked about it all the time and like to reminisce about it all the time. He wrote several very expanded versions of the diary that's in this book, and tried to get them published. He thought the drawings would make a good book, and he wanted to write the book. Several people offered to edit it for him. He got turned off by that idea. He didn't want anybody monkeying or editing his material. So he turned down these offers.

Finally, he made the arrangements with Grabhorn Hoyem~~e~~ to print it. They used his own diary of the trip verbatim. He lent it to them, and they told me they were so entranced with the flavor of his own log of the journey that they printed it verbatim--typographical errors, phonetic spelling, everything.





Oldfield: That would have pleased him very much, but he died just before it came out. So he didn't get to autograph and he didn't get to see it. But it has been a very successful enterprise, I think. I think they've sold them all by now.

DuCasse: Yes, because that kind of personal reminiscence is always fascinating to people. And this would be unique, you see. No one else had-- well, not since Two Years Before the Mast had somebody really catalogued and recorded the goings on of a merchant marine ship.

Cravath: This is wonderful: all the days, like "Friday the seventeenth of April, nineteen days out." He's got the whole thing. Beautifully done, isn't it?

Oldfield: It's mostly anecdotal things--the colorful character of the men that manned the ship. It had thirty-some men on it, and not a <sup>one</sup> single liked books.

DuCasse: They just didn't expect that they would have them.

Oldfield: Well, no, it was that the company that operated those boats didn't give a hoot about the men. They were virtually Shanghai'd! They handed out money to them to go and drink with, and then they rounded them up in the bars and dumped them in jail, and then poured them onto the ship before they sailed. Of course, Otis recorded all that. The company was a little bit miffed about it at one point.

Cravath: About the book.

Oldfield: Well, not about the book, they didn't see the book. But he told these stories along with exhibiting the drawings.

DuCasse: That certainly is wonderful that it was preserved in this form in



DuCasse: this beautiful book.

Cravath: I remember when this<sup>came out</sup>--shortly after Otis died.

Oldfield: Yes, he just didn't quite make it.

DuCasse: What was the date of Otis' death?

Oldfield: May 18, 1969. So it came out in '69, a little after. I guess the date is in there somewhere.

DuCasse: It's a pity he couldn't have seen the finished--

Oldfield: I'm so sorry he couldn't have seen it. It's a beautiful job.

DuCasse: That's really splendid, though, that it was done.

Oldfield: I think it may have actually been printed before he died. But by the time it was ready he was not in shape to autograph it.

[end tape 3, side B]

Date of Interview: 4 February 1981

Begin tape 4, side A

DuCasse: When I went over the last session, I found that there were a couple of things that weren't absolutely clear to me. One of them was: I don't know that we got the names of your brother and sister. I wanted to make sure that we got those down. Your brother's name was--

Oldfield: Edgar.

DuCasse: And your sister?



Oldfield: Ruth.

DuCasse: You mentioned about teaching at Hamlin School, but we never got any dates for that. Do you remember when about how long you taught and more or less when you started?

Oldfield: I can remember about. I started in '45, and I taught there--some of it part time--I was still there until '71.

DuCasse: We got your birth date, which was--you want to give that to me just so it'll be on the tape?

Oldfield: September 21, 1902.

DuCasse: Now we'll get back to our sequence. We stopped after we had talked about--I finally got this all typed so I knew what was happening. We talked about the two books that he illustrated, the McTeague and we went into great detail on the one of his Alaskan trip. That was later in his career. We got his death date, but there's still a lot we want to know about Otis prior to that time. One of the things that might be interesting to others is how he worked. When he was doing his own painting, did he have any kind of a special schedule, or did he just work in it between his teaching? Would you like to tell us a little bit about that now?

Oldfield: I would say that he painted all the time. He was always in his studio. Of course, he had a few hobbies, too. He became after we moved to Telegraph Hill, enamored of the boats that he could see from our window, particularly the rather local ones. He was not moved by the big ocean liners or the military boats. But the little schooners that carried lumber up and down the coast, and the scows that went up the creek to Petaluma and Napa. And



Oldfield: also the ones that went up the Sacramento River. He made a number of models of those, and became so interested that he, for years, spent at least a day a week doing research in San Francisco library: going through old newspapers and making lists of sailing dates and all kinds of little historical data that he could find in old newspapers about the movements of these boats. I don't know how far back that went, but it was an awful lot of stuff, I assure you.

DuCasse: That's very interesting that he was as thorough as that.

Oldfield: He was very thorough. In everything he did he was thorough, but he was also stubborn. If he picked up a wrong clue and it misled him, it took an awfully long time for him to admit it. I, of course, didn't push him into that, so I don't really know if there are very terrible errors in his records or not.

He became so interested in boats that it was almost consuming. I imagine that it appeared a little bit with his painting, although probably not very much. His output was pretty large anyway. He painted every day of the week if he was free to do it. Except for his teaching schedule, nothing interfered with his activity in the studio.

Cravath: He never taught five days a week, did he?

Oldfield: No.

Cravath: What, two days a week?

DuCasse: Yes, usually they would do it two or three days a week.

Oldfield: Usually two days a week, or maybe even less, because a lot of his classes were special classes, like the Saturday afternoon and





Oldfield: morning classes that they had at the art school for people who couldn't come during the week, and for children. He never taught a children's class, but for years he had a Saturday afternoon class which was open to people of any kind. I used to go there with him once in a while. There was one old guy who came up from a retirement home, and he would keep saying to Otis, "Come on, professor, paint it a little bit for me!"

Then he had night classes. But until his last two or three years at the San Francisco art school, he didn't have a figure painting class, which is what he wanted all the time. He finally had for a few years before the war came along, and that was what ended his teaching career at the San Francisco art school.

After that, he taught at Arts and Crafts.

DuCasse: Was that during the war years or after the war years that he began at Arts and Crafts?

Oldfield: I think it was after.

DuCasse: That was interesting, because that was one of the things I was going to ask you, if he taught right up to the end, and I was thinking naturally of San Francisco. But that's interesting: he was really at Arts and Crafts.

Oldfield: He was at Arts and Crafts after the war. During the war, he worked first at Moore Shipyards as a draftsman, and later at Fort Mason. What did they call it--it was the Army Transport Service.

I have an amusing little anecdote I can tell you about his



Oldfield: work in a shipyard. There were rather stern measures about this during the height of the war, I guess it was, when output was very important, to prevent people from moving to other jobs, and leaving the shipyards and other things short-handed. So there was a regulation that you couldn't quit. If you quit, you'd be black-balled, and you wouldn't be able to be hired anywhere else. So, of course Otis quit. He couldn't stand the idea of anybody telling him he couldn't. It wasn't so much that he wanted to quit; he was pretty tired of the routine, because it meant getting up at four AM, and walking to the ferry building, and taking a bus--I don't think there were boats still running then--I guess he took the train to Oakland. Then he had to walk some distance.

I remember I used to pack him a lunch with a thermos of soup in it. He would have this in his lunch pail. It was still fairly dark when he got to Oakland; he had to walk across some railroad tracks. Invariably, he tripped and fell and broke the thermos. He got very annoyed with that.

He would come home and shake the thermos to show me what had happened. Anyway, he worked there for a couple of years, I guess, before this order came out that employees would be penalized if they quit. So he quit. So he was called into the office and told that he would not be able to find employment anywhere else. He didn't accept that ultimatum either. So he went to our good friend, Dr. Eloesser , and told him about what was happening. There was a court hearing--I don't remember how this court hearing came about--but the doctor testified for him that this was a sensitive



Oldfield: person, and that his health was in jeopardy with the job that he had. Therefore, he was quite right to quit. And Otis got the judgment.

So, then he was employed by the Army at Fort Mason. He stayed there until the end of the war, when all civilian employees were turned out.

DuCasse: That's great. What type of thing did he do? Do you remember?

Oldfield: At Fort Mason? Whatever they needed--he designed--he didn't actually paint them--he designed signs. I remember there were a lot of "Welcome Home" signs and things like that. He designed the decoration of the bay sides of the piers, which were planned to welcome the returning soldiers. I have drawings of those designs somewhere. I couldn't put my finger on them, but they're around here somewhere.

Also, he designed floats that were in parades that dealt with Army personnel. I remember there was one that was a float for WACs--that's the Women's Army Corps--he was very thrilled with that.

DuCasse: I'm sure he did a beautiful job on that one.

Oldfield: I didn't see it, but apparently they were quite pleased. He became friendly with some of the officers, and talked to them about his hobbies. Eventually, one of the--I don't remember what his rank was--one of the officers asked him to make a model of, I think, an army tug--I'm not sure. Otis did that. At the presentation, it was quite a grand ceremony, and set him up a great deal.

DuCasse: This must have been very satisfying to him, to be able to do something more related to his own talents. Did you, by any chance,



DuCasse: do any war work, or were you too busy with your family?

Oldfield: He violently opposed my doing war work. I wanted to try to do something. I had done some mechanical drawings, but I had a gap in my mathematical education, so I bought a book on trigonometry. I went through it on my own, much to his distress. He accused me of liking that book better than I liked him.

DuCasse: He was not having any rivals of any description, I see!

Oldfield: No, he was not having any rivals at all.

Cravath: Didn't you work with the Red Cross?

Oldfield: Oh, yes, I did a little volunteer work.

Cravath: I mean, I think he was on the Bulletin of the Red Cross.

Oldfield: Yes, at the Bureau of Inquiry at the Red Cross headquarters.

Through Switzerland. A lot of them were very, very, difficult.

Jewish people here who drew families. The return messages would sometimes come back, and they were always terrible. We had to call in the people and deliver these messages.

DuCasse: That must have been heartbreaking.

Oldfield: Yes, it was. Otis didn't mind my doing it, as long as it was volunteer work. But he didn't want anything that would be more absorbing than that. I don't think I worked more than two or three hours a week at that.

DuCasse: At least you had the satisfaction of doing something.

Oldfield: Then it got into another kind of thing. I think it grew out of this same office. Anyway, I transferred my volunteer activities to a program which was designed to employ artists in rehabilitation work, like going into the hospitals and doing whatever the artist









Oldfield: At the museum, yes. And the head was Nell . Also,  
Leah Hamilton worked there.

So that's the extent of my war work. It really wasn't very much. I was ambitious to have a job like Otis did, but he opposed the idea. He had all kinds of good arguments: I should sit home with my children; my children were young teenagers, and they needed me; who was going to pack his lunch?

DuCasse: The good old days, when the woman had to be in the home.

Oldfield: Well, that was his conviction.

DuCasse: I can understand that, from what you've told us of him already.

Let's see. After his war work, you said he went over to Arts and Crafts to teach.

Oldfield: Yes. I'll have to tell you how that started. Mr. Meyer called one day and asked if he would be interested in a job, a small teaching job. At that time, Otis knew that he was going to be terminated, but he didn't know when. So he said yes, that he was interested in a small teaching job. Apparently Mr. Meyer put him down for the summer session. He hadn't been terminated yet, and when summer session started, there was a frantic call from Mr. Meyer, "What happened to him?" because he didn't show up; he was still working for the Army. It was a misunderstanding, you see.

DuCasse: I know Meyer was often peremptory, and he probably never even thought to remind Otis that he was putting him down for summer!

Oldfield: I'm sure he didn't, because Otis would have known if it had been



Oldfield: definite, of course. But I think that Meyer assumed it, and when Otis didn't show up, he was terribly upset. But Otis couldn't show up: he was still working for the Army. And he explained it to him. But Meyer said, "Oh. You said you would come. You accepted the idea." But he didn't make it plain to him when he was expecting him. So that was his beginning at Arts and Crafts. He did start in the fall semester, because by that time his Army job had been terminated.

DuCasse: That would have been in '45, wouldn't it?

Oldfield: Forty-five, I think so.

DuCasse: I imagine that they needed someone like Otis, because Marty took ill in the fall of '42 and died in January of '43. And he was their main figure man, drawing and painting. I'm sure that they needed a man like Otis who could do so many things.

Oldfield: He did start then; I guess it was in the fall of '45. I don't have a record of it; I'm not perfectly sure. This sounds right, doesn't it?

