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Charles Banks Wilson

Oral History Interview

By:

George Sabo

July 20, 2004

George Sabo: Okay, this is July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004, and this is George Sabo from the University of Arkansas, department of Anthropology, interviewing Mr. Charles Banks Wilson for the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual history. Mr. Wilson, we're sitting here in the living room of your beautiful home, surrounded by all of your many wonderful artworks, artifacts from Oklahoma. You were born in Arkansas, however. Could you perhaps begin with a brief account of your beginnings here in the state of Arkansas?

Charles Banks Wilson: Well, my mother was from Springdale, as were her other seven siblings. When my father left for World War I, my mother was pregnant. They had a home in Miami, Oklahoma, but she of course wanted to be near her family in Springdale, so she came over to Springdale to have her child, me, there on Johnson Street in Springdale. Her family had a big 3-story home, quite a nice place. My grandfather had been a real estate agent and insurance man. He also had been the Secretary to the Arkansas Fruit Growers Association for 25 years. But, in any event, I was six months old when my father came back from World War I, and they quickly moved to their home in Miami, Oklahoma, and that's where I grew up and went to school. The circumstances of him finding out that

he had a son is kind of interesting to me because he was on a battlefield in a foxhole, or what we now call a foxhole. In those days it was a trench and the soldiers got so very little mail that whenever a letter came, everybody read it and passed it news along, so dad learned about having a boy from other soldiers hollering at him, “Charlie you’ve got a son.” Anyway, when he came back, they moved, as I said, to Oklahoma. Dad had been a professional musician. He led the Army band that played the concert for the King of England at the Armistice. And having been a musician, we had a lot of music around our home. I remember the basement was filled with manuscripts and things he had used, because he played for a number of the big dance orchestras of the period, as well as the theater orchestras in Chicago. But anyway, mother is the one who got him to give up music, because she said that she was not going to be married to a traveling musician. Mother and dad had both, interestingly enough, lived in Springdale but didn’t know each other. Mother was a teacher and her family was sort of the upper-class people. My dad’s folks lived on the other side of the tracks. And I don’t guess they really met until both of them moved to Oklahoma where dad worked with his father, who was a house painter and decorator, and mother was a teacher in the public schools, and, by the way, everyone who studied from her remembers her very fondly. One of them in particular was Lucien Ballard, who became a great motion picture photographer. He remembered my mother because he would be a good boy and anybody who was a good boy in her 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class got to stand by her with their arm around her. [Laughter.] So I guess she was just as popular that early as she was later on. I will take this maybe—getting the cart

before the horse, when they died, which was in seventy something. I would say it was a good year and maybe longer that hardly a week went by someone didn't say to me, "I sure miss your mother and dad," which I thought was quite unusual for just two common folks. Anyway, dad had been a painter, a house painter with his father, and he started doing that again and was very successful. He just did contract work. He didn't have a paint store or anything like that, but mother changed things! He was keeping his paint and ladders in the garage, and she insisted that he put them in a paint store. Well, being around color, I guess—or maybe you're just kind of born that way—but I had an interest in drawing, and I drew on everything. And I have often said that my first mural was under my mother's kitchen table because it was a nice great, big white area, and I was just tall enough to reach up and paint on the bottom of that. I used to draw on the bottom of the paint boxes, which had a big piece of cardboard in them. I drew on the back of photographs mother framed and hung had on the wall. I remember vividly, on one of them I had made a drawing, and I heard mother's car drive up the driveway, so I immediately erased it and wrote on there, "Mother I love you." [Laughter.] Thinking that would be excuse enough to explain the off of the wall.

GS: So your dad's house painting shop and all the materials provided a setting in which you developed your very earliest inclinations?

CBW: Possibly it did. I often say to young people or to parents, young parents, that if your child is going to be an artist, there is nothing you can do to stop him. If he's not going to be, there's nothing you can do to make him that. My folks' advice was, and their action was, to give me all the materials I needed and get out of the

