

## **Brann Wry**

*Executive Director of New Jersey from July 1973 to June 1976*

*Interviewer:* Susan Neumann

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*Brann Wry current contact information:*

121 Buckingham Avenue

Trenton, NJ 08618

609-695-4372 (H)

212-998-5505 (W)

[Brann.Wry@NYU.edu](mailto:Brann.Wry@NYU.edu)

*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?*

As far as I understood it, the big idea at the time, since New Jersey funded the arts at a very small extent, was to get the state of New Jersey to have an arts council and do some funding so the NEA money was the money that we actually gave to the arts organizations. So it was very important for us to have the NEA money and it stood there as an incentive to the legislature to continue to fund us. That was really the big idea, you know, because we were very aware that we were sub-grantors of federal money and that the money did not come from us although I must say that the state at the time did match the federal money pretty well. It was just okay but not great but they kept us in business. The state of New Jersey did establish it and did give it administrative money and a little bit of grant money but the endowment money was usually bigger and more important than ours.

*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?*

My big idea when I took my job, I thought when I took the job the idea was a couple of things: to help organizations get some of this money, to become better organized, to get more of this money; and also to help the arts council itself, I don't know, move itself in a more positive governance direction. They still needed by-laws and they still wanted a little more direction with their committees and things like that so I was very pleased to do that and I was also very interested, since I'd been an intern with the arts council, I was very interested in the arts education potential for the arts council because artists in schools was very new and while I was an intern I had run three components of the artists in schools program for the state arts council. I was very aware of that role. *How long were you an intern?* I was an intern for six months in 1972 from July to December, or mid-June I guess it was to December. I was getting my Masters in arts management from UCLA; I'd gotten a BA from there. So I knew the council well when I took the job. The other thing...my other "big idea" was to grow the arts council. It had a very small staff and was only doing its job slightly adequately because we really didn't have consistent financial oversight, we didn't have consistent program direction; there was no deputy director; there was nobody doing publicity and that kind of thing for the arts council so it

had a lot of administrative gaps that had to be filled in. I was able to write positions and get them funded so that was something I enjoyed doing. So we grew from a staff of 6 to 16 while I was there. It was fun.

Also teaching people in the field what a grant was and how to get it. Actually sometimes people asked me, "What's a grant?" So there was a certain amount of instructional stuff you did by going around the state and doing workshops and that kind of thing on how to get matching funds and what they were because this was only the sixth year of the arts council's life. By then there were arts councils in every state but they were brand new except for New York and, I think, North Carolina. They were really very new and so, you know, it was really a new idea for people.

*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?*

Oh, I think I did. The arts council stayed at that size for many years. The basic structure that I left stayed in place. I had written sort of a dream-what-you-want budget for the arts council at their encouragement and I had put everything in it that I thought an arts council should have and one of the things I noticed they did was they regionalized some of their grants so I had large regional grants in there...for the time it was large, maybe \$30,000 to each county...and they adopted that idea eventually so there was a certain amount of regionalism that occurred because of what I had written in my last budget so that was kind of a pleasure to see that that idea lasted and it somehow became reality. We have a system of local arts agencies that include county cultural and heritage commissions and local arts councils. In some places we have a slight parallel duplication but not usually because actually there are places in the state where there is a small population and only maybe one cultural and heritage commission serves the whole thing. But that was nice to see that that idea came through. There was also a design component that I got money for but that didn't last beyond my being there. That was more like a design schools and an architecture and design program that would help locals find better design and that kind of thing but that never got as much money as regionalization and I think regionalization probably worked better because it was on the ascendancy in New York, number one, and elsewhere in the country but number 2 because it spread money around the state. Constituency-wise, that's a lot better for a legislator.

Did I change my mind about anything that was needed? I learned a lot about boards being a new executive director. I thought the board needed to be better at what they did. It wasn't a rude awakening by any means but it was something that I learned over those three years that the board needed to be just a little stronger in their feelings, a little more adept at handling their own leadership issues and handling their own leaders. There was one strong leader who was difficult and made it difficult for most of the board and they just never quite checked him. I thought they could have been stronger people and, you know, so they're people. But that was part of it; they would sort of flounder and they also were not very good advocates for the arts and I thought that was disappointing; that was really needed more. If someone were proposing an arts council member, it should be someone who could articulate and is not afraid to do that. We all have influential people from time to time and I had some that were very influential but would never open a door

or pick up a phone as far as being advocates and that was difficult at times because, you know, as a staff person you don't have access to the same people those board members have. That's something I would change, I would like to have worked on in the following years but by that time I was leaving and going to New York University.

