INTERVIEWEE: DONALD G. LARSON

INTERVIEWER: Tammy Lau

DATE: April 21, 2008

TL: I'm Tammy Lau. We're here at the campus of California State University, Fresno with Donald G. Larson. Today is Monday, April 21, 2008. Good morning, Don.

DL: Good morning, Tammy.

TL: I thought we'd start a little bit with your background history, who you are, where you live, your family, a little bit, just to give it some context before we begin talking about world's fairs and your involvement in that, and your collection. So why don't we begin with your early history?

DL: Well, I was fortunately born in San Francisco. San Francisco's a wonderful place to be born. But when I was about a year and a half old, my parents moved here to the San Joaquin Valley because it was the Depression and my father was looking for work, and he came down here and started farming. We ultimately landed in Kerman, or outside of Kerman, on a ranch, and I grew up there and went to Kerman High School and graduated in 1951.

I didn't want to be a farmer, I wanted to go away to college, and I did. I went to College of the Sequoias in Visalia, and then I transferred to the University of California at Berkeley, and I graduated from there in 1954 and immediately started teaching school. I graduated in June and had a teaching contract in September, and I taught for the next forty-five years. I taught sixth grade to begin with at Caruthers Elementary School, and then I taught at Kerman High School for

two years, and I got married to Carol Kratt, and we bought a house here in Fresno, and I started teaching in Fresno Unified School District, and I taught there for six years. Then in 1964 I transferred to Fresno City College and spent the next thirty-five years teaching at Fresno City College, retiring in 1999.

TL: And your other family members?

DL: I have a twin brother, Phil Larson, who worked in agriculture on the west side of Fresno County and then became a Fresno County supervisor. I had an older brother, Galen Larson, who worked for Fresno County and was county clerk for twelve years here in Fresno. So we've all been involved in the community.

TL: Can you tell me about the circumstances that led to your family going up to the 1940 San Francisco world's fair?

DL: Well, my mother had a sister, Grace Anderson, who lived in San Francisco. Aunt Grace was an absolute delight. I enjoyed her immensely. She used French perfume, and she cooked fabulously, and she led what I thought was kind of an exotic life. We would go up and visit her, but we had not been to San Francisco since we moved here. And then in 1940 we had a car and enough money to go back and visit Aunt Grace and go to the world's fair.

Of course, the big thing was to see the Golden Gate International Exposition, the Golden Gate Bridge, which was new, and the San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge, which was new. I can remember driving up. It was a long drive in those days from Fresno to San Francisco. You had to figure six hours probably because it was all two-lane roads. You always worried about your car boiling when you went over the mountains. And I can still remember the railroad

aqueduct, or whatever it was, that the trains drove over, that we drove under. I remember that, and it's still there and the road still goes through it all these years later.

I think perhaps the thing I remember that was most delightful was coming across the Oakland Bay Bridge and looking down on Treasure Island, and painted on the top of the building it said Billy Rose's Aquacade. I knew we were going to see that, and I was very excited. I was very excited to see the fair, and San Francisco, from that point on, was always perhaps for me the most exciting city anywhere. We stayed with Aunt Grace that night and for a couple of nights and went out to see the world's fair.

TL: And that was the first time you'd been to San Francisco.

DL: It was the first time I had been back to San Francisco.

TL: And you were how old?

DL: I was seven that summer.

TL: You were quite young. Of course, that was before World War II. Can you tell us a little bit about what life was like then, again to give us a flavor of how things were.

DL: Well, the 1930s, the time in which I grew up, and the early 1940s, America was a very different place than it is in the twenty-first century. Life was much simpler. Shops and stores closed on Sunday. Movies were fifteen and twenty cents. Gas was maybe a quarter a gallon, or less. Certainly a different world. We had a lot of food prepared at home. My mother canned all the fruit and vegetables she could for us to eat in the wintertime.

Even sometimes we would raise animals and have them slaughtered and then keep them in a freezer, although that was more after the war than before the war. I was always criticized because I'd call a refrigerator an ice box because when I was a kid it was an ice box, and we had ice in it. Today we have refrigerators.

I was twelve years old before we had our first indoor plumbing in our house. We lived on a farm, it was a rural area. There was a bathroom in the house, but it had never been plumbed. My parents had it plumbed, and I remember when I was twelve it was the first time I really remember wanting to take a bath. Baths before that were primarily in a big galvanized tub on Saturday night, and Mother made the soap that we used.

We were poor, and my mother was very frugal and utilized everything she could. Then, of course, in farming, it became much more prosperous as we moved into the early 1940s.