way. They didn't discourage me, but they didn't particularly encourage me. My dad, I understand, was perhaps typical of fathers in that he never told me he was proud of me, never told me he liked what I did, but he told all the neighbors. I think possibly the greatest good fortune that I had were my parents, because both of them were artistic and wise. I think some parents make a mistake in telling their children "this is really good" when the kid says, "I don't think it's very good at all." My mother never did do that. When I would say, "How do you like this mother?" She would say, "Well, what do you think?" And that's as far as it went, but that was pretty smart because had she encouraged me or been complimentary on something that I didn't like at all, I wouldn't have put any value on her opinion one way or the other. I guess I had good fortune in other ways because I was kind of a stranger in the town, I mean an artist—I didn't particularly like cars and things like that. I did like horses, and dad supplied me with a horse because he had a great big pasture outside our house and we were right on the railroad track, and so I had a horse and things of that sort, but for some reason or another I think I was just a kid that was a little different, and people didn't quite understand me. I know that other kids didn't understand me, and I look back at it, and I probably wouldn't have understood myself. The teachers took advantage of me and encouraged my work. The English teachers and the history teachers would have me decorate the blackboards with whatever subject they were teaching, and I would do a big mural for them on the blackboard.

GS: Now, was this in a public school in Miami?

CBW: This was just a public school in Miami, Oklahoma. There were no art classes at that time, but later I studied art for a year in a high school class.

GS: Okay, so the teachers were recognizing your interests and your skills, and they encouraged you in that way.

CBW: Yes, but I think the whole school did because—I have to tell you the truth, I really wanted to be an actor, because from the time I was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade until I graduated I was in every high school program, play, etc., and I really thought [I could be an actor]. I thought I wanted to be an actor even after I had gone to art school in Chicago, because I had a lot of friends who were actors on radio shows and such. And then in the evening, we would get together and read plays, and one of them, one of the boys was a Shakespearian actor, and it was he who convinced me—he didn't say anything, but I quickly recognized I better stay in art.

GS: Like your father, were you a musician?

CBW: Yes, I played a trumpet and my father played the trombone as a musician, and I was the director of the high school band as the drum major and played in all the orchestras and that sort of thing, but, yes, music has always been a part of my life. Now it's mostly enjoying the symphony here in Fayetteville every time they have something like that, but I used to go to the operas and the symphony when I went to school in Chicago. I attended the Art Institute in 1936 and was there for the next four years. I later went to New York to become a cartoonist.

GS: Right.

CBA: I did lithographs, drawings on stone and pulled multiple prints, which I must tell you about, but two fellows sent me to New York to be a cartoonist. I decided that

this wasn't what I wanted to do. I drew—see they had the fellow who makes the drawings and somebody else who inks it in. I drew “Terry and the Pirates” in New York City and also did a cartoon strip called “Charlie Chan” by a man named Alfred Andriola, but I again decided this wasn't my thing. My grandmother had encouraged me to be a cartoonist because she felt I couldn't make any money in art. She said, “You might make it as a cartoonist.” I went back to the Art Institute in Chicago and stayed another two years.

GS: Yes.

CBW: One of the most difficult things that an artist is presented with is finding a subject for his talent. It's probably the same with a writer. It was my good fortune, I knew from the very beginning what I wanted to do. I think another thing is kind of like something poet Langston Hughes told me. He said he was made a poet by a little girl in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class who said they wanted to make him the class poet because negroes have rhythm. And Langston Hughes told me, “I don't have any more rhythm than a dog.” But anyway, he said he got his profession chosen for him in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class. So I got my profession, I think, from my fellow students, because being from Oklahoma I had to know Indians, had to know all about Indians, and they'd say, “Tell us about the Indians.”

GS: When you were in Chicago?

CBW: From 1936-1941. I was just an illustrator in Chicago. When I was in New York, I just did everything.

GS: Okay, so they wanted to know about the Indians from the Wild West.

CBW: That's right. Of course, I didn't know anything about the Wild West or Indians. I had just been raised among 13 tribes, and I just thought just [of them] like everybody else, white people or any other nationality. There was such an interest by my fellow students in Chicago from the very beginning, and I was there five years. I came back and I camped with the Indians out at the Powwows and things like that. I ended up marrying an Indian girl, who I thought was the prettiest thing I ever saw in the firelight of the stomp dance. But I did lithograph prints and things like that, which I would sell at a dollar a piece. Now they bring two and three thousand dollars! But at the time, selling them to fellow students for a dollar, I thought boy how long has this been going on? [Laughs.] I really felt like I was in a gold mine. I'd only pull about ten impressions thinking no more people than that would want what I do! Now I realize that my lithographs have truly become my autobiography! I could never write a better one.

GS: So when you began to center your artwork on the Indians of Oklahoma, your artworks were mainly lithographs?