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

I think probably what I was proudest of achieving was I really had helped for the budget to grow so I had helped for arts organizations to have great continuity of their budgeting. I think I also had a very nice relationship with the people in arts organizations; I was very proud of that. People told me after I left that they thought I'd been a very distinguished executive director and that they really had been very pleased with my leadership so that's intangible but it's feedback I got after I left. And I also I think...one of the nice things was that I really felt as though I had a place in the field here in New Jersey because I then became a founder our coalition of the arts and humanities and so the people whom I had known in a different relationship became my colleagues for advocacy and I really felt as though I was one of them which was really nice. Then I knew it wasn't just about my being in an office; I knew it was about identifying with similar causes and goals. It was really nice; a nice feeling. Probably the relationship I achieved with fellow arts administrators and artists in New Jersey, I think I was proudest of that.

*E. What was most frustrating to you?*

The most frustrating for me in those days of the arts council was the interloping I experienced from the Secretary of State's office in the affairs of the arts. It wasn't constant but it was always a surprise and it was from people who really didn't care at all about what we did. And we were part of the state department; for some reason they had put us in the state department. And the state department, it was really a political operative who ran the state department and all they did was keep records. With us in there, we were a real programming agency, you know. And so they really frequently either got in the way or they slowed down our work because they didn't understand it so it was very frustrating to work with them. We were a division of the state department. The chairperson of the council was considered my boss but then so was the secretary of state so I was a division head within the state department but my chair was also very politically operative himself so he would frequently make deals with the secretary of state that I wouldn't even know about and I would walk into something totally surprised and frequently I was the bad guy because I didn't know about them with those two. So they played a lot of games with each other. What would happen was they usually slowed down our work; or they would have an administrator...there was a guy who was their administrator, he just wouldn't do things with the biggest smile on his face, he just wouldn't get them done. So that was probably the most frustrating thing, when they would interlope and it was all new so politics and government and the arts was just being invented. And these people were pretty small but we seemed to get by. This is politics frequently among two or three people who liked to play with each other and slow you down in their play. Now I can laugh at it fortunately but as a very young person new to government and everything, I wasn't so happy with it.

*F. What was most surprising to you?*

I think the most surprising to me was the lack of definition of what an arts council should be or what it should do. As an intern I thought these people really had it together because we had a university president and we had a former director of a museum and we had the publisher of *Esquire*, you know, and then a member of the landed gentry so they were all people you'd look at and say, "Gee, these people have really made it." Then you'd get into a room with them and you'd realize they really don't know what to do with this thing. They wanted to give money to the arts all their lives and now that they had a chance to do it, they didn't know how to do it. They didn't have a sense of how to govern themselves and that was surprising. While they were very conscientious, sometimes they just lacked the kind of courage I thought they should have about what they were doing because they were very prominent people. So that was the most surprising, I think; people who had this very distinguished position in the arts and a lot of responsibility who just didn't know what to do about it and so sometimes I'd think, "My goodness, these people must have been on boards by now because I think the youngest one was...I think I was 31 when I became executive director...the youngest one was 11-15 years older than I was so I figured, "Well, they've done more than I've done" but they still didn't have a grasp of that and what direction they wanted to go and it was very curious and that was probably the most surprising.

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

It was very good. The NEA, the Partnership Program was terrific. Clark Mitze, I think, was the director of the state arts program, the federal partnership program at the time and that was also the era in which the regional representatives were brand new. And there was a woman by the name of Lara Morrow; she married and became a Morrow; she was a Mulholland or something like that; great, great gal and lovely to work with. So we had a very supportive relationship with the NEA. Nancy Hanks also took an interest in me for one reason or another; she was always very friendly to people so I always felt that could approach the Endowment and work with them. Also with ACA, Michael Newton who was the executive director. So I really felt as though I was a part of that and I enjoyed working with Endowment. It was easy to take their suggestions, you know, with the meetings they held; regional meetings and that kind of thing and also with other local arts agencies; those relationships were terrific. So it was a very happy time in that respect, those three years between working with the regional reps, working closely with the Partnership Office on grants and things we wanted to do and getting their advice and also learning about what other state arts councils were doing through ACA. And then our own local arts agencies were growing. We already had a network of arts councils that were springing up and then it became sort of more institutionalized and organized during those three years along with this parallel legislation that allowed a county in our state to set up a cultural and heritage commission so we had sort of a mix of local private arts councils and the county arts agencies and they were all growing up together. Those were happy times. *There's one word I'm not understanding. You said legislation that created local...* Cultural and heritage commissions. That's what they're called. And you can hear that they can combine arts, history, "culture" where the private arts councils that had

