

Indiana Heritage Research Grant Interview
12 pages
Irwin Lee Detchon Interview

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am?" I said, " I think you're 50." My cousin spoke up and said, " Oh, Lee, she's at least 100." (Laughter).

D We went away about that time. My father built a house up in Michigan. A cottage right on the shore of Lake Michigan. Ludington, Michigan. The only way you could get there was by boat. We went every summer. That was a pretty good place for an artist to work. I wouldn't dream of doing anything like that. My father didn't understand artists at all. He just didn't have any patience with them. He just thought they didn't do anything.

84 J He didn't encourage you? D Oh, no. He discouraged me. If he'd see me drawing or something he didn't like it at all. So, I was 35 years old before I considered drawing. Fritz Schlemmer persisted in my taking some lessons. Pretty soon I liked it. He was a wonderful artist, really. J A wonderful teacher too. D He was dandy. Did you have any lessons with him? J I did when I was a teenager had drawing lessons. I always regretted that I didn't get to take painting. ∴ You took painting in the 20s? or 30s? D The thirties. He talked to me once about taking up art as a profession. I said "Fritz, I don't think I can make a living at it. " He said, "Well, what do you want, do you want money? or do you want prominence, or do you want to leave something to posterity?" He said, " Did you ever consider that? No t taking most people take, take, all they can, salary, comissions." He said, "Think about leaving something to society". I had never thought of that.

J That sounds like Fritz. D He was a socialist. One year the government had the WPA . They had a for artists. A meager sum that they would pay for paintings. He did 8 or 10 paintings for the WPA and they were beautiful. J What did he do? D They were scenes around Crawfordsville. And the countryside. Some trees. And then he did some downtown scenes quaint plain and typical & challenging I thought were really great. They became quite well known; Washington took some. Washington, D. C.

218 She was a little older than I was. T I think she's right about your age. One time Ike moved to Chicago. Just on business. That town outside of Chicago. Florence Elston came from there. (Ed. Morris, Illinois) ... South edge of Chicago. He (Ike?) was there with his wife Pearl. They bought a house at a socially prominent place, because he was getting wealthy then. ... He was driving a Rolls Royce. And he had a chauffeur, who wore a uniform. He noticed that the lady next door had nothing to do with him at all. She wouldn't speak to him, or call on him. Ike was kind of vengeful. He thought, "I'll fix that." The lady next door appeared one day in a new sealskin coat. They wore sealskin then. So he told his chauffeur to go to Marshall Fields and get a sealskin coat. So he did, and he wore it around, and the woman never appeared again in her sealskin coat. Laughter.

263 Another thing I remember one time he lived in Philadelphia, early in his career I guess. He was married then. After work at 5 o'clock he went to a bar, where the socially proper people went. Business men. They just didn't have much to do with him. He was a little bit crude I guess. But there was one man there, and he got friendly with Ike and said, "I have to go to Chicago on business. What's it like? I'm kind of afraid to go to Chicago. Do you know any place I could stay?" Ike said, "Oh, yes, you want to go to the ^{Everleigh} Club. The ^{Everleigh} sisters." They had a house of prostitution. So, sure enough, he went there. He thought it was very strange. I guess he stayed maybe one night, and it became known. He was engaged to be married. T Sounds like he (Ike) liked to play pranks.

I remember too. My folks had a little apartment in Florida. In 1925. Ike bought this beautiful palace sort of, right on the ocean front. It was a beautiful place. Ad Miami Beach. T In those days that was a beautiful place. J Oh, yes. D It was almost in the surf. It was so close to the ocean. It had a beautiful upstairs, looked right out on the Gulf stream. Ike invited us over there for Christmas

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crimes. How people could be so insensitive. Even ignorant people didn't

, but I remember Mrs. Vance, the widow, and

she sang at the church on Sunday in the choir, I don't know how many, quite

a few years. J That was her house on Wallace? T Did you know him too?

D Yes. I didn't see him very much. He did some painting in our house on the

walls on the inside. Murals. J You said they were painted over, didn't you?

D Yes. J There was one on the ceiling? D Almost. Upper wall. They were

fruit paintings, fruit trees. And blossoms. And they were awfully good.

His technique was a full brush technique. J Impressionist style? D Really

realistic. They had ample paint on there. He was very talented. J He was

quite a muralist. D Yes. He did murals in the Elkshall. J Those are lost

I guess. D They took them down. I don't think they were Vance's best work.

J That's good to know. D They kept them 'til they tore the building down.

J They remodeled it, for the construction company. That's when the murals

disappeared. The murals were in the attic for a time. Then they were put in

a storage building. Nobody has been able to find them. They couldn't be in Mary Virginia's (Shaw)

attic? J I hope so.

T Martha Cantrell wanted me to ask you about the summer kitchen at Lane
Place. Do you remember? There was a trellis separating the house and the

summer kitchen? D I remember the old kitchen but I don't remember the summer

kitchen. Was it outside? T Yes.