CBW: Yes, because everything else I did were more or less projects of the class, in the still life class and things like that. But the Indians weren't my only subject, because I had the good fortune of parents, and I had good fortune in this Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri corner, and so I had not only the subject matter of the Indians, but I had the cowboys, the farmers, and the miners, you know. I had it all, and that's what I painted because I really think that an artist is important when he records his own time and place! So painting out of a picture of New Mexico from an *Arizona Highways* Magazine, or something, you know just

wasn't my thing at all. Everything I did was regional. And I had a good friend [in Chicago], a fellow I remember named Tex Hammel that I went through the Institute with. He later moved to Florida, but I've kept in touch with him. He was about five or six years older than me. I've had good luck with people, and he would tell me, "Don't, no matter what you're doing up here in Chicago, don't forget where you came from." What wonderful advice! He also did influence things. For example, on Saturdays, when I'd been in school all week and wanted to do nothing maybe or just sit up there and draw (I didn't let a day go by without drawing), he'd say, "No, get up out of that chair, come on, and let's go to the Field Museum and spend the day." Well, we would go there and I, being encouraged by my teachers to sketch and draw and so forth, and would go to the museum, and, of course, I would draw what everybody else would draw, which would be the animals, lots of stuffed animals, sketchbooks full of them. Later, I gave them to the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, but then I began to notice how interesting the people were standing around looking these exhibits. So I soon had sketchbooks full. I admonish myself quite often today about not drawing more people. In Chicago I would draw people in the automat eating, some people eating in such a way that it's as if they were afraid someone was going to steal their food, and others who had sort of a regime of laying all their canes and umbrellas and everything a certain way, placing their silverware a special way. People are very interesting, but kind of strange, and that was wonderful material for my sketchbook. I think people who've known my career have said something that I appreciate very much. I was referred to as "the consummate artist,"

whatever that is, but whatever it means, I'm proud of it! I don't think artists as a rule, maybe there's circumstances that change things, but I don't think artists as a rule hang around together. They might, you know, superficially like to go to the restaurant or go to the bar or something like that, but so far as their work is concerned, almost every artist feels like he or she is the one who has the real key to art, and there is always this kind of, not a jealousy, but just almost a contempt for artists [who see things differently]. Good design is important, because no matter how well you draw or how well you paint or sculpt or whatever, if your design isn't good, then to me it isn't good. You know, just to get far a field from this history, the thing that I'm so aware of is that you can never paint the fragrance of a flower. You can paint the realism of the color and the realism of the shape and the realism of the design, but you can't paint the fragrance of the flower, so quit fooling with that. Paint the things that are possible, and that is design, so consequently I find that extremely important. I appreciate modern art because the modern artists of, not so much today, but for say twenty years ago when they first began to get into abstract, nonobjective things, I'd admired it a great deal because they were working with pure design, pure color, and while I work somewhat realistically, I still resent when people come up to me and say, "Gee, I like your work—it looks like a photograph." [Laughs.] That just offends me something terrible. But art has been almost an obsession with me all my life.

GS: In looking at some of your artworks that I've seen and have admired a great deal, one of the things that has struck me is your treatment of people, of characters that are in art, the people that are featured in the various compositions and to my

untrained and unschooled eye, there is a remarkable fidelity of character or personality that comes through. How is this captured? It stands out in your work. A lot of people that are drawn or painted by other artists don't seem to have the same sense of character or personality that your models do.

CBW: A portrait is more than just a reproduction of a face. However from the beginning, clear back in the early days in school when I would do lithographs, and I did something like two hundred, not a lot at school, but in my career probably over two hundred stones, I've always been aware of a need to impart a message. I believe art should have meaning. I did one print in particular that nobody liked, but now I find it very interesting, and it was a Powwow, but in the background was a Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round. In the foreground the dancers were sitting with a bottle of beer by their side. The Indians didn't like it because of the beer and the white people didn't like it because of the merry-go-round. Most people that look at Indian paintings want their Indians to still be on the prairie riding a pinto pony across the plains, but I think in almost every painting I've done, I've tried to say something about the people. My daughter one time said, "Dad why don't you just do an Indian and don't make a social comment," because most of my Indian paintings have a social comment. I remember one back in the 1930's that was an Indian who was sharpening his plow. I did another painting of an Indian Powwow, and the little boy was dancing, practicing in his costume while the fellows in the background were repairing the car. Always something like that, and as I've said I think it's important to record you time, and my time was not with Indians in war bonnets going across the prairie. I did one just the other day