grown up were mostly really concerned with art. So a lot of these cultural and heritage commissions also took on local historical sites, some of the broader arts programs. They might take on things like labor in the arts or they might have a space that they would administer for a state arts council and do shows within that that would be social science, that kind of thing, so they would go a little beyond the arts. My relationship with other SAA's was terrific. In fact, as I was leaving the state arts council, I was asked to join the NASAA board but since I was leaving the arts council; they couldn't keep the invitation open. I think Bob Barnett asked me the day I was leaving or something. Bob Barnett was from the state of Pennsylvania. He was an arts council director before I was. Do you have his name anywhere in the history? Bob was the director during the time I was. I think he might have left the year after I did. ACA was terrific; they were a big help. Michael Newton was wonderful to work with; he really was. I think the ACA was really very helpful in doing the kinds of research the state arts agencies needed. NASAA broke off from ACA...it was a part of it, or it was a chapter, or a group... and then became it's own but ACA continued to do some research and some writing that arts councils really needed. And I thought they were very good for overall advocacy for the local arts council movement. You know I think it was the ACA probably that was very important to get community arts councils recognized by NEA as fundable. That was my impression because they already had before NASAA a broad national kind of constituency. NASAA's more refined; it's really state arts agencies interests whereas ACA was concerned with all sorts of arts councils. So I have to hand it to those people in those early days of the ACA for their publishing and for their conferences and for kind of bringing us along and helping us to professionalize staffs and that kind of thing in the arts council movement.

*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?*

I think the biggest single issue was the state arts council field taking on its own leadership and direction and I think it took many years to feel that out and where it should be going regardless of the federal government and I think that came together more in the early 80's than in the '70's. For instance, many years prior to 1980...I think it might have been probably 1974...I was at a meeting with Nancy Hanks of state arts council directors...not everybody in the county...but state arts council directors mainly from the northeast; I know Tony Keller was in the room and I said to Nancy Hanks...and Clark Mitze was there, too, and I said, "Nancy, you know the National Endowment for the Arts policy kind of rolls out as a wave upon the state arts councils? Do you think that wave will ever turn around and then go back and hit the NEA?" And everybody's eyebrows went up because I saw this tremendous potential among state arts councils and so far we had really taken most of our direction from Clark and a few other people at the Endowment; we tried to get our grants for the different programs and stuff. She said, "Perhaps, but she didn't see it yet." It was a pretty good answer. But that's where I thought the challenge was; for the state arts councils to really get a grasp of their own power and the direction they should go and through their own alliances what they wanted to make of the state arts councils budgets and the relationship with Congress and legislatures and all of that and I don't think they were there yet. But it came along and probably founding of NASAA was

first big step in that. So establishing themselves as a force was probably the biggest issue and challenge. It's pretty impressive in the early days to have the federal government, to have the National Endowment for the Arts involved in what we did on a daily basis with the matching grants and all of that. And one can have the sense that maybe their staff was either more professional or bigger or whatever...it was bigger than state arts councils except for maybe NYSCA, New York State arts council...it really was the big kid on the block. And I think it was only as state arts councils grew and as the arts councils came to deal with regional situations and I don't mean just regional in their own states but with other councils doing things cooperatively and getting sense of what they really wanted the National Endowment to do; that they faced that issue and found practical alternatives for their relationship, how they related to the Endowment. It was kind of growing up and understanding they were agencies themselves, creatures of this kind of movement that said every state that gets a grant should have a sister agency. So big deal, so who were these sister agencies; but who of that emerged I would say over ten, twelve, fifteen years and then became very powerful and influential, I believe.

*I. 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, our special political ally as a guy named Frank Fisher who was always our vice chairman and never our chairman. He was our vice-chairman for 15 years. He was the most delightful, friendly guy but I'm sure he was so politically active that we never really knew it. I think he really kept our line of communication open with the state house despite each chairman who might have come along and he was always friendly with all the chairmen. He got along very well with different chairs of the arts council. Frank was from Ocean County over by the water; the County seat of that is Thom's river; and Frank was very involved in the state municipality association and he would always remind you that we have 567 municipalities in the state of New Jersey...okay, thank you, Frank. And this is what they're looking for from the state arts council. But Frank I think had a very strong platform from which to work that was really, really statewide. The chairman was an urban development specialist and he really worked more out of Trenton and had a lot of big contracts for developing big buildings and that kind of thing but Frank really knew just about everybody there was to know in government and he was as pleasant as the day was long. I think it was Frank that probably kept our relationship with the governor and with the legislature positive in that he could really explain the budget to them, that Frank would open doors for you when things weren't going so well. He would always go to appropriation hearings even though the chairman was speaking, he would always go to the legislature with you. And he knew everybody in the room and with my chairman, most of the legislators did not trust the chairman but they did trust Frank. My chairman was a very shifty, devious guy. For all of it, he was just a deal maker and I think he threw fear into some legislators because he never went to a meeting by himself and he always brought somebody along who took notes about the meetings and he would always send you a memo right after the meeting. So you'd think, "This guy is really doing a number on me." Frank would smile and he'd shake your hand; he'd never do any of those things. So they all loved Frank and I think Frank put that kind of human face on us; and he could talk to everyone on the council whether it was the former deputy director of