DuCasse: Yes, it does. V-J Day was in August of '45.

Oldfield: And when did Spencer Macky take over?

DuCasse: That I don't know. It was when Ralph--it was in '46 something. I think Spencer Macky was--

Oldfield: I seem to remember that it was quite soon after Otis started working there.

DuCasse: Then Meyer retired. He lived a little while longer, but he was retired then.



Oldfield: Spencer immediately gave Otis a lot more work. So he was almost full-time at Arts and Crafts for a few years. Then he and Spencer quarrelled. I don't really know what it was about; all I know is what Otis reported to me, which was that he was in Spencer's office one day, and he showed him something. And he said, "Can you do that?"

And Otis said contemptuously, "I make it; I don't fake it." Almost as bad as Benny Bufano saying to Lee Randolph: "I don't know about Lee Randolph. If you're a painter, I'm a banana peddler."

DuCasse: Oh, dear! How artists love to ruffle up the feather of fellow artists. My father did it all the time.

Oldfield: I know. That's why I'm telling you. I don't know whether it should be for publication or not, but they're all gone now.

DuCasse: Oh, certainly. They're all gone. It's not going to hurt anybody. These things are so natural; they're so much a part of an artist's life that it has to be in there.

Oldfield: Anyway, Spencer fired him. He was reluctant to be fired. He argued with Spencer about it. But Spencer wouldn't give in. So then Otis said, "If you fire me, you'll only last a year or two." And this was true.

DuCasse: Yes, because that was just acting at a moment of spitefulness, which we all have. He should have swallowed his pride.

Oldfield: Yes, we all have it. But it was a little bit contemptuous--it was a lot contemptuous of Otis. I'm not so sure he didn't





Oldfield: deserve to be punished.

DuCasse: Well, he was confident of what he could do. I think that your peers should recognize that a lot.

Oldfield: Of course, he had always had very enthusiastic backing from Spencer. I guess it hurt.

DuCasse: He probably felt that he had the confidence of the man; he could say what he felt.

Oldfield: Yes. And he felt that he was being unjustly criticized, and that it was unfair or something--anyway, I don't know. That's a little story of Otis' career at Arts and Crafts.

DuCasse: Did he do any teaching after that?

Oldfield: Only private teaching. He always had private classes.

DuCasse: And did he have them in his own studio?

Oldfield: Yes, in his own studio. After we moved out here. But we had a studio on Russian Hill where he had classes for twenty years, I guess.

DuCasse: Was that when you were living on Telegraph Hill?

Oldfield: No, we lived on Russian Hill after Telegraph Hill. He never had classes in his studio on Telegraph Hill, primarily because there wasn't room. It was a very small place where we lived there. And he never was willing to have his studio away from home. I talked him into it once; I thought it would be good for him and good for me. There were small children around that bothered him, and I couldn't keep them quiet. One of them told me the other day, he used to come out to the back door and yell, "Keep those children



Oldfield: quiet! I'm working."

DuCasse: [laughter] That's natural. Do you remember when you moved from Telegraph Hill?

Oldfield: Yes, '37. October of '37. We stayed there until '60, when we bought this house. That was twenty-three years.

Cravath: Is this all recording?

DuCasse: It's all recording. It's so nice and quiet--

Oldfield: It's going to be very, very boring to listen to.

DuCasse: No, not at all! All these things, all these ideas about Otis and the things he did--you never know when something will be the kind of information that somebody else is trying to find. So whatever may seem trivial to you might not be to someone else.

Cravath: Last week did we discuss our nursery school?

Oldfield: I don't think we've said anything about it.

DuCasse: No, we shall bring that in.

Cravath: I think that was a most important institution.

Oldfield: Do you remember the years?

Cravath: Well, let's see--

Oldfield: I remember we had three two-year-olds, and one three-year-old between us. So this had to be around 1930. The nursery school-- Ruth and I got together to try to help each other, because caring for these little kids was pretty time-consuming. I wanted to work, although I wasn't doing it very much. I had found that I had a tendency to try to paint when I put the children down for a nap, and be a little testy with them when they'd wake up before I was



Oldfield: ready to quit.

So we decided that we could give each other a day off by each one of us taking on the whole job one day a week. Ruth would send her twins over at about eight o'clock in the morning right after breakfast. And on my day, I took my two to her. They would play. We had a little deck on the back of our little flat on Telegraph Hill where we had a little sandbox and some things for the children to do. Then I would take them for a walk so that they got some good exercise. Come back and put all four of them in the bathtub together, and put them all down for a nap.

Cravath: After lunch. You fed them first, didn't you?

Oldfield: Yes, I fed them first, I guess. I gave them lunch first. Then I would clean up the faces and stuff and put them all down for a nap.

I remember Beth was a thumbsucker. Ruth was doing everything she could to stop it. You know they don't stop it at all anymore.

DuCasse: Oh, no. You have to let them "do their thing."

Oldfield: So, poor little Beth, she had these rings around her fingers to keep her--mittens at one time. But there was also a little metal device. It was like rings that tied around. Those rings made callouses on those poor little fingers. But I put them on, and I put the mittens on mine.

Cravath: I don't remember this!

Oldfield: You don't?

Cravath: [laughing] No!



DuCasse: That was the period, though, when one interfered with what were considered bad habits, so they wouldn't become permanent.

[end tape 4, side A; begin tape 4, side B]

DuCasse: Now, you were talking about pediatricians.

Oldfield: I remember the pediatrician warning me that if I deviated as much as ten minutes from the feeding schedule, I would give my child a psychosis. [laughter] Of all the crazy things!

DuCasse: Which, of course, nowadays they're thinking that that's just what you were doing! You can't win!

Oldfield: The result was that I had one child who has a feeding problem because of this rigidity. You were not allowed to pick your baby up if it cried. What a horrible!--it's a marvel that the children that were born in that period didn't grow up more psychotic than they did.

Anyway, I had a lot of fun--

Cravath: I did, too.

Oldfield: And the dinner table and luncheon table conversations were just killing sometimes.

DuCasse: You'd get the backlog of what went on at dinner from your two children, I guess, didn't you?

Oldfield: No, they stayed for dinner. They had lunch and dinner and were picked up just in time to go home and go to bed. It was a wonderful day for the one who was off, but a very hard day for





Oldfield: the one who was in charge. However, we survived all right.

Cravath: I enjoyed it.

Oldfield: And I enjoyed it too.

DuCasse: Let Ruth put in a word or two about her day, now, in relation to this. Did you follow pretty much the same schedule?

Cravath: Oh, yes. Helen, you brought the children down to me, and I used to take them up to you, right after breakfast, you see. Then I would go through the routine of bathing them, and lunch, and the nap, and when they got up from the nap. We'd have supper; they'd play. And we'd give them supper. Otis would pick the girls up after supper.

DuCasse: I think that's wonderful.

Oldfield: Just take them home and put them to bed.

DuCasse: So you had one full day each that you could really do your own work in.

Oldfield: And it was a full day. You could make your dental and doctor appointments for that day with confidence, know that you'd have time no matter what. Of course, the idea was to free each of us to do a little work. I don't know about Ruth, but I know that I always <sup>did</sup> other things that I needed to do so badly that I think the time got mostly filled up with that.

Do you remember any of the conversations we overheard, Ruth?

Cravath: Yes, I remember one in particular. It was our children discussing what their fathers did. One of mine said that their Daddy works in a bank. I think it was Beth who said, "Oh! He makes money!"  
[laughter]



DuCasse: Very impure to the child of an artist!

Cravath: You probably remember some, more than I do, Helen.

Oldfield: I'm trying to think. I don't remember any.

DuCasse: Except that they did have very interesting conversations.

Oldfield: Yes. And largely it was about the food, which one of mine never liked, no matter what it was, and one of Ruth's would always eat, no matter what it was! [laughter] They balanced each other out.

Cravath: It was really funny when it came to dessert time. Helen's little girls didn't go much for dessert. But Sam would eat all his dessert, and then he'd move on to Jaynesplace, and eat all her dessert, and move on the Rhoda's, and eat all her dessert.

Wasn't that the routine?

Oldfield: Yes, that was the routine.

DuCasse: He must have enjoyed eating.

Cravath: Oh, he did. Beth didn't--whether he got her dessert, I don't remember. But I remember he'd get three or four desserts.

Oldfield: They were awful cute.

DuCasse: And that was wonderful for those children to have that companionship in their youth. I'm sure they were good friends as they grew up.

Oldfield: I think that it brought them close together, don't you?

Cravath: Yes.

Oldfield: And also brought me very close to Ruth's children. I've always felt as though her children were like mine because of that time. I don't know how long we managed to keep this up, but I think it was a year or more, don't you?



Cravath: Oh, yes.

Oldfield: I remember taking them for walks, all four of them. Sam was a bit unpredictable, so I held on to his hand, much as he hated it. He was the only boy, you see, and he was treated just like a little girl, and I suppose that bugged him. Although I don't remember that he ever said anything, except that he didn't want to hold my hand.

I knew that my two were trained, if I allowed them to run ahead of me, to wait when they came to a crossing. At first I was not sure whether Beth would or not, but she finally convinced me. She would run ahead. She had this lovely, clean, straight hair, which was cut in a sort of a dutch bob. When she would run, it would bounce, and her head would waggle around a little bit: she was just like a rag doll. She seemed to have no bones or anything; she was so loose and moved so easily. I used to love to watch her.

Cravath: You know, I don't remember that I took them for walks. Do you remember?

Oldfield: I don't know what you did! [laughter] I know that I did, because I felt that they didn't get enough exercise on that little deck that I had. I think I took them for two walks every time I had them. Sometimes we would go up--it was before the Coit Tower was built, and there was a sort of open space up there, and some ruins of the old buildings that used to be up there, and outcroppings of concrete--stuff like that--and eucalyptus trees, and gravelly, open earth. I let them dig in the earth with their fingernails



Oldfield: and make little houses out of the rocks. They played around beautifully there.

I used to take them for at least one walk every day where we would go up and down Telegraph Hill. That really was a good workout, you know.

Cravath: Well, they had them walking down to my place. But you'd come and get them in the car at the end of the day.

Oldfield: I don't remember the details of that very much. Maybe they went both ways in the car. I don't remember that. I remember Sam Bell coming to pick yours up, and I think that he walked them home. I'm not sure. So they got back, too.

Anyway, I was doing my job as conscientiously as I could, and I thought they needed exercise beyond what they could get on that little deck. It was rather confining. And the sandbox was not totally satisfactory, because they poured it in each other's hair and all that stuff. [laughter] That's the way children are.

DuCasse: You mentioned that at one point you tried to get Otis to rent a studio elsewhere so he would have more peace. But that didn't work.

Oldfield: It lasted, I think, one month. He allowed me to persuade him, and he rented a room in the Monkey Block. He took some canvasses down there. My idea was that I create a husband who had a working day routine, instead of being always underfoot and always needing to have everybody conform to what he wanted. I thought that he ought to be equal to taking care of his needs for himself. I





Oldfield: think he came home for lunch, however, but I don't remember for sure about that.

Anyway, he had this studio for about a month, and he moved some canvasses down there, and the materials he needed for working. At the end of a month, he couldn't stand it anymore, so he moved back. That was the end of that.

Then after we moved to Russian Hill, he pre-empted the largest room in the house for a studio. It was what they called a railroad flat. There was a hall that went all the way from the front door to the back. Across the back was what was intended to be a dining room, Italian style. A sort of party room. It was the whole back of the house. It was by far the largest room that we had. It had built-in cupboards and things which were designed for keeping dishes and things, and he made use of those. He moved all of his stuff in there.

But it was the only place that we had during the years that we lived there where we could have guests for dinner. So when we wanted to have guests for dinner, we had to move the easel and his stuff aside and set the table in there. The only other possible place was the kitchen, and this was not a very gracious place to entertain your guests. So this became the accepted custom. He got used to it; he didn't mind. But we had to re-arrange things when we did that. And it didn't really look like a dining room, because there was paint on the floor and all that stuff and his work all around.



