THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **EILEEN BOWSER (EB)**

INTERVIEWER: **RON MAGLIOZZI (RM)**

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

RM: There are four broad areas that I'd like to touch on. One, your personal goals and experiences; two, how the Film Library functioned in all of its capacities; three, the Film Library in the context of The Museum of Modern Art as a whole; and four, the Film Library in the context of the New York film community and the International Film Archives. Those are four very large topics, and I'd like to start, as most oral histories do, with your personal history, your parents, your siblings, your birth, upbringing, education, formative influences.

EB: I don't know if you've seen that article that I did for *Film Historia* [Barcelona, Spain, Vol.II, No.3 (1992): p.245-257], which gives some biography. Not to repeat myself too much.

RM: I do have that.

EB: So you know that I was born in Ohio on January 18, 1928, and in a large family. I was the youngest. Went to college there at Marietta College on the Ohio River, where I met my future husband, Bill Bowser. We got married right out of college. We came to New York for about a year and a half or so to earn some money because we intended to go to graduate school. And then we went to Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina, to get our master's degrees.

RM: What were you studying?

EB: In my undergraduate school, it was English major, Art minor. In graduate school it was Art History major and English minor. And it was there that I decided that I really wanted to work in an art museum. So we came to New York and I went around to all of the big art museums and applied, and nobody had an opening immediately.

RM: What year was this?

EB: The fall of 1953. So I took a temporary office job for about six weeks, I think, and The Museum of Modern Art was the first one, indeed the only one, to respond. And so there I went off very happily. But they gave me only part time jobs at first. I worked in different departments. I was in Membership. I was in Publication Sales. I worked for a while as assistant to the director of the Museum's secretary and one part time job I had was for a settlement house a couple blocks away in which one of the people at the Museum had an interest. I quit that job because I realized I was never going to get a full time job at the Museum as long as they could keep me in that other spot, so I quit and the next day I went to Personnel and they did find full time work for me. At the end of 1954, a year and a couple of months later, I got the job in the Film department, because the then curator, Richard Griffith, needed a secretary. [Note: Griffith was Assistant to the Curator of the Film Library, 1940-1942; Assistant to the Director, Film Library, 1949-1951; Curator, Film Library, 1951-1965.] I wasn't a real secretary because I didn't do shorthand, but fortunately, he didn't need someone to take dictation. He wrote everything that he wrote on the typewriter himself. Then I just retyped it.

RM: So you came to the Film department with no particular interest in film?

EB: Yes, and no particular knowledge, no particular experience. I didn't go to movies when I was young, or very little, because it was the Depression. It was a large family. We lived in the country. If we went to the movies, we all had to go, so it might happen once a year. Except there were free screenings in the summertime when I was a very little girl, in a public park. And mostly what I can remember is that they were grade B westerns that had probably run their course.

But anyway, we got to see them for free, and I can certainly remember watching the horses and the cowboys.

RM: Do you recall what the first film you saw was, or any film, that made an impression on you?

EB: The earliest one I saw that I remember was *The Little Colonel* with Shirley Temple. The neighbors took me, and the reason that they took me was they were giving away free paper dolls, and the reason that I remember that movie is, of course, I had the paper dolls for years after with the costumes. And when I saw *The Little Colonel* again, after I came to the Museum, because it happened to be in the collection, I found all I did remember were the costumes, the dresses that little Shirley wore. But I didn't go much, maybe a little bit more after I got to college and was dating. But it was quite by chance that I fell into films and fell in love with film, of course.

RM: So you had no preparation for work in films.

EB: No, I brought an art historical background to the history of the movies. So actually, I found it very useful.

RM: When you were studying art did you study any particular period?

EB: Yes, my master's thesis was on the paintings of Tintoretto in the Scuola de San Rocco, but I did take courses in modern art, as well. It was a fairly good education, I would say, at that particular time. We went to North Carolina because it had a great reputation for drama and playwriting, and that's what interested my husband Bill. But by the time we got there, the people that made that reputation were gone, and I was much more fortunate in my experience there than he was.

RM: So when Richard Griffith hired you, he wasn't looking for someone that had an expertise in film? I imagine that there weren't a lot of people who were experts in film.

EB: Well that's for certain. There were no film courses in those days, much less so a degree program in film. People came from other backgrounds. Of course, many of them came as fans of film. Dick Griffith had been there almost from the beginning, right out of college, because he was in contact with Iris Barry while he was still in school and arranged some of the very first screenings of the Museum's films. At Haverford. So that was how he got to know her and got hired as her assistant. [Note: Iris Sylvia Barry was Librarian, Library, 1932-1935; Curator, Film Library, 1935-1946; Director, Film Library, 1936-1950.]

RM: When you came into the department, did you have a sense that there was a community there in the department? I'm thinking of people who worked there, with whom Griffith had day-to-day contact. I know he communicated with people like Arthur Knight [Note: Arthur Rosenheimer, Jr., who took the name Knight after he left the Museum, was Assistant Curator, Film Library, 1939-1949.] and those kind of people. Were they around? Were you exposed to a group of people?

EB: Well, yes. That's certainly where I met Jay Leyda, who came in in the '50s, when he was working on the *Que Viva Mexico* film project. [Note: Leyda worked in the Film Library from fall 1936 through spring 1940.] Charles Laughton, I didn't, so to say, meet, but he had come in and looked at films in preparation for making *Night of the Hunter*. And the Gishes came in. Muriel Rukeyser was a friend of Dick's. I didn't get to know her. I met her. I met a lot of people but getting to know them was something else. Herman Weinberg, of course, came in. What happened was, really how I met a lot of the film people was that there were two guys who were at the Museum when I came, John Adams was an assistant to Richard Griffith, and Chris Bishop was working in Circulation for Margareta Akermark. [Note: Akermark headed the Circulating Film Program from its inception in the 1940s until the mid- 1960s when she was named Associate Director of the Film Library, a post she held until her retirement in 1978. Bishop and Adams held

various administrative positions in the mid to late 1950s.] Chris Bishop was the son of the poet, John Peale Bishop, I think was his name, and he and John Adams had been friends, had met at this high class psychiatric institute. Everybody would know the name if I could think of it. [Note: Austen Riggs.] Dick Griffith went there later trying to cure his alcoholism. Anyway, they were good friends and I liked them enormously, and we got together and decided that what we really needed to do was to get to know the collection. We wanted to start a real catalogue. When I came the catalogue consisted only of some little 3x5 cards with maybe the name of the film and the director and a couple of stars. There was an inventory system that was done at the vaults, but a catalogue, no, it didn't really exist. So we started with the idea of looking at everything, but to find time to do that. . . We used to do it on Saturday mornings, for which we weren't paid, of course. This was a voluntary activity, and in order to have a projectionist come in on Saturday, we raised the money by organizing a small group of people that paid a very small amount, just enough to cover the cost of the projectionist, and it was called "The Saturday Morning Film Series". It was upstairs in a small screening room. It wasn't in the big theater.

RM: Right. Fourth floor?

EB: Yes.

RM: Do you recall who was in that group?

EB: Well, some of them later became quite famous. One I remember was Ed Gorey, you know who he is, and Susan Sontag. They were both little known then. Susan Sontag had her little son with her and I remember that some of the other members of the group were a bit irritated because he was so young. But actually, she made him be quiet, pretty much. The others were all people that went on to work in film, and I think you know all of their names because they were all mentioned in that Charlie Turner article [Magliozzi, Romald S. "Witnessing the Development of Independent Film Culture in New York: an

Interview with Charles Turner." *Film History*. Vol.12, No.1 (2000): p.72-96], a lot of those people.

RM: How did you contact these people? Was there a New York film community out there?

EB: Well, there were always the ardent fans, the ones that sit in the front few rows at the Museum screenings. As a matter of fact, Chris Bishop invented a name for them that went into the language. We called them "friends of old film" or "foofs". We even had a button printed up. And I read that later in print, so I know that other people took up that name at that time.

RM: You had a button printed up with that on it?

EB: Yes, it said "Foof".

RM: I hope you find one of those here someplace.

EB: I think I've still got. . . [walking away and returning] Here's a "foof" button.

RM: Oh, that's fabulous. That's great.

EB: I think it's the only one I have.

RM: Well, will it to me, please. Or to the department. I'd love to have it. I've been through the Christopher Bishop file, and so I know that you were a good friend of his. You had lots of joking going back and forth. You had nicknames for each other. You almost never addressed each other by your real names.

EB: I saved up the memos. I tried to trace somebody through the files because there's all of this memo exchange about the work going on that goes into different subjects, but I really, especially after he died, tried to gather Chris's

together in that file, because I thought he was very witty. I always enjoyed him. He had a good time.

RM: Yes. I gather he was a troubled person, however.

EB: Yes, he was. He left after a while and I think he worked at the San Francisco Museum for a while and then he was coming to New York for the first New York Film Festival if not a very early one, and stayed in a hotel room then set himself afire, I suppose, having drunk too much and sitting in a chair with a cigarette. Something like that. He died very young. It was very sad.

RM: Was he in his twenties when you were doing the Saturday morning screenings?

EB: Probably.

RM: And John Adams as well?

EB: Yes.

RM: What happened to John Adams? He's another person who seems to have disappeared?

EB: He was a really nice, friendly guy. He did shows at the Museum. Henri Langlois offered him a job in Paris, so he got permission to go, like for a year or something. [Note: Henri Langlois was co-founder and director of the Cinémathèque Francaise.] But I think Griffith made it a condition that he should finish work on some show he was doing. Which he didn't get done. So Richard Griffith said, "OK, you can't come back." And then John left, after working his year in the Cinémathèque, he left the profession. He went back to school and became an anthropologist, and I think he is still teaching somewhere in one of the southern universities. I actually saw an anthropological journal with some articles with the name John Adams, but I couldn't be sure it was him because it's such a common name.

RM: Yes. He's someone I'd love to get in touch with.

EB: Yes, I know. I would, too. He called me once, years after, at the Museum, and said he was in town for something and he'd like to come over. I said, "Great, great," and he didn't show up. I remember, we never did get together.

RM: Well if you ever find those, if you give me the leads I'll be happy to follow them up.

EB: I'll have to look. I think those journals are in the bookstore. They probably haven't sold. I'll look and see what university that John Adams was from. I'm not positive it was him, of course, but I think it was likely him.

RM: Could you describe the day-to-day dynamic of the department when you first got there? I mean, who was on the staff and what they were doing.

EB: It was very small, of course, when I came. Dick Griffith was the whole thing, both the administrator and curatorial, and that means all aspects of curatorial, the collection and the programming, and everything. Margareta Akermark was there running circulation, and she was at that job a long time. And at that time she had more staff under her because the films were processed at the Museum, the shipping and the checking and the repairs and all of that. Later they farmed that out. So there was a fairly sizeable staff.

RM: They were still circulating 35 [mm] in the '50s?

EB: No, I believe, if I'm correct, it was in 16 [mm] then. It was getting too costly to send out 35 [mm].

RM: So did she have a staff of four or five people, you think?

EB: Something like that, yes.

RM: Was there a preservation officer?

EB: No, there was a technical person. And I'm trying to remember if it was Olga Gramaglia when I came. For many years it was Olga. [Note: Gramaglia was employed in the Film Library from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950's as Technical Assistant, then Technical Supervisor.]

RM: Olga replaced Edward Kerns?

EB: I think so. I never knew Edward Kerns. [Note: Edward F. Kerns was the first Technical Director, Film Library, 1930s through the late 1940s.]

RM: You didn't know any of the. . . I mean, Iris Barry had left, and Allen Porter was somewhere in the Museum, I think, still. [Note: Porter was Exhibition and Circulation Director, Film Library in the 1940s, then became Assistant Secretary of the Museum].

EB: He was in the Museum, not in the department. My best memory of him was when there was a showing of Yugoslav films and there was a reception arranged with Yugoslav people, and for some reason people were away and I got stuck with being the hostess, although I hadn't arranged the show or anything. And I remember dear old Allen coming in the door of the party and having a great old time and talking to everybody. He was such a social person. At one point, he leaned over and whispered in my ear, "What is this party in aid of?" He just really didn't know why he was there. He was really fantastic that way. But yes, the department was quite small.

RM: Just Griffith and you and Margareta and her staff?

EB: Yes, and when I first just started, John Adams and I shared an office, but of course, within a couple of years he was gone and Chris was gone. So there was Margareta with hers, and as long as I can remember, the inspection and care of

the films was in a basement room, not among the offices. And we stored our films in Long Island City with Bonded at that time. A terrible place. And we had only one person at the vaults who was responsible for everything. I had, of course, no technical knowledge at all, it only came very gradually for me. I can't say that I'm a great expert now, but anyway, I learned something. We never had. . . After Olga, there were several people that weren't really experts, either. The first time our preservation program really got on its feet was when Peter Williamson came along. [Note: Williamson started as Lab Coordinator around 1980, he is currently Film Conservation Manager, Dept. of Film.] He was the kind of guy, if he wasn't an expert at first, he found out pretty quickly. He soon was teaching me. That was when we really started to do quality preservation work. But I must say that, in the years before, we had the great good luck of doing a lot of our work at Movielab [Inc.], and at that time the head of Movielab, I had no idea, but he took our work himself and didn't farm it out, because he loved what the Museum was doing. And he was a great expert, also.

RM: Do you know his name? I'm sure there's correspondence.

EB: Yes, or Peter will tell you. [Note: Frank Berman.] Because he taught Peter a lot. After he retired, he came as a volunteer for what was too short a time, sitting in on the screenings when the films came back from the lab and explaining what was wrong, what could be done better, what they could do differently.

RM: When was this?

EB: That was when Peter was there, when he was just new, still a volunteer. And of course, Peter sat in on those screenings. We all learned a lot, but especially Peter. Unfortunately, he died, Frank -- the name will come to me. That's what happens at my age. I have a five to fifteen minute time delay on all of the names.

RM: So you got the chance to do everything, it seems. Chris Bishop and John Adams and you sat in on these screenings. Obviously, Griffith was accommodating? No restrictions?

EB: He was really a fantastic boss for letting you do what you wanted to do and never saying, "That's not your work; you can't do that." Maybe he wasn't the best administrator in the world, but he was the best boss I ever had for -- how shall I say? -- not only encouraging you, but taking for granted you were capable of doing things. When I first became his secretary, I went into his office and he said, "Yes?" And I said, "Well, I need something to do." And he said, "Well, you know, you can fill my desk calendar." It was the beginning of the year. Then shortly, he went off on a trip somewhere. I truly hadn't been given any tasks, so then I just sat and read the files, and that's when I learned what the work was all about. [Laughing] I read all of the correspondence files, endlessly. And then he came back and started working on the Sam Goldwyn show, and did give me an assignment to go through the Moving Picture Worlds to see what I could find, all of the facts and resources on Goldwyn's career. [Note: MoMA Film Exh., *A Producer's Work: The Films of Samuel Goldwyn*, February 13-July 22, 1956.] You can still find my work I did on that in the files. In fact, finally, he said to John -- by this time I was over in the Public Library looking at the *Moving Picture Worlds* we didn't have -- "Pull her off it, will you? She's gone far enough." [Laughter] So John told me this ended my work on that project. And that's where I really learned to love the research and reading about films. As you know from the dedication in my book, I'm still reading *Moving Picture World*.