the New York Art Museum who was a very aristocratic type person or a single practitioner architect or an actress from south Jersey. He could talk to all of those people; he could calm them. He was also a Republican appointee in a Democrat administration and he had continued to hold his position on the arts council so you knew people really liked him; he had a basic power base that they didn't disturb so I would say Frank was that very special person and I'm not sure he ever got the recognition he deserved. He was the one. And to be fair the chair did do other good things for us but he wasn't the person that people would really like to be with.

The other part of it: "Can you think of an anecdote that tells us something about the arts in the political climate..." yes, I can. This was a meeting I went to in the chair's office...he had an office just right down the street from me and he actually had a nicer meeting area than we had so we frequently had meetings in his small board room or meeting room and it was right across from the state house. He was closer to the state house than I was which might tell you something. We had a meeting one time with the president of the symphony, the volunteer president of the New Jersey Symphony, and my chairman and the executive director of the symphony who was Kathy French who now does job placement in Virginia, the Kathy French Group. But Kathy was the executive director, we were both young executive directors and I saw the two presidents spar off at one another about the symphony's grant which was probably...it was in those days, it was 50% of the money we would get...it got a \$500,000 line item in our, let's say, \$900,000 budget and another \$100,000 or whatever the Endowment was giving it at the time. So we had very little discretion over that but where we got very involved was in accounting for what the symphony did with the money so we had the accounting responsibility for that. It was very interesting to watch these two chairs negotiate that kind of responsibility and that contract and what the symphony was supposed to do for the money and whether the symphony was serving the whole state. We used to get questions about that all the time from the legislature and yet the legislature would continue to give this line item grant so we were in a position, we're saying it shouldn't be a line item; we should make the decision. Alan Lowenstein who was the president was going to his particular legislators and he was getting a line item. Now those legislators were from Essex County which is Newark. That's the biggest population base and the strongest base for the Democrats, Essex County. That's why the symphony would continue to get this line item grant. And, of course, we wanted, our basic agenda was to wrest it away from them but you could see that this guy who was a Newark lawyer was just too powerful for us; he had much more power than we had in the legislature. It was very interesting to watch that being negotiated. I always think of it every so often. Kathy French had a worse chairman than I because he would turn to her and say, "Kathy, what's he's talking about now is such and such..." I'd think, "Oh, my god, I'm glad Al doesn't do that to me in a meeting" because he would make it seem like she was a student, like it was a tutorial for her. It was very interesting to see the two guys really spar and I have to say to give my chairman credit for this, he did said to him, "You know, you're getting the largest grant in the state and we want to know what you do with that? How do you serve New Jersey citizens? How do you take care of the different regions because we're going to have to report about that? The legislature going to look to us and w either have to know or forget about it?" And, of course, in those days you didn't want to give up a line

item like that because it would make you that much smaller and you would give the line item to somebody like the library. Why would you do that? So it was very interesting to watch that be negotiated. But I always thought our line items were the most interesting things to watch because people came out of government that I never knew about. For instance, the head of our purchase and property was an opera fan. It was because of him...his name was Herman Crystal...that the New Jersey Opera (they took on the moniker New Jersey State Opera) a company that did maybe at most two operas a year and grand opera but they cost so much...they got a \$250,000 grant and that, too, was line itemed and here was a person in purchase...you would never know who this guy was...he wasn't an elected representative and yet he would pop up at their openings, he would pop up in a box and the president of the opera and the maestro would be escorting him to his seat and all the staff would be, "What's Herman Crystal doing here?" In fact, he was the one who really administered their grant for them; they would get their payment before anyone else; one of those little surprises; their hidden bureaucrat down there. And I'm sure the legislature; they wanted Herman to do things for them as well because Herman was the one who got all the paperwork done. We had a governor who loved opera, Brendan Burn; became governor in my second year as state arts council director; nice guy, kind of quiet but nice; and he was the first one who had a great big inaugural concert; and we ran the concert and he was friends with Marilyn Horne and Marilyn Horne sang and Henry Louis conducted the symphony and played some special stuff that the governor wanted to hear. We began with a lot of hoopla and some of us had hoped for a renaissance in the arts in New Jersey and it didn't happen because of him. We thought, "Oh, my goodness, at last somebody who loves the arts" and all these people from Essex County said, "Wait until you meet Brendan. He goes to the opera. He sits with Madame Scheritza and loves all these older divas and stuff." Nothing came of it. He just kept going to the opera but so what.

