

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Emerson Nathaniel Bell

**COLLECTION:** 4700.1594

**IDENTIFICATION:** Prolific painter, sculptor and musician; long-time Baton Rouge resident and art teacher

**INTERVIEWERS:** Barbara Faulkner

**SERIES:** McKinley Oral History Project – Social Organizations

**INTERVIEW DATES:** June 25, 2002

**FOCUS DATES:** 1930s-1970s

**ABSTRACT:**

**Tape 3175, Side A**

Introduction; born in Baton Rouge c. 1930; South Baton Rouge formerly fertile ground for artists and musicians; began studies of art and music as a young child; in later travels, saw how Chicago, New York and overseas were similar to South Baton Rouge; grew up in African Methodist Church; parents encouraged him to check out other churches to find out about variety of belief systems; was part of choral group while in the military in Japan; influence of uncle who was a draftsman; invited to paint mural of in St. Michael's Church around age fourteen; cousin from Texas helped on mural project; mural is no longer there; people don't appreciate old architecture, such as beautiful theater torn down on Third Street in Baton Rouge; lived in New York and Michigan; studying art with vo-technology teacher in Baton Rouge; during the seventies, showing his art in New Orleans, working, teaching, applying for grants; many nice art galleries in Baton Rouge during 1970s; affiliation with Baton Rouge Gallery; showed at Broussard Gallery in Old State Capitol building; voice teacher that made a big impression on him and was well-known in Paris; artistic influences as a child, importance of reading; stayed with aunt in Michigan and Canada; The Ladies of Job's Tears benevolent society in Canada, and other old do-gooder ladies; importance of simplicity in his life; his art education; his best teachers were work horses, believing in hard work and constantly producing art; dedication is more important than education; his carving mentor, an older man from Sicily; to be an artist, one must be producing work; learning from old European masters;

**Tape 3175, Side B**

Spent more than twenty years of his life living in other cities, not Baton Rouge; connection with MacDowell Colony and an influential teacher who came from there; feelings about living away from Baton Rouge; desire to teach; he was the first visiting artist in Baton Rouge public schools, funded by Nation Endowment for the Arts grant; spirituality in his art and the art of his friends; attitude about commercialism and art, never produce work just to make money; importance of

beauty and sincerity in art; selected his students carefully; ran his classes like an art colony; took his students out to paint murals; his innate spiritual ability to detect talented students; a student who is now a successful designer in New York; separating out the insincere students.

**TAPES:** 1 (T3175)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 8 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 28 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Correspondence; excerpts (7pgs)

**RESTRICTIONS:** None