with two dancers because a man in Jackson, Mississippi, said he wanted something of mine, but he wanted an Indian, so I did these two Indians dancing, and one of them is looking back at the other dancer, and I called it "Competing Dancers." Because it's a competition. It wasn't like dancing to the Great Spirit, they were dancing to best the other fellow. Now this one of the Quapaw, this up here, and that you have a big reproduction of it in the University I think, that fellow actually posed for that, and I did it for a purpose because they wanted me to do something in the Arkansas Capitol in Little Rock, and all they talked about were the Osages, who really were series enemies of the newcomers coming in, whereas the Quapaws looked after the white settlers, and I felt that they needed a good painting of a Quapaw which they didn't have, so I came back and did it. He was my wife's double cousin. Everybody told me he wouldn't pose for me, and he couldn't have been sweeter. He posed for the whole thing. It doesn't make a comment like some of my paintings do, but it's one that I felt sort of an obligation to do, and occasionally I'll do something like that, but it's just like this painting I just finished which has caused much national comment. Every newspaper in the country has reproduced a picture of my painting of Woody Guthrie (who wrote the folk song "This Land is Your Land." "The Folksinger" they call him. But this was my chance to make a comment, and what might interest you, is that I didn't tell anyone what I was doing. The Oklahoma Senate wanted me to do something for them. They have eleven of my paintings in the capitol, but they wanted something else. They wanted a western picture, and I told them that I've done western pictures, and I'm not doing anymore research, and he said, "Well

Charles we'll just take anything you'll do." I can do that. So without telling him—and he left thinking I was going to do an Indian jumping off of a horse onto a buffalo. I had wanted to do Woody Guthrie back at least twenty five years ago, but I couldn't get the material I needed and the cooperation of the family and his friends. How lucky I was that I didn't do it then because I'm so much better now and have a feeling about it, and I think that's the great luck of that painting, but it was my chance to do it. I told the senator [Charles Ford?] when he said, "I don't know if I can get the money for this," after he saw [it], "because you know Woody's controversial." I said, "Well those are the people that do things that are memorable when there was a little controversy." Someone else told him, "Well you said you wanted to paint something controversial, you have now."

[Laughter.] But whatever! So to me art has been more than just color and paint, it's a chance for the artist, like the writer, to say something, and I feel like that was a part of my inspiration as well as my obligation. I took none of the fee, and presented the \$20,000 to the Huntington Disease Society. Woody died of Huntington's Disease, and so did his mother.

GS: Does the objective of saying something, taking the opportunity to say something, work for you a little bit differently in your paintings of contemporary people or scenes as opposed to your historical paintings, the Quapaw painting, for example, that depicts a Quapaw from 1700? You have that Osage trade painting that was set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? Or the painting of Coronado? Does the kind of statement you want to make differ in those two cases between a contemporary subject and a historical one?

CBW: I think in some instance I might relate it in saying that this is a background for now. I don't know that I think those kind of things. They may be important to historians in the future. I don't think they're that important to me. If someone said something about something being important, I might say this is important. Even my painting of the Osage Orator, that was Charlie to me in a costume and he's the man who had the first car in the Osage tribe.

[Tape 1 ends]

[Tape 2 begins]

CBW: I want to tell you that in 1936, I graduated from Miami High School, and I'm telling you this, not out of ego but just to put it on record. I was a student council president. I was an American Legion citizenship medal recipient, and I was *Scholastic* magazine award recipient when I graduated in 1936. I enrolled in the Art Institute of Chicago in 1936. I exhibited the International Watercolor Exhibition in Chicago in 1939. In 1940, I was an Art feature in *Coronet* magazine. And then, in 1940, I moved to New York. In 1941 I got married and illustrated my first book, which was called *The Hill*, and was about gold mining in California. Then, in 1942, I was selected by Thomas Benton for the Associated American Artist Project, [on] lithographs. I moved to New York and lived there for the next two years. I exhibited in the Artist of Victory show at the Metropolitan Museum—one of fifty American artists selected that had done works about patriotism, I guess. I was in *Collier's* Magazine Art feature that year. In 1943, I won first prize in painting at the British Museum. God, how old was I then? Twenty-two, twenty three? And at that time I was writing for the