*J. How did you use your time?*

*1. Can you describe a prototypical day?*

Typical day included: I would probably work with my...well, first thing I did in the first year was I got a deputy director and the deputy director took over grant program because I had been doing that full time and that is what the arts council had had the executive director doing, doing almost nothing but grants. I would work closely with my deputy director and we would usually touch base very morning. Then the next thing I would probably do is talk to the chairman and also talks with the chairs or the chairs of committees on the board who had upcoming meetings to prepare for their meetings and to figure out who of this growing staff would be going to those meetings. Then there would be another part of my day when I would be dealing with actually getting our obligations paid or getting grants through and the deputy director and I would work on that as part of the day. There was also another part of the day that I was still very involved in our...we had a consultant...but I was still involved with our newsletter at the time so I would be working with our consultant on what the upcoming articles would be and reaching the deadline and those kinds of things. And then there was another part of day when I would be dealing with chairman. I probably spoke with him at least once a day about some matter, or had a meeting with him maybe every other day about what the arts council was doing. I frequently also traveled out of the office to different parts of the state and had

meetings with representative groups or with, let's say, a new ballet organization or a new local arts council so there were a lot of those out of the office things. Also probably this was more in a typical week; I probably went to one or two performances a week to see what people were doing. That pretty much made my day and then into the week I would be out of the office usually two and a half days a week I was somewhere in state. So my time was divided between making sure that we paid our bills and also making sure that our committees were running effectively and then the outside stuff of either dealing with the state department and making sure they understood what it was we were doing; a little bit of interpretation going on all the time; and then working with the growing field because we really didn't have that full network of local arts agencies yet. I was doing workshops about our grants program and then occasionally I would simply be going to meetings with different groups around the state. Did very little, only occasionally did I go outside the state and that would be more to a national meeting or a regional meeting or down to Washington. But that's pretty much how I spent my time. The day began very early. You know, the answering machine was great when it came in. I loved that. Sometimes it was a big help.

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

25\_\_\_ *Grant administration*

10\_\_\_ *advocacy/lobbying with public officials*

15\_\_\_ *field /constituency communication*

10\_\_\_ *agency strategic planning*; When they would talk with me about it, I could spend a lot of time on it. Arts council members were really lovely but they didn't always want to do what you wanted them to do in the sense that they would come together for a meeting and they would feel, "Boy, I'm really giving a lot to the state," and when you'd really want to talk with them either about the by-laws or about governance structure, whatever, they'd say, "I've got to go now."

25\_\_\_ *program development*. I was always thinking about that.

5\_\_\_ *fundraising I find funds for organizations with other agencies*

10\_\_\_ *partnership building (with other government agencies, with other types of nonprofits, with private sector, with arts/cultural agencies at other levels of government)*

What kind of fundraising did you do? I would try to find funds for organizations with other agencies so that's the most I did. I wasn't as aware of that as I'd like to be. That's probably one thing I wish I had known more about in those days because we really thought of funds coming mostly from our state legislature and not as much from the Endowment for other arts organizations in the state and there were some states who did that very well; state of Delaware, (name?) she raised a lot of funds for her arts organizations but she had no money from her state. So I would talk to corporate officials, for instance, about sponsorship and that kind of thing to encourage that.

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

Yes, it did. At the beginning I was adding systems because when I came in the previous executive director had no real way of logging grants and getting them looked at in a consistent fashion so I had to do that part of it, I had to organize that. I was also involved

with figuring out what the personnel structure should be to cover the various things that the arts council wanted to do whether it was advocacy or regional or aesthetic programs like design awareness and stuff like that, artists in schools so I spent a lot of time working on infrastructure for the organization in early days. Then as I moved on, I became much more involved in how the arts council should, might govern itself and then how the arts council related to other states and other agencies so it became more of an outside job as well as an inside. I didn't have to spend as much time because by then I had set up the systems for making sure the grants were administered consistently and that people got...it was I, for instance, who set up one deadline for grant applications. We didn't have that when we came in; it was a rolling deadline and they would never know why or when they were getting a grant. There were all these basic things they hadn't done because they were only a staff of 4, 5 or 6 people and one guy essentially was trying to cover all of it with a couple of consultants; that was Byron Kelly. So it changed from more of the internal, just getting it together, to more of the external, to seeing where the arts might go in the state, what the overall aim for the arts would be eventually and how the arts community could cooperate with one another and serve state interests and that kind of thing. That was very satisfying to move in that direction; I became more of a ??? Rather than an agency executive which was very nice for me.

