

E. Ray Scott

Executive Director of Michigan from 1966 to 1985

Interviewer: Susan Neumann

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1. Think back on those early days of SAA's, when you were new in your job and the whole "field" was in formation.

A. What was the "big idea" behind the formation of the NEA and SAA's?

Frankly I think it was because for the first time there was money available for such a thing. And the state of Michigan appropriated \$50,000 to get it started and with the... I think it was something like, oh, I don't remember, something like \$40,000 from the federal government so we had a budget of something close to \$100,000.

B. What was your "big idea" when you took your job – what was the situation in your state, and where were you hoping to go?

Well, the situation in the state was I think that there were about 5 or 6 community arts councils and that was it and our main job was to try to figure out what sort of program we were going to develop; we had the money, what were we going to do with it. And we had a statewide event that invited representatives from all parts of the state to suggest what programs would be appropriate for a newly formed state council and those were then referred to at that time disciplinary committees to suggest or to form programs for the Council to consider.

Would you consider that your "big idea"? What did you think when you took the job that it would be?

I thought that we had to do just exactly what we did and that was to have a statewide get-together and find out what ideas would come out of each of the several committees that were pretty much based on discipline at that point.

C. When you left your job, do you think you had made progress in achieving your "big idea"? Or did you change your mind about what was needed?

No, I thought we did a pretty good job. We had, as I said primarily based on disciplines but then it evolved into more of a geographic area that included several disciplines and I guess I considered that that was a better way to run it, having several disciplines per geographic area rather than a discipline that covered the entire state.

D. What were you proudest of having achieved during your time in office?

Well, I think the Art Train was the genesis of a lot of things.

When was it established, do you recall?

Well, I think it started about 1970 and it opened about a year and a half later. And we recruited rail...I forget what they call technically the rail equipment...but we got three railcars mainly for hauling passengers and converted them into exhibit areas. And then we had a car that was dedicated to artists at work and you wandered through the railcar with an artist doing their thing and painters and sculptors and silversmiths and whatever. So that the people could actually see, having gone through the space where the art was displayed, then they got into the car that was devoted to the artists doing their thing. And then we actually had a security system in the train because nobody wanted to lend art to something that was not secure and we had a railcar for a long time that was a generator car; it generated the electricity for the train. And then we had a caboose where the people who were not on duty could go and relax and we had one person who stayed with the train because the railroad would not guarantee their safety so only one person stayed with the train. And we had requirements that anyone who wanted the train had to agree to form a community arts council if one did not exist so that there would be an organization to continue the work of the train after it had gone. And when it was over, we had over 100 community arts councils and the train, when last I checked on it, had visited 33 states and I assume that the requirements are pretty much the same.

The architectural community was invited and encouraged to develop the train site and performing arts groups were encouraged to perform something in conjunction with the visit of the train and we had community theatres doing plays and community orchestras doing something, either at the train site or in the community, while the train was there. A lot of activities spun off of the Art Train because when the train went to other states, of course the railroads there had to be cooperation between the railroads so that they would pull the train. The train never had an engine...that was the only thing it was missing...so we had to hook it up to an engine and you got to the place that the train was going to out-of-state communities, we had the cooperation of railroads that did not serve Michigan and for instance when we got to a point where the Santa Fe had agreed to pull the train and they balked a little bit because they said, "You know, over the mountains, we have to have three engines; one to pull and one to push and one in between," and he said that they weren't excited about that because he said they were afraid that with all that stress on railcars that were built about 1923 that they would practically disintegrate. But we had a couple of governors' wives from states that the train had visited and they got an appointment with the head of Santa Fe and persuaded them to look at the train and after they did, the guy from Santa Fe not only agreed to do it but loaned some of the Santa Fe rails' artworks for display on the train. And when the state of Michigan legislature indicated that they were not going to fund the whole thing, Nancy Hanks came down to view the train and said, "This cannot be permitted to sit on the side." And so she said, "If you will contact state arts council directors, you can tell them that the train will be available on a regional basis for a month that would include at least four stops in each state." And so that was encouragement to get regional cooperation from states so that

one of the states would serve as the focal point for requests for a train visit. And so out of this came the creation of any number of regional arts agencies.

I had no idea that Art Train started with that requirement of a community arts council forming. That's a great idea.