DuCasse: This place that you're living at now--is that where you had, perhaps, a little more convenience.

Oldfield: Yes. What happened was that I had an illness. I was working, working almost full-time, if not full-time by that time--

Cravath: That's when you were teaching at Hamlin School?

Oldfield: I was teaching at Hamlin, and I think only at Hamlin. I think it was after I stopped teaching at St. Rose. I stopped teaching at St. Rose because my arthritis got so bad that I couldn't negotiate those stairs. You remember the classrooms that we had were on the top floor. Going up was difficult, and coming down was worse.

DuCasse: Did you teach at St. Rose's before Ruth did?

Cravath: Yes, we did. She taught sewing.

DuCasse: You both taught there at the same time?

Oldfield: I taught sewing in the same room that Ruth had a sculpture class in. I tried to pick up all the needles and pins, but they were always getting pins or needles in the clay. So it wasn't really a very good combination. But anyway, we got along all right.

Eventually I had to give up teaching at St. Rose, although I liked it very much. While I was there, they tried to persuade me to take on a typing class. I remember I told Sister Leonard, who was the principal, that I didn't know anything about typing. I was a peck-and-hunt typist. She said, "Oh, you don't need to know anything; just buy a book." [laughter] They certainly didn't



Oldfield: think very much of typing.

DuCasse: It was probably just one of those necessity things that they put into the curriculum.

Oldfield: There was a nun who had been teaching it, you see, and something happened so she couldn't do it anymore. I was there; I guess at that time maybe I was the only lay teacher that was there. Anyway, I didn't want to do it because I knew I was not competent. I didn't know anything about typing; I never learned to type, except peck-and-hunt.

DuCasse: We've digressed slightly, which is fine. It was after the move to Joost Street, where there was more space for Otis to work.

Oldfield: Yes. I was talking about my illness. I had had a bad afternoon at school; I remember that I had had to excuse myself from my class to go to the bathroom and vomit. I was feeling very sick when I got home, and also had a pain in the tummy. So Otis reminded me afterwards that when I got home I had said to him, "I have classic symptoms of appendicitis." I had never had any such symptoms before in my life, and really didn't believe it was appendicitis, but I knew what the symptoms were. So that's what I said to him. I went to bed and I couldn't eat. A couple of days went by. I guess it was a weekend. I pampered myself all weekend.

Finally I called the doctor in Oakland who was treating me for arthritis. I told him about my symptoms. He said, "Oh, you probably picked up a flu bug. Take some Pepto-Bismol." Which



Oldfield: I did, and it didn't do me any good at all. Finally the pain and the nausea were so great that I was just moaning and groaning around there. So Otis put me in the car and took me to the surgeon, who was the only doctor we really knew very well at that time. He didn't know what was wrong with me, but he gave me a shot for the pain and ordered me into the hospital.

I was in the hospital for two or three days, where I was checked, and tested, and they had discovered that I was not running a temperature, that I didn't have an elevated white count. They had no idea that I had an infection. Finally, they took me in for exploratory surgery. I think that the doctor--he didn't tell me so--he probably thought that I had a growth in the uterus. But it turned out, by the time I got into surgery that it was a ruptured appendix.

So I stayed in the hospital for quite a long time. I remember they shot me full of penicillin all day and all night. I came through it. When I got home, the building where we had been living for the last twenty years had been sold, and the people who had bought it were starting remodeling procedures. They'd cut holes in the walls, put in a central heating system, and they were putting in complete copper plumbing, and the plumbers were hammering and banging--I was just out of the hospital! It was a ghastly affair.

Our children thought that they should try to help at this juncture. They were living in this neighborhood, and they





Oldfield: brought us out here. The agent that they knew showed us this little house, and Otis fell for it immediately because the garage had been turned into a room where he could make a studio. He didn't care about anything else at all. But he saw a possible studio. So he said it was fine. He never stopped complaining about that converted garage in later years. But he was responsible for our buying it and our choosing it, because I didn't think it was an adequate studio. I was feeling so ill anyway I probably didn't think much of anything.

So we made an offer of quite a bit less than the asking price, and it was accepted. First thing I knew we had bought a house and we were moving out here. I came home from the hospital the end of February, and we moved in here--no, it wasn't the end of February. It must have been the middle of February. We moved in here the first of March, 1960.

Cravath: That was a good move.

Oldfield: I have been very comfortable here. It's a nice, comfortable little house. And I had more conveniences, which I had never had before. But Otis never stopped complaining about it. He used to look out at the view and say, "Ugh. Just like Los Angeles." And then he referred to it as "out here in Siberia." He just hated it.

Cravath: But he's the one who--

Oldfield: He chose it because he saw a possible studio, and that was all he cared about. He didn't care about anything else--about the



Oldfield: environment we lived in. That was my problem. So that's how it happened.

We had a few thousand dollars which we could pay down on it. The people who wanted to sell it, I guess were very eager to sell it, so they accepted our offer, which was quite a bit less than they were asking. So we moved in, and I've been here ever since.

DuCasse: Well, it certainly is charming and cheerful.

Oldfield: It's comfortable for one or two people. It isn't very big, but it's comfortable.

DuCasse: By that time, of course, your married children were out and grown.

Oldfield: Oh, yes, both of our daughters were married by this time.

DuCasse: So that's good. You had the freedom to be in a place that was just for the two of you.

Oldfield: And the studio is a comfortable place to work. I still work in it, and I think it's quite nice?

Cravath: Have you been in it?

DuCasse: No, I just looked in the window.

Oldfield: After Otis died, I felt that the use of that studio was like a riches. I had never had one before, you know. He was used to having the best room in the house devoted to his work space. So it was a bit of a come-down for him, because there's no plumbing in it. I had a little sink put in after I started working in it. He had to come in to wash brushes or go to the bathroom. He didn't like that. And then going through two doors. He was used to using



Oldfield: the family bathroom on Russian Hill. But it didn't mean going out. It just meant walking up the hall a little bit.

DuCasse: What we would like to also ask you is the names of some of the artists that both of you were associated with, or Otis was associated with, during those years. We've spoken about Ralph Stackpole. Were there any others in that early period in San Francisco after his return from Paris that he was particularly intimate with, or that he had friendships with or dealings with? Sometimes these are interesting facts for others. For instance, Piazzoni--he must have known Piazzoni.

Oldfield: Oh, yes, and he loved Piazzoni. Everybody loved Piazzoni. Piazzoni was influential, I think, in getting him his first opportunity to teach at the Arts School.

Cravath: At the California School of Fine Arts?

Oldfield: Yes, at the San Francisco Art School. I remember that Otis was fond of quoting Piazzoni, because he and Piazzoni had a conviction in common that painting portraits or doing anything that was subject to the approval of the buyer was tantamount to prostituting your art. They talked about it a lot, anyway. I don't know how deep the conviction was, but they talked about it a great deal. I remember that Otis was fond of quoting Piazzoni as saying, "I'd sooner take the plough!" because Piazzoni had a small farm in the Carmel Valley where he spent a lot of time. He would sooner plough that land in order to make a living than to accept a commission which didn't leave him in full control.

DuCasse: They were rugged individualists, weren't they?



Oldfield: I think that this kind of rigidity is out of favor now. I judge that it is, although I don't have any very specific evidence to point to.

DuCasse: I think the artist now has really to work in many different fields in order to earn a living. In that period--

Oldfield: It was almost all that was open!

DuCasse: Yes, that's right. Now artists are not as rigid about it. They'll work at anything that they have to work, as long as they can keep up their own.

Oldfield: So Piazzoni was a close friend. I think his closest friend, though, was Rinaldo Cuneo. Rinaldo and Otis shared a birthday. They were not born in the same year, but they were born on the same day. So all the way back to very, very early in my marriage--I guess the first year or maybe the second--I made a birthday cake for both of them. I remember that Otis built a cardboard form which I used to bake these cakes in--I guess he had to make more than one, because it went on for quite a few years--it was in the shape of a crab. So I made crab birthday cakes for years and years and years.

DuCasse: Is that because they were Cancerians?

Oldfield: They were Cancerians.

DuCasse: I have two grandchildren who were both born under the sign of Cancer. I understand that.

Cravath: Two boys?





DuCasse: No, one boy and one girl.

Oldfield: Do you understand that sign? I don't think I ever shall.

DuCasse: Well, I should say I'm aware of some of the characteristics of the sign.

Oldfield: For years, Otis was so confident of his sign, and so denigrating of mine because I'm a Virgo. Whenever he got mad at me, he would say, "It's that damn virgin!"

DuCasse: Well, all I can say is, we have our problems getting along with other signs, too, don't we?

Oldfield: So for years I felt that I had been born under an inferior sign. Although it wasn't my fault, it was just the way it turned out. He just downgraded my sign and upgraded his until he got the message across. It lasted for quite a long while.

We have one granddaughter who is a Virgo. But I've got a whole flock of Scorpios. One of my daughters--

DuCasse: I'm inundated with Aquarians.

Oldfield: I love Aquarians. I think that's a wonderful sign. Of course, I don't believe in any of this stuff. It's kind of entertaining. It's amusing. Of course, you have something to blame things on if you need it. It's something to talk about.

My favorite young man, who has become related to me by marriage-- he's married to my granddaughter--is not only an Aquarian, but he's a Valentine. He was born on Valentine's day. That's <sup>Lloyd</sup> Laurie.

DuCasse: We spoke earlier of Stackpole, but we didn't go into very much detail.



Oldfield: Oh, I told you about their meeting in Paris.

DuCasse: Later on, after he got back to San Francisco and they renewed their friendship, they were also good friends.

Oldfield: They were also good friends. In fact, Ralph was Otis' best man at our wedding.

Cravath: The wedding was in his stoneyard.

Oldfield: The wedding took place in his studio. And, of course, we were neighbors on Telegraph Hill. I became very close to Ralph's second wife, Jeannette. We shared babysitting problems and were constantly together. We also developed our sewing skills together. We were so close together in actual physical space that we were in each other's houses every day.

But Otis' personal friendship with Ralph was not as close as it was with Rinaldo.

Cravath: I didn't remember that.

Oldfield: Well, you might not even have been aware of it, dear, because-- I noticed it, of course. We did spend time together. A few years ago, I was going through old snapshots in Otis' storage. He loved to squirrel things away. He had little packets of things stored in cigar boxes and such up on the top shelf. After I started using the studio, I wanted to know what was there, and also clear some space for myself. So I went through some of these things. I came across some pictures that were of Ralph and Jeannette and Otis and me and our two children and Francis Stackpole on a beach party.



Oldfield: I had a memory of the day; I remember being on the beach and who was there, but I didn't know what beach it was. I didn't know whether it was Rockaway, or what. Anyway, I sent copies of them to Jeannette, and told her that I couldn't remember what beach it was. She wrote back immediately: "Baker's beach."

DuCasse: Isn't that funny? I was going to say, I'll bet it was Baker's beach.

Cravath: We used to go there from the Art School.

DuCasse: I used to be taken there as a child.

Oldfield: So we had that kind of a friendship, a family sort of friendship. But Otis' real buddy was Rinaldo.

Now, let me see. Who else was around here?

DuCasse: Maynard Dixon?

Oldfield: No. Otis never had a close friendship with Maynard Dixon.

DuCasse: But they had met, I suppose.

Oldfield: Oh, yes, and Otis worked for Maynard. When he was getting established in San Francisco, Maynard had some commissions on which he needed help. He employed Otis to do some of the work. I don't know what it was or what happened to the mural

[end tape 4, side B; begin tape 5, side A]

DuCasse: I'd be interested in the fresco, because I think we missed that



DuCasse: when the tape stopped--the fresco technique. Now, was that Maynard who was most interested in it, or--

Oldfield: It was Otis. And the reason that he was useful for Maynard was that Maynard didn't do fresco either--or at least not at that time. So he wanted somebody who would work on his oil murals. Otis was qualified for that, and also Otis needed work. He was trying to establish himself here, and didn't have a teaching job yet, and was living very frugally.