United States Information Agency, counteracting Japanese propaganda, which I told you about. And I published a paperback book called *The Indians of Eastern Oklahoma*, which I wrote and put together, and it was reissued in 1955 and 1960, and again in the year 2000. I originally sold it for 25 cents, and now it sells for \$10.00 or more. Oh, and by the way, I am very proud of the fact that I wrote an article about Indians in the war, during 1945, which was published in over 100 Sunday newspapers. I had a one-man exhibit in the Smithsonian, and I began teaching art at Northeastern Union College in 1945 also. And I taught there for 15 years. In 1950 I began my series of 50 watercolors, which turned into 100 later. The Ford Motor company magazines. And then I illustrated a book for Jay Frank Dobie's book on Mustangs, which is a history of the American horse. I won the Carr P. Collins award for that in 1953. I spent 3 years illustrating books, including Stephenson's *Treasure Island*, *Geronimo*, *Chisum Trail*, *Peak Massacre*, *Battle of King's Mountain*, and a travel guide for Canada.

GS: If I could just interrupt for a second, Dobie's *History of the Western Horse*, the art that you did for that was kind of—gained some renowned for presenting perspective of the horse, the mustang. How in the world did you do that?

CBW: I tried to think like a horse. What might interest you, I'm thinking how to say this—the Stark Museum in, I think it's Stark, and I've written that wrong. I didn't think about that. Stark Museum in Orange, Texas bought all the originals for that. And a fabulous amount of money. I never would have guessed it. Yeah, that won, the Carr P. Collins award. See my daughter was born in 1954, and she later became Miss Indian Oklahoma and was first recipient of a scholarship to the

University of Arkansas, of an Indian scholarship. I need to talk to you about that. I've won the Joseph Pete Pinnell award at the Library of Congress, 1955. Did a mural for John D. Rockefeller called Rendezvous of the Beaver Trappers for his Teton Lodge in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and the same year illustrated my first Oklahoma state school history book, which was in use for 9 years. In 1957 I did the first of three national Will Rogers calendars for the Gerlach-Barklow company. I did Tom Gilcrease's portrait for the Gilcrease Museum. I retired from teaching in 1960 to devote full time to studio work. I spent the summer with Thomas Hart Benton traveling and sketching on the Santa Fe Trail. I did the portrait that's now in the Oklahoma Cowboy Hall of Fame, the portrait of the Osage Orator. Tom Benton was working on the mural for Truman and got ill with traveling bursitis and couldn't work on the mural. His wife called me from Kansas City. [She said,] "Charles you've been wanting to do a portrait of Tom, now would be a good time." So, I spent that winter doing a portrait of Thomas Hart Benton. I was made a fellow of the International Institute of Art and Letters, Geneva, Switzerland that year. And in 1963, Oklahoma State commissioned me to do life-size portraits of Will Rogers, Sequoya, Senator Robert Kerr, and Jim Thorpe for the State Capital rotunda. I was appointed first honorary Oklahoma state ambassador by Governor Bellman and went to England. Wedgwood commissioned me to design basalt plaques of the American Indians in Staffordshire, England, and the project was overseen by Prince Phillip. NBC did a film about my murals, "Names We Never Knew," and the traveling exhibit of the pureblood drawings that I have been doing since 1936, along in there, began

to tour the country. Murals for the capital were completed, and then NBC did a film “Search for the North American Purebloods,” Tom Snyder interviewed me then. I did Carl Albert, who at that time was speaker of the United States House of Representatives. That, by the way, was my second portrait of him, and I was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1976, received the distinguished service citation, a cap and gown ceremony at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, and was interviewed by Hal Holbrook in 1976 for the television series “Portrait of America.” By the way, Hal Holbrook interviewed me as I stood on top of a chat pile out there in an Oklahoma mining field. That was interesting. In 1979 I did oil portraits of world champion cowboys Jim Shoulders and Tom Ferguson for the Cowboy Hall of Fame, which was commissioned by the R. J. Reynolds Company. I received the Governor’s Arts Award in 1980 at a retrospective exhibit of my work in The Dunagan Museum at Bouvar, Missouri, which was a really good exhibit. Also [there was] a retrospective of my work at Crown Center in Kansas City, Missouri. Oh and the Gilcrease had a huge show, which was the largest attendance of any show they’ve ever had at the Gilcrease in Tulsa—except for the Moran show, Moran outdid me! I finished a painting depicting the life of Will Rogers for the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, and I found that quite interesting because it was on the telephone books all over the state of Oklahoma, and the telephone company told me that it became the most stolen telephone book in the history of the company. People love Will Rogers. [Laughs]

GS: Yes.