RM: So you obviously didn't come in to the department and they didn't say to you, "Our mandate is to circulate films and we also do preservation work and we also do exhibition program." You said, he was doing everything, Griffith was.

EB: He was, yes. Even when it came to the circulating catalogue, he's the one who wrote those notes to go with the films.

RM: Did he speak of Iris Barry at all? S she was still alive at that time. Did you have contact with her?

EB: He corresponded with her constantly, and with Paul Rotha. And those two correspondences he kept in his desk drawer instead of handing them over to me to file. And when he left, he took them with him. They were obviously very personal to him. As you know, they more or less disappeared.

RM: That's a shame.

EB: I was so hoping that Iris's papers would uncover some of that, but they didn't.

RM: So you have no notion of what the correspondence was about?

EB: Well, certainly about work. They talked about acquisitions and programs and so on. And she was our contact with FIAF [Note: Federation International des Archives du Film/International Federation of Film Archives.] He seldom went to FIAF. He didn't like to travel. And so, of course, she kept him up to date on that. It's like she never left, I think, for him.

RM: Did you speak to her?

EB: Only once. She came back. I had done that update on her D. W. Griffith book, but not with any contact with her. And she had to come back to the States to keep her passport, because she had an American passport. So she came once on a short trip. And she was around the department. I spent three days arranging appointments for her, anything she wanted to do. And one day, the phone rang in my office, I was standing in Margareta's office, two or three of us were standing talking about something. She was in my office and she just automatically picked up the phone, with the whole bunch of us all there. [Laughing] And then she came in and she said, "Is there an Eileen Bowser?" And she looked right over my head. She still didn't know who I was after three days. [Laughter] So, no, we weren't acquainted. [Laughter] That was our total experience, although, I heard a lot about her from other people who had worked with her. One person, I wonder if she is still alive, is Pearl Moeller. Have we talked about that? [Note: Pearl Moeller was Secretary, Film Library, 1941-1944;

Assistant, Museum Library, 1944-1959; Supervisor, Dept. of Right and Reproductions, 1959-1969; Special Collections Librarian, Library, 1969-1981.]

RM: No.

EB: She was the Librarian until she retired many years ago, and I worked for her, briefly. But she had been in the Film department, and so she could talk about the days when every afternoon ended up in a sherry party or something. Or, that was the impression she gave me. Maybe it was just tea, but it all sounded a little more leisurely. We all were entitled, the workers were entitled to take our fifteen minute breaks and go and have coffee in the penthouse, things like that. I did it all the time. It was somehow a little more genteel in those days.

RM: How often fifteen minute breaks?

EB: Every day, you were supposed to be able to go in the afternoon.

RM: They gave you the coffee? The coffee was free?

EB: No.

RM: Could you discuss: Richard Griffith was an alcoholic, and I would assume that that would have had a negative impact on the way the department functioned, particularly when he was having problems. Margareta told Rachel Gallagher, before she died, that he would come back from lunch so intoxicated she would lock his door so he couldn't get in his office, and he would go home. I don't know how true that is. [Note: Gallagher was Assistant to the Director, Film Library 1984- 1998.]

EB: I don't know. I can only say I never saw any of that. The most I ever saw him in his cups was at a Christmas party, when anybody might be. No, I never saw that. I know he had a tendency to forget about appointments, not show up for appointments, and I suppose that was a symptom, but I didn't really recognize it

for that. I thought of him as an absent-minded person, his thinking was in the clouds. No, I never saw that. And after he was gone from the Museum, he showed up one day. When Willard Van Dyke was there we were sitting in Dick's old office and he showed up and stuck his head in the door, and then you could see the full-blown alcoholic. [Note: Van Dyke was Director, Dept. of Film, 1965-1974]. His face was all red, flushed. But that was the first time I ever saw him in that condition. And somehow, I can remember going to look for him when he didn't show up for an appointment, and knowing to look in the Dorset bar, but I didn't find him looking drunk, to my eyes. I was innocent, I suppose. Actually, when he did his work he was so brilliant, to my mind, that it was fine with me. I didn't worry too much about his tendency to occasionally forget an appointment.

RM: I wanted to ask you what you thought of the Museum's film collection when you first came there, but obviously, you only slowly came to appreciate what was there.

EB: I got my film education from that collection, and I don't know how I could have gotten a better one at a university because I think it was such a rich collection already, even though it was comparatively small in those days. But I had to look at the films, I was trying to get them catalogued. Well, in those days I went to every screening that we had. They didn't change the films so frequently.

RM: And Griffith did all of the programming? Margareta didn't do programming at this point?

EB: No.

RM: You weren't doing any.

EB: I wasn't doing any when I started. John Adams did the occasional program. And the schedule was quite different. We would show a film for several days, and the films were mostly shown in a really organized way. We were showing the work of a genre or company or director, and there were program notes in most cases.

When I started it was expected there would be a booklet, a publication, that the Museum itself would publish in most cases.

RM: For every program, every show.

EB: Yes. Any one of any importance. Of course, there were fillers and there were the straight showing films in the collection kind of shows. But for every important show there was supposed to be a publication, and the show would go on for six months or more. They were very thorough. I think they're starting to come back to this now: I was reading the minutes of the last FIAF meeting and the symposium, and it looks to me that similar ideas are now returning. After Richard Griffith it changed very quickly to the style of what Henri Langlois was doing at that time, which is to show everything in quantity and with fast changes. And that certainly had its advantages; I'm not putting it down, but I very much respected the other way of doing it, which was much more selective, thoughtful, and had a much more intellectual basis than the programming that came after. Both methods are good because if the Museum is an educator, then you take its point of view, its view of film history and so on. And the other kind of program allows the spectators to make some discoveries of their own. They're not being told what's important and what's not. So that's why I say there are advantages to both.

RM: When the Museum started, a lot of the funding they got to found the department was based on the idea they were going to provide an educational service and certainly the film program was part of that educational outreach. I suppose the programming, exhibitions, were a part of that as well. Program notes certainly were a part of that.

EB: Circulation was indeed our first method of showing films, because we didn't have a theater. So that was the very first way of showing films. The films hadn't been available in movie houses. A film would show for one or two years at most and then just disappear.

RM: When you came to the Museum, it seems as if the exhibitions and the circulating film program were the two mandates that were being met most aggressively, and the preservation aspect and the cataloguing of the collection, the archive aspect of it, was not being addressed.

EB: Well, it was always minor because it was behind the Museum scenes, and it was a Museum tradition, probably not only at The Museum of Modern Art, that the most important work was the exhibition. The whole Museum was about exhibition. That was the prestigious work. That's the one that got the press attention, and so on. But of course, behind the scenes, none of that would be possible without the archival work. That's what I could see after I was there for a time.

RM: Based on my reading of the files or what I've done cataloguing similar documents, I've gotten the impression that when the department was founded, there was an initial, very aggressive period of collecting films, there was publicity about the collection being built, and the collection grew for a relatively brief period, from 1935 to 1941 or so, and then it seems to me as if the department, Iris, had to face a serious funding crisis. I call it a crisis. Obviously, they suddenly realized: we have all of this material and we don't have funding for its storage or its preservation. And that the collection -- I don't know, I may be wrong -- kind of stood still. There was a kind of decline. I think deaccessioning went on. Things were lost. I wonder if my impression is correct. You did come in right at the point where you had to address this.

EB: There certainly was a slowing down. There was the principle that the collection should be highly selective, and that was something that I think eventually, when I had more power, I changed. It was less restricted in my day. But, yes, you had to be selective, and the collection wasn't to be so big, it was to be the best, definitely. And then, of course, you ran into the problems of owners of films not wanting to cooperate and a lack of funding, certainly. It was the beginning of the worry about the nitrate disappearing, that everything was going to deteriorate. Dick Griffith would say that he felt that he had become a curator of a collection

that was disappearing under his hands, and that's what kept him awake nights. And he did work really hard at fundraising, but it just took years to raise consciousness about that, and the really big funds didn't come until finally the National Endowment for the Arts. It was when Willard, I think, came in as Director, not Dick, that the trustees were convinced to put up that first sum, I think $650,000, towards the preservation of the film collection. So that was quite an achievement.

RM: In the 1960s, then?

EB: Yes.

RM: Before that, the funding would have come. . . I assume it originally came from the Rockefellers and [John Hay] Whitney.

EB: Yes, Whitney put in money, and there were film showing benefits, but the benefits only earned pennies compared to the cost of saving the films.

RM: There was a film preservation fund started, and I think Adams was involved in that. Was it still ongoing when you came?

EB: It was, I think, being started in my time. Not that I did it. I was still just a secretary. But there was a pamphlet. There were a lot of fundraising campaigns, more than one.

RM: And you're saying they didn't net.

EB: It didn't net big enough money. It could save a couple of films a year, and that was just far too slow. So then, fortunately, I got responsibility at just the time that the money came in. I had to deal with the spending of that money on the collections, decide where it should go, and so on. My first task was the big important names like Griffith. We had the D. W. Griffith collection, the Biograph collection. In the beginning we never dreamed we'd be able to save all that we

had, so you'd start with the most important things. Every archivist probably does this. But the problem is, you're just learning how to do it. So after you have all of the experience, years later you find that sometimes you have to go back and do those over. So we've done a lot of that in recent years.

RM: All of the material with the Griffith collection, the Biographs and Edisons were there when you came in the '50s?

EB: Yes, they were. Well, maybe an odd or two missing ones we're succeeding in finding, as you know, in Russia, Czechoslovakia, and places like that. We've filled in a few gaps, but they were basically there. The Fairbanks collection, too. The William S. Hart collection.

RM: Was the department still collecting when you came in, do you recall?

EB: Yes, oh yes, there were new acquisitions every year. It's just that they were not huge acquisitions. We never succeeded, for example, in getting a big studio to turn over their nitrate, like we did later. Conditions weren't right for them to do that then. It was not really the fault of anybody working there, it just didn't happen until television needed material and everything was being copied on video. And then, even later on if they wanted to junk their nitrate they could no longer do so without spending a lot of money, for environmental reasons. A lot of things like this caused the studios finally to begin to see that they should let the archives take responsibility.

RM: Griffith left in '68 or '69, or is that when he died?

EB: I think that's when he died. I think it was '65. [Note: Griffith died in an automobile accident in 1969.]

RM: Is that when you got a change of position? I heard you already had.

EB: Well, I had already become curatorial assistant and I can't remember for sure whether I had made assistant curator by that time, but I was rising up, very slowly, because I never asked for a new title or an increase. I just never did, it never occurred to me. I just wasn't the type to do that. But anyway, no matter, that's beside the point. The year that he left, they searched for a director but they didn't hire anybody right away, and they made me responsible for all of the curatorial matters, and Margareta was responsible for all of the administrative matters. And we did that for a year. That is, we were responsible under, in my case, Alfred Barr. [Note: Alfred H. Barr Jr., was Director of the Museum, 1929-1943; Director of Research in Painting and Sculpture, 1944-1947; Director of Museum Collections, 1947-1967.] But he never did much supervision. He looked over some exhibition labels I did, and things like that. But I considered myself very privileged to know Alfred Barr, of course. He was the kind of guy, if you were walking through the halls, he'd have an acquisition he was considering up on the wall at the end of the hall, and he would ask your opinion about it. It didn't matter who you were.

RM: On the fourth floor, you mean?

EB: No, fifth floor was where they were then, I guess. I can't remember. Anyway, it didn't matter, if you walked those halls, you could very well be asked by Alfred Barr what you thought, no matter who you were. It was really great. He was just willing to talk to everybody about these kinds of things. But anyway, for a whole year I had to do all of the curatorial work, but in the end what I found was that all of the curatorial work really meant that all I could do was programming because that absorbed all of my time. There was always a deadline to meet with programming. So when it came to that end of the year and we hired Willard Van Dyke for our new director and we decided we'd split off, and I was asked which I wanted to do, and I chose the more archival half of it, caring for the collection.

RM: You had the choice between the archive and exhibitions?

EB: Between that and doing exhibitions. Adrienne [Mancia] was there by then. [Note: Mancia was Curatorial Assistant, Assistant Curator and Curator, Film Dept. from the mid 1960s through 1996.] I had hired her as a secretary to Dick Griffith and he left very soon after that. So she was given responsibility for programming and me for the Archive. But that was my choice and I've never been sorry about that. Of course, I did some exhibitions later, as you know. But I didn't have the daily responsibility. I could concentrate more on acquisition.

RM: Did Adrienne come in with, as you did, without any particular film experience.

EB: She had just a little bit more than mine. She had worked for one of the film distribution companies. She was a born programmer. She was a terrible secretary but she was born to program.

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

RM: I'd like for you to speak for a minute about, and you can speak to this in terns of your whole tenure at the Museum, the Film department in the context of the Museum as a whole, and the way it was regarded. Frankly, there's always been the issue of its being a stepchild to the other arts, and as late as this week, I got a call from a library saying, "We have a space problem, can we send all of the film books off-site?" If there's one department that can get second-rate treatment, it should be us, we should be willing to step aside. And, of course, I made a fuss about it. I wonder if we could just speak about that through the whole history.