He used to go to the cafes: Bigin's, and Poppa Coppa's. At Bigin's he would go around sketching the diners at the tables, and then Bigin would pass the hat, collect a few dimes and nickels for the artist. And, of course, the sketches were given to the patrons. It was Columbus Avenue at Adler Place. It was 12 Adler Place--Bigin's.

Now, Poppa Coppa's was--where was it at first?--down on Montgomery Street, I think. Then it moved out to Spring Street off of California. I remember being there once at a dinner which had been given by Bill Gerstle. I can't remember what the occasion was. Anyway, I was seated next to Maynard Dixon. Across the table from us was a great Russian beauty who was the wife of Archipenko--Madame Archipenko. Did you ever meet her?

DuCasse: I did. I studied with him for a summer.

Oldfield: Yes. Well, she was just a devastating Russian beauty. I, at the time, was young, and I guess I was staring at her. I must have been staring at her, because Maynard nudged me and said, "Atta girl, kid. Get a good eyeful. Genuwine European golddigger!"





DuCasse: [laughter] Oh, great!

Oldfield: That was typically Maynard, too.

DuCasse: Was Edith Hamlin on the scene at this point?

Oldfield: No, she was not. This was before her time.

Cravath: This was while Maynard was still married to Dorothea Lange

Oldfield: I think it was between. I don't know how much time there was between. Dorothea left, you know, and went with Paul Taylor. I think it was at a time--I don't remember the year--right after Dorothea had left and married Paul Taylor.

Cravath: I think it was around 1931.

Oldfield: Something like that, yes.

I have another little story related to Maynard Dixon, and this is mostly about Otis. When Otis first knew Maynard, he was married to Dorothea, and they had two little boys. They invited Otis to dinner.

Cravath: And you, too, right?

Oldfield: No, it was before. This was while Otis was working for Maynard. I don't know whether it was before I knew him, but it was certainly before I married him. Anyway, Otis went to dinner, and Maynard showed off his skills as a father, and took Otis into the bedroom to watch him diaper one of the babies. Otis was terribly disgusted; he thought this was just awful! So demeaning for a man to do a thing like that. And this was the man that he had respected as an artist! He was so disgusted. I got this from Otis, naturally, I wasn't there. Then he said to me, "In Paris, the artists don't have children." And that got spread around the whole art community,



Oldfield: this little contemptuous remark of Otis'. And when Otis married me and promptly had two of his own, he had to take a lot of ribbing.

DuCasse: Oh, I'm sure he did. [laughter]

Oldfield: It happened to him every once in a while, because he was also fond of saying: "There's one thing about my art: it doesn't make any noise." Referring to musicians. Then when he got a trumpet player for a son-in-law, he took a lot more ribbing. He called those things "boomerangs." Came back and hit him.

DuCasse: I think the visual artist very often feels that they have the advantage, that the musician really has to create too much sound. I've heard that from other artists.

Oldfield: Well, it's not only sound, they feel it's performing and not creating. They don't think of performing as creative. They have more respect for composers than they do for performers.

But anyway, this was just some little snide remark that he liked to make. He made it once to Henry Cowell and almost got in a fight.

DuCasse: Oh, I can believe that! He knew Henry Cowell, did he?

Oldfield: Yes. They weren't close friends, but we used to meet at parties a great deal. I remember one when Cowell performed, and had the bad judgment to come over and ask Otis how he liked it. And Otis came out with his famous remark: "One think about my art--it doesn't make any noise." And there's nothing more insulting you could say to a musician than to call what he does "noise."

I remember Cowell looked at him and said, "If you were a little bigger, I'd wipe up the floor with you."



DuCasse: Unfortunately, it was rather true. Cowell made a lot of noise.

Oldfield: Yes, he made a lot of noise, and he was a big guy, and Otis was very small.

DuCasse: Let's see who else we have to ask you about. Nelson Poole, I think you said you and Otis might have known.

Oldfield: Yes. We knew Nelson and Helen, but there was not a close relationship.

DuCasse: Can you think of anybody that you'd like to talk about?

Oldfield: I can't remember his name--the other fellow, the Frenchman who had a studio--Poulanc. And of course, Otis and Lucien were close. They were close, although there was a certain amount of rivalry between them. Otis used to call Lucien a "professional Frenchman." I guess he wanted to be the only representative in the group, and Lucien was a genuine Frenchman. Also he made snide remarks about his dressmaking.

DuCasse: I think my father looked down upon Lucien for that reason, too. He always felt that that was <sup>not</sup> really "bona fide"--for an artist.

Oldfield: But Lucien did everything with a flair. Much later in my life I met a woman who had gone to Lucien to have a gown designed and made for her. He had said to her, much to her distress (at least as she told it to me), "Madame, how can I create for you unless I see you nude?" She was not prepared for this at all.

Cravath: That was Lucien?

Oldfield: That was Lucien.

DuCasse: He believed in working from the inside out, didn't he?



Oldfield: At every cocktail party, he was always in the midst of anything that was going on that was a little bit risqué--if that word is suitable--I don't know. For instance, there was one girl--I can't remember where it was, but it was a long, long time ago. There was a girl who was bragging that she could stand on her head. And Lucien said, "I'll hold your legs." [laughter] And he did!

DuCasse: That was right up his alley!

Oldfield: That was right up his alley.

DuCasse: You're right, he had flair.

Oldfield: Yes, he carried it off. I'll never forget the last time I saw him: he was announcing that he had accepted this assignment to go to Burma with the Army to record the--he was assigned by Life magazine to record the activities of the Army in various of the war theaters. I think first he went to China, Chunking.

DuCasse: He also went to India, didn't he?

Oldfield: Well, he was killed in Burma. He was on his way from China. He spent his first few months on this assignment in China somewhere. He threw a big party to celebrate his departure. He had an Army uniform. He'd gotten this Army uniform, and he had a cobra skin that was conspicuous on the wall of his studio for many years. So over this Army uniform he had draped the cobra skin. He was putting on a show. He had a wonderful time at his own parties.

So he told about how he was going to do this. This was just one of my memories about his show-off tendency. And, of course, he never came back. He was on his way from Chunking--that is the right





Oldfield: name, isn't it, of that capital?--and the plane crashed landing in Burma, and he was killed, and all of the work that he had accumulated--and he was prolific, it must have been an awful lot--was destroyed in the wreck. It was a really very tragic ending.

But he went out in a blaze of glory, and I'm not sure that he wouldn't have liked that. He loved to be conspicuous, and he would do almost anything to get the attention. Like holding up that girl's legs--I'll never forget it. She was in a cocktail dress, and in those days they were pretty short. But her dress was around her ears, you know, it went right up when she stood on her head. And Lucien was there holding up her feet. [laughter] I would like to have a photograph of that. But he loved it in himself. He bragged about it.

Cravath: Somebody should have made a cartoon of that one.

Oldfield: Maybe someone did. I never saw it. But there was a big crowd there. It was one of those big cocktail parties. I used to get terribly bored, because they always interfered with my home routine. I had to find a babysitter, and someone who could not only stay with my children but feed them their dinner, and often put them to bed. By the time the cocktail party is over, your own dinner has been thrown off schedule because you've eaten a lot of those little sandwiches and had a couple of drinks, and I didn't feel like going home and cooking. And we were usually too poor for my husband to offer to take me out. It just disrupted the day, and I didn't really like them very much.



DuCasse: Are there any others that you think of or come to mind?

Oldfield: I mentioned Poulanc a while ago. He was a Frenchman, and Otis was fond of him. Most of their conversation was in French. His studio was near Nelson Poole's. I know they used to spend a lot of time together jabbering in French. Apparently they agreed on a lot of the hang-ups that Otis had. Whether they're hang-ups or not--I haven't known anyone else--of course, he and Rinaldo agreed very well. We spent a lot of time together as a foursome. I remember at one period Ethel Cuneo and I agreed that we would write a book about what it's like to be an artist's wife. We never did it, but we planned it; we talked about it, because we shared an awful lot of experiences. But it never got to the point of being put down. In fact, I think it was because Rinaldo died. He died rather prematurely. He got cancer and he died. Ethel was absolutely destroyed by his death for a while. But she got over it, and she married someone else, and left the area. We corresponded for many years, but after a while it gets difficult. Lives have drawn apart, you don't see each other at all. So it sort of petered out. But we were very close friends, and spent lots and lots of evenings together, sometimes planned, and sometimes just unannounced one or the other would drop in. We would spend long evenings, Otis and Rinaldo talking about painting, and Ethel and I talking about what it's like to be an artist's wife. [laughter]

DuCasse: Were Cuneo's and Otis's ideas about painting very different?

Oldfield: No, they seemed to agree very, very well. They were very harmonious.



Oldfield: Also, Rinaldo had a store of information which interested Otis.

He had been born in San Francisco to an Italian immigrant family, and had grown up in North Beach, and known Telegraph Hill when it was a semaphore station, and when it also was the site of this castle--somebody's castle, where they had jousting matches. Oh, he had a lot of very interesting lore to talk about about the days when he was a kid.

When he was eighteen, he joined the Navy. He had an enormous collection of tatoos. He learned tatooining. He tatooned all his shipmates when he was in the Navy himself. Also, he had been an amateur boxer, starting in the times when these jousting matches took place on Telegraph Hill. He participated in some boxing matches at the same time, or shortly after. But he joined the Navy at eighteen, and he was in the Spanish-American War. He was a little older than Otis. I don't think it was as much as ten years, but it was nearly that much. Maybe it was more than ten years, because the Spanish-American War was 1890, wasn't it?

DuCasse: Eighteen ninety-eight, I think.

Oldfield: Yes. Otis was born in 1890, and Rinaldo was eighteen at the time of the war.

DuCasse: It if was 1898, if my memory serves, he was about ten years older.

Cravath: Helen, did Otis know Moya Del Pino very well?

Oldfield: Oh, yes. This was through Helen, because we knew Helen, who was then Helen Horst.

Cravath: She was one of Otis's students.



Oldfield: She was one of Otis' students. She and her sister used to come to that studio where he had his first private class, in Leidesdorf building. Carol Wirtenberger and Clifford White. They would be delivered and picked up by the family chauffeur. So they were a bit conspicuous, because always before the class was over would come this knock on the door, and a very polite voice saying, "I've come for the Misses Horst." They would feel they had to leave, because they knew their mother had sent the driver for them. She didn't want them out any longer than that. This, of course, was where I first met them. But then, later, after Otis and I were married, they used to come to the studio in the Montgomery Block for private lessons, not only in painting but also in bookbinding. So I got to know them very well there.

Then we moved to the little flat on Telegraph Hill. Helen used to come up there almost every day, as I remember it. I remember she drove a great big Packard--what did they call it--roadster, because it had a convertible top which was always down. And she had an eggbeater on the radiator that turned in the breeze. Her boyfriends used to come up and leave bouquets of violets and things in our mailbox, and I got to know a lot of her boyfriends.

Eventually, she met Moya. And Moya was working for that--what was the name of that decorator who had the boat in Sausalito?--lived on a boat--this was in the twenties. He was well known; he was a decorator. I think it was the barque Echo that he had. He had it all painted up in black and white design.





Oldfield: Anyway, Moya, when he first came to San Francisco, was an unknown Spaniard. He had worked for an interior decorator in Spain. He had a lot of funny stories to tell about that. Do I have time to repeat one of them?

DuCasse: Certainly.

Oldfield: He told about this fellow that he worked for having bought the furnishings of a house which had been sold off by the heirs to an estate. The man who was employing got everything--paintings, furniture, everything. And Moya, while he was employed by him, learned to decorate furniture, refinish furniture, and make paintings. Of course, he was already trained as an artist, but he did whatever the boss wanted. One day this fellow brought in the things that he had acquired from an estate. Among the paintings was a picture of a priest--a bust--a small painting of a priest. Moya's employer said to Moya, "It's a nice face on this. Take it over to the Prado and copy a uniform from a Goya onto that face."

So Moya did, and brought it back, and it was fine; it was just like a Goya. Someone came in to the place of business and saw this painting and identified it as a Goya, and the fellow who was offering it for sale said, "No, that's not a Goya; that's a painting that has been painted from a Goya that's in the museum. That's not an original Goya." But the fellow thought that he was just trying to get out of selling it to him.