CBW: I did the oil portrait of the historian Angie Debo for the capitol rotunda. In 1987, I was given the Lynn Riggs Award for Excellence in the Arts presented by Celeste Holmes, the woman who played Ado Annie in the play "Oklahoma." She came down to do that, which was very flattering to me. I did a life-size bronze of Tom Benton for the Benton Foundation in Kansas City. The book on my lithographs was published in 1989, [and won the] Oklahoma book award. I moved to Fayetteville in 1989 and established a new studio. In 1991, I exhibited paintings and drawings depicting Will Rogers at the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore. In 1994 I did a life size, another life size, of Will Rogers for the memorial. My *Freedom's Warrior* painting in 1995 was commemorating great Indian chiefs, which was to go to the Pentagon, but they never have done anything about it. I think they are pretty busy with Bush's war right now. An entire collection of my drawings became permanent part of the Gilcrease Museum, which precipitated a collection and [created] annual internships for students of Indian ancestry to go on forever at the museum. That was in 1995. [I completed] two large paintings depicting Osage history for the Pillsbury Foundation, St. Louis. My book was reprinted *In Search for the North American Purebloods* and added to. I made a note here, in 1983. I began 18 years of being included in *Whose Who in America* and *Whose Who in American Art*. In 2001, I was named an Oklahoma Treasure at the Governor's Arts Award. I was just saying in 2004, I did a portrait of Woody Guthrie.

GS: That is a great way to cap quite a remarkable career then.

CBW: Well, it does sound that way if you go through it like that, doesn't it?

GS: When you moved here to Fayetteville in 1989, you didn't bring your lithograph here with you, did you?

CBW: I did lithographs here, yes, I did.

GS: Okay.

CBW: But I had them printed in Chicago, whereas prior to that time, I printed them myself in Oklahoma.

GS: In your studio in Oklahoma?

CBW: In my studio, and I gave all the equipment for that to the, was it the Tahlequah, Tahlequah, is it now a university or is it still a college?

GS: It's a University now. Now, is the equipment still in use there?

CBW: It's going to be used, but I gave it to them, you know, way back in 1990, and they have never done anything about it. But there is a young boy who was a previous student at the University of Arkansas who was over there as a teacher and he wants to put in a lithography department.

GS: Okay.

CBW: And I told him that I would, without any charge to him, come over and spend however long it took to get them set up, and I would show them how to arrange things as well as how to do it. I've heard nothing from them.

GS: Is that becoming something of a lost art?

CBW: I don't think I would consider it a lost art, but it's not as big a thing as it was back in the 1940's when they had the Associated American Artists. It was Thomas Hart Benton who had seen my work and gotten me involved and in it, and so I did, I think four lithographs for them. But they didn't pay me as much as I

thought they should, so I didn't do anymore for them. I did a couple of very famous ones, one called *Ozark Summer*, and one *Ozark Winter*, or *Ozark Snow*. But the things that I've been doing in more recent years have been, in some cases paintings from old lithographs that I liked, but I still have an inclination and enjoyment of doing paintings that make a comment, whether it's a historical comment or a social comment. For example, I did one, an Indian standing in front of a car filled with hay, cows eating the hay. He's standing there with a pitchfork in bull rolls. He was very, very poor, and I titled it *The Citizen*. They took his land, they took his heritage, they took his way of life and in 1924 they made him a citizen. And so that's a comment.

GS: Right.

CBW: And then I did another one that was purchased by Oklahoma for the Senate Chamber, where they meet and have a drink I guess. But anyway, it's one called *Tribal Honor*, and that's a painting (which is a lithograph I did later as a painting) of a politician getting a war bonnet from an Indian in a war bonnet and all the tribes watching. And I did one old man that delights me, and he's looking up at him very skeptical, and he is looking at this politician, his long white hair, and a typical caricature of a politician, and I'm sure that the old Indian is thinking, "but I still don't like that old white rascal." And I'm doing one right now that you might think of as a comment. It is, in fact. But I've done a big painting of a man with his rooster, and I call it *Walt's Pride*.

GS: Right.