Side Two

When I was in high school (I remember) having breakfast seeing the old colonel would
a white horse ride by
on his horse, a pretty spry old fellow. He and Ike didn't get along too well.

In fact he wouldn't let Ike come home to a big party. Ike went to Wabash for a
year, then he was expelled. Maybe it was a semester.

T So it wasn't inherited wealth. D No. He was in a position to make big
money. J He was kind of a playboy too. D Oh, yes. He had a nice boat down in

93 D Oh, yes. That was her wedding dress. J What a beautiful dress. Very elaborate train. T What was her name? D Hattie Detchon and she married a man who worked at the bank-McIntyre.

T Speaking of the Wallaces, do you remember either Lew or Susan Wallace?
D I remember General Wallace. In fact I was about 4 or 5 years old and he had a big garden party. I remember big crowds of people. But he greeted every one. There was a little kid there only about 5 or 6 I guess and he kept pestering Mr. Wallace, pull at his coat tails and just kind of pestering. Finally, the General picked this boy up and turned him upside down right in front of all the guests. It was one of the Wallaces. Must have been a grandson.

Lee, weren't your folks invited to go to New York with the Wallaces?
D Mother and Dad were good friends of the Wallaces and but the Wallaces were older. So the time came when Ben Hur was produced in New York on the stage, and the famous producer Walter Whitesides, anyhow, it was a theatrical producer and so they invited Mother and Dad to go with them to New York to see the show but they didn't go. They thought there was too much disparity in the ages. T Did very many people go with them? D No. T Do you remember Mrs. Wallace? D No, I don't. T Susan Elston? D No, I don't recall her. Mother and she were good friends. But I don't think I was ever in the Elston house. T John Clements tells the story about an ice skating party on the Wallace grounds and he was too young to go. And he's older than you are, so I don't imagine you were invited.

J I asked about Mary Oda. D I studied with her. She was wonderful. A real true artist. She had no commercialism about her at all. She just created for art's sake. She was awfully good. She was kind of pretty. J Was she from a local family? D Yes. I don't know much about her. But she was real nice. She married an Army officer. J That's what I understand

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We are trying to have something of every painter in the area. D Well, I'll keep that in mind.

DeS: I have the account of your parents' wedding there. D Yes, read a little of that. T ^{There was} a beautiful wedding which occurred June 16th at the residence of Mrs. Sally Lee of West College Street which united the fortunes of Dr. Irwin A Detchon and Miss Annie Belle Lee. Nearly 100 guests were present to witness the ceremony and the rooms of the house were handsomely decorated for the event. In all the rooms were banks of large potted plants and festoons of smilax. Each room had a distinguishing variety of rose. In the hall there was a profusion of deep red roses; in the parlor where the ceremony took place were white bride's roses and in the black parlor yellow Marshall Neal Field roses, in the dining room pink LaFrance roses. J That sounds very elegant. Where did they find all these roses? T I was wondering about that too. J I don't think we have hot houses around here now that can provide that many roses. D No. I take roses to the cemetery every year for my wife. J Is she buried in Oak Hill? D Yes. J That's a lovely cemetery. D Yes, it is. J There are so many trees. D I remember going out there once. They had a cemetery association that had a meeting out there. M B made a little talk and he said I wonder how it'll be to be buried out here? It was kind of funny. He said "Look at the beautiful view you have."

T Do you have any other memories of Lane Place? D Oh, not so many. Of course I do of Helen Elston Smith. T Do you know why they called her Puss? D No. I have to smile when I think of so many times she came over to our house and she was hungry. She'd come over about supper time and Mother would say, "Let me fix you a plate". She'd hardly eat anything. She didn't do any cooking. And Helen would say, "No, no, I don't want you to do that. I don't want anything." Then she'd pull up a chair and eat off of my plate. Laughter. That so embarrassed my mom. T Was this in the period when she was beginning to be hard up? D No,

305 she was a

DeS: Was she the one who sold her jewelry?

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Yes. DeS We had a big sale at the 4 H building. Lasted all day long.

T 420 I remember when Arch and Esther were here how particular Arch was about the lawn. In the back it almost looked like a park. D Yes. He cleared it a little bit but it's still kind of an alley.

T We enjoyed being your neighbors. I remember your mother. DeS Where did you live? T This house right next door. Back in the 50s. Late 50s.

D When I was a school kid I went to Willson School. Every day I had to go through the Re ^{ams} to school there. 1915 16. J What's that? T Fern and Martha before the Roundtrees.

DeS Wabash College owns the back half of this lot. J They do? T That was done to preserve the wasnt it? J That's the lot that's right across from the Elston home. DeS Esther had that in her will. T That was the reason; they didn't want it ever to be built on. D The college had the money. His folks were - it sold for \$31,000. DeS The man who was bidding against them was going to build a big condominium back there. J That would be terrible. (Agreed). D Dan Evans was affiliated with Wabash and they would have bought it no matter what it cost. T It was a good thing. DeS They keep it looking nice. D Yes, I don't have to worry about it.

J Maybe we should let you rest. D No, I'm not exhausted or anything.