So he went and did more research, and brought proof that this was a Goya, and insisted on buying it. So eventually he bought it.



Oldfield: Moya, many years later, was in the National Museum in London, and saw his painting as a Goya. That's a silly little thing.

DuCasse: I know, but these are what is wonderful to hear. No one else would know these except someone who could talk to it at that time. That's very interesting.

Cravath: I remember the last time I saw Moya was when I went over to be with Otis after he was ill.

Oldfield: Over to Ross.

Cravath:

Oldfield: Yes, because Helen and I were close friends and we had more in common than meets the eye here, because our ancestors had been associates. My father was a hop grower, and Helen's father was a hop broker. In my childhood, I used to come to San Francisco with my father and go to the Horst Brothers' office on lower California Street, where my father would get his checks and things like that. So the name of Horst was familiar to me, long before I knew Helen.

We remained close friends until her death.

DuCasse: Did she continue her art?

Oldfield: She was always very interested, but she always felt that her gift was minor, and that she needed someone behind her to push her all the time.

Cravath: She worked in my class for a while, but she was very modest.

Oldfield: She was very, very modest, and very, very retiring.

Cravath: She was talented; she could have if she'd really wanted to.



Oldfield: She did a lot of bookbinding. In fact, I remember one of her close school friends was about to be married, and she wanted to make an especially nice gift for her. So she had Otis help her, supervise her, and help her make a little parchment book, which contained an illuminated and hand-lettered version of the marriage ceremony--the traditional one. It was all done and illuminated on parchment, and bound in a little white parchment missal. Anyway, it was a totally dedicated work, because every bit of it was painstakingly produced by hand. Otis had some experience with manuscript illumination and lettering. So he just sort of held her hand while she was producing this thing. She finished it finally. She finished it and gave it to the friend as a wedding gift.

So during those days, we spent a lot of time together and became very close friends. When Helen married Moya, this just increased the interest that we had in each other, I guess. We saw each other very regularly, and were very fond of each other. It was very distressing to Otis and me when Moya became ill. Well, it's always difficult to watch someone go through the decline.

DuCasse: He was not that old, was he, when he became ill?

Oldfield: No, but he was in his sixties. No, he wasn't. I think he was about--he was just past seventy when he died.

Cravath: Moya was younger than Otis, or older?

Oldfield: A few months older. Very close to the same age. I don't remember his birthday.



DuCasse: No, it's just interesting. So often age does not really matter, when you have something like **art as a common bond**.

Cravath: They don't ever think of age.

[end tape 5, side A; begin tape 5, side B]

DuCasse: We were talking about those artist friends who were very much a part of your life. You remember now the ones that we just reviewed, and maybe you want to add some others that we haven't gotten into. Remember we talked of Maynard Dixon, and Lucien Labaudt, and Poulanc, Moya Del Pino, and Helen. Were there any others that you can think of?

Oldfield: I don't think of any others. I think that I mentioned all that were close to us at that period. Then there was a later period, when there was a younger group.

DuCasse: What time would that have been?

Oldfield: That would have been in the forties and fifties.

DuCasse: Do you want to specify some of those?

Oldfield: The first name that comes to my mind is Nathan Oliviera. He was Otis' student at Arts and Crafts. That's where they met. Nathan and Mona used to come to our studio on Russian Hill quite regularly. They were very fond of each other. After Otis died, Nathan was instrumental in arranging a show for him at Charles Campbell Gallery.





Cravath: Was that one the only show of Otis's work there?

Oldfield: Yes. That was the only show.

DuCasse: It was a sort of a retrospective, then, after his death.

Do you remember the date, or at least the year of that?

Oldfield: It was '76. I've had one other show of Otis' work, which was sort of a memorial show at the Labaudt Gallery. That was in '72. I haven't managed to arrange any other showings. It's really too much of an undertaking, you know. Coping with framing, and transportation. It has been suggested a number of times that I try to arrange a show at the Crocker Art Gallery in Sacramento, because Sacramento was his home town, you know. But nothing's ever come of that, largely because of my own indolence. It scares me, the thought of trying to do it. So that hasn't gotten off the ground at all.

DuCasse: If someone in Sacramento could instigate that, and do the work.

Oldfield: I have a friend up there who would instigate it as far as the gallery is concerned, but I still would have to handle the pictures, see that they were properly framed, and arrange transportation. And that's ninety miles; it's a tremendous job. I just falter when I think of it.

Cravath: Would Jane be interested in doing that, Helen?

Oldfield: She might. It's very interesting about Jane. What she does is try to prevent me from being foolhardy. And she is always terribly concerned about proper insurance, about transportation hazards, and she would want all kinds of guarantees which places like that museum are not about to provide. Of course, I'll suggest it to her



Oldfield: again. I haven't suggested the idea of a show in Sacramento for a long time. But I'll mention it to her again and see how she reacts. She would have to do all that hard work which scares me. She would if she didn't think that there might be hazards connected with it that would be foolish to risk.

DuCasse: I was thinking of maybe a hundredth anniversary or something, a centennial kind of thing.

Oldfield: He was born in 1890. His centennial won't be until 1990. That's quite a ways off.

DuCasse: When we did Marty's, we missed his by a few years, but by a few years later. It would have been 1869, but the museum just barely opened. They had his retrospective in 1974.

Oldfield: I have the catalogue on it.

DuCasse: Isn't that a beautiful catalogue? That is, incidentally, out of print. They are thinking of possibly trying to have it reprinted. I have two copies left, and that's all there is.

Oldfield: I have one, in case you ever feel terribly pressed and need to know where there is another one. I want to keep it, but I just wanted you to know that if you come against a real problem, that you know where there is another one.

DuCasse: Thank you. That's very interesting about Nathan Oliviera, because he's a very well respected artist in the area now. It's nice to know the connection with Otis.

Oldfield: Of course, before he left the San Francisco school, the now San Francisco Art Institute, he had several other names who have been



Oldfield: quite well known as students: Diebenkorn and Hassel Smith are two that I can remember. Both of them departed considerably from his ideas as their fame grew.

DuCasse: But they had both studied with him.

Oldfield: They had both studied with him.

DuCasse: Well, they certainly did depart. There's no doubt about that.

But whatever they had learned I'm sure contributed to what they eventually did.

Oldfield: When Otis first came to San Francisco, he was considered very far out. The newspapers referred to him with such phrases as "the artist with the flaming palette" and all kinds of things like that. But he never really wanted to express himself in a totally abstract way. He didn't mind breaking down images into semi-abstract or nearly abstract forms or components, but he didn't ever like the idea of starting with a blank canvas and just putting shapes on it without connection with any physical object.

So at the time that the abstract-expressionist movement became dominant in San Francisco, he was totally outside it. That was what I meant when I said that for a while, his painting was in the mainstream. But then in the years I think beginning sometime in the forties and coinciding with the time when he was no longer teaching at the art school in San Francisco, his style began to decline. He had maybe ten or fifteen years when he was riding the crest of the wave. It seemed a short time, but it was crammed full, the time that he did have. After that, he felt himself considered "old hat."



DuCasse: Marty was in that same position.

Oldfield: And he resented it intensely.

DuCasse: Oh, of course. I think they both very rightfully did.

Oldfield: Especially since his ideas had been so avant-garde when he first came, you know, and pronounced so by all the people who knew him.

DuCasse: It shows also how fast --change comes and goes.

Oldfield: How fast. That is the thing that appalls me.

DuCasse: The whole mood of art changed, say, between 1920 and 1940. It was a revolution in this country. Men like Marty and Otis who had been so well schooled and so well trained and so disciplined just were not interested in playing around. That's what they had done in their youth.

Oldfield: This was the time when people like Sam Francis came along.

DuCasse: Are these pictures over here of him?

Oldfield: No, he was someone that I knew slightly because he lived across the street from me for a while, and I knew the woman from whom he rented a room.

Cravath: Was that on Union?

Oldfield: On Union Street, yes.

DuCasse: I think we got that in the last tape.

Oldfield: I think it's in there somewhere. She told me. She was the one who told me about taking him in when he got out of the army. He was undecided as to what he was going to do with his life, and enrolled at the Art School. Of course it was just the right time for him.





Oldfield: This is the way it goes: so much, it seems to me, that happens to artists and to other creators, too, I'm sure, is dependent on fad and accident. The things that happen in the world, and the moods. They can just play havoc, or they can give such a boost that it's phenomenal, and sometimes seems rather unwarranted. But that's not for me to decide.

DuCasse: True. Fortunately, as things settle, and time goes on, we begin to get more perspective. Now, they are beginning to appreciate the key men who contributed to this development in California. So Marty and Otis and all of their group are going to gradually come into their own and they're going to be looked upon as key men of importance.

Oldfield: That's what we're hoping for.

DuCasse: So thank goodness for that.

Oldfield: Yes, thank goodness. It doesn't every stay the same for very long.

DuCasse: And it's almost as if the younger artists were painting themselves into a corner. They're getting so completely apart from everything that they're going to have to change. They're going to have to start back.

Oldfield: Otis liked the idea of being an ivory tower artist. He didn't want to go with the trend of the times; he was stubborn about that. That was one of his reasons for not joining the crowd, I guess. But it was also convictions, of course, which were more deep-seated than that.



DuCasse: That's interesting about his thoughts, because those are some of the things we were hoping to fill in in case we hadn't touched on them before. Did he say anything? I mean, do you remember some of the things he said about twentieth century art in general, or any of the "isms?" Did he have strong opinions?

Oldfield: He felt that total abstraction had no concept.

DuCasse: He's right. Even Kandinsky said that. But the other men thought they could get around that.

Oldfield: Well, they still do, I guess. They're still trying. I don't totally agree with it; I think there's concept in abstract expression. But it's not the same thing that he considered concept.

DuCasse: What he was thinking of maybe was that it's non-objective. Non-objective art is a little different from abstract, because you abstract from something.

Oldfield: Yes, that's right. I think non-objective--although Kandinsky did things that were almost totally non-objective.

I know that a lot of other people have done it too. In fact, I enjoy working in that idiom myself. I like just patterns, and value and form. I remember Marty coming up behind me when I was in his painting class, and he would say [huskily], "Where's the value? Where's the proportion? Where's the 'eenfeeneeteesimal' plane?" [laughter] As a matter of fact, when he got through, I didn't think there was anything there at all! [laughter]

DuCasse: Then you had to start all over again.



Oldfield: Yes. Well, he would keep us working for so long on trying to find a subject. Especially when it was a model, and the school was paying the model's fee, and something had to come out of this. I knew I had worked until there wasn't any point in doing anything more sometimes. I was an obedient student, and I would go on and try to find something.

DuCasse: You see, this is the wonderful thing about both Marty and Otis, that they had a deep grounding in the beauty of reality. To them it would have been pointless to try and depart too far from that. It's sad, but the younger generation of artists are wallowing around, really trying to come back to that. They're having a hard time doing it.

Oldfield: Are they really trying?

DuCasse: They are. You remember the figurative movement was a return to reality.

Oldfield: Yes, but that was quite a while ago.

DuCasse: That was, but you see, it didn't last too long, because the abstract expressionism was too strong. But I think many more are beginning to come back. This photographic realism is an extreme; but maybe this vacillation between extremes will bring us something more human.

Oldfield: I know that Otis particularly--because I know more about him than I do about Marty--felt that nature was the base. It was all right to depart; in fact, he would be the first one to say that art is not holding up a mirror to nature. It's nature expressed through temperament. And the temperament is very important. He had rather disparaging things to say about what he called decorative



Oldfield: art. He considered most non-objective painting primarily decorative. That's why he considered it without concept. He felt that it was missing something essential.

DuCasse: That's interesting. How did he feel, say, about the work of Arthur Mathews, which is now considered decorative. He was the leader of the so-called Decorative School. Was that kind of decorative art also something which he felt was--

Oldfield: Yes, I can't swear to it, but I would guess that he would have included that. It's not emotional enough. For him, expression had to be emotional. It had to contain the emotion of the artist and his response to it. Whether it was landscape, a still life, or a figure, the idea applied.