TL: Well, then let's get back to the world's fair. You're seven years old, you're in San Francisco, you're at this exciting world's fair. What do you remember most about it? What stands out for you about that?

DL: Well, that night that we got to San Francisco, my aunt took us out to Treasure Island. We all went out to the fair to see it at night. I was enthralled. The lights were glorious. I can remember they said that my eyes practically bugged out in front of the statue of Pacifica. Pacifica was an eighty-five-foot statue by Ralph Stackpole that stood dominating the Court of Pacifica. It was bathed in white light with a prayer curtain that tinkled in the breeze behind it. And then, of course, in

front was the Fountain of the Western Waters. All those names I know today, those are things I saw then. For a seven-year-old boy, it was an amazing sight to see.

We moved down to the Court of the Seven Seas, to the Tower of the Sun, a four hundred foot tower in the center of the Court of Honor. Just overwhelming. But perhaps more than anything else, the Court of the Moon, lit in deep cobalt blue, with a sparkling golden arch fountain straddling the center of the court. It was just a beautiful thing.

I remember the lights. They were so impressive. I remember getting lost that night looking at model trains in one of the halls. Everybody moved and I didn't, and then when I moved they were gone and I had to find out where they had gone to. I remember that very vividly.

I remember riding the carousel. The carousel was just an incredible one. It's still in existence. It's in the children's area of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. But it had very fanciful creatures on it. I remember the place that I rode was a round revolving seat that you could sit in with other people. It's still on that carousel, but it doesn't revolve anymore. I was really intrigued by that.

I was intrigued by the little train we got to ride in because I was fearful that it might go up on the track that rode on the – well, we used to call it a scenic railway. It wasn't that, but it was a roller coaster. And I was fearful we would be ending up on the roller coaster. Scenic railway, by the way, is a term that came out of the 1915 world's fair because they had a kind of a roller coaster that was showing various scenes as you went on it. But I didn't go to that fair.

We also went out during this time to the various exhibits around the island, and we came back the next day, and then we saw Billy Rose's Aquacade. Well, I just thought that was the most fabulous thing I'd ever seen. It was a show that Billy Rose had put on in 1937 at the Great Lakes Exposition. He had shown it in New York in 1939 and then brought it to San Francisco in 1940. It featured Gertrude Ederle, Johnny Weissmuller, Esther Williams. They were very young then, and when I saw them again fifty years later at a reunion on Treasure Island, they had aged a bit, but then so had I. (laughs) It was precision swimming, high diving, slapstick comedy, girls, girls, girls. Billy Rose knew that's what attracted the audiences, and it was a smashing success on Treasure Island. But for a seven-year-old boy, it was just a marvelous thing. I remember going back to school that fall and using cardboard to do a diorama of Billy Rose's Aquacade for our class, along with drawing a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge, which they exhibited in the County Fair that year.

I was really overwhelmed by the experience of Treasure Island, and overwhelmed by the experience of San Francisco. I mean, there were just so many things. For someone who basically was on a farm for most of those early years, to be exposed to a city on that size and scale just absolutely blew me away. I've never lost my love for San Francisco.

TL: Okay. Well, we have this wonderful photograph, of course, of you and your family at the San Francisco 1940 fair. If you could hold it up for the camera and talk a little bit about the photograph and what you remember about that moment.

DL: Well, this picture was taken after we had seen Billy Rose's Aquacade, and we're standing in the Court of Flowers, which was one of the main courts among the pavilions on the island.

I think it's interesting to note as you look at this picture that my mother is dressed [in a] hat, coat, heels. My father has on a suit and tie. That's the way you dressed to go to see things like this in 1940. Always that was the way we dressed in San Francisco. When I would go downtown shopping in San Francisco, even as a young adult, I would wear a coat and tie. If my mother was with me, she was always in a hat, heels, coat, gloves. I mean, you dressed to go shopping in San Francisco. Things have changed considerably in [since] those days. It was a different world.

But it gives you a little bit of the scale [at the]corner there of the Court of Flowers, and the four of us are standing there. My twin brother was taller than I was then, and he's taller than I am now.

TL: So he's on the left?

DL: Yes, he's the taller one. It's funny, my sister-in-law made the comment, she said, "I don't know what Don was holding in his hand, but I bet he's still got it in his collection." It's quite likely that I do because I saved the guidebook from that fair, and that was the first piece of world's fair memorabilia that I collected.

TL: And your parents' names are?