*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?*

I think what I'd like people to know if they were asking me...sometimes my student ask me...is that, and this remains true today, it is a very formative field; it's a field still in formation. In those days it allowed a lot of adventure, and I don't mean that facetiously even though sometimes it had a facetious aspect to it, but it was as though, if you'd really given those people, the early ones, if you'd given them a year by themselves first before they had to become arts councils they might have come up with a much different world. But they didn't have that period. It was sort of as though they had always wanted this and somebody called the night before and said, "Your baby's in Oklahoma. Go pick it up." And you never had any chance to think even about what you would do with a baby like this. So I think that in a lot of cases, I think that we should understand it's the arts council can define for the world what the arts world should be. It can give that words and give it, if you will, a corporate cultural so the arts council in each state can kind of set that standard and, if it has the strength within it, it can turn around then and tell legislators, when they ask and if they have the right information, where we should be going in the arts and I think we can still do that as arts councils. I believe there are arts councils that are doing it now. It might be very hard in a formerly very distinguished arts council like NYSCA, New York State arts council, as their role diminishes to feel that they can do it but they still draw tremendously influential people who can speak for them. I think that's something that the state arts agency movement could apprehend a little better even today, 30 or 40 years later. It can set the standard; it can identify that they can identify where the arts should go in this country, and they have that responsibility probably more than ever especially in this terrorist environment we live in, this great environment of fear. You know artists deal with fear all the time; they deal with the fear of change; they deal with the anxiety about the future and yet they go out and do something about it. They find out what are the new materials, what are the new thoughts,

how does the philosophy I'm looking at apply to what what's happening today and then they tell us something about that. That's a great paradigm for where we're going in this crazy new world that we live in; shocking in some respects. So I think the state arts agencies can still do that. I encourage my students especially in the field of governance to create the kind of governance you feel is right for your organization. Don't take it from somebody else who makes you feel you should run your organization this way or do the programs. You should really sit down with your leaders and figure out where you want to go and articulate that; tell the world where you want to go. That's my soapbox. It's still a new field. If you look at the cultural policy environment of some of our European neighbors, it's much different from what we do and yet in some ways we can be much more vocal about it because we're not yet tied simply into a system of either employing all the arts employees in a particular jurisdiction like Berlin. They hire almost everybody who's in the arts so we're not hamstrung with that. They are; they don't know quite know what to do with 2000 opera employees. We would like to get them all paid but we don't have to pay them ourselves but we still have a lot of freedoms in making our cultural policies. I would think that's the next frontier for state arts agencies are to make cultural policy; to formulate it. That's a big task.

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

Less and less. I have done a couple of workshops for our arts council and I hear from David Miller every so often. I also interfaced with them a little when I was board president of the Princeton Ballet; always very positive. And I also stay in touch with friends and colleagues at New York State Arts Council because I work up in New York but not very much. No, I don't go to their meetings and I don't follow them very, very closely but it's always a nice feeling when I am in touch with them. It's always a pleasure.

*A. If so,*

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

My impression is that it has. Now I have to say as far as NYSCA goes, no, it hasn't changed very much as far as I can tell; that they're still very, very involved in funding the disciplines. This state arts council here seems to be much more involved with doing workshops and getting information out to the field; their staff seems much more involved with kind of the discreet areas in the arts whether it's arts education or granting but then surprisingly my impression is that the state arts council in New Jersey now has per capita a lot more resources than NYSCA does. I get the impression from NYSCA that it's trying to keep up with what it used to do whereas New Jersey it's kind of invented these new areas whether its capital funding for the arts so their role here has really expanded and in NY they're just maintaining their ground as best they can. But otherwise I can't give you an overall impression of the field. You know, NYSCA is still very devoted to its discipline approach. It believes in that; that it should really help the disciplines and, of course, it parted ways with the National Endowment for the Arts. I can see why Jane Alexander did it because she wanted to save the Endowment so it worked...for awhile.