Cravath: Did he ever study with Arthur Mathews?

Oldfield: No. When he was here, I think Arthur Mathews was the head of the art school--

DuCasse: At the turn of the century.

Oldfield: At the turn of the century was he? Well, Otis was here then. He was here, but he was at the Best's school. He wasn't studying at the Art Institute.

Cravath: It was the California School of Fine Arts.

Oldfield: I remember some of the anecdotes that I've heard about the art school at the time that Arthur Best was there. Isabel West was a student there, and so was Ralph Stackpole. He told me that she wore a bustle, and that the other students in the life class would put their charcoal on her bustle. [laughter]





Cravath: Who told you that, Ralph?

Oldfield: Ralph.

DuCasse: Oh, that's lovely. That is cute!

Cravath: Isabel Percy West.

Oldfield: She was one of my favorite teachers.

DuCasse: Oh, she was a good teacher. And I think she had a tremendous personal interest in the students, too.

Oldfield: Yes. I remember that she used to invite us over to Sausalito weekends. I remember going over time after time with crowds of students. I think ten or twelve of us would go at a time. And bless her heart, she would not kick us out, she would give us dinner.

I remember that one of the group that I went with was Louis Miljarik, and Dorothy--what was her name--afterwards married Otis Shepherd--I can't remember what her name was before. Anyway, those are two of the people I remember who were in the group that went to visit Mrs. West on her invitation for weekends. We didn't stay all weekend; we would spend the day. But it meant going across the bay. We would get there as early as we could, and stay all afternoon and talk, and then she didn't want to kick us out because she had to feed us. And she did it! She was marvelous. Her poor husband suffered through it.

DuCasse: Yes, he was not an artist, was he?

Oldfield: No. I think he was a newspaperman, wasn't he?

DuCasse: I'm not sure. Do you remember her little electric car?

Oldfield: Yes.



DuCasse: I can still see her riding around in that little car.

Oldfield: I remember that from the days down on Allston Way.

DuCasse: I saw her in the last years of her life. Amazing--she was still getting around.

Cravath: When did she die?

DuCasse: Just a couple of years ago. I think it was not too long ago. It was quite recent. She was in her nineties. Wonderful old girl.

Let's see. Are there any others that you can think of the younger group? You mentioned Diebenkorn and Hassell Smith--

Oldfield: They, of course, were not close friends. They were people that I knew as students. I remember quite a few names of people who were students who are not important enough to be included in this thing. It was his habit to invite certain students of whom he became rather fond on that basis of teacher-student to come to the studio and pose for a little head or something. I used to put them up, and it was my turn to get the dinner and feed the visiting students at that time. I went through a long period of doing that, especially after he was teaching at Arts and Crafts. I still know a few of the students whom I met at that time. One is Steve Perun .  
Who else was there in that group? Shirley and Cloyd Massengill-- these names don't mean anything. But there was quite a large group of them. They would come and spend a Sunday or a Saturday in the studio with a lot of talk. Then they would still be there, and I would cook up a pot of spaghetti or something and feed them all.

One day, a group of these people came in. I saw them approaching;



Oldfield: their cars were parked across the street, and I saw them all converging on our house. I didn't realize that this was going to be any different from the other times when the group had come over. But it happened to be my birthday. And they had come with a cake and a gift of French perfume. It was very, very sweet of them. We had an evening. Of course, I still cooked the dinner, but they had brought the dessert. But there was a big crowd of them. I guess there were probably drinks, too. I don't remember that.

DuCasse: Must have had a little bit of red wine somewhere.

Oldfield: Yes, red wine or probably martinis, because that was the martini era. I loathe martinis now.

DuCasse: So do I! [laughter]

Oldfield: But that's what it was all the time, or maybe gin and tonic. They probably brought that, too. Otis had a store of cognac, which he hid under the French couch. He hid it under the studio couch—

DuCasse: It was handy, but not visible.

Oldfield: Handy but not visible. I heard for years from these young people how amused they were the first time he offered them a drink, and pulled out the couch and got a bottle. [laughter] He was very parsimonious with his cognac.

DuCasse: You have to be a real appreciator--

Oldfield: I don't think I ever became an appreciator of that. It tasted like medicine to me. But he enjoyed it, and apparently a bunch of those kids did, too.

They would come over and tell him their problems. I remember



Oldfield: there was one couple--his name was Jim Robinson, and he had been a student at Arts and Crafts, and he had been a Marine in World War II. After coming back, he had married. He'd had enough of war; he didn't want to be involved in the war at all anymore. Then the Korean war came along. He arrived at the house with his wife one day, almost in tears. He said, "They took me." He had to go back in the Marines. And he was terribly upset about it. He didn't want to leave. He had done it, and he didn't want to be involved again. So he was another of the Arts and Crafts students who became friends. They really became friends because the association went on for many years after Otis had left Arts and Crafts.

DuCasse: I think very often a teacher will make friends with certain of his students, who really become life-long friends. I have several who have been like that to me.

Oldfield: I have too. In fact, the only valentine I got this year, not counting my daughter's flowers, was from a student that I had in the fifties. She said, "Hi, teacher."

I have another one who is in Indonesia now--a very intense little person who has been over there for three years. She keeps writing to me. Her mother lives in Tiburon. Her mother comes around and takes me out once in a while. This is all inspired by this little girl who was my student.

Cravath: Was that at Hamlin?

Oldfield: At Hamlin, yes.





DuCasse: We talked about several things that Otis was interested in in the twentieth century development. Did he have any artists in the past that he revered? Marty had some of his favorites--

Oldfield: That far back, I don't remember--

DuCasse: Were there any that he ever mentioned?

Oldfield: Oh, yes, he talked a good deal about Renoir. He liked Renoir, and he didn't like Picasso.

DuCasse: I can understand why.

Oldfield: But he did like Mat isse.

DuCasse: Mat isse was much more serious than Picasso.

Oldfield: Well, I don't know about that. I admire a great deal in Picasso.

I am just overcome by awe viewing some of his draftsmanship. I think that he was a great artist. But I think a lot of things of his were tongue in cheek, too. And, of course, he got away with it, especially in the later years. But that doesn't spoil him for me, because he did a lot of things that were very expressive. However, Otis didn't go for him very much.

I remember, though, in our studio on Russian Hill, Otis had cut out a small head of Picasso--I think it was a photograph--and tacked it up on the studio wall. One day, our two children, who were little kids at the time, were in the studio, and Jane asked Rhoda, the older one, "Who's that?"

And Otis said, "Don't you know? It's President Roosevelt."

[end tape 5, side B]



[begin tape 6, side A]

DuCasse: Let's talk about Diego Rivera, because you just approached it once, and I said, "Let's wait until it kind of comes in naturally."

Oldfield: All right. It may be a little repetitive; I don't know what I told you.

DuCasse: That won't make any difference.

Oldfield: My first memory of Diego--and I think I may have told you this story--was the day that we picked him up in our little car. I don't remember where, but it was on his first visit to San Francisco, in the thirties. It was when he did the Stock Exchange.

Cravath: And the Art School?

Oldfield: And the Art School was done on that first visit too. We picked him up somewhere--it wasn't at the airport--I don't remember where it was. As I remember it, I have a mental picture of a downtown street. So it must have been somewhere downtown. He climbed into the back seat of our little car--

DuCasse: Could he get in?

Oldfield: He got in all right, but the fenders went right down on the wheels, and the wheels couldn't turn. So I had to get out and give him my seat, which was what they called the suicide seat, the front seat. In that position, apparently the wheels would turn.

Cravath: Where did you go then?

Oldfield: I got in the back seat, where he had been. I didn't weigh as much; he weighed well over three hundred pounds.



Oldfield: He was sweet and kind. I don't know where Frieda was. I don't remember that she was with him on that occasion, but she might have been, because he might have completely absorbed my attention. She was always so retiring and quiet that she might have been there, and maybe I got in the back seat with her. I don't know.

Anyway, we got to know him quite well after that. As I remember, he lived in the studio which was in Ralph Stackpole's--

Cravath: That was 715 Montgomery Street.

Oldfield: Yes, which was where I had been married, and which Ruth occupied later. Then he began accepting all of the social invitations that he received as a matter of policy. He couldn't have been interested in absolutely all of them. I remember that Ralph used to complain that he was wearing himself out stupidly and unnecessarily, because he didn't have to accept all of those invitations. But one of them that he accepted was from a friend of ours who wanted to have him present at a Christmas party. So somewhere I have a photograph of my two little kids and Diego and Frieda and Otis and me sitting before a Christmas tree all decorated with those little paper hats you used to get out of bon-bons, and false moustaches, and whistles and things. We were all dressed up in those things. I would offer to find it for you, except that I have been trying to find it, and can't put my finger on it.

DuCasse: Someday when you're looking for something else, you will.

Oldfield: Yes, that's the way it happens.



DuCasse: I think Diego was that type of person: very charming and affable. Playful.

Oldfield: And he liked people; he was interested in people, and he didn't mind putting himself out for it. I remember another occasion when a Chinese group had a big banquet--I think it was in his honor, and he probably felt that was an obligation too. But he sat for hours and hours on one of those little square lacquered stools, that must have cut him in two, because he was so heavy. And he overflowed on all sides of it, you know! He must have had an imprint

Anyway, he did it, and he didn't show any signs of pain. He answered all their questions. He talked extemporaneously about everything that came into his mind. And everybody who was present was fascinated. I was there with Otis because Otis had been instrumental in starting this Chinese group through his student Yun Gee. Yun was really the instigator of the Chinese Art Association, I think they called it. The members met in Yun's studio. They thought of him as a sort of a guru. Most of them were not even necessarily attracted to painting; but this was an opportunity to be a part of some group which gave some prestige to the Chinese who were in a rather submerged position at the time.

When I went to Yun's show at the Oakland Museum--was it last year or the year before?--I was amazed to find that nearly all of the people there were Chinese. I would have thought with the





Oldfield: Oakland Museum's mailing list, there would have been a lot of others. But we were among the few who were non-Chinese.

DuCasse: Well, probably because that is a period that is only now being revived, in a sense--that period in which--

Oldfield: When he was in San Francisco, it was twenties. It was late twenties.

DuCasse: Yes, and it was S. MacDonald Wright and his whole group, you see. Now, that's being explored; so many who got the invitation for it may not have recognized the name or realized that this was an important person to see.

As it happened, I received the invitation, and I couldn't go that day for some reason. But I went down to see the exhibit very soon after, and I was just enthralled; I thought it was magnificent. His work is beautiful. That was a very important period. Billy Justema knew S. MacDonald Wright, and through him I got a lot of information on that program. That was a marvelous example--in fact, I told my students. I said, "Here is an example of that kind of painting which you don't see very often. Go and see it."

Oldfield: I have become very friendly with his widow. She is hoping to be here again this Spring sometime, depending on whether she's invited to lecture--she's a photographer. She hopes to be invited to lecture for a photography exhibit which is to be held in Long Beach. If she does come, she will come up here, and I would like to see her again. But we do correspond.



Cravath: I'm so sorry I didn't get to meet her when she was here for that show.

Oldfield: You can get a chance to do it if and when she comes up again. But it's a little bit in the lap of the gods, you know.

DuCasse: Not to change the subject, but because I don't want to get too far away from it, you mentioned just briefly about Frieda. Did you then other times have a chance to get to know Frieda very well?

Oldfield: Oh, yes, Frieda was at my house many times. I thought she was beautiful, exotic, but I couldn't talk to her very much. She didn't speak any French, and she didn't speak any English. And besides, she was very ill. She would spend the evening on the couch, or retire into her bedroom and just stay there, because she couldn't participate in the conversation, and she was feeling miserable. In this little photograph I have of the Christmas that we spent together, she is sitting--she wasn't tired enough not to be visible in the photograph--she's in the photograph. As I remember, most of the time she was just absent. She would come and put in an appearance.