EB: I know that in the beginning, Alfred Barr was indeed instrumental in there being a Film department, that he had planned to have one even before the Museum opened, although it took him some years to do because he had to convince the trustees that films were worthy of collecting. I think that notion still continued after Alfred, there were people in the arts who still didn't understand and still

thought of film as something where we can show films about the works of art. I didn't have, in most of my time there, I didn't have a very active connection with the rest of the Museum, so there was that aspect to it. It was the aspect of film that it takes time to look at. I could go in a gallery and look for a couple of minutes and I've seen a painting. It might, of course, bear further study, but at least I've seen it. But people wouldn't take the time, who are not in the department, to really look at the films. You know that when works of art are acquired by the Museum, they have to pass through a Museum review committee. In all of the time I was there, I just reported the acquisitions. No one wanted to discuss them. We always gave an open invitation to come and look at what we were acquiring, but there was never any decision from a trustee committee as to whether or not we could acquire things because they hadn't seen them. You couldn't set them down in a room and trot a picture in front of them like the painting department could. So yes, we were always different, so it wasn't only the attitude towards film as a stepchild, it was there because of differences in so many aspects of our work. We had to store them off-site. We had to run them through a projector before the public or anybody could see them. And I think that contributed partly toward isolation from the rest of the Museum and what they were doing. And I must say, I had very little contact with other people there once I was involved in the film department work, and I'm glad to see that there's more contact these days. More joint exhibitions, for example, which I always loved doing and was interested in. The *Art of the Twenties* show was a lot of fun and I got to do the film section of that. [Note: MoMA Exh.#1277, November 14, 1979-January 22, 1980; MoMA Film Exh., *Art of the Twenties: Films from the Archives*, December 3, 1979-January 27, 1980.] When I left, Kirk Varnedoe and I and Peter [Galassi] were working on a three-department show. [Note: Varnedoe was Adjunct Curator, 1985, appointed Director, and later, Chief Curator, Dept. of Painting and Sculpture, 1988-2002; Galassi was Associate Curator, 1981-1986; Curator, 1986-1991; Director, and later, Chief Curator, Dept. of Photography, 1991-present.] It never came off but I left about that time anyway. But I think it's really taking advantage of the Museum's riches to do those joint shows and there is room for a lot more, and I'm glad to see that there's an interest now in doing more of it.

RM: Well, Mary Lea is, of course, much more politically active in the Museum as a whole, and I think one of the results of that is that there are more of these kinds of shows. [Note: Bandy was Administrator, Dept. of Film, 1978, then named Director, and later Chief Curator, of the department 1980-present.]

EB: It could be. But I also say, I think it was Kirk Varnedoe's idea. HE certainly is not one to think of film as a stepchild. Different generations.

RM: So that battle wasn't fought then, day-to-day, in the department. Was Griffith politically active with the trustees and that?

EB: Well, he certainly had his friends there, and Margareta was also very good at that. She knew a lot of trustees. They tried their best. But not me. That was not something I was ever involved in. We had our own trustee film committee then. Of course, I met with them, as we all did, and talked with them and got to know a few of them, like, of course, dear Celeste Bartos. [Note: Bartos was very active on the Committee on Film from 1971]. We couldn't have done anything without her. But that was later, when I was a curator. Trustees weren't talking to the "little people", as Margareta used to call us. In fact, we usually wouldn't even have bothered to organize or anything when we were junior in the department.

RM: So you didn't have any negative confrontations with people from other departments, other curators?

EB: No, I can't say that I did.

RM: I thought you told me once an Arthur Drexler anecdote about something to do with the collection. [Note: Drexler was Curator, 1951-1955; and Director, Dept. of Architecture and Design, 1955-1986]. Maybe you'd say that for the record.

EB: Ah yes, yes, of course. That was the time when they were doing efficiency studies of the Museum and he was one of those who was doing it and he looked

over the film department. That was at a meeting. The whole department was there. He couldn't understand why we would have more films in the collection that any single staff member could ever see. He sat down and figured out the number [of films] and how long it would take to look at them. Thank goodness nothing came of that. But it was indeed when we were much more in a period of expansion.

RM: When was this, in the '70s?

EB: It might have been. I can't seem to quite have a time sense about that. Obviously it was before you were there if you don't have a memory of it.

RM: I don't have a recollection of it. I came in '75.

EB: OK. It must have been the end of the '60s.

RM: And he wasn't being facetious? He was serious.

EB: He was serious. He didn't understand what we were doing. He didn't understand films at all.

RM: Do I recall you telling me that he suggested that you deaccession a lot of the material and just put the films on a loop or something in the lobby?

EB: Sure. There was a worry about our films being accessible. He was trying in his mind to reconcile our collection with the other collections. And as I've said, they don't easily fit for material reasons. And yes, there were a lot of efforts to try to get us to have the films out on display the way a painting is on display. And that's been a struggle, indeed, all through the years. I don't know an easy solution to that. Wouldn't you want to relate films to an exhibition? It really isn't satisfactory to put them in the gallery because a film needs to be seen in its own special circumstances, in a proper film theater, in the dark, and so on. So it's an

irreconcilable problem. People have to be willing to go look in the gallery and then go to the auditorium and look at the film.

RM: Of course, they use video as a solution to this, even complete films in galleries.

EB: But of course, as you know, it's not a solution because you're not seeing the film properly at all.

RM: And most people don't sit in a gallery; they look for five or ten minutes.

EB: It's O.K. for television, they look at it and walk off.

RM: At some point you must have gotten a sense of mission about. . . a sense that there was a career for you at the Museum in film. I suppose there's no one day that that happened; it must have gradually happened over the years, when you were exposed to doing film research, which is obviously gratifying to you.

EB: Well for me, as I said at my retirement party, the first day I walked in the door at the Museum after I was hired I felt proud to be working there. I felt such a great sense of pride because the Museum had such a great reputation as a wonderful institution. So that's what took me through, because that feeling never stopped, not until the last day I worked there. I still felt pride that I did work at The Museum of Modern Art. So even though there were a lot of times that I was discouraged and things didn't go well, that pride never stopped. It was the institution, more than any individual person, that was there that impressed me. But the most influential thing on how my career went, was that I got to feel. . . It influenced my thinking, and I got there rather late, actually, but it was because I was in a lowlier position than most people. It's obviously the directors and curators that go off to FIAF, but it was, we had a congress in New York in 1965, anyway, in the mid '60s, and Willard Van Dyke was our director then and he was sitting on the executive committee of the FIAF, and as far as I could tell, he and Jacques Ledoux clashed over something, I have no idea what. And I was sitting in on the whole congress meeting, and Willard announced, well, no, he wouldn't

be eligible for the election this year, there weren't travel funds and so on. So Jacques I'm sure to irritate Willard, said, "Well, what about Eileen? Couldn't she be a candidate?" I didn't know what to do, this was in public. So I just had to turn to Willard and say, "Well, I don't know if I can accept it. There are no travel funds." And Willard said, "You may accept, Eileen." So I got elected and I never stopped. And for me, this was meeting all of the other archives, getting a real sense of film archiving as a profession. You realize that, before my time, there were a lot of amateurs. There was nowhere you went to get an education, and most people, film fans, weren't even coming with the technical knowledge. They just came out of love of film. But I think through the association of all of the archives, together, and looking at our common goals, that people began to look at archives more as a profession and the work was done more professionally. And there began to be real preservation and real cataloguing, real documentation. And this really happened about the time I joined FIAF. I was invited to go to the congress in London. Now that was 1968. That must have been in 1969 we had the conference in New York. It was '68 I went to my first congress. I didn't know why I had been asked or anything, but the first day of the congress they announced they were forming a cataloguing and documentation commission and among the people around the table that they proposed to be part of it was me. So I didn't even really see that congress because then we adjourned to another room. Preservation commission had started a year or two or more earlier. That was the first move towards professionalizing what we were doing: preservation, and then documentation, cataloguing was the next. They were founded in London that year. And that's when we really began organizing, cataloguing, trying to make up rules that we could all follow, finding ways that we could save on the work, which, of course, was what the [periodical] indexing project came out of. We would discover talking together that everybody was doing the same thing in countries all over the world, and there were some things we could collaborate on and save some of the individual work.

RM: Such as cataloguing film periodicals and scripts and posters.

EB: And so that changed my working life quite a lot. I began to think of things in a different way.

RM: This group, this cataloguing and documentation commission, was still a group of amateurs, in a way. They weren't professional librarians.

EB: Mostly they were professional librarians, for the largest part, more than anything else, but not completely.

RM: You weren't.

EB: I certainly wasn't.

RM: Who was on that, the first?

EB: Brenda Davies of London was made the first chairman, of the combined commission that was first founded. Now, how was Jacques Ledoux sitting in on those? I don't know. He was on the commission, but of course he was active in the congress. He was there. Some of the people I remember best came in later. I can't be sure if they were there that first day that we met. Anyway, within a year or so we decided to split into the two commissions, it being more practical. We were wasting too much time trying to cover the two fields. And I went with the documentation one.

RM: You became the head of the documentation, didn't you?

EB: I was for some years, yes. Brenda was there and then we had another head, Eberhard Spiess of Weisbaden was there, and then I became the head.

RM: It was in this period that Michael Moulds came?

EB: Yes, Michael Moulds was hired too, the first paid person to work for FIAF after the secretariat.

RM: Before that was Frances Thorpe.

EB: Frances Thorpe, yes, she was on my commission.

RM: This is when I came in, because I knew Frances and Michael.

EB: There was Ruggiere Rubianoff, Karen Jones, Eberhard Spiess, and the Dutch guy, John Loeuks. Nobody could ever pronounce his name correctly. He was such a sweet fellow. Who else did we have? That's it. I hope I haven't neglected somebody, because we became awfully good friends.

RM: So Ledoux was a difficult person?

EB: Oh yes, oh yes, he was. I always adored Jacques, but he also could be a big pain. He was a great perfectionist and busybody and so on. And we did have our worst fights over the indexing project. Karen Jones and I are always given equal credit for that project when, in fact, it was her idea and her push and her organizing and so on that really got that going. I think the chief thing I did was to be inspired by her and go out and find funds for it, and I was on the executive committee. I was in the position to argue for it.

RM: The funding for the project.

EB: And I got money out of the endowment for it and everything. So that was my role in that. I believed in what we were doing but Karen was more the driving force. It was her idea. After all, she was the librarian, she was into this work already. But anyway, we really all became very good friends because we used to meet two or three times a year in those days.

RM: I don't think anyone in my experience at the Museum was more committed to FIAF than you were. So obviously, that's proof that it meant, and what you said it meant to you, professional recognition.

EB: It meant a great deal in my maturing as a person. I was in my forties when I first went there. That's where I learned, for example to speak in public. I was extremely shy about speaking in public. And I had to do it occasionally, to introduce a film, and all, but it scared me to death. I was not confident at all in front of a group. But in FIAF I learned not only to speak in public but to learn that I was good at it. So that's becoming a more mature person. It opened my eyes.

RM: It gave you the voice that you didn't seem to have as much at the Museum, you weren't the person that was meeting the trustees and that sort of thing.

EB: Maybe that was partly my fault, too, that because of my shyness I wasn't very active in the Museum. But when I got in FIAF I found that people really respected me. It just made a big difference.

RM: That may be one of the things that happens to you at the Museum. You often get more respect outside the family that you work with than you do in it. I mean, people come to you with more respect than the people you work with. It's a very unpleasant reality, but I think, obviously, it isn't just you.

EB: Yes, maybe it is correct to use the word "family", it is just like families. You have to go outside to be appreciated.

RM: Do you have anything to say about the "Embryo" project? That was something that was done outside of the commissions.

EB: Only that I always enthusiastically backed it. There was always the movement in FIAF to get the collections catalogued and common in that we all would know what everybody else had. It was really needed, for practical purposes as well as for research and academic reasons.

RM: You were going to share cataloguing.

EB: Shared cataloguing. But, of course, there were a lot of things against it. It was a long hard fight, but that was always Jacques Ledoux's interest and that was always my interest. You just had trouble convincing people that it could be done. The problems as you know being chiefly problems of ownership that the people who own the films, some of them would give us a very hard time, would want to take films away. So that was a slow process. Iris firmly believed in open catalogues and I always firmly believed that you could say "No" if someone wanted to take a film away from you. You know, you really could. I don't think Dick Griffith believed that. And maybe it was true in his case. He didn't dare. MGM took films away from us at one point. He wouldn't dare say, "No you can't touch them." And maybe he couldn't. Maybe they just would have come after you with the lawyers.

RM: I know you also fought off Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., wanting to take back or somehow mess with the Fairbanks films.

EB: Yes, it was really very hard. So I understand entirely the fear and the secretiveness and all. That's how it came about. It wasn't just, "I've got something that you don't know." It wasn't that. It was a real, practical fear. But I think once this situation was changing and the major companies had confidence in trusting the work of the archives, it was very hard still for some archives to believe this was true. They were still afraid. A Raymond Rohauer buying up his supposed rights and coming on and demanding films, we could absolutely say no to him, but people were afraid he'd come with a lawyer and they couldn't afford to hire lawyers. I learned to say no to those attacks, and it worked. So I was confident other people could do that, too. And that's no problem. It might still be with us but much smaller.

RM: [Paul] Killiam is another person, I think, who gave this trouble.

EB: Oh yes, he certainly was. He was a nicer guy to deal with, certainly. He wasn't that nasty, but he made promises that he never kept and I think that, again, Dick Griffith was naive about people like that. He let Killiam have commercial access

to collections that he didn't have to, the Edison and Biograph collections. It was a time when there was no money for preserving all this nitrate and Killiam had said, "I will give you a fine grain master for the collection for everything that I copy." He never did. All he did was go run claiming to own these collections, which wasn't true. That was the hardest thing I had to do: I finally brought an end to those supposed agreements. It wasn't easy. Those were agreements I was stuck with, you know, from before. But there was no legal basis for them. We didn't have to allow him access at all. But I understand why Dick did it. He was desperate to get those films saved.

RM: Right. Well, definitely there were things lost from the collection. There were things that deteriorated.

EB: I've never thought that there was anything important lost in that way. Some that did deteriorate actually existed in other archives, so I never felt that there was a great tragedy, it was always just an imminent tragedy. You had to worry that the tragedy was coming. I desperately tried to get the films copied at the time.

RM: Was anything deaccessioned during your tenure due to this situation of not being able to be copied? I know that earlier the Pathé collection of newsreels and stuff which they acquired with fanfare was later deaccessioned.

EB: Yes, they were given back because they couldn't afford the storage cost, but that's before my time. No, we didn't do that. But I think in the years when I was first working with Dick Griffith is when MGM or some of the other companies may have come back to us for their films.

RM: Right.

EB: In my time, I don't mind admitting at all that I would keep a copy if I was forced to give something back. I thought if I didn't have a legal right to do so, I had a moral right, an ethical responsibility to do so. That was my job. I was supposed to keep films from disappearing.

RM: Do you recall specific cases?

EB: No. I can't say I do.

RM: I recall when we lost the right to distribute some, to circulate some, films. I think *Blonde Venus*, Paramount-Universal things, and they demanded that we give all of the prints back. I remember going in and saying, "I hope you're not giving all of the prints back." And they said, "Well, we didn't think about it" at one point. Even one 16 [mm] print for the Archives.

EB: Yes, 16 millimeter prints we'd be more apt to give back. Of course, I wouldn't fight so hard to keep that, but a 35 [mm] original, no way would I give that back. [Laughter] We could always say something had deteriorated then just keep it locked in the vaults until a future time. I had been there long enough to learn that things always changed and an archive can afford to outlast any owner of the film. And it's true. It happened in my time. So, archiving is for the long run. You have to be patient. [Laughter]

RM: What about your relationship with collectors, which can, of course, be of great benefit to an archive and a bane to them. I'm thinking of people like [Herman] Weinberg and [William K.] Everson in particular. I know there were problems with Everson. With his and other collectors' desire to make suggestions and to oversee what's going on in an archive and to second guess decisions made by the archives. Do you want to speak about that?