DL: My father's name is Bengt Larson and my mother's name is Olive Larson. It's interesting, her maiden name was Emmingham, and that's the English side of the

family. My father, of course, is Bengt Larson, and that's the Swedish side of the family.

TL: But he isn't from Sweden.

DL: No. My father was born in Peekskill, New York, and then the family went back to Sweden after he was born. He was one of sixteen children. They went back to Sweden, and then World War I came and they weren't able to come back to the United States until after the war was over. So he came back with his family in the late 1918-19 period, or early 1920s, I don't remember which. And my mother was born here in – well, she was born in Great Falls, Montana.

My grandfather, George Emmingham, had married a widow in England with five children, and his family thought that was just terrible. He was so upset with them, he loaded them all up and came to Canada, and then into the United States, to Great Falls where my mother was born. And then he had three more daughters in Oregon, where he finally settled.

So my mother was one of four daughters and five half-brothers and sisters, so that was a family of nine children. My father was a family of sixteen. You add that together, that's twenty-five. And then they married, so I had about forty-five aunts and uncles at one point in my life.

TL: Well, you were lucky that you had that Aunt Grace in San Francisco.

DL: Oh, Aunt Grace in San Francisco was always very special.

TL: I can imagine. Well, thank you for sharing that. We talked a little bit about the fair and what an impression it made on you, but did you have anything more to add

about that? What other than the spectacle, and your age, you were such a young boy and coming from a rural area to an urban area.

DL: Well, it was a significant change. It was interesting because we got to drive around San Francisco a bit that day, and my aunt was knowledgeable. We went past the Palace of Fine Arts from the 1915 fair, which began my love affair with that building. And she showed me where the Japanese Tea Gardens were because I was interested in the fair and the idea. That came from the 1894 fair. And we did go to Playland on the Beach. One of the exhibits at Playland was Laughing Sal and the Fun House. Inside the Fun House was a mirrored maze. You would walk through this back and forth trying to find your way, and everything was reflecting. That was an exhibit that had been preserved from the 1894 Midwinter Exposition. So expositions have sort of touched my life in a variety of ways during that visit to San Francisco.

TL: So when was it that you started collecting world's fair items? You mentioned the one guidebook that you bought at the fair.

DL: I saved the guidebook from 1940, and then I was able – my older brother had gone to the fair in 1939, so I had that guidebook from 1939. Then I didn't do a whole lot, because living on a farm it wasn't accessible, but as I got older, I started haunting the used book store on Fulton Street in Fresno. Downstairs in the basement they had a lot of old used books. I remember the first book I pulled out of that stack of books was called *The Jeweled City*. I had no idea what that meant, but I opened the book, and the first picture I saw was an aerial view of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. The book was like ten cents, and I bought it.

I noticed that they had a lot more books, so I began buying all the books I could buy, and they were very inexpensive. I would just build up a collection. Then when I went to Berkeley, to the University of California, I would go to Newbegins in San Francisco or the Holmes Bookstore in Oakland, and there were all these wonderful used books at relatively inexpensive prices, and I began picking up whatever I could. Just one thing led to another. Wherever I saw world's fair materials for sale, if I could afford them, I would buy them. And they were fairly affordable in those days. They've gotten to be very expensive now, but I was able to put together a fairly sizable collection over a period of time.

And I had other people giving me things. People would clean out their attics or their garages or their basements, and they'd say, "Oh, we've got all this junk." I'd say, "It sounds great to me." And there were some wonderful world's fair things that I acquired in this way. So the collection just sort of grew and grew until it got so big that my wife said, "Something has to be done with this because it's taking over our house."

That was when I was able to come out and talk to Dr. Madden and Ron Mahoney here at Fresno State about donating the collection to the Special Collections Department. They were very interested, and I was very interested, and it's worked out extremely well for all of us.

TL: And what year was that?

DL: It's hard. Probably thirty years ago. I can't remember exactly, but it probably – this is 2008, probably in the seventies.

TL: Yeah, that's what the file showed. Maybe 1972 is when it started.

DL: Something like that, 1972.

TL: How big was your collection then? Do you remember?

DL: Oh, I don't know. I divided it into three sections. I'd had it appraised, and I divided it into three sections, and I gave one-third like in December and the next third in January, and that made it tax deductible in two years. Then the next third the next year, so that I was able to – I didn't need that big of a tax deduction at one time, but it was nice to have it three years in a row. Of course, it also meant I got audited three years in a row by the IRS. (laughs)

TL: Do you think it was maybe two thousand books? Do you have any sense