The second time that he came, when he painted the mural which is now at City College--he worked on Treasure Island--she was in much better shape then.

Cravath: I remember seeing her downtown when her color was good.

DuCasse: Yes, I remember seeing her at that time also.

Oldfield: I remember seeing her then, when she was really<sup>more active</sup>--although she was still rather out of it as far as conversation was concerned--

DuCasse: But she could speak a little. I remember talking to her.



Oldfield: She could speak a little . She had a few words. And she was very amiable about it; she tried. And she was in better physical condition. This was the time when they remarried. They had been divorced, I believe, between the two visits. The second time they had their second marriage ceremony here. They're the only people I know, besides my own daughter, who have done that. My daughter has married the same man three times. Remarried twice!

DuCasse: Speaks well for the state of marriage, doesn't it?

Oldfield: I don't know whether it does or not. I think that it must mean that she has matured a little bit, although it sounds to other people as though she has trouble making up her mind. I don't know which it is.

But I do know that she is not being critical of him now, and she definitely was.

DuCasse: Did we ask you if you had met Orozco when he came to San Francisco?

Oldfield: Yes, I met him, but just at parties. I never really got to know him. I met him because I was politely introduced to him, and he politely acknowledged it. I also met Covarrubias that way.

DuCasse: Oh, and Covarrubias was a charmer, too.

Oldfield: But I didn't get to know him, either. It was just a matter of introduction and a little polite conversation.

DuCasse: It was wonderful that they got to San Francisco, because they had really influenced the trend of arts in the forties here.

Oldfield: Well, especially Rivera, I would guess.

DuCasse: Yes, I guess he really had more personal influence.



Oldfield: I rather feel that in my own estimation, Orozco is the greatest artist of the three. But I think that Diego had the greatest impact on San Francisco.

DuCasse: And I think from what you have said now about how he put himself out and was so open to meeting and mixing with people, I think that was part of it. He was genuinely interested in becoming a part of the community while he was here.

Oldfield: Yes. And of course, many of the artists who were working here-- oh, another name that I may or may not have mentioned, who was an artist who was close to us was Ray Boynton. Ray had been down there, and met Diego, and learned the fresco technique in Mexico. Most of the artists who worked at the Coit Tower had come under his influence--under Rivera's influence. Ralph Stackpole, and Victor Arnautoff--they all had--I guess Victor studied with him, I don't know whether Ralph did or not. But they were very close friends. It was Diego's influence that caused all of those murals in the Coit Tower to be frescos.

DuCasse: Did Otis do any of those?

Oldfield: No, he did an oil painting which is in the elevator foyer. In fact, he was in charge of the group that worked in oils.

Cravath: Didn't Ray Boynton do one of those, too?

Oldfield: No. Rinaldo did two, and Moya did one and Otis did one. There are only four. They were not done in place, like the frescos. They were done in the studio and applied to the walls. Otis much preferred that way. He was never intrigued by fresco.

DuCasse: That's a messy proposition.





Oldfield: It's a messy proposition, and it's like--I think a little bit of his aversion was the same as his aversion to water colors. It's an instantaneous medium. You must make up your mind, and you must go right ahead and do it while the time is right. You have to work when the plaster's wet.

DuCasse: That was very consistent with his attitude towards watercolor technique.

Oldfield: Well, he was consistent in some ways, anyway.

So they painted those panels in the studio, and they were applied to the walls. Otis also did the lunettes that are over the elevators. They're little seagull things.

He had some influence on the subject matter, and he chose the men he wanted to work with him. Originally, one of them was to have been done by Bill Dahl. Bill backed out for some reason. I think he was teaching at Stanford at the time, and he didn't have enough time to give to it. So he backed out. That was the reason that Rinaldo did two of the panels. Moya did one, and Otis did one.

Cravath: They're there now.

Oldfield: They're there, and they're using the elevator again now. So I guess they're accessible. The room was blocked off for a while.

DuCasse: Those have all been restored now, at least the frescos have.

Oldfield: The frescos--I don't know whether the oil panels were damaged or not.

DuCasse: They probably weren't, because it seems to me that to begin with, they are not quite as fragile. And I think they were in a position, perhaps, where they weren't quite so easily--



Oldfield: They're not so easy to scratch.

DuCasse: When they're down below your arm level, why, it's too tempting.

Oldfield: Those oil panels are too. They're tall; they come down to maybe twenty-five or thirty inches from the floor.

Cravath: Can you go up into the tower now?

Oldfield: You can go up the stairs, I guess, if you have the fortitude.

Cravath: Do you remember when we had that tour for the Oakland Museum?

Oldfield: Yes.

Cravath: [to DuCasse] Did you come along?

DuCasse: No, but you and Dorothy and I went specially, just the three of us. I took all those slides, remember, because I needed them for my history of California art. That was before it was open to the public.

Cravath: I haven't been there since. We'll have to go some time.

DuCasse: Yes, we'll have to go. I'd like to get pictures now of those oil paintings, because they were in a position where the light wasn't very good.

Oldfield: Well, they aren't very well lighted. But I expect you could--with a flash.

DuCasse: We could try it anyway.

Cravath: [to Oldfield] Would you like to go?

Oldfield: Yes, of course. Let's do that, if I can manage it.

DuCasse: Some beautiful day like this, we'll manage it. We'll get you up there.

Oldfield: Okay. Well, I don't want you to have to carry me, but I can walk.



Oldfield: I'm slow, and it takes me a long time.

DuCasse: Fortunately, when we get up to the top, then you don't have to do anything more than walk straight lines.

Oldfield: Yes. And I'm very nostalgic about that thing, because I was living on Telegraph Hill at the time that this was done, you know. I used to take my children and go up there and walk around and see the progress and watch them working.

I remember one day Victor had his youngest son there, Jake. Jake was a little towheaded kid--

Cravath: As wide as he was tall!

Oldfield: Yes. Victor kept introducing him as his little Mexican, because he was born in Mexico.

Then I remember Kenneth Rexroth and someone else who was up there trying to organize the artists into--I think they called it a guild. But it was really a union.

Cravath: Was Artists' Equity a result of that?

Oldfield: No, I don't think so. I think this was another thing entirely. It was called the Artists' Guild. Otis was the thorn in the flesh. He was not a joiner; he didn't want to join anything, although he was a member of the Art Association and the Artists' Council for years. That he considered constructive. But he never joined Artists' Equity--or maybe he did at the very end.

Cravath: I remember we were both on the board.

Oldfield: I did. I think we had a joint membership at the very end of his life. Somebody talked him into it.

DuCasse: You could get the blame for it.



Oldfield: [laughter] I guess so. Anyway, he refused for a long time because he disapproved of these organizations which tried to safeguard artists. He sincerely believed that you became a professional artist by creating and showing your work and earning awards like prizes, or being able to sell. He thought that was the only way you could become an artist. And anything that was going to give you any guarantee or even help you was suspect, and he didn't want anything to do with it.

DuCasse: How did he feel about teaching? Did he feel that that was a little outside the realm of the creative artist?

Oldfield: No, he approved of teaching. He loved to teach, and I've had many of his students, including Nathan Oliviera, say that he was the most inspiring teacher they'd ever had.

DuCasse: Oh, I'm sure he was. He had so much spirit; that's what students need in their teachers.

Oldfield: Yes, he was inspiring. But he liked teaching. It is a creative endeavor after all, and he found it creative. He much preferred it as a way of making a living to any kind of commercial art. That he scorned, although he did take a few commercial assignments when he was having problems having enough to eat when he first came to San Francisco.

For a short time, he had a job on the San Francisco Call, making drawings of San Francisco scenes. I have somewhere a collection of some of them--not the original drawings, but the newsprint ones. I remember that one of them is the Powell Street cable car turntable with all the people piled on it. He did quite a few of those. They





Oldfield: sent him out on assignments. The end of that came quite a long time before we were married.

He told me the story; I wasn't present at the actual happening. He was assigned to cover a French ship which was in dock. So he went--

DuCasse: He must have enjoyed that.

Oldfield: He got drunk. [laughter] This is by his own account; I wasn't there. He had such a grand time, and they plied him with wine and whatever--I don't know what he got. But he didn't get any drawings. He went back to the newspaper the next day and got fired. He also went to the hotel where he was living at that time. They were shocked, and plied him with coffee and a cold bath and sobered him up. But he didn't get the drawings he was assigned to make. So he lost his job on the Call.

Cravath: That was before you were married.

Oldfield: Yes, quite a while. I was not aware of it until he told me about it.

But he did do a few commercial things like that. However, I don't think he really thought of that newspaper assignment as commercial. It was, of course, but it also called upon his fine art abilities.

DuCasse: Oh, absolutely. And his own personal response to things, too.

Oldfield: I remember another of the places that he covered where he was sent was a prize fight. There were drawings of that somewhere.

DuCasse: Who was the artist in New York that did the same subject?



Oldfield: Bellows?

DuCasse: Bellows. It's interesting: some artists are very intrigued with--

Oldfield: Well, Otis just made drawings. But he was very good at pencil sketching, charcoal sketching he did--

DuCasse: I imagine that he had a technique that really worked.

Oldfield: Very expressive, and done with great economy of line.

Cravath: You'll have to show--

Oldfield: Well, you know where they are, honey; you get them down anytime you want.

DuCasse: They must have--Marty had that same gift. I think that was stimulated and developed in Paris. I think the artists there--they never stop drawing. Wherever they went, they were sketching.

Oldfield: There's a whole collection--I don't have them here; Jane has them in her house--of little sketches about that big that he made on the streetcar. Anyplace--always had a stub of a pencil and this little book.

DuCasse: And that, of course, is why they became good, solid artists. They knew nature so beautifully; they knew character.

Cravath: Right. With just a few lines--

Oldfield: And this was his subject matter as long as he lived: people. He loved to do people. He did some still life, but he found it a little bit dull. It wasn't exciting enough for him.

DuCasse: I don't blame him. I hated still life when I was a student.

Cravath: But he did a lot of lovely little landscape sketches.

Oldfield: Yes, he did lots of landscapes.



Cravath: Dozens of little ones that we used to do up in Gold Run.

Oldfield: Yes, at Gold Run, and also at Alta. He tried to sell those. He offered them for ten, fifteen, twenty-five dollars. Toward the end of his life, people kept talking him into showing these things and trying to sell them. The experience was so humiliating and discouraging, you know. Friends would arrange for wall space where he could show them in banks, or public buildings of various kinds. This meant getting them framed, hanging them himself, taking them down, and bringing them home. People would say things to him, passing by, like, "Can't you do any better than that?" Oh, it was so insulting!

DuCasse: They were just not able to appreciate what those were.

Oldfield: So he finally came to the place where he thought it was very foolish to expose himself to that sort of thing. So he would absolutely refuse.

DuCasse: I don't blame him, because that's not right. It's still very difficult; even the collectors of art will always say, "Do you have any paintings?"

I say, "No, I don't. But I have his finer drawings, that he felt were the best thing in his life." They're not interested. They want a painting; they feel that is a complete thing. While a drawing can be just as complete, if not more so.

Oldfield: I wonder if we'll ever come to the place where people want Otis' paintings.

DuCasse: They probably will, because now--we were saying this a little bit



DuCasse: earlier--more and more they are beginning to appreciate the men who were in that transition period, if you will, who didn't jump on the abstract expressionist bandwagon. They remained true to their own selves; now they are going to be seen in the proper perspective to what they were. And really, from what greater individuals as artists <sup>they were</sup> because they remained true to their own lights. But it's coming.

Oldfield: I'm not sure that I'll be around. But I'm trying to get my daughter interested enough in it so that she will carry on and that she will have access to them. She's already trying to help me preserve them and record them.

DuCasse: We must--this is something I'm certainly going to do, and I'll take this upon myself while there are still people at the museum that I know. You see, the Oakland Museum is trying to remedy this unfortunate lack of interest. They have been systematically giving retrospective shows to these key figures. I'm sure that they're intending Otis is to be one of them. But I'm going to mention this. I'm going to tell them that I've been doing this work with Helen. I'm going to say, "You've got to get that done, you've got to do that, especially while Helen is able to gather together the materials." Fortunately, if the Oakland Museum did it, they would do a lot of that. I think that they would relieve you of a lot of the heavy work.