EB: Well, I can't speak about it in any specific way. I did work out relationships with two or three collectors and got wonderful material. It was a matter of building up trust. I would be absolutely discreet about them, about where I got the film, and I was, and the fact that they could trust me in that. And so yes, we did save quite a lot of wonderful films that way. My chief interest was in acquiring 35 millimeter prints, and not so much 16 [mm]. So, of course, that restricted it. Only a few collectors were really into 35 [mm] because it's expensive. So Bill Everson gave

up all of his 35 [mm], I think. He was only collecting 16 [mm]. And he was very nice about letting us borrow for shows. He did that quite a bit. I did have a hard time, I must admit, getting close to Bill Everson. I went to Film Society screenings for years, my husband Bill and I both. And once Bill Everson kindly asked us to his house to look at some rare films. And I thought, on that occasion, "Finally we'll talk." Bill Everson would never talk. You know what I mean? An ordinary conversation. And going to his house. When the lights came up, he had some film canisters under his arm and he said, "I'm going downtown to such-and-such a place to show these films. Anybody want to come along?" That was late at night by then, really late. And there was no conversation. So I think he was shy. Maybe mistrustful, I don't know. But it was a funny relationship with him. But if I asked him a favor, he would say yes.

RM: He was that way to the end of his life. I borrowed a film from him for a screening at the Museum, *King of Jazz*, right before he died.

EB: His mission in life was showing films to people, you know. He wasn't the kind of collector just to have pride in having something. He loved to show films. So on that ground you could always reach him.

RM: But don't you think there definitely was some kind of mistrust that he had of the department, the fact that all of the films ended up going to NYU. And specifically, the *Peter Pan* incident. Were you involved? You were involved in that, weren't you? We had the 35 [mm] of *Peter Pan*. We let it deteriorate. I could have sworn there were memos from you about this, or was he describing 16 [mm] prints? Any recollection of that?

EB: No, and we never had *Peter Pan*. It was George Eastman House that had it. I don't know. I'm sure that there were people who didn't like what we were doing, but I didn't hear about it directly. Only heard it third hand, but I didn't have to believe it.

RM: And you didn't address it, so you don't have any specific recollections? Did you know John Griggs, people like that?

EB: Yes, John Griggs, now I know we made an enemy of him, not by my department but by circulation. He was always borrowing circulating films and pretended he was showing them without admission charges, which, of course, was against the rules, and then it was proved that he was charging admission. Or that he was copying maybe. I can't be sure because I wasn't in the middle of that incident, but he was then cut off from having any further rentals, and, of course, he was furious. So there were incidents like that. But I didn't even know him. I wasn't lending him films. We weren't lending films from the Archive to individuals, of course, or even to small film societies. We were renting only to institutions.

RM: Can you speak now of the collectors you had relationships with and what we required from them? Or is it still confidential.

EB: I wouldn't talk about it.

RM: They're still living?

EB: Yes.

RM: I know I mentioned this before: do you know anything about the *Golden Door*? The stealing of prints from the film storage during your time.

EB: I never knew at the time, but again, I heard only third hand. I couldn't understand why certain collectors or people wanted to tell me these things. Could it have been sort of in a bragging tone? Years later I would hear this about, you know, and then this sly look, it really annoyed me.

RM: Years later.

EB: Years later. Not at the time, no, not at the time.

RM: I'm not even sure when this happened. It was the '40s. Was it during your period?

EB: I think it was in the '50s when we had this one guy at the vault who was a wonderful worker. He was a doll and he was so good at what he was doing. But as it turned out, he was a compulsive gambler, and the Museum only found out about it when his salary was being garnished by debtors. And he was fired right away. Of course, when that happened the Museum didn't want him there. And it was really a pity because he was such a good guy. But as far as I can figure out, he was the one. And it wasn't, also as far as I know, it wasn't so much taking films out of the Archive, it was films that were going to be discarded because the prints were deteriorating and were left outside for collection. Even Don Malkames told me about films from there because he gave them back later. [Laughter] He did. He saved them and he copied them. And that's the thing. The decision about when something wasn't safe to keep any more was left to a vault person, and that was wrong. That was before I had any responsibility for it.

RM: Do you mean when Griffith was in control it was left to the [vault managers]?

EB: Yes. They were supposed to have the technical knowledge. They could say, "This is deteriorating; it's not safe; we have to get rid of it." And so it was accepted, duly recorded. As you know, these days, if the vault person says this is deteriorating dangerously, that is, if the film has some interest for us, Peter [Williamson] will look at it and find out for himself. And very often it's not the case, it's a rusted can. But I had no idea how big that problem was or how long it went on or anything, because I knew nothing of it at the time. I never knew anything of it officially. It's just people loved to drop hints about certain people. I figure, if he really stole the films out of The Museum of Modern Art, why are you telling me about it? I don't want to know.

RM: Who were these people?

EB: People among the "foofs". Those kind of people.

RM: Well, that's interesting. That's something I would never have thought to ask, who and how it was decided that something needed to be deaccessioned. They just put them on the trash, is that what happened to them?

EB: No, they were going to be picked up by the companies that did silver recovery, but while waiting for them it was considered maybe dangerous to have them in the vaults, they might explode or something. You know their technical knowledge wasn't so great. And so they were put outside on the loading dock for pickup.

RM: Well, you mentioned Don Malkames. I mean, Charlie Turner, of course, has huge respect for Don Malkames. Apparently among the buffs and collectors, he seems to have been a cut above, in terms of seriousness.

EB: He was a real gentleman, and to be sure, he was making deliveries and saw films out there and said, "Could I take these?" And the vault man said, "Yes". When he got the films that weren't really rotting after all, he copied them.

RM: Do you remember any titles?

EB: Again, I think they were probably Biographs, that's my guess.

RM: You shiver to think. [Laughter]

EB: Yes, I think he was an honest guy.

RM: And his son Karl. I believe that they actually worked and continue to work for the Museum, is that true?

EB: Yes, he did, after Don died then Karl took over. Biograph films have to be done on the Biograph printer, which is our possession. We allowed Don to keep it up there. Of course, he collected these things [equipment], and I tried very carefully

to cover it in writing so that people would know. I was afraid they would think it was part of his collection but it is a part of the Museum collection. And Karl's been doing it but Peter thinks that Karl won't go much further with this, he's not that well.

RM: I know and I think his wife died.

EB: His wife died, yes.

RM: He's someone that Charlie says I should interview.

EB: Yes, that would be. . . Everybody had the idea that Don should be interviewed and recorded about all that equipment that he had. I tried, myself; you couldn't get him quite pinned down. You know how people. . . They don't say no, but can never find a specific time to do it.

RM: Well, I was speaking about equipment. What about other things? What about the question that I call records management. There were what was considered ephemera, in those days: posters, and stills, and equipment. And really, some of that came into the department whether you wanted it or not.

EB: The Museum would never accept the idea that we were an equipment museum. I couldn't get an O.K. to collect equipment. Maybe I didn't try very hard.

RM: Did you want to, though?

EB: Yes, I had the urge, certainly, knowing that things were out there and should be saved. And I spent, indeed, years trying to see that there would be some place. And when they were trying to spend endowment money in Queens, just to spread out the activity through the boroughs, I absolutely was one who told them. In fact, I was an official advisor. I said, "This is what you should do: collect equipment, because nobody in our area is doing that, and not necessarily throughout the country." So I can say that I had a hand in that collection.

RM: I'm sorry, what did you mean when you said Queens?

EB: The Astoria.

RM: Moving Image.

EB: Yes, the Moving Image museum was begun in my time. They were looking for a role to play. I urged them to consider the equipment.

RM: It's my sense that when stuff came in, obviously there wasn't much staff, that when posters and stills came in, there was really no one.

EB: There was no one assigned to do them. And this was my big battle with poor Willard when he came. He didn't, of course, know what archives were about. He was a filmmaker and photographer. And he, very early on, said, "Why are we keeping all of this paper? We're supposed to be collecting film." And I couldn't explain its importance to him in any other terms than to say, "Willard, it's as though you took away my typewriter. I can't do my work without it, these materials." And he grudgingly let it alone. And this was all kept in a closet then. I was still keeping up the clipping that had been started earlier. Reviews and career articles and things like that were clipped. There was nobody assigned to do that and I couldn't do much, but at least I kept up.

RM: Who did it? Do you know when it started?

EB: Yes, that would have been in, I think, Arthur Knight's time. He was assigned to the library, but as a film specialist. That wasn't a part of the Library. The Library was basically shedding materials under Bernard Karpel. [Note: Karpel was Acting Librarian, 1942-1946; Librarian, Library 1946-1973.]

RM: Yes, I wanted you to talk about that as well.

EB: I had quite a hard time with him. Among others, since. I know he was a famous librarian, and I used to say, "What's a great librarian if they can't keep track of the books."

RM: It may be another example of what I was saying about that early period of collecting, acquiring, and then being faced with the fact that there was no place to put it and no money to preserve it.

EB: Sure, sure. That's what happened. Anyway, he shrugged all of these clippings and files off on the Film department and they were shoved into a closet. But I kept it up because I always had a ready reference source to go find credits and comments about a film when I needed them, and I used to be cataloguing, for example, and I kept it up to date because, of course, there were no *New York Times* reviews and so on published in book form. But I had to cut down the number of things I clipped because there was only me doing it. Whenever I got a chance for a volunteer, then I would set them to work on it, too. That was always, as you know, very skimpy. Volunteers come and they go, they're good or they're not good.

RM: So I had the sense that Karpel deaccessioned stuff without really consulting the Film Library. Is that true?

EB: I don't know so much about deaccessioning, but the worst thing that happened was during one of the Museum's building programs and when we didn't have enough space, he said, "I'm putting this stuff in dead storage." I don't know that we were consulted what he would put into dead storage. But there was no list, no idea that we had this material, and I was out acquiring it all over again. I filled up the gaps in the *Moving Picture World* and things like that. And we discovered not so long ago when that material came out of storage, that we already had some of it. So I was really mad because I could have used it all of those years. I also didn't need to acquire it again. That's what I couldn't understand. Putting things in storage, sometimes you have to do it. But to do it without having a list or creating a catalogue so that people would know. I really had no idea we had it

and I worked there for years. [Laughter]. Those documents. . . One allowed scholars, when they came along, access to them, and so that was the beginning of the Film Study Center. It existed, in fact, for some years before it got a name.

RM: I think it existed from the very beginning. Someone from staff would have to provide people access to it. I know you did it for certain people.

EB: Yes, it was always there, we just formalized it in Willard's time.

RM: Where would the people go? Into the Museum Library? Did you give them a space beside your desk? Where would they come to look at a film or a file?

EB: All of that: in the Museum Library or at my desk.

RM: I assume you didn't have much contact with the other libraries in New York: the New York Public Library, what we now call Lincoln Center, in terms of exchange.

EB: Well, there was exchange going on.

RM: Was there?

EB: Yes, there'd be *Moving Picture Worlds* that we acquired for our collection from the Public Library because it was a duplicate in their collection. So yes, there was that kind of thing.

RM: This didn't survive to more recent times. It has always frustrated me that so much of their duplicate material went into their Lincoln Center bazaars for so many years. Stuff that we'd have wanted, if offered to us.

EB: Yes, they could have considered us.

RM: Items that would have complemented our runs of periodicals, but that were sold off piece by piece to different collectors.

EB: OK, well maybe you're right. Perhaps Bernard Karpel can take credit for some of the early exchanges, but more likely it was Arthur Knight. He was there but that was before my time. . .

RM: I know you mean Arthur Rosenheimer.

EB: I knew him as Arthur Knight, that's what I call him.

RM: I'd also like to know what happened to the film stills, posters and other such gifts that came to the Film Library in the early years. Often people come to me and say, "Well, one time you were given Disney material." Or they ask about UPA animation art we were given, or Meliès drawings we had here. And occasionally I've noticed that these items are now in the Drawings department or Design department. My sense is that sometimes they were just stolen or lost.

EB: We already had a stills collection when I came, that was one of John Adams' assignment. When he wasn't assisting the curator, he was in charge of that. So yes, we did have that, and of course, it survived because it brought money.

RM: That early? I wonder when it began to be a moneymaking proposition? I don't think it was at the beginning, in Iris's time.

EB: Well, there weren't that many film books being published.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **EILEEN BOWSER (EB)**

INTERVIEWER: **RON MAGLIOZZI (RM)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

DATE: **DECEMBER 27, 2000**

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

EB: I wanted to say that the Saturday morning film series lasted for a whole ten years and we went through every film in the collection that was project-able at that time. Of course, the collection wasn't so big. And that really gave me the knowledge of the collection that was invaluable to me.

RM: Ten years. You started in '54 at the Museum? So you're saying, until '65, roughly then?

EB: Maybe we started a little later. Of course, the cataloguing didn't get done the way we thought. We started out with these great big cards. That's what people did when they couldn't get all of the information they wanted on it. When I saw how fluid cataloguing is, never reaching completion, always changing that's when I thought up dividing the cards up into credits on one card and notes about the film on another, and technical stuff on another. So that was a great innovation in the days before computers.

RM: Who put the stuff on the cards? You? Chris and John?

EB: Chris and John did some.

RM: Handwritten?

EB: No, they were typed cards but there weren't very many of them. They didn't do very many of them. But then I have to think also that they weren't there that much longer. It was just me doing it after they left.

RM: So you're saying you devised the three-card system that we have.

EB: Yes, that you have on the manual cards now. But the really good things resulted from those Saturday morning screenings, my knowledge of the collection was influenced by those screenings most directly. That and the fact that it was possible to see everything that we showed publicly in those days because we worked at a slower pace. Once it was changing every day, it's too much of anybody's life. I couldn't give that much time to it. But I would go after work. We weren't given time off to go in the daytime but after work I would go and see each film that was showing at that time. It was about two a week.

RM: Two a week?

EB: Yes, because it changed that often. That was when I could see everything. Once it changed to daily, I couldn't keep it up. And finally I realized that it was not possible for me ever to see all of the films that survived from the beginning to the present day. I finally accepted that. Now I do even better. I see fewer films because I realize the impossibility of seeing them all. Now I'm more selective. But it took me a lot of years to get to that point. I used to try really hard to see every film possible.

RM: When we left off we were talking about the Library and Bernard Karpel and the acquisition of stills and posters and equipment, and how we didn't really collect equipment. Posters and stills, of course, we did.