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

I think the incoming staff first of all should really understand politics and government and then governance so they should understand how people should work together toward group goals and then the ancillary skills I think should be speaking ability, articulating what it is people need to hear or want to hear about an arts council; writing skills; and I think they should really have had an experience running an arts organization somehow before they take over a state arts council. So they should have probably come out of a theatre or a local arts council or something that's a little more local than a state arts council. I think they should really apprehend what it is the arts want to produce. I was a fellow at Endowment for a quarter of a year quite a few years ago. I found that the Endowment was even further away from producing art than a state arts council because at least at a state arts council you were right next to the local symphony or Ballet Company or school or whatever. And I found at the Endowment they were that much further removed. I think that any of us in public field should have real sense, a real grounding in how art is made and what artists are trying to do before working at an arts council. And that's kind of a basic administrative skill for any arts administrator anyway; to really know that, how the art is made is very important. But the speaking skills, the articulating skills and also some fiscal skills; they've got to be able to read a budget, understand a budget and not only their own but they have to be able to understand the budgets of their constituents. They have to be able to read a symphony's budget or a museum's budget. They have to know a little bit about fund accounting; to understand how it explains the programs of an arts organizations; the priorities. If only one skill, I would say writing: writing, writing, writing. They have to be able to write. They have to be able to write clearly; very important.

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

Yes, I would. Yeh, I loved it. I would definitely do that again. I think it's a wonderful field.

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

Yes, I do, I mean in the people I've seen. I've seen some very fine people come into this field who care about the arts or who care about the state or they care about the commonwealth of the people; and care a lot about the arts so I've been very pleased. The people I have met among junior arts administrators with arts organizations and arts councils I've been very pleased to consider them a colleague in our field. We've got some terrific ones here at state of New Jersey arts council and in New York, those people that I've met there; I think they are very fine individuals. So, yes, I think it's lived up to its promise.

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

It's mostly because I'm doing my own thing. Al Berr and I have dinner every so often together. We're friends and he's wonderful with my students. He's a guest lecturer but you know now I'm an educator; I'm not an arts council executive so you sort of become what you do, you know the old saying. So I'm very involved in forming people to

become arts administrators and, having been in the arts council movement, it's very important for that part of my own formation. I couldn't have imagined it otherwise.

*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?*

I don't think I have changed my mind. I still think they're very necessary. Yeh, there is one thing. I think state arts agencies are much more necessary than the National Endowment for the Arts. I don't know if that's heresy but I really think we don't need the Endowment any longer. It's a terrible thing to say it doesn't grab my imagination any longer to have a National Endowment for the Arts because it is not really the kind of policy making body that I would like to see it be. It's become so toasty and mainstream that it's kind of a disappointment; and corporate. That's probably a change in my thinking. I teach very little about Endowment. I used to teach much more about it and now we let the students know that there is an Endowment and how the matching grant program works and all of that. My students would know about it but they'd be much more aware New York State Arts Council or their own state arts council as being informative and even guests will say, they'll ask them about grants and stuff, and they'll say, "Oh, the state arts agencies are much more important." That's a surprise. Of course, I'm not advocating its banishment or termination. I wouldn't want to go to that world but that's probably a surprise to me. I wouldn't have said that upon leaving the state arts agency or even 15 years ago but more and more I see that. I think it was the eventual drift from the arts agency advocate like a Nancy Hanks or a Livingston Biddle through the technocrat like Frank Hodsoll; the mood began to move in that direction and got fewer and fewer chairmen with whom we could really identify and then poor Jane Alexander; she was just beleaguered by so many forces at the time she took over. It was really too late to have a Jane Alexander. That comes as a surprise to me. But I've noticed it and I think I've had to kind of accept it over the years that the Endowment is truly much less influential than it could be. Who would have ever thought we would see the politicization that we've seen at the national level. And that came as a surprise to all of us. Who could have prepared us for that; I don't know. And maybe that was our own responsibility.

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

I think I would say it's a great field. I think I would encourage them to do that. And I think the single piece of advice would be this: get yourself a very good mentor two or three years prior to taking on significant responsibility in this field and make sure the mentor knows how art is made and has a very strong political sense.