Otherwise it would be like, you know...it could be like a circus that came to town and when it was over, it was over but they had to leave behind something that would continue the work,

E. What was most frustrating to you?

I think legislators who wanted to include specific allocations in the budget bill for specific.... A lot of legislators wanted something permanent in their district for.... But, from the beginning, the state arts council was opposed to line items because in a way that would usurp the prerogative of the council itself in determining what the money was to be used for and where and how much. So the frustrating thing was battling the legislators who wanted the appropriations bill to include a specific allocation for a project.

F. What was most surprising to you?

Let's come back to it.

G. What was your agency's relationship with the NEA like? With other SAA's? With ACA? With local arts agencies?

NEA – Well, I think, with the National Endowment for the Arts, it was pretty good. I made it a point to cultivate a personal relationship with Nancy Hanks and I was always welcome in her office and I was invited to serve on several of the NEA committees. I thought the relationship was very good.

SAA's – Well, I think that was also good particularly because of Art Train. The Art Train was scheduled to travel to...gosh, I can't remember....Colorado or one of those Western states for one of their annual meetings and so everybody who attended the annual meeting of state arts agencies were exposed to the train. And, of course, there was a regional arts council that we participated in.

ACA – *Did you attend the annual meetings of state arts agencies?* Yes. Sue, I guess I'd have to say it's good 'cause I can't think of any negatives. It was a good opportunity to exchange notions and ideas between other state arts agencies and we did.

LAA's – Well, that was excellent because, once again, everywhere the train went they had to have a community arts council and it was just over a period of a year or two, the number of local arts agencies multiplied considerably and we had a program that was devoted exclusively to maintain a liaison with community arts councils. I don't remember a single incident in which there was a problem. Sue, you know, it's been such a long time from 1966 to 2004. Some of these things have gone out of my head. Well, I guess I should say that I think the negative things would have stuck with me and, because I can't think of any, I have to assume that it was pretty congenial.

H. (this can be a probe question from g above) What was the single biggest issue or challenge the SAA field had vis a vis the federal government, the regionals, other states, the local arts agencies?

Let's come back to that.

Alright, because I'm going to ask you the same thing in regards to regionals, other states, and local arts agencies...whether there were any issues that were really burning issues or challenges...Like later in the 90's there was the whole censorship issue and Mapplethorpe and all that. Want to come back to that?.

NEA – Well, I can't recall any instances such as Mapplethorpe. I think censorship, which I suppose Mapplethorpe would be, was never a problem.

It could have been anything else like funding, allocations from the federal government, were there any issues about how the moneys were decided?

I don't recall that there were any prohibitions in how the funds were to be expended.

Can you think of an anecdote that tells us something about the arts in the political climate of your state at that time? Can you tell us who – if anyone – was a special political ally to you in those days (the governor? A legislator?)

Well, we were very fortunate to have for 14 years a governor William Milligan who was a staunch advocate for the arts and you know, of course, the capital and legislature are in Lansing and my offices were in Detroit. When I first became director of a state arts agency, I went to the governor who was in his freshman term then as governor and I simply sought him out and said, "I guess we have at least one thing in common. We're both new to our game and I hope you know more about making laws than I know about..." And he says, "Oh, we're doing to get along fine. Why don't you stop down to my office before you leave to go back to Detroit and let's have a little visit," and we did and we established a rapport that served us for the 14 years that he was governor. He would always come down at Christmas time to his office in Detroit and have a little reception for all state employees in the Detroit area and when I would go through the line he would say, "Ray, if you're not in a hurry, if you like you can stay until the line quits and I'll talk to you about the budget." And at his instigation we had a understanding that he would recommend what he thought the budget could accommodate for the arts council and he added, "If you can persuade the appropriations a committee and the legislature to allocate more than I have recommended, I will not veto it." So our budget grew more than most, I think, because I worked with the legislature. We always had a hearing before the house and senate appropriations committees and we gave them a real pitch. I remember one time we inserted in there a brand new dollar bill and said, "You know, this is not a bribe. One dollar is not enough for a bribe but if you'll look at the picture on that dollar bill, just to give you an idea about the comparisons of the amount of money that is being requested for the state arts agency is about the size of the pupil in George Washington's eye: the right eye if you are a conservative and the left eye if you are a liberal." And, of course, there were some that wouldn't go along with it. On the appropriations committee there were always some that you just could not get to but I kept a record of the birthdays of each of the legislators that were on the appropriations committee and they got a birthday cake and one of them says, "God, Ray, you'll do anything." I say, "Well, I want you to feel bad if you vote 'no' on this appropriations." The governor was certainly a political ally and I think there was a little incident that I would like to relate. When the bill creating the arts council was put before the legislature, I spent a lot of time in Lansing and the bill passed the House something like