EB: I never could convince them but never really tried because it was against the Museum policy. We weren't a technical museum but, of course, I kept a few treasures that came our way. It's darn lucky that we had the Biograph printer. And that's what's so important about equipment: that the technology changes

and it's happening today. Films or videos or digital disks that are being made today, now you go ten years down the line and there won't be anything to print them on because it keeps changing, changing. That's why archives need to collect equipment, but, of course, that would be quite beyond the rest of the Museum to understand.

RM: Did you collect the Biograph printer? Is that something you acquired?

EB: No, that came with the collection of Biograph stuff. Billy Bitzer brought that in. He probably did some early printing on it, I imagine. I'm really sorry that Billy Bitzer was before my time. Wouldn't that have been fine to be around when he was working there.

RM: Let's clean up a few stray items that are still out there. One is the Film Study Center. Did you participate in establishing the Study Center in '68? That's when it opened.

EB: Yes. It was a movement all through the Museum: all departments got study centers at that time. I don't remember, but there probably was endowment money for that. You know, the question of making things more accessible. That was probably it.

RM: Did you have any supervisory control of that at the time?

EB: Yes, I did for a while. I was the supervisor of the staff and what they did. I hired Charles [Silver]. It might not have been until Mary Lea was director that Charles was made independently responsible, not under me any more. [Note: Silver is Study Center Supervisor, Dept. of Film, 1970 to present]

RM: That long?

EB: Maybe not that long. But that's how I remember it.

RM: And he was the third person to be in charge of it. Regina Cornwell was briefly? [Note: Cornwell is listed in the 1969 Annual Report as Clerk/Typist.]

EB: Well, she was there. I don't remember that she was the head.

RM: Gary Carey.

EB: Yes, Gary Carey was, I believe, actually someone I hired. And Carol, his wife, was doing stills. [Note: Gary Carey is listed in the 1966 Annual Report as Editorial Assistant; and Carol Carey is listed in the 1969 Annual Report as Program Assistant.]

RM: Right.

EB: It's one of the departmental marriages.

RM: So you had very little involvement with stills then, ever.

EB: Yes, only that when I catalogued the Griffith Papers, I worked there where the stills were in the sort of basement area.

RM: Where was the [Film] Stills Archive? Was it in the basement?

EB: Yes, it moved around. It was in the basement of the 21 building.

RM: Oh, I see.

EB: It was in the brownstone next door. I know that it was in the brownstone next door, that it was in the basement where I worked on the Griffith Papers.

RM: I know there were security problems with stills. I know when I came to the Museum, there was a problem with all the special collections. The films were in

one place but all of the other stuff was kind of in closets and in plastic bags and it really wasn't being treated the way it needed to be.

EB: No, certainly not.

RM: I am particularly fascinated by the *Photoplay* collection. Apparently the document, the files, and I assume everything, came with the stills. The stills were, of course, used right away, but the paper material was in storage. It still is not totally processed to this day.

EB: I remember the *Photoplay* collection came in, I believe, when John Adams was in charge of the stills department. So that was his job. That was almost the beginning of the stills department. Of course, they had collected stills before, but that was the gigantic one that made it an important collection. He was a long time here trying to get that in order. I was never in charge of it and I don't think I was ever even supervisor over anybody. It was always separate, the stills.

RM: I had a sense that [Allen] Porter worked in it for a while, at one point.

EB: I think for a time he did.

RM: And Helen Gray was gone when you came, right? She was long gone? [Note: Gray was in charge of the film stills from the 1930s through the 1940s.]

EB: Yes.

RM: She left when Iris left?

EB: I don't know. She was just a name to me. [Pause]

RM: You were in charge of collecting films. Did you have a collection policy?

EB: Yes, I did. I was fully aware that the Museum was supposed to be collecting the best films, as it did in other departments, the best works. But as I got more into it, and especially as I got into FIAF, I became aware that if we were too selective, films would die because there wasn't somebody else out there collecting them. So I began to feel it was my duty to collect everything I could get my hands on. But I resolved this in my own mind by establishing a separate identity for a permanent collection and a study collection. And I didn't worry too much about where the lines were. In fact, you won't find it on the catalogue cards or anything, because it just got too difficult. It was a philosophical concept that I could justify saving films that really were not of first artistic quality but had many other reasons why they ought to be saved. I felt it was, at that point, it really was, for all archives, it was a question of gathering in everything we could, because otherwise it was just going to die, and we couldn't let that happen. We never consulted anybody about that either, I just did it.

RM: Well, as you said, there was no one, no committee looking on.

EB: The Library of Congress was not actively collecting. George Eastman House was still very small. They started in the '50s with James Card's own collection. And out in California at that time, when UCLA started their archive, so-called, the people in charge of it knew nothing and cared nothing about preservation. They were collecting films for the students to study. That was it. I mean, I know it's all changed now, it's a serious archive, but it wasn't in the beginning, because I was quite familiar with the people who were running it.

RM: When was this, in the '60s?

EB: Yes, there again I am very unsure about dates. I don't know when. But certainly when Bob Rosen was in charge, it became a serious archive when it joined FIAF. It was that FIAF could be such a good influence on a place like that. And I saw it happen all over the field. People just gradually and naturally learned what it is an archive has to do, and have support from the other archives to do it. Because

many archives collect just out of people's enthusiasm. In that case, like the university [UCLA] that had films for the students to study.

RM: And do you think that your personal taste in films affected what you collected?

EB: Oh well, for sure. For the films that you went out and looked for. When Donald Richie was there, we worked out a list of films that were not in the collection that we should have. [Note: Richie was Visiting Curator, 1971; Curator, Dept. of Film, 1971-1973.] And I worked on that for years after, and a very large percentage of them are actually in the collection now. Not all of them, probably because they couldn't find them, they were lost films or something. But we did work from a list of what he and I thought would fill gaps in the collection. It wasn't until near the end of my career at the Museum that the big collections like the Ted Turner collection and so on started coming in. And as I've said, it was because they could no longer afford to throw out nitrate. And they didn't understand that they would need it again. I knew they would need it again, but it was amazing to me that I could get a contract written at that point, where I would say you can only come back to copy the nitrate once. If you want to come back more, you have to pay for a new fine grain master, or whatever was needed. And they signed that easily because commercial people never can look ahead and see that they are going to need that stuff again. They thought if you put it all on video, that's an end to that. But always, there'll be a new media in a few years and everyone will come back. That situation changed a lot very much near the end of my years there. It wasn't like that before, when it was like pulling teeth to get the single titles. And I probably did more by the way of film exchange with other archives, recovering especially, lost American films in European archives. And that's again where the FIAF played a very important part, because those exchanges were on the basis of personal relations more than anything else. You'd sit down and talk with people and talk about films and what they have and what they want. That's how the real gems come into the collection. If you don't spend your time like that at FIAF, and I understand there isn't quite so much of that kind of exchange now, that's the way to make the collection grow. It's personal contact that is so

important. As you know collecting documentation for the Museum. It's the same thing.

RM: You actively sought silent comedy. Is that true?

EB: Yes, that was one of my enthusiasms, certainly. And also an enthusiasm for the archive in Prague, so we did a lot of exchanges with them. Wherever I could get them. I would still do that today, because silent film comedies are very much what they call today "orphan films". There was nobody to protect them. And they went through owner after owner after owner. So maybe because they were so popular around the world, that we were able to find them again. And then, of course, in most countries, something's terribly lost because the titles are gone and you only have foreign titles and you cannot -- I tried -- you cannot recreate those titles, even when you translate them. You can't get back to the originals that were there. You're not the same person that was writing them in different cultures. So we got some acquisitions from London, Australia, and Canada. Exchange was especially valuable when you can get American films back from those countries. I think I did a lot for the collection in that particular direction, the collecting of films from other countries.

RM: Whenever anyone inquires about the silent comedies I always think of you, because I know most of them have Czech titles and a lot of them came from that period of exchange. Let's talk about academics, now. I would say, from my observation, that one of the distinguishing characteristics of your tenure at the Museum was the association with academia that you seem to have sought out and explored and inspired. When did this start and where did it come from?

EB: I don't know. It was seeing all of the research had to be done and trying to. . . I think I finally concluded that it had to be a group effort. There was a FIAF symposium in Montreal on methodology of film history, which they asked me to organize. I think I only had, almost only had, American speakers because of the transportation problems and all. Nonetheless, I tried to set out some of those ideas that film history has to be done as teamwork because there's so much to

be done it couldn't be done by people in isolation, and that every generation has a new version of history, and therefore we had to redo film history with new approaches every generation, which I still think is true. But it was the 1978 congress in Brighton that really started off film study, and that was as much or more the work of David Francis. What I gave David Francis was tremendous enthusiasm and support for this idea, but the idea was, as it was in Brighton, we started out to do the school of Brighton filmmakers. And then we gradually broadened it to include everything that survived from 1900 to 1906. And the only reason this could happen was that the archives had all these years of work at preservation and making prints that wouldn't have been available for scholars before. So here was a chance to screen them in a group, and the idea was to bring together all of the film scholars to look at them instead of having to write about films from hearsay and what somebody else had written about them. To really look at them, freshly. And so we cooperated by doing it on our side of the Atlantic. We brought together a bunch of scholars and showed them everything that we could pull together.

RM: At the Museum?

EB: Yes. Everything we could pull together. This was in preparation for Brighton. The idea was that there would be a group of European film scholars doing this, too, but they didn't manage to do it until just in the days before Brighton, whereas our American and Canadian scholars had seen things six months to a year in advance and were able to prepare their thoughts in advance.

RM: So you brought the scholars together? You must have had a relationship with them already.

EB: Yes, I had to select people that I already knew and that would be interested in this period and in this kind of thing. And, of course, there were certainly NYU students. But Andre Gaudreault and I had already run into. . .

RM: In Montreal? This Montreal thing is before '78?

EB: Yes. It had to mostly be people that had come to the Museum or who maybe had been in touch with me by correspondence that I knew were good scholars and that they were interested in it.

RM: I know their names will be in published documents but do you recall offhand?

EB: Well, for New York it was Tom Gunning and Charlie Musser. There were people out of Jay Leyda's classes. And Jay Leyda was, of course, also very responsible before me, of getting these people started in the subject. Let me see, who's the guy in San Francisco who did the book on before Griffiths?

RM: Don Crafton?

EB: No, not Don Crafton, that was Before Mickey. No, he did a book with a bunch of essays by many people in the group. [Note: Bowser means John Fell.] After we screened the films at the Museum, he told me, "This was the happiest time in my whole life." It was again the question of people working in isolation and getting together with other people, like you say, enthusiasts.

RM: At this point had you already started teaching?

EB: No, it was in the next year that I did the Columbia course, the next year or two years after Brighton.

RM: That I sat in on, right?

EB: Yes, that was the 1907 one. And it was because we had done 1900-1906, and 1907 I thought was the missing year before Griffith started, that that would kind of fill in the whole thing. As an historian myself, I always find it extremely valuable to try to go back and look from the beginning forward instead of sitting here with all that we know and have seen, looking backwards. Of course, that's truly impossible, but in the attempt, it's like you can begin to look at films the way the

people at the time did, fully realizing you can't get there, but, you know what I mean.

RM: This is exactly the thesis that I have for my presentation about songs. I'm saying it's wrong to look at films alone. You have to consider the whole world of entertainment, the whole mass media. You have to relate the movies to the music and to the music publishing business, which I think was very important, and to the theater, because people at that point didn't look at them separately. They were all part of it. And that it was a continuous show. The show started in the movie theaters but went right into people's homes. A lot of the stuff came into people's homes -- post cards, sheet music, images of the movie stars, flip books. Any number of things.

EB: All part of the process.

RM: It's all part of the entertainment experience that people had a sense of. I'm getting off track.

EB: That was the thinking that influenced the group of scholars that went to Brighton.

RM: Very active looking at all of these films. That's what I found remarkable in the 1907 course. Which is what you did. It's the model. Showing as many surviving films from a period. That, in itself. . . Even if not a word was said, you have learned.

EB: And then talking them over with other people. It's just that you look at them all. And done very informally in a small group is really nice, because then you can talk out loud if you want. It's not quite the same as the theater experience. But it's useful when people say something right when they see it.

RM: So part of it was the Brighton conference conducted the way they normally are. Did you re-screen the films and then have papers presented?

EB: Yes. The Europeans and our group met in the few days before the symposium and saw a lot more films, some that our group selected and sent over, and then the ones that they had assembled in Europe. So those groups were talking together in the days just before the symposium. And then they selected a group to be shown in the symposium, and did papers or talks in between. And of course, it never stopped from there. All of those people would go to Pordenone [Note: Pordenone, Italy, the site of an annual festival of silent film, *Il Giornate del Cinema Muto*, founded in 1982]. They started the group Domitor, the people that were interested in the same period. So it's still going on, the echoes from that particular [Brighton] conference, and they all acknowledge it as such. It has been written up. It's recognized as an historic event. So it's kind of wonderful to have been a part of it. Not knowing, of course, what we were doing at the time.

RM: And they brought it back to the NYU Film Program that Jay [Leyda] continued.

EB: Yes, it's just the world over now. There are people who are working on the same aspects and who know each other. Even in some cases where they're the only ones in a country. There was one guy from Japan who came to all of these things. I'm sure he didn't have any colleagues to talk to. It makes such a difference. I really am proud to have been a part of that. And I learned so much as a film historian from it, too. I'm always getting ideas from other people. It was as much an influence on me as the others.

RM: Is this where The Transformation of the Cinema took place? [Bowser, Eileen. History of the American Cinema, vol. 2: The Transformation of Cinema 1907-1915. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990.] I know when we talked about publications, you did film notes and things like that, but Transformations is your life's work, in a way.

EB: That's my biggest book.

RM: And a great achievement.

EB: Yes, the thinking behind that book comes out of what we learned from Brighton on. I was very influenced by people's ideas.

RM: Had you started work on it before then?

EB: No.

RM: Did you have it in your head before that?

EB: I knew that I wanted to do a book. So many of my publications were done jointly with other people, and I wanted one of my own. My ego demanded that, you know. So when the opportunity came up, I was offered a book contract and applied for a sabbatical to do it. I never could have done it otherwise, because my work at the Museum just didn't give me time. I couldn't responsibly do my job and do a big, ambitious project. Dick Griffith used to do it, but we were so much smaller then. The work wasn't quite so overwhelming in those days. We grew, we got a bigger collection, and the film world grew around us. There was much more demand on us. I never could have had time. I was able to get that sabbatical.

RM: How long? Was it a year?

EB: It was a year, and I almost did all of the work, the research and the writing, within that year. I know there was a little work left after I got back to work, but the bulk of it was done.

RM: That's amazing.