*V. Information about you:*

*A. Education*

*1. Educational level (has, ba, some grad, ma, PhD)* BA in History; a JD from Georgetown; MBA from UCLA; I studied with Hy Faine who founded the arts management program at UCLA in their business school; labor lawyer from NY; very first director of programs; founded in 1970

*2. Major/field Arts management*

*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)*

My skills and competencies: First of all, I learned how to write very well in Jesuit schools because they made us write essays two or three times a week and we got their feedback on them. I also learned how to research from them; how to use a library. Also studying law you had to be on your feet quite a bit and talking and articulating what it is you believed in. And then I also got performance skills from studying piano and dance as a kid so I had performance skills and I'm not afraid to be in front of a crowd. And third I got organization skills from I think a couple of things: first of all, from having some leadership positions in college; head of a political club and some other organizations in college and I was a president now and then so I had some leadership responsibility; and practicing law for awhile also made me feel responsible for individuals. I also grew up with a sole practitioner doctor...my father was a general practitioner....so I was very accustomed to seeing him work on his own and that was very easy for me to adopt that style of working; take responsibility for people. Then I was very, very lucky. When I finished law school, after that I went to the seminary for awhile and studied at Catholic U but I went out on tour with their national players and I was hired as an actor and I was assigned the role of accommodations manager which meant I had to negotiate all the hotels and places where we stayed on national tour. And so I handled money for people...actual cash money as they say in Texas...and I also handled negotiating with the hotel so I found that I really liked that, just through being assigned it which to me was a total accident but I'm sure to the company was not a total accident because the people who ran it thought, "Hey, the guy's a lawyer. Why shouldn't he be able to negotiate deals?" So all of that came together for me and I was very, very lucky into a profession. I never knew I was leading towards that profession at all. If you had said to me in 1967, "You're going to be running an arts council in 1973," I would have been blown away. Totally blown away. Who would have known?

*C. Work Experience*

*1. Specific arts management experience vs. non-arts management experience*

I had the practicing law experience. The arts management experience was the accommodations manager experience and handling money and reporting to people, individuals on what I had done with their money, so that was very good. Also in the arts management area, I also have some consulting experience so I've helped people to set up 501© 3 and helped them to do their original business plans so that's been terrific for me because it brings together my management skills along with my legal skills. Through that I've also had experience negotiating with the IRS and stuff like that about the status of an organization's application. And then I've had some advocacy responsibility with the coalition for the arts and humanities in New Jersey and that was all great, too. I was a co-founder with other folks in the state who wanted to advocate. So those are the specific experiences I had and then, of course, I became more of a project director when I went to NYU because I became program director in our field and there I used my counseling skills to help people form their own careers and that's very rewarding. I love that; helping young people do that or people of all ages because I have students from age 21 to

55, doesn't matter in the sense that we're all frequently transferring skills from another area.

2. *Did you work for a SAA either before or after your time as Executive Director?*

I interned in New Jersey in 1972 and then got the job in 1973. I went back to UCLA to finish my...I was there from June to December; I went back in December to finish my MBA and in March the state arts council decided to fire the then executive director and the chairman called me and encouraged me to apply for the job so that in June I was hired as the executive director. I applied for two other positions: one as executive director at Minnesota Arts Board; I was offered that but turned it down; and in the 80's I applied for the executive directorship of NYSCA. I didn't get that because there was an insider. In each case it meant also my spouse changing her job; it would have been very hard to move to Minnesota for my wife. She's a lawyer, too, and would have to take another bar exam. Most people don't understand what she does because she's an appellate research attorney; she needs an administrative office within a court system that wants people to write appellate opinions for them. There aren't many of those places. There are a lot now but there weren't when I was looking at other jobs. And consequently I also realized how much I would have missed New York and just as glad not to run NYSCA as it turned out. Things happen for a reason. I've been on panels at the Endowment and the state of New Jersey and I feel as though I continue to be involved with the public sector.

3. *Did you work for a public sector agency – not an SAA – either before or after your time as Executive Director?*

No, I didn't. It would be more consulting occasionally; never an employee again. Just the internship and some sort of supporter or panelist later on.

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*

D. *Do you pursue any art form? Which?*

Yes, I do, I sing. I sing mostly with a church choir actually. I discovered my voice about 14 years ago. I could always sing but I could never sing with the technique that one

would need to sustain a lot of singing. So in 1990 I began taking voice lessons and I have a tenor voice and people seem to like my voice. I've been in a show and I've done some solo work and recital work and I like it very much. I still attend arts activities in all disciplines. I've come to really love dance over the years and I find it equally compelling and dramatic to plays. I've also come to like straight plays more than I used to because my background is mostly music and musical theatre but I've come to like straight plays just as much. But, my tastes have really expanded in that respect. But I can't say that I'm at the avant garde; so I think my tastes are still somewhat conservative but broader.

*E. Demographic information:*

1. *Gender* - Male
2. *Age range now* - 62
3. *geographic region he or she lives now* - Trenton, born in DuSaque, NJ
4. *political/partisan identification* – Democrat

June Batten Ehry in early 70's wrote about executive directors; may want to check