75 to 6 and then it went to the Senate and I had talked to everybody in the Senate and I thought it was a sure thing and so when the bill was up for passage in the Senate, I went over to sit in the gallery and the senators now have buttons that they push “yes” and “no” but at that time they liked to have their names called off and the clerk would check them off. When the bill to establish the council came up, and they were calling off the names, the first two or three were “nay, nay, nay;” and I thought that that can’t be the bill and yet there it was on the desk of the clerk and so I said, “What the hell could I have done wrong?” When it was over, one of the senators got up and said, “Now before this vote is recorded, I would like to request a recheck....a recounting of the votes.” And so they did a recount and, out of the 38 senators, there were 36 that voted “aye” and one who voted “nay” and one who abstained and one of the senators said, “Well, I suggest that this vote be recorded before a friend of ours who is in the gallery has a coronary.” He looked up to me and he said, “E. Ray, we only do that for people that we love.” I think it sort of covers the relationship I had with the governor and legislators.

J. How did you use your time:

1. Can you describe a prototypical day?

We had on Monday, we had a meeting of all of the employees except the secretaries and then during the week anytime anything special or unusual came up we would have another general meeting.

So was your time spent in managing staff or was it working with the field or with the Council?

Of course, it was always working with the Council. I didn’t see a place for that on the list. I did a lot of work with the chairman of the council; I would say probably 10% and to get it to 100% another 5 % could be added to advocacy/lobbying.

2. In a typical year at the beginning, can you give a general idea of how your time divided (in percents, roughly):

10%___ Grant administration

20%___ advocacy/lobbying with public officials

5%___ field /constituency communication

10%___ agency strategic planning

20%___ program development

___ fundraising*

___ partnership building (with other government agencies, with other types of nonprofits, with private sector, with arts/cultural agencies at other levels of government)

*I don’t know what that includes. We were prohibited from raising funds, private sources, because it impeded fundraising in the communities.

3. Did your time use change in any noticeable way from the beginning to the end of your time at the SAA?

I think more time was spent on program development and grant administration.

K. What else - information, stories – can you tell us that you think people in the future ought to know about your agency, or the SAA world in general?

II. Have you stayed in touch with the state arts agency field since you left your position as Executive Director?

Well, Sue, I have to say that, when I left the Council, I was appointed to the direct the state commission on art in public places and I was there for six years and then I retired. And except for an occasional phone call for a specific matter, I have not stayed in touch with the executive director of the state arts council.

You've obviously have stayed in touch with some of the directors.

Yes, but that was mostly based on friendships that I made during the time. Just, for instance, I went out earlier this year because Frances Poteet who was at one time director of Missouri; they had a 40th anniversary and she was honored for work that she did during the time that she was there even though she now lives in Albuquerque so I and several other directors of state arts agencies and a couple of former employees of the National Endowment for the Arts went for her, to contribute to the honor that she received and I've done that sort of thing. As a matter of fact I did it one year for Wayne.

A. If so,

1. From your experience, how has the role and the activities of SAAs changed since you began your career?

I haven't kept up with that.

2. From your experience, what skills/competencies do you think are most important to incoming SAA staff? To SAA leadership?

3. Would you pursue a career in SAAs/public arts management today if you were starting out?

Yes, I would.

4. Has the field lived up to its promise? Why or why not?

B. If you have NOT stayed in touch with the field, why not?

The main reason is because I felt I have discovered other things that I'm as interested in or more interested in and I felt that, if I evidenced too much interest in it, it would be looked upon as "none of your business." I think knowing what I know now about state arts agencies I think I would pursue a career because I'm better qualified now for a career in the state arts or public arts management than when I was when I originally started out.

III. Think about the time when you were starting your work with SAAs. What have you changed your mind about, if anything, from then to now?

IV. Do you have a single piece of advice for a young person entering the field of public sector arts administration today?