EB: One year. When that guy told me it [Brighton] was the happiest week of his life. . . That was one of the happiest years of my life. I really enjoyed the work. I wanted so much to do it. And I should be going on doing more than I am doing since I retired. I work small size now. [Laughter] So anyway, after Brighton, as we already went through, was the creation of the Columbia course, though as

you know, I didn't really have students. I had two people apply and it was supposed to be graduate research methods in film history. And one student dropped out before it even started, so I was left with one student, and he sat there, throughout, didn't say much. I gave him an option to write a paper on almost any aspect of that project, maybe to give us some more historical background, or anything. And he never finished the work, he never started the work, as far as I know. Never did his paper, so he never graduated the course. So in the end I have to say, I was just pleased to accept the eager film historians who came, and a book came out of it, and a lot of articles. But nobody graduated the course. [Laughing]

RM: So Brighton cemented or gave birth to this academic affiliation that you had.

EB: Sure. I have every interest in the work that they're doing. There was, you realize, a revitalization of film historical studies, because at that period in time, everybody was into theory, and film history almost died. That was sort of looked down on. This was a rebirth, that is still going on, thank goodness. And now the theoretical studies have died down a lot. A lot more people are doing film history now.

RM: Yes, I had the misfortune of going to Columbia, which was all theory, all structuralism, which I really had very little interest in. I was getting assignments that didn't interest me much. I wish I had been a part of it [NYU]. I was at the wrong school, really.

EB: Columbia has never done very well with their film studies. And I think they were the very first university to offer film courses.

RM: They had some good people there, too, but it just didn't work out. So you taught a number of times after that?

EB: No, I only taught once more, right after I retired I taught this course at NYU, again a graduate course in film archiving. So that was completely different. I had told

them that I wasn't very interested in teaching, so they dreamed up this thing where I could have a graduate course and a limit of five students. And actually, there was a lot of competition to get into it. It was an interesting experience, but I don't really want to go on teaching, especially not film archiving. I think to teach film archiving, you really need to be at a film archive with all its facilities, and not just to cooperate with it. Of course, I used the Museum to some extent, but I was hesitant in how much I could do knowing the staff was overburdened and all that. But the most wonderful thing happened. We were up there to look at some films one time and afterwards Peter [Williamson] kindly took them all into his office and he had a piece of film out on his rewinds. It was a famous film, one of the Warners features. Anyway, he could tell them what it was. He showed it to them and he told them all about the history of this piece of film material: what generation it was and how he could tell. And that, for the students, was a real revelation, and something I couldn't have asked Peter to do. But he did it on his own. I'll never forget that. They spent over an hour or more, poring over that film. They really didn't see much about physical handling of films. That's why you have to be at an archive.

RM: Right.

EB: Anyone can learn from that. Once I was working on a Steenbeck [Note: a viewing table] with one of them. They all had different projects and he was trying to look at this film to identify it. We had already copied it, but it was the nitrate, so we could see what the original stock was. It had been curled too tight for too long, and every time we went to stop it to look at something, it would go spiraling up and we had to patiently rewind it again. So he had the actual physical experience of what happens to film, and he finally said, "We mustn't stop it any more. It doesn't want to." So that's really important to learn, how to handle a film, you can't teach that in a university. Without an archive attached. And I met some really nice people that way.

RM: Are you still in contact with a lot of these academics?

EB: Yes, because, of course, they became my friends.

RM: And do you regularly have to read manuscripts and that sort of thing?

EB: Sometimes I do, yes.

RM: Pretty gratifying.

EB: Yes.

RM: It's like being a private tutor.

EB: I don't know; the last two papers Tom Gunning sent me I couldn't download them successfully, so now I've got to wait for him to mail me something. That's very frustrating. I wonder when they're going to make computers simple and uniform. All this nonsense you go through.

RM: The character of the film department in The Museum of Modern Art has to be different somehow from the Library of Congress or George Eastman House. It's always struck me that almost every film archive is different in some way, some institutional way. I know that there are institutions where they have massive preservation programs. Ours is very small. In fact, David Francis once called the Museum's a "boutique operation."

EB: Well yes, compared to the size of their collection and ours, sure.

RM: Do you have any comments on the relationship with the other archives?

EB: I'm glad to say, maybe because the Museum was a founding member of FIAF, that it was always held up as a model to other archives. It was always very much respected for what it did. I lucked into that one, when I came. If you were from The Museum of Modern Art, as you know to this day, you're somebody because of the Museum's reputation. I always said I couldn't leave the Museum for

another job because it would be going down. I started at the top. To go to any other institution in the United States, for me seemed like going down. So I could leave, but I couldn't leave with the feeling that I was moving on with a career, or something.

RM: Were there any limitations to being a film department inside an art museum, as opposed to, say, the Library of Congress, in terms of institutional support.

EB: Well, sure, the government funded ones certainly had firmer support at times. The East Germans used to love to lecture us on the stability of government archives. Look what happened to them. Governments fall and archives fall with them. So that was a very sad historical lesson for them to have to learn. But it's true, we were very independent of government. When I first came, no one wanted to accept government grants. They were so in fear of losing their independence. Someone would tell them what to do. Of course, we did never accept government support but government grants for special projects became extremely important to the Museum. But when I was first there, none of that. We did that with horror.

RM: They had had those government contracts during the war. I guess that was different.

EB: That was, I guess so. Yes, they were doing a service for the war effort, as everybody was in those days.

RM: Well, I'll ask the question I just asked in a somewhat different way. You were at the Museum long enough, and during your career you witnessed the development of what might be called the culture of preservation that didn't exist before. Over the past two decades in particular, preservation is no longer the business of nonprofit film archives. As you know, it's a business. Studios, academics, everyone wants to be a part of archiving. Even when I first came to the Museum, it was easy for me to get that job. There wasn't that much competition because doing archive work wasn't competitive.

EB: It wasn't glamorous and especially archival work and working, as I say, behind the scenes was definitely not glamorous and it was very hard to attract money to it.

RM: So you've witnessed this. You've witnessed a period when the Museum was "it", was the standard. You've seen the rise of the Library of Congress and UCLA with their massive preservation programs, who do a lot much more high profile preservation work than we do, and who do a lot more of it every year -- I seem to be able to get more of their stuff on video -- and who do other kinds of merchandising. Any thoughts on that? Any gains or losses to that?

EB: I've always said, the more people doing it, the better, because the job is so big. No one institution could possibly do it all. And altogether they won't do it all. Sadly, we have to accept this. But yes, I can remember the sense that when the Museum got all of the credit, the Museum was the glamorous place. And I thought there was jealousy among the people that worked at the Library of Congress and George Eastman House. Because no matter what they did, and they did splendid things, they didn't get the press coverage and the attention that we did. And I'm extremely pleased that they finally got to the stages where what they do is considered important. It was tough, especially for Eastman House, because they're off the beaten track. It's not so easy. People are not passing through Rochester on their way somewhere else.

RM: Speak a little about Eastman House. They always seem to leave that out, and I think it was in the '50s when you started -- Griffith -- that they tried to have some kind of cooperative relationship to do the storage.

EB: Dear Dick Griffith's naivete, I think, in his dealings with Jim Card. [Note: Card joined the staff of the George Eastman House in 1948. He retired from the position of Curator of Motion Pictures and Director of the Department of Film at the International Museum of Photography in 1977.] Jim was not really all that honest, either, you know. But we had a budget problem. We had acquired more

films than we could afford to store, and Eastman House had built new vaults, nitrate storage and everything, and they had space, they were sitting empty, so, of course, they agreed with Dick that at least on a temporary basis they could store some of our collection there. They were overjoyed. And especially the Biograph and Edison negatives went up there, on a truck. I think it was an open truck. Jim Card wrote a letter, it's in the files somewhere, these guys arrived in this truck with some barn doors over the truck to keep the rain off. I don't know how it survived that trip. I didn't have anything to do with that, of course. In fact, I think they moved those before I got there. I'm not quite sure, but it was somewhere around that time, because Eastman House had the new vaults. And then, we couldn't get all the films back. I really struggled for years, and Jim Card just got angry and said he didn't have staff to go out there and pack up films. It was very hard to get films out of there. Finally we did most of it. There are still odds and ends that never showed up. But I'm sure if we didn't get them, some other archive did. He would send things off to Langlois, I suppose. But he'd send films off there, and the relations between the two of them, Jim Card and Langlois were really funny, too. They managed to mislay each other's films when borrowing them. Oh dear, what a story.

RM: The robber baron archivists.

EB: And people would send off originals. I know that we did that with *The Honeymoon*, the part of *The Wedding March* that was missing. And this was something, again, that Dick trusted. It was Erich von Stroheim sitting there in Paris, who wanted to put the film together, and who were we to say "no" to Erich von Stroheim. And we sent off the original material, didn't stop and copy it first. That's one thing, I must say, I never did. I never sent off a film without copying it first in my whole career there. But anyway, that disappeared.

RM: One sequence of *The Wedding March*?

EB: *The Honeymoon*.

RM: Do we have the whole film or did we just have that sequence?

EB: We had that particular part of it, I believe. It's all we had and Langlois had the other part. We had gotten it from Universal, I think. There was also a connection between Langlois and the people at the Milan archive. I think it probably landed there at some point. But it probably burned up in one of the fires that he had. I know that people speak of Langlois as a great archivist. He was a great shower of films, a great publicist for old films and archives, and all that, but as an archivist, more films were lost forever because of his policies. So you can't call that a great archivist, if he didn't save the films. He would store them every which way and they just weren't taken care of properly, and there were many fires, and we shared originals in those days.

RM: Eastman House was not the only place that the Museum sent films for storage when they had that storage problem, was it?

EB: I think so. I don't know of any other.

RM: What's the story with *The Black Pirate*? Didn't that print go off?

EB: That's another story. In the Fairbanks films we got all material, endless outtakes and second, third, and fourth negatives, a whole lot of excess material. [Note: Douglas Fairbanks Sr. deposited his films with The Museum of Modern Art in 1938.] It was a big storage problem. There was the feeling the films were important enough that every shred of it ought to be copied from the nitrate, but there was no way we had enough money to do it. And I think this was discussed at a FIAF meeting, and no doubt it was Langlois who said, "Send them to us. We'll do it." And so they all went off to Paris, and they got stuck in customs because Langlois didn't have the money to pay for bringing them from the dock to Paris.

RM: You're talking about *The Black Pirate* material.

EB: No, it was all of the major features, or most of them. And it got to be such an issue in FIAF because they were sitting up storage charges in customs. And finally the other archives came to the rescue, and each of several archives said, "We'll take this film" and they got shared out, and that's how *The Black Pirate* got to London [Note: National Film Archive, British Film Institute, London.]

RM: The understanding being that they were Museum prints and that they were just being stored at these places?

EB: Well, they were going to take care of the preservation of them.

RM: They were going to preserve them.

EB: And certainly they did. Certainly they did in London. I don't know whether Langlois ended up with any material or not. [Laughter] After all, he sort of created this problem, and then other archives stepped in to resolve it.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

RM: So we're continuing with the Fairbanks material.

EB: Some people were disappointed because they got the illusion that they were getting complete films. We certainly never mislead them about what they were getting, but maybe in the translation, and after all the quarrels with Langlois, it came out wrong. I don't know. But, people were, on the whole, pretty good about it. I'm sure that London would, any of them would have returned to us material when we asked for it, except that [Raymond] Rohauer got into the picture there somewhere and claimed rights. [Note: Rohauer was a businessman infamous for claiming the distribution rights to silent films and threatening lawsuits to protect his interest.] And Ernest Lindgren, whom I greatly admired, signed an agreement with Rohauer that said the material had to stay there.

[Note: Lindgren joined the British Film Institute in 1924 and headed its National Film Archive until 1973.] I told Ernest I saw a draft of the agreement, and I said, "He can't make you sign this, he doesn't own it. And you owe that to us." I told him, I really did, but he signed it anyway. And consequently, he was afraid. The lawyers were afraid to let him send the material back to us. Now I understand it's finally resolved itself, but it took years. I couldn't make any headway while Ernest was there, or some of his successors.

RM: I think Michelle Aubert was the one who had it sent back.

EB: Anyway, that's a long, tangled story and I might not have all of the details right, but there's pretty good coverage in the files on that episode. Except for trying to recover material, I wasn't involved in it. I witnessed it.

RM: With George Eastman House, it seems to me that after this failed effort to get prints, or after this conflict with getting things back, this soured the relationship with them.

EB: We didn't get on very well with Jim Card. Jim always took an adversarial relationship. He was one of those. If he was building his collection, he was building the collection because Iris Barry ignored or disliked so many films that he thought were important to collect.

RM: That was his line of reasoning.

EB: That was his line of reasoning. He said it over and over again. You'll find it in his book, too. I think his animosity towards Iris and what she did was so strong that it saved me from getting it in the neck in his book. The worst thing he could say about me was that I thought D. W. Griffith was so great that there was nobody else for me. I didn't mind too much that being said about me, so it's okay. [Laughter] But we occasionally had little difficulties about other things, mainly, not shipping films back. But he had a hard time with everybody. He was convinced that FIAF must be a communist organization, and he had a trustee

that was sure of this and was a real right-wing conservative, a big guy among his trustees.

RM: An Eastman House trustee?

EB: Yes. So he pulled out of FIAF with Langlois. He never really went back. So he remained an outsider. But nevertheless, he created a very important archive there, which is getting more important all of the time. I was up there doing research while you were out on strike, and I was totally impressed with the setup they have there and the staff now working so eagerly dedicated. [Note: The Museum's Professional and Administrative staff union, known as PASTAMoMA, was on strike from April 28-September 10, 2000.] It was a very good experience. I envied them in a sense, because it looked better than our own study facility. I have to say partly because they don't get as many visitors, of course, but nevertheless, their attitude was so helpful and their equipment is new and available. Anyway, I was just the least bit envious that they had such a good set-up there now. It's really nice.

RM: That's great. You know, I've never been to Eastman House. Can you believe that?

EB: In Willard's day, he took the whole staff up on trips two or three times to spend a weekend, maybe, looking at films and just having a good time. That was a bit of a nice thing to do. So we all got to see something of Eastman House.

RM: That's terrific. You were never the head of the Film Department. You were always second in command, let's say, or maybe shared second in command with someone else. Could you comment, through the years, on the differences between the different directors of the department? Their goals and how it affected your work.

EB: As I said, Dick Griffith's the one that I respected the most for his intellectual approach to films, but he was not a great administrator. Maybe not even great

with the archive end of it either. Then after that was when Willard came, after a year without a director. Willard was pretty good about strengthening us in the money department. He got more support for us. He absolutely made a convert of Celeste Bartos to our cause. I ended up getting along with him. I told you, at the beginning, he wanted to throw out the papers. He came back and apologized for that later, because he did come to see their importance eventually. And I think he did gradually get to appreciate what a film archive was about. He did some good things. He was to some extent a male chauvinist without maybe even admitting it, I think. It was difficult for him to accept a woman being head of things. And yet, I was.