CBW: But this one, the man in overalls, slumped down in a chair and he's holding his rooster up, and I titled that one *Oklahoma Outlaws* because they've outlawed rooster fighting in Oklahoma, which I think is so ridiculous when you think of the thousands of chickens that they raise under horrible circumstances.

GS: What is your of the impact that your artwork has had on American Indians today and Indian and white relationships?

CBW: I really don't think it's had any impact at all. I do think that it stirred up a little thought because I coined the word "pureblood" in this relationship, and of course some people quoted, what do they call it? Thoroughbred or something like that. But because I've had some, I've seen it where people talk about him being a pureblood, which I think is important because the Indians have been encouraged to think about their beadwork and their dances and their music and all that. And nothing really continues the heritage of the Indian like those old purebloods, and so that is one of the reasons I thought they should be recorded because they are getting scarce. I went to some tribes that had no purebloods at all. The Winebagos had purebred left. Well there's one, our tribe has one pureblood, and that old man didn't want to pose for me. And he's the one that I had to move his television, and he didn't like that at all. He had had a stroke on one side, I painted the other, drew the other side, and I went back home, and I thought why did I do that? Why didn't I draw him like he was. So I went back again and drew him with the paralysis on the one side. So I drew them like they were. Some people tell me—they'll say, "Well I didn't like some of your Indians." Some are really good and some are not so good. I said some of my models are not so good

because I just draw what I see, and I don't try to make them any better or any worse. There were a couple of instances drawing the purebloods that I recall. There was the man that I went clear to Redrock four times before he'd ever pose for me, because he had been a magnificent Indian dressed in white buckskin, big war bonnet, was selected in Texas as the most typical American Indian, and he got old. He was 84 years old, and he, he'd had a rough life and he looked every bit of it. And he was not proud of the way he looked, and he didn't want to pose for that. [It took] four trips to Redrock, and a trip to Redrock is like going from here to the moon. I remember having to wait an hour and a half for the darn train to get out of the way so I could get across the tracks with the bell ringing all the time. One interesting story about drawing one of the Indians, was he didn't want people to see that he was posing for me, so his white wife took him over to another house they owned and he posed for me in a little room that had a skylight. He was thinking probably that he was posing for a photographer and shouldn't move. He sat there without blinking, that bright light coming in. A little bit later, I had almost finished the drawing, and I noticed him just kind of slipping down in the chair. I said, "Would you like to rest?" He said, "I think I would," and he just fainted dead away on the floor. And I thought, "I've killed the last Delaware." [laughs.] Well he came to, but he turned kind of blue and Indians when their red blood goes out, turning kind of grey, and I thought, "Oh my God, I've killed the last Delaware." Well, he came to. But I had an Indian friend I was telling this story to, and he said, "Charles, I know you, and I know you were sitting there thinking, how am I going to prop him up until I finish this painting?" [Laughter.]

But, anyway, every drawing that I've done has been an experience; it has a story behind it. So, that's the great fun that I've had out of my profession. It's been a lot of fun. It's been a lot of work too, but once you get over with it—it's kind of like a woman having a baby. I once told an old country woman, finishing this painting is just like having a baby. And she looked at me real tough, and said, "How many babies have you had?" So, I don't say that anymore. [Laughs.] But it is painful, I mean certain things about it. But I go to the easel every morning anticipating that it's going to be fun, and when I don't have a painting on the easel, it's disappointing. But I remember when the University of Oklahoma reconstructed my studio in a corner up there, and had one of my old paintings there, the *Daily Oklahoman* came out with a little story saying he didn't finish this one because he died. I was just here about a year when this came out, and my friends all over thought, "My God Charles has died." So I wrote to the *Oklahoman* and I said look, "I will never die with a painting unfinished." And so I'm anxious to get to that next one every time just hedging my bet a little. But I tell people some people may not like the work I do. I'm sure there are artists that don't like what I do, but, and I've never been any good influence on art but I tell them you may not like what I do, but remember, I had a hell of a good time doing it. I don't know much else I can tell you.

GS: Okay. Well, that sounds like an excellent place to stop then.

CBW: I think so.

GS: Thank you so much. I'm sure that...

CBW: Being we read the resume, don't you think that that probably got everything.

GS: I think so.

CBW: I think I was looking through here on all these so-called famous people but I don't really think that has much to do with what they want.

GS: No, this is great. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]