Oldfield: Well, Terry St. John has been over here and looked at the collection of paintings.





DuCasse: Yes. You see, he's the one who would be interested in it.

[end tape 6, side A]

[Date of Interview: 25 February, 1981; begin tape 6, side B]

DuCasse: We're going to go back to some of the material on our first tape and get the real reason behind the delay in your going eventually to art school. You want to say a word or two, and then we'll play this back and see what we're getting.

Oldfield: You mean like "testing," something like that?

DuCasse: Yes. Just so we know we've heard your voice. [brief tape interruption]  
Okay, if you want to start in once more about that family matter--

Oldfield: About my father's objections to my studying art. They were really very valid objections, and there was a reason behind them. He had had a younger brother who had married a woman who claimed to be an artist. There was a little doubt about this in the minds of some of the family members, because they usually referred to her in an uncomplimentary way as "artistic."

Anyway, she had married my father's younger brother and gone to live with him in Nevada City, where he and another man had a mining claim. My uncle worked as a night watchman in one of the



Oldfield: big stamp mills up there. His partner in the mining claim boarded in their house.

One night my uncle came home from his job, for which he carried a gun, and found the other man there with his wife. He opened the door, and they shot each other. It was one of those traditional stories of a triangle, I guess, although I had no knowledge of that at the time. I have heard remarks since, when I've been a little older, which lead me to believe that there was a problem there, and that this tragedy had a very strong effect on my father.

This is the reason that he felt that women who studied art came to no good ends. Anyway--

DuCasse: You mentioned a funeral--something else that happened.

Oldfield: Oh, yes. There was a funeral in Nevada City to which my father and his sister went. They reported--although I wasn't present at the funeral; I remember hearing this story told many, many times--about the grieving widow standing between the two coffins and crying for her two darlings. Naturally, this didn't have a very good effect on the relatives of one of the dead men.

There was another reason that my father was dubious about the wisdom of letting me study art. His cousin, with whom he had been domiciled in their youth by their mutual grandmother, who was my great-grandmother, of course, was Jimmy Swinnerton, who later acquired quite a reputation, and had been conspicuous in the art world. I don't know when--I guess--would it be late nineteenth century, or early twentieth century?



DuCasse: Probably early twentieth.

Oldfield: Anyway, Marty told me he knew him, too.

DuCasse: Yes, he did. I remember hearing him speak of him.

Oldfield: Swinnerton had been notorious. I remember once I spoke to him on the phone and told him--I had never met him, and I wanted to contact him. So I wrote him a note and he called me. I told him who I was, and he said, "It looks as though even my family has forgiven me."

But his reputation was distasteful to my father, who was a gentle, idealistic person. This was another reason that he felt that he didn't want me to be associated with the arts. So he was unwilling to finance my first year at art school until after I had agreed to go to Stanford as a math major. That had fallen through because of his financial problems. He could not finance me for the first year, so I never went to Stanford at all. Instead, I stayed at home and took care of the household during my mother's illness. After about two years of that, he decided that I had earned the right to do what I wanted and allowed me my first choice. So he financed me for at least my first year at Arts and Crafts. And the rest of that is on the tape.

DuCasse: That's wonderful, so that we just have amplified. And that brought in Jimmy Swinnerton, which we didn't have the first time around. Okay, we'll just stop this, and then what we'll do--[tape interruption]

DuCasse: Okay, now we're going to be recording. Now you can start talking about Kenneth Rexroth.



Oldfield: I really don't have very much to say, and I thought it was already on the tape. All I had in mind to say was that I was visiting up there at the tower when this organizing was going on. Otis was being difficult; he wasn't going along with their ideas. So what has stuck in my memory is that Rexroth turned to him and said, "The trouble with you, Oldfield, is that you're an anarchist." [laughter]

DuCasse: What did Otis have to say to that?

Oldfield: Well, he said it was true. [laughter] He said it was true, but it didn't make him a good candidate for being organized. I think they just went their separate ways.

Well, wait a minute. There's a card around here somewhere--he was a member of the guild or artists' union, local whatever it was. There was such a thing formed. Somewhere or other, I have Otis' membership card. But it didn't last very long. When it came time to pay the dues, the artists didn't do it. [laughs] So that was the end of that. I don't remember too clearly about it.

But there were a lot of things that went on that discouraged Otis from doing the things that people wanted him to do to be enterprising. I remember there was one occasion when Otis was involved in a scheme or an arrangement--I don't know that it was a scheme--with Ray Bertrand to produce lithographs. They hired a young man to represent them, to peddle the lithographs, for which he was to get a small percentage of the purchase price. Otis made several lithos. The peddler--I can't remember his name--was supplied with several prints from each artist, and he absconded with them.





Oldfield: So this was another attempt to be financially sophisticated and enterprising which backfired, because he just lost his work.

This sort of thing happens to artists all the time. It's not only Otis; I know it happens to others too.

DuCasse: Yes, unfortunately, it has.

Cravath: I think this is the time to bring you up to date on this Alexander business.

Oldfield: Oh, yes, I'm interested.

Cravath: Did I talk to you about it?

DuCasse: I don't think you did. Did you want this on the tape?

Cravath: Oh, no.

DuCasse: Okay, we'll stop this then.

[end tape 6, side B]



## CONCLUSION

Helen Oldfield remained in a convalescent hospital for the last months of her life. She rallied at one point--but this rally was not sustained.

Ruth Cravath and I had two visits with her during September, to show her the transcript and to get answers to a few questions that had arisen between the taping session and the typing of the transcript. She was pleased to see it "in black and white," and enjoyed having parts of it read to her. We are most grateful for her daughter Jayne's help in proofreading the transcript for any errors or additions she would notice.

Helen's continued weakness was a great concern to us all, but in a special way for Ruth and I, as we had so hoped she could see the final stage, in printed form, which would have been such a great satisfaction to her as well as to us for her. But it was not to be. On November 16, 1981, Helen passed away peacefully. She has joined Otis and the many friends who preceded her into the next world.

Her devoted daughter, Jayne Blatchly, arranged an intimate ceremony of remembrance for Helen in Jayne's home on Tuesday, November 24, 1981. Among the San Francisco art colony friends who shared with the family a touching and most suitable remembrance of Helen were: Antonio and Grace Sotomayor, Ruth Cravath Wakefield, Mireille Piazzoni Wood, Micaela Martinez DuCasse, and Terry St. John of the art department staff of the Oakland Museum. It was a communion of spirits, not sad, but so grateful for the friendship Helen gave to each of us with such warmth and love.

Helen had always minimized her own significance as an artist because of Otis being in the forefront all their life together. Helen was a good painter in her own right, and kept up her own work after Otis died. An exhibition of her painting, organized by Jayne, was held in November and December of 1981, at the Laurel Heights Convalescent Hospital, where Helen had lived those last months of her life. Several of her paintings were sold, a tribute to her own ability as an artist.

We are grateful indeed that there was time to do the essential phase of this oral history of Otis and Helen Oldfield while she was still with us. It is a precious legacy, along with her own paintings, from Helen Clark Oldfield.

Last, but not at all least, we owe a special debt of gratitude to Walter Nelson-Rees and James Coran, who, out of their great interest in, and knowledge of, California art as collectors and scholars, gave generously the money to have the tapes transcribed. Their contribution was most essential for the ultimate completion of this worthy project.

Micaela Martinez DuCasse  
Ruth Cravath Wakefield

January 1982  
Piedmont, California



## EPILOGUE

It is always hard to look back on a life that has been lived before one's own eyes and judge its success. My mother, Helen Oldfield, would be judged as "the best" by myself and anyone who has ever known her. Not strangely, she would never give herself such a rating. On reading this fascinating transcript, I am able to see how important the artist's wife was to the budding art community of her time. My own memory of mother goes much farther. She supported and advanced a noted California artist and developed her own strong talents as well. Though all but a few of her last years were spent in practical areas (posing for hundreds of hours for her husband and teaching art at the Hamlin School), she never lost her drive to create visually. When at last she had time to apply herself to her own art work, she developed a style so personal and distinctive, one wishes she had had another life to give to it. In this area lies the crux of divergence in success judging. From mother's viewpoint, she never succeeded in "getting anything done". In my viewpoint, she accomplished several lifetimes at once.

Because many facets of Helen's life were overshadowed by her husband, I am deeply grateful the Oral History Transcript was completed before she had a crippling stroke. Her last few months were uplifted by the editing of this material with the help of her oldest and dearest friends, as well as her first one-man show at the nursing home where she spent her last days. (Exhibition announcement next page).

On November 22, 1981, a final tribute to Helen was held at my home for her closest friends. Participants included Ruth Cravath and Mirelle Piazzoni Wood, who were present at Helen's wedding to Otis Oldfield fifty five years ago. The highlight of the ceremony was "A Song For Helen"; the Brahams Lullaby sung in German, accompanied on the lute. Memories mixed with tears as we added a pinch of ashes to the urn, knowing Helen had been with us in spirit. The urn will be placed at the Neptune Society's Columbarium in San Francisco to welcome all pilgrims.

Jayne (Oldfield) Blatchly  
January 15, 1982



# helen oldfield

Helen Regina Clark was born in Santa Rosa, in 1902.

After graduation from High School, Helen attended the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, from 1922 to 1924.

In 1925, Helen met the internationally famous artist, Otis Oldfield while attending his classes at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Helen married Otis Oldfield in 1926 and had two daughters shortly thereafter.

Helen lived on Telegraph Hill and Russian Hill with her family during the start of her teaching career at the Sarah Dix Hamlin School, where she headed the Art Department. She taught at the Hamlin School from 1946 to 1968.

The Oldfields moved to a small house on Joost Avenue in 1960 and there, after the death of her husband, Helen began her own separate artistic career.

Helen showed her work regularly at the Godfrey Gallery in the Mark Hopkins Hotel; the Arts and Crafts Co-op in Berkeley and the Sonoma Valley Arts Center. She had her greatest success with the Valley Art

Gallery in Walnut Creek where she rented and sold her work on a continuing basis from 1972 to 1980.

Helen was an active member of the Artists Equity Association's local chapter, working on projects for artists with her friends in the area.

The pictures shown here through January first, 1982, are a sample of the work Helen has done from 1940 to 1980.

Each picture is an original oil painting on a standard size canvas board. The smaller size works sell for \$50.00 each and the larger works sell for \$75.00. These pictures are easy and inexpensive to frame at home with ready made frames and make colorful additions to any room.

Make checks payable directly to Helen Oldfield and indicate at bottom of check painting number marked on the back of each work for sales identification.

We, the staff and Helen's family, hope you like these pictures and find they add brightness to your holiday visits to Laurel Heights Convalescent Hospital.

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Ruth Cravath

Born in Chicago in 1902, and educated at the Chicago Art Insitute. Studied at the California School of Fine Arts in the 1920s, where she was a student of Ralph Stackpole's.

Well-known sculptor and teacher.

Charter member of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists, and long a member of the San Francisco Art Commission.

Her work is in private and public collections. Notable public works include the Starr King statue recently reinstalled at the First Unitarian Church, San Francisco; the "Timeless Family," IBM, San Jose; and the Saint Francis at Candlestick Park, San Francisco.



Micaela Martinez DuCasse

Daughter of Xavier Martinez and Elsie Whitaker Martinez. Educated under her father at California College of Arts and Crafts, 1928-31.

Studied fresco painting with Victor Arnautoff in 1938, and sculpture with Ralph Stackpole in 1938-9, at San Francisco Art Institute.

Liturgical mural commission in 1939 at St. Boniface Church, San Francisco. Career in liturgical arts through mid-1950s. Founding member, Catholic Art Forum of San Francisco.

Member, art department faculty, Lone Mountain College; chairman, 1955-78.

Organized a survey course in history of California art, as a preview to the opening of the Oakland Museum in September of 1969. The research and knowledge obtained in preparing this course was background for the oral history interviewing of Helen Clark Oldfield.











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