RM: Wasn't Margareta still running circulating? So he was dealing with a woman?

EB: Yes, and she was made to be administrative second-in-command. But maybe even before Dick left, I think Dick gave her some administrative title and then it got stronger after that. Of course, she served as the administrative head.

RM: Why would he have taken the job if he wasn't an archivist?

EB: Well, he didn't know, people don't know what an archive is until they actually get there. And he ended up doing some good things. He certainly backed what programming was doing and the changes it made. He had a bigger appreciation of independent filmmakers, considering that he was one himself, so he certainly got more of those films in and showed more of those films than had happened under Dick's regime, although Dick certainly appreciated avant-garde and showed it and collected it. But still, the current movement of the avant-garde sort of felt that Dick didn't appreciate them enough. But Willard went out of his way to bring them in, and was working with Adrienne, of course, at that point, too. I guess maybe that was his greatest strength, the exhibition side. And certainly he brought in Donald Richie. If he could have kept him, that would have been great because that was a great choice. Donald was a fantastic film historian, film archivist. There's a memo in there somewhere that Donald Richie wrote for Willard soon after he came saying what he thought should be done in the

department. And at that point he said that Adrienne and myself should be made curators. Of course, Willard didn't act on that for a second. [Laughing]

RM: What was Donald's title?

EB: He was a curator, I think he was a part-time curator. But he wouldn't stay because he didn't like being in New York. But I think he was really fond of the Museum and enjoyed his time there.

RM: That was in the '70s

EB: I adore Donald and still do. We are not very much in touch because he's so far away, but once in a while we are.

RM: So as an administrator, was Willard approachable and around? It sounds like it, taking people on trips to Rochester. . .

EB: Yes, very good.

RM: He gave you a sense that you were a group, a department.

EB: The first unions and strikes came along in Willard's time, and that was a problem. [Note: The Professional and Administrative Staff Association of The Museum of Modern Art, PASTAMoMA, was affiliated in May 1971 as Local I, Museum Division. The first strike ran from August 20–September 3, 1971.] And everybody was very angry because here was this enormous left-leaning liberal and he should be in favor of unions and all that. But now then the same kinds of bitterness came up that you have experienced. And Adrienne, especially, always had a tendency to love somebody inordinately or hate them, and there wasn't much in between. And I think with every director we ever had, that process took place. She loved Willard when he came in and hated him after. She was able to stir other people to follow her.

RM: Despite the fact that he was so heavily into exhibition, which was her thing. Was it because of the strike?

EB: [Laughing] I can't explain her thinking very well. That just was her personality. And so they ended up disliking Willard very much. I grew to like him better than I had at first, being more moderate in nature. I didn't love him or hate him, either one. [Laughter] He did undermine me but I don't think he meant to. He sent me off to FIAF with a letter to our Yugoslav colleagues that he was particularly good friends with, and I think he was telling them to look out for me and take care of me, the lion's den I was walking into. But that offended me terribly, you know. He would do things like that. He was part of the group that made me chairman of this national committee. God knows why, after we had a conference at Mohonk that decided to set up an organization to find out what, I can't remember the purpose of it, to study the state of film education, I think. One of those things where we were to guide the endowment on where to send their money. And later in the meeting that I was chairing -- I mean, I just went on for a year -- one of them said to me, "Well, Willard said that you found me to be a very great difficulty in our group." I hadn't told Willard any such thing. He would poke his oar in where he shouldn't and handicap me in what I was trying to do. But I really don't think he knew he was doing it. It just was him. So I had my problems with him but, O.K.

RM: He left on good terms, then?

EB: Yes. And he was followed directly by Ted Perry. [Note: Edward S. Perry was Director, Dept. of Film, 1975-1978.] And Ted had a lot of problems that I didn't fully understand, but for me he was an angel because he was the first one who came along that really did understand about the Archive being at the center of all of the other activity, and he really did give more support to the Archive. He saw to it that I was promoted to curator, one of the few things he did. So how could I not think he was a great director. [Laughing] He's got a book out which I've ordered, which is supposed to be autobiographical, but I don't know if it's about the Museum or just about his childhood, from a description it's maybe not. [Note:

Perry, Ted. My Reel Story. Hanover, NH: Middlebury College Press, 2001.] I ordered it. I'll let you know more. I think I'll have more understanding of him once I read that book. I know he was a strange person in some ways. He was so nervous, always. It was hard to sit next to him because he couldn't stop moving. He was nervous in that way, physically nervous.

RM: He was only at the Museum a few years, isn't that correct?

EB: I found him to be a really nice guy. Now, who was the one on staff who died of AIDS?

RM: Vito Russo?

EB: No.

RM: A friend from the Museum? Who worked on the staff?

EB: Yes, on the staff. Mary Lea [Bandy] was particularly close to him.

RM: Steve Harvey?

EB: Steve Harvey, yes. We had a showdown once because after Ted Perry left. He was job hunting in London, and the British Film Archive was looking for a head, and they wrote to me in confidence for a recommendation. I wasn't supposed to tell anybody so I didn't. And I wrote back a letter that recommended Ted. Whether I was right or wrong, I don't know, but the staff was furious with me when they found out.

RM: The Museum staff?

EB: Yes, because they disliked Ted Perry so much. So I was attacked in a meeting and I tried to say, "Just what was so awful about Ted?" And the most I could get was out of Steve Harvey, was, "He once said something awful about my writing

and hurt my career." And I said, "Are you sure? Did you confront him about this?" "No, I wouldn't confront him about this. I was told by someone that I have absolute confidence in." I still don't know who that was. So there were things like that that I didn't know. I didn't even know they hated him that much until that meeting and I was attacked.

RM: Apparently he was very much hated. The whole break between Charles and Mary Corliss was over the fact that Charles was supporting Mary Lea and Mary was supporting Ted. [Note: Corliss joined the Dept. of Film in 1967 as Stills Archivist; she is currently Assistant Curator, Film Stills.] I don't know what you know, but I've never heard a coherent version of the story hearings.

EB: I can't understand completely, either, and why Mary Corliss shared my enthusiasm for Ted I don't know either. We never talked about it. And Ted got into some problem with the administration, I think. I don't know what it was. It's amusing how in the dark you can be when you work for a place like that.

RM: I would assume that you would know, you're one of the people I would have come to with the story.

EB: Yes, I really don't have it. I was a bit mystified. I think Ted was very sincere in what he was trying to do there.

RM: What he trying to do in favor of the Archive?

EB: Yes, that was one of his things, certainly, and he also, of course, being an academic, had a natural tendency to want to bring academic types in. Which, for some reason was resented by others in the group.

RM: Who did he try to bring in?

EB: Not on the staff, just to present programs and to give lectures. For some reason there was this suspicion that he shouldn't act stuffy and academic around here.

RM: Do you recall who he brought in?

EB: No. There were strange things that went on, partly to do with the administration of the Museum at that time, too. Anyway, like I said, Mary Lea was next, and as I told Mary Lea driving back from Pennsylvania, "If you never do anything else with your career here, you've made your name by making this important contribution." Getting those vaults built. Because you know, I always say that the most important thing, that we lacked, as an Archive, was proper care of our films. And I couldn't get people to take it seriously, until she came along. And she did and she really worked at it. And Celeste [Bartos] listened to me, too, I must say. I talked to her a lot about it. And Celeste was the kind of person that would come in, take you to lunch, and say, "Well, what do you think is really needed?" It was really needed. I mean, that's the kind of trustee that we have in Celeste.

RM: And that's how your relationship to her developed? She seems to be the one trustee you had a relationship with during this whole history.

EB: Oh yes.

RM: Talk about that, a bit. To me that's a complete mystery, how you would talk to a trustee like her, except that she seems to have been approachable.

EB: Well, she made herself available. There weren't many trustees like that, but when she gets assigned to film she takes courses in films. She tries to find out what it's all about. How many trustees would do that? So, maybe she didn't become an expert, but she became knowledgeable enough to know how her money could be spent wisely –- and you can't ask more than that -- and without trying to boss you around. She didn't try to tell you what to do. She asked what should be done. Yes, that was a really rewarding endeavor, and not only for the Film department of The Museum of Modern Art, it's places all over New York City and things like that that she's done.

RM: New York Public Library

EB: And you don't see her getting all of the publicity or her name in the society pages much. In fact, I don't think she did spend much time socializing like that.

RM: No.

EB: She's handled her wealth really well. Now Lillian Gish had all this money to give away. I'm sure her intentions were the best, but she didn't work at it like that. She didn't provide that the money she left should be handled the way. I think if you could really sit down and talk to her about it, she would have done much better. Just that stupid award going to people who don't need it. She could have done some real good with that money. It should go to young people who have some good use for it.

RM: Isn't there an endowment she gave to the Museum for preservation?

EB: Yes, it ended up being nearly a million dollars. And that she discussed with us to some extent, but we always were trying to open it up and not get too restricted when we talked to her. There are restrictions on it, which she had a right to do. One could talk about it but nobody could talk to her about this enormous grant she left for the performing arts because she didn't tell anybody. Even the closest person to her, Jim Frasher, didn't know that she had all that money to give away. Nobody did.

RM: Weren't we supposed to get her papers and her stills and all of that?

EB: We were supposed to get the stills, and again, it wasn't in the will, and her things were being handled by a bank who knew nothing about films. I think they didn't want to, better to err than to listen to people who would know what to do. But her papers going to the Library of Congress was really quite right, because she, in her lifetime, did give the papers but the stills should have come to us. And Jim Frasher did the best he could to get them for us. But no matter. They're in good

hands. It's just always a pity when collections get scattered too widely. It's harder on the scholars.

RM: That's what I always think. But people want to spread their legacy around, that's what their thinking is. Is that all you have to say about Mary Lea?

EB: Well, that's the chief thing. That's the thing that I'm proudest of from her. It's quite enough. She didn't have to do anything else, as far as I was concerned. And I told her so. She again was not the best of administrators. She was a little like Dick Griffith in that regard. She's not tough enough, and he wasn't tough enough, to really get people to do their best work.

RM: Well, don't you think that, in defense of anyone who works, this really applies to anyone who works in the department, if they're trying to do their best and really facing all there is for them to do, they have to realize that there's too much for them to do. They can't do it all, and they have to make, have to decide that certain things aren't going to get done, or that they're going to dedicate their energies in one direction or another. And when you do that, being a good manager may be one of the things you decide you haven't got time to do if you're going to do the other things.

EB: Yes, that's quite true, and that's one of the glories of working in the department: that you can determine -– I found that from the beginning and it really saved my life -– how you're going to spend your time. And you can spend it in the direction that you think is the most valuable. No, I'm talking about toughness in regard to people who don't do any work. That's what I could never bear, that people should take a salary and not produce for it, knowing how slim the resources were there. But that's kind of old-fashioned, too, I'm afraid.

RM: What?

EB: My ideas about your responsibilities when you take a job. I just don't see sitting there and doing nothing.

RM: I have a few odds and ends left for this session. Just a few more names of people we haven't mentioned. Jean Lenauer. His name turns up a lot. [Note: Lenauer is listed as Technical Director in the 1969 Annual report.]

EB: He was our technical director for a while.

RM: He was. When would this have been, after Olga [Gramaglia]?

EB: After her.

RM: In the '60s sometime, I think.

EB: Yes. And of course he came as a working filmmaker. He had pretty good technical knowledge, but I don't think he was great on the preservation quality aspects. I didn't think any of them were until Peter came. Not even our dear beloved Madeline Matz, who worked very hard, had the best knowledge, background in the world. [Note: Matz held various positions in the Dept. of Film from late 1960s through late 1970s including Film Inspector, 1969; Traffic Manager, 1973, Laboratory Inspector, 1976; and Inspection Supervisor, 1978.], She also was a woman speaking to lab guys. You've got to have the lingo. You've got to be able to know more than they do to talk to them. It's not an easy job for anybody. Peter's managed it, but I think that was a problem for Madeline. It wasn't that she didn't really try. She did a lot of good work.

RM: Madeline was there when I came, so Jean Lenauer must have been before her.

EB: Yes, probably. There were several people in there that weren't there very long. Jean Lenauer was nice.

RM: I recall him coming around occasionally when I was there. George Pratt?

EB: George Pratt was a very dear friend and much respected. He again was a very strange personality. He either loved people or hated them. I was fortunate in being one of those he loved. But I always tried to reason with him and I didn't get very far, about people, you know. Because he got disgusted with them all, and so he and Jim Card were for many years at each other's throats. But as a film historian, he was working away on his own book doing really noble work, and I think everybody recognizes that he did an extremely important job. These day's he's recognized at least.

RM: Well, he certainly was. When you said that history was a forgotten discipline, he's one of those people that was holding out, one of the few people that was. . .

EB: Yes, working away alone.

RM: Yes, but in the dark, basically. He was doing the kind of basic research that later on was admired.

EB: So yes, we would certainly write to each other, back and forth, research questions and all. It was one of my problems with Jim Card that I went up there and George captured me and you had to be on one side or the other, you know. You couldn't be quite so close to Jim Card once that happened. And George would take under his wing any film historian if he thought they were doing good work. He would take them up.

RM: He'd share his research, he was very generous. He was extremely generous to me during the Treasures project. [Note: Magliozzi, Ronald S. Treasures from the Film Archive: Short, Silent Fiction Films in FIAF Archives. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988.] Extremely. One of the two people that was most supportive.

EB: He'd take you out to dinner and wine and dine you and all that, but when he came to New York he never came to see me. When he came to New York it was to hear music. Music was one of his other enthusiasms. I think he was shy. I

pleaded with him always to join the Brighton group, the Domitor group, to come to Pordenone. None of those things would he do. I think he was really painfully shy, which was really too bad because he missed a lot of good times that he could have had with fellow enthusiasts. But somehow we hit it off, found we could talk to each other. When he got mad enough at Eastman House, that was after poor John Kuiper came back, and he really hated poor John, who was a friend of mine in those days, he took the money -- he had some independent wealth -- that he used to give annually to George Eastman House and he started giving it to us. He gave it to me as a discretionary fund. And that was a very great help, because there was no acquisitions budget, and we decided to spend it that way, on acquisitions, which included making up prints of things already in the collection, and to do it in honor of Dick Griffith whom he also admired.

RM: So when an acquisition was needed before this, you had to get funding for every acquisition? So, in a sense, you were applying to somebody for money whenever an acquisition was made.

EB: Or what I did most of my years was exchanges. That's how I acquired most of the films sort of without cost.

RM: Right, just shipping.