I guess because before I got into arts council work I spent, I don't know, 7 or 8 years as a lobbyist for the medical society and that gave me a jump on getting to know the legislators and I can't imagine any more profitable way to spend your time than getting to know the legislators who are, well, you know, I had an understanding before I accepted

the lobbying job with the medical society that before I did anything, I would spend six or eight weeks sitting in the gallery of the House and the Senate understanding the whole procedure and identifying those legislators who obviously were in charge. I had an understanding which doesn't necessarily apply here that, if I did not understand or agree with a position of the medical society on a bill, I would not be required to lobby for that bill but that ...I can't image a bill that would come before the legislature that I wouldn't be strongly in favor of. But you can't go wrong by knowing who the key people are in the state legislature. I know that I discovered that with several state arts councils, the director of the state arts agency stayed away from anything having to do with politics at all and I think that's a mistake.

V. Information about you:

A. Education

- 1. Educational level (has, ba, some grad, ma, PhD) – I got I guess halfway through a doctorate. So you have an MA? Right.*
- 2. Major/field – Well, undergraduate work, it was theatre and speech; and in graduate work it expanded to an area called communication arts.*

B. What skills/competencies did you have/did you bring to your leadership position at an SAA? How had you acquired these skills? (experience, professional development training, formal degree education)

C. Work Experience

1. Specific arts management experience vs. non-arts management experience
Arts management experience includes 6 years as Command Entertainment Director with the Department of Defense in Stuttgart, Germany.

2. Did you work for a SAA either before or after your time as Executive Director?
No

3. Did you work for a public sector agency – not an SAA – either before or after your time as Executive Director?
Executive Director, Michigan Commission on Public Art, 1985-1991

4. It may be necessary for us to just ask them to make a list of their work experience in chronological order – no need for years – including the SAA, and then for us to categorize – jotting one of these categories after they have named the job:

- private sector management*
- government agency management*
- gallery/performance group*
- fundraising/grant administration*
- performer/critic/writer*
- lobbyist/advocate*
- nonprofit sector experience*
- elected office holder*

-arts education/teacher
-academic
-service organization experience: national or other

Work Chronology

1953-1959

Command Entertainment Director, Department of Defense, Headquarters, U.S. Seventh Army, Special Activities Division, United States Armed Forces, Europe, Stuttgart, Germany – *government agency management; performance group*

1960-1966

Public Relations Representative/Lobbyist, Michigan State Medical Society, East Lansing, Michigan – *lobbyist/advocate*

1966-1985

Executive Director, Michigan Council for the Arts, Detroit, Michigan – *government agency management*

1985-1991

Executive Director, Michigan Commission on Public Art, Detroit, Michigan – *government agency management*

D. Do you pursue any art form? Which?

Yeh, I've always been interested in theatre. I belong to three or four theatre organizations in this area.

You did acting at one time, right?

Yeh, and directing.

E. Demographic information:

1. *Gender- Male*

2. *Age range now – 81*

3. *geographic region he or she lives now – Detroit area, Dearborn*

4. *political/partisan identification - Democrat*

From Bob O'Leary:

Would you like information on what he's doing now being a mentor to other people and helping them to direct and act and all at Players? He has done a great deal for me. He just funded the first annual E. Ray Scott Michigan artists' awards. There are three \$3000 gifts, and that was directly in response to the fact of the state cutting all its budget for Michigan artist's grants. The state had \$100,000 allocated for grants to individual artists and they cut it to 0. If I can point out a couple of little things that might play into this, when he set up the award: limited paperwork, anonymous nominations, no grants, no forms to fill out, no reporting back once you got the grant, everything that he dreaded working with the government he made that there were no limitations. In fact, when they gave it out he basically said, "You can do diddly with it, I don't care. It would be nice to give me a letter, let me know how it might have helped you out but..." These are four

people who were already established, you know, who might be poor as hell, wealthy as hell, it doesn't matter; they were pursuing their craft and this wasn't a wistful idea and then I'll go get a real job. But all the nominations, when they came into him, in fact everybody who received the award remarked they were kind of shocked because "Who had nominated me?" or who to thank but that was the way it was supposed to be; no politics involved and tried to make it statewide, particularly in this state. All through Arts Serve was a medium that he funneled the money through. Arts Serve promotes art and is funded through the state but its funding has been cut.