EB: There was always some cost involved, but much less, and you could squeeze it out here and there. And once in a while, when Willard was there, he would say, "Here's so much money you can spend on films this year." He was pretty good at that. He would find money. So it was just there was never a budget line for it. But most years the director would find some money to fund the acquisitions. Sometimes they got it from Celeste, or the independent film acquisitions you could get through endowment grants. There were a lot of different things. We just scrambled. But that was very helpful, the coverage from George's funds, that it was me and nobody else that would decide how it was going to be spent. [Interruption.]

RM: So, how much money did George give you every year?

EB: It was five or six thousand, and it was over a period of years. It mounted up to a respectable amount. It would vary. That continued I think until he died. But I felt embarrassed by it because I couldn't tell Eastman House and I couldn't tell John Kuiper that this was the case because it had to be confidential. I did tell John eventually but I couldn't do it at the time.

RM: Margareta Akermark?

EB: Well, she was always, I guess, very successful operating circulation. She traveled around and talked to people. She was very good at socializing with people. She enjoyed that part, I think. Which I was never too good at. [Laughing] I should speak about her achievements but what I think of more is her personality. I found her very witty. She had a good sense of humor. She really could make us laugh. I think that's why she and Chris Bishop probably got along so well. They enjoyed a good laugh, and that's always a very important quality to have.

RM: She was there when Iris [Barry] was there, so she really has a long history.

EB: She had a long history, yes, because she came there as an eighteen year-old girl and worked at the front desk.

RM: Do you recollect any of her recollections of Iris? Was she good to work with? Did you work with her much?

EB: I didn't have that much reason to work with her, no. Circulation wasn't my bag, although I did contribute to the catalogues and writing about the films. That was my chief connection with circulation.

RM: Well, you were the resident historian in the department, I would say.

EB: Well, once Dick Griffith wasn't there any more I did have to fulfill that function and try to convince people that it was an essential function. I wrote a paper once for FIAF about the importance a knowledge of film history had in film archives. It seems like a truism but really I did write a paper and some archive people told me later, "That really helped me in my own archive." They took my paper and they showed it.

RM: What year was that? It must be published in one of the FIAF reports.

EB: I don't know if it was published or not, but there's that file on me that I worked to assemble. We depended on these files for history of other people, so I compiled one for myself, too. I tried to put things like that in it. It should be there.

RM: I'm glad you touched on the records management issue. I'm often trying to figure out where things came from, where the records in the department came from. Apparently some of them are not around any more, some went up to the Library of Congress, and then came back to us recently. I've been there so long. I've seen attitudes change. There was a time when no one in the Archive, after you left, really gave a damn about those files. And I kept saying, "Give them to the Study Center. I'll take care of them." It was always a matter of logistics to get the cabinets. And now, I'm being told I shouldn't be going in them any more because they're sacred and there were valuable things in here, and there are "sequences", that kind of thing. And I'm saying, "You don't even realize." The provenance of the documents is what I'm really asking about. I always thought that you basically constructed these files as they are today.

EB: Well, we had centralized files, at one point, and it made sense to me because otherwise different people in different sections of the department were corresponding with the same people. And it didn't make sense [to have separate files]. They needed to be all together and open to everybody. And Dorothy Gromann would maintain those files. [Note: Dorothy Gromann Delany joined the Publications Department of the Museum in 1964, became Secretary in 1965, then Executive Secretary to Willard Van Dyke, and retired in 1982.] She was in

charge of them. And after she left, people always rejected this idea. They didn't want to do filing. So any filing that was done, I did because I needed those files. I referred back through the files to the beginning of the Department. I needed to know the history of the acquisitions, knowing our relations with people and our agreements. I really needed those. The people today really need those, too, but they don't always realize it, and they won't be able to find what they need.

RM: Did you divide them up? It seems acquisition material was taken out of a lot of the files.

EB: They're all part of the same files, but acquisition has its own section. And when I found something that was relevant to that elsewhere, I put it in there, of course.

RM: In my processing of the documents, I never touched the acquisition files. I only do the later stuff. But as you know, there is acquisition information in those other files, inevitably. It's all mixed together.

EB: Because you would continue to have correspondence with people on a variety of subjects that made it really hard to catalogue well. And it could have been better done with the use of photocopying, but of course, the Xerox machines in those days were on paper that faded. Here and there it would happen that somebody would decide it was just taking up too much room -- we should get rid of this -- but I don't think it happened too much. I tried to maintain them. But as an entity. . . I think again it was probably Willard that decided some should go down to the Library. I'm not sure. Because he had that urge to get rid of papers.

RM: Right, right. There is the odd case that some of Griffith's stuff is in the Library, in the Museum Archives, and they won't give it back. [Note: The Griffith Papers are in the Museum Archives.] And some stuff is with us. That's happened a few times, which is kind of baffling to me and to other people who don't expect that. But when you first came to the Museum -- you may not even remember this -- what were you were confronted with when you first came in as a secretary and saw those files?

EB: Those were the curators' files. Those were the files, in my office. I still say, that's how I learned what it was all about, by reading them. And that's why I think people don't know how valuable they are to the daily work. They're just old history; shove it in there and forget it.

RM: A lot of the answers to what the collection is and isn't is in those files, I thought.

EB: There was extraordinary stuff, even from the early days. I'd find strange gaps and I didn't know why. I do know that in the process of daily work, if, for example, someone wanted to claim some films, and try to find out the terms of an agreement, or there was a lawsuit, then the papers got pulled out and they didn't necessarily get back in the same place. That frequently happens.

RM: And I gather Margareta disposed of all of the Circulating Film papers and so forth. None of those are in the Archive. I've asked, and apparently she got rid of them at some point.

EB: That's what I'm told. I don't know. I don't know where they are today.

RM: Well, I haven't been able to locate them, which is really a shame, because a lot of the history of the department is lost there. And I think that's the reason I don't know much about Christopher Bishop and Adams and Allen Porter, because a lot of their time was spent working with her, and those documents are gone.

EB: I did make some effort toward programming [film exhibitions], that their files should be in order. I trust they still are. Because I had to keep files by show.

RM: Did you organize those files as well?

EB: At one stage, I did, yes. I didn't keep it up, but at one point I did.

RM: That job was taken over by Robert Beers, and now it's come to me and I organized them and did an exhibitions master list. [Note: Beers was Secretary, then Executive Secretary, Dept. of Film, from the early 1980's? to the mid 1990s.]

EB: Because people were always coming up with questions, "Where did you get that print?" I would expect programming would have felt the need to keep it up thoroughly because people are always asking. I don't know. Maybe they were in Robert Beers' time. I never looked at them again.

RM: They were maintained up to when he left when I took them over. He's now, of course, gone, left during the strike.

EB: Is he okay?

RM: Apparently, yes

EB: He lives somewhere in the Village. I've seen him on the street but not in a long time.

RM: We're about done for now. I do reserve the right to come back. I did want to ask you a couple more things, though. The fire. We didn't talk about the fire. To finish this up, any anecdotes or any things you remember. Any celebrities, any incidents that occurred during your term at the Museum that you think are worth recalling, anecdotally. And the fire being one of those things. Talk about that experience. [Note: A fire broke out in the Museum on April 15, 1958.]

EB: Well, after we got out everybody was busily involved in pulling out the works of art and the films and other things.

RM: When was this? Tell me your recollection of when it was, roughly, and what actually happened.

EB: It was during one of our rebuilding programs, I know that.

RM: '57?

EB: That's possible. Anyway, it was a rebuilding program, and it was one of those workman's, construction worker's fires. And it was quite a big fire, because once we went on the street you could see there was the smoke and everything.

RM: It occurred during the day, during working hours?

EB: During working hours. And what I did was to grab the Rolodex, because for one practical reason, I knew that Dick Griffith had a lunch date with Muriel Rukeyser, the poet. This is a nice story because I telephoned her thinking this was going to be on the TV news or whatever and people might get alarmed, and to say he wouldn't be making the lunch date but that he was okay. I had seen him outside the Museum. He wasn't injured, and he was busily pulling out films. So the really nice thing is that later she wrote a poem about the Museum fire, and my name is in it because I telephoned her. [Laughter] It was so funny. I can't remember now the name of the poem, but I have seen it. I don't know what collection it's in, but when I see a collection of her poems, I look to see if I can find it. She was a good friend of Dick's. And after he died, she called me and we had lunch one day, but we didn't go on to become friends or anything.

RM: You said Griffith was pulling out films. Circulating films that were in the building for exhibitions?

EB: There were circulating films there. One had to worry always about water damage. We did suffer damage to some Orson Welles material that was there. That was the only thing that I know about. That was because Iris Barry had talked to him about doing a show, a wall exhibition, and he had sent this material in. And almost all of it, I think, was theater material, not film material. Photographs of stage productions, that kind of thing, and it got water and smoke damaged. Glass was broken on the frames and all. She had really tried to send

the material back to him because the show had not come off for some reason. In fact, I think I also tried to send it back to him. He was never available because he was always, you know, here and there in some corner of the world. It never got back to him. So it was a pity, because it wouldn't have been there to be damaged. Of course, we had the Oscar for *Citizen Kane* there, and that we had to return later, thanks to Peter Bogdanovich who knew it was there. He became friends with Welles when Welles needed money, and Peter convinced him he could sell it off for the money. And he asked for it back, and, of course, I didn't have any reason I could say no to that. I knew it was his property not ours but it broke my heart to send it back.

RM: Sure, was that in the '60s? People have asked about that.

EB: Yes, I was so sorry about that because I don't know where the Oscar went after Peter got his hands on it. Maybe Peter Bogdanovich knows. It's not like a film you can make a copy of.

RM: So after the fire what happened?

EB: Then there was a big rebuilding program, like you're having now, but we moved up into the old penthouse restaurant. We had our desks out in the open dining room area. We didn't have all of our files or anything. It seems like it was a whole year. It was so hard to get our work done because we didn't have private offices, we didn't have all of our files. So I always remember rebuilding programs as such a terrible disruption. It's not counted as part of the cost, but it is part of the cost for an institution, that for a year, for several years, most of the real work of the Museum doesn't get done. You're just coping as best you can to circumstances. With all that goes on in a building program they don't ever consider that. It never occurs to them because they don't know what the Museum workers are doing.

RM: Any other anecdotes? Celebrity encounters? You weren't there when Joan Crawford came? What about Gloria Swanson? Were you any part of that?

EB: Yes.

RM: She took her stuff back.

EB: That story I got mostly from Dick Griffith. They had accepted stuff from her, and there was some home movie material, which was deteriorating. He told her about it but she promptly put it out of her mind. He forgot about it and then she came back after a while and discovered to her horror that Baby Gloria's baby pictures weren't there. She got unjustly furious and took away the films. They went to Eastman House. It wasn't a real loss, as if she'd taken them back into her personal collection.

RM: I assume you told her they were disintegrating because he hoped she would fund their restoration. Instead she ignored it.

EB: In those days there was a shortage of money, and with *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* having to be preserved, you couldn't really allocate resources to people's home movies and baby pictures, even though one would want to have them. But, of course, by that time Dick had gone but I knew about it because we were still in touch after he left. The famous people that I knew were all somehow silent movie stars, as you know I became friends with Blanche Sweet and friends with Lillian Gish. I feel very privileged and I have wonderful memories of them. I'm so glad I got to know them. They were the only ones that really became friends among the famous people. I forget to mention the most important one of all, Carl Dreyer. I felt truly honored to have made his acquaintance. A great man. And there was George Cukor. Cukor came once. He was contemplating a biography film about D. W. Griffith along with George Axelrod who was to be the screenwriter. They came, of course, to see the Griffith Papers but they were not researchers and spent most of two days talking and asking me questions. It was an interesting experience when he did that. You know he was such a sweetheart.

RM: When was that, in the ‘60s? ‘70s?

EB: ‘70s maybe, because I catalogued those papers pretty early.

RM: I didn’t ask you about that because in the Italian [Note: Spanish] interview you talked about cataloguing the Griffith stuff and preserving the Biograph, so I kind of kept away from that. There’s one thing lacking we haven’t talked about, how you directed preservation.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **EILEEN BOWSER (EB)**

INTERVIEWER: **RON MAGLIOZZI (RM)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

DATE: **DECEMBER 27, 2000**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

RM: Do you believe film is an art?

EB: Yes, I do. Of course, my training as an art historian sends me in that direction even before I get to The Museum of Modern Art, but once when I gave a paper and it came to the question period someone asked that and they said, "How would you define the art of film?" I'm afraid I begged off. I said, "You expect me to answer in a few words. I'd have to write a few more volumes to answer that question," and I still think that. I think that films are an art form the way books are an art form. There's a lot of trash published. A lot of films that are probably not works of art are made and they can be important too for reflecting their times and important too to be saved and studied. But I still have to believe that some films reach the point of a work of art and so touch upon it. I do believe that. And as I said to this film theorist who was questioning me, that that's what makes me interested in film as a subject. It's film as an art that makes it interesting to me, otherwise, I might be just as interested in doing a history of cosmetics or anything else. It's as an art form that it first draws my interest.

RM: And there's the attitude that you bring to it, when you collect films and preserve them. I assume that without that attitude -- that film is an art you are dealing with -- you wouldn't collect and preserve it.

EB: Then it's a business.

RM: Yes, it wouldn't be more than a business.

EB: I'm sure that the history of locomotives in a locomotive museum is very important, very fascinating too, but it's not the same thing as dealing with an art form.

RM: Yes, a popular art. That's what I was trying to get at when I asked about being a film department in an art museum. It's really high art and low art, or that attitude. Popular art versus high art, if you consider art to be high art.

EB: That's very true, except, of course, there's no line in the middle. It's pretty wavy, fuzzy. That's what you have to cope with. If there was a hard line, then we could just collect film as art, I suppose, and that would be a worthwhile thing to do. But it's not like that, it's not that easy. And what I think is a work of art, another generation might not. You have to fully realize that. I'm not afraid to accept some responsibility for my times and for selecting what I thought was important, and I don't have to be afraid for that because there are so many archives, thank god, and so many different people with different ideas. Altogether, we probably do half a job, at least, in trying to save films.

RM: O.K., thank you.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

END INTERVIEW

From Ron Magliozzi's Notes:

EB: [afterthought to question of what role Luis Bunuel might have played in creating abridged version of *Triumph of the Will* at the Museum]. My impression is that when Iris Barry was in charge she was a one-man operation. She did everything. She wasn't a manager who delegated jobs and let her staff run with them. She did everything herself.

EB: One day it was raining and as I came into my office the phone was ringing, so I sat down and answered it in my raincoat and hat. Bill Lieberman came by, looked at me, and said, "Now you really look like Iris Barry." She was known for wearing her hats in the office. I never had much to do with Lieberman, just to say "hello" when we passed each other's offices.

EB: My appearances in the Brownlow films did more to make me famous than anything else I ever did. Television is the most powerful medium for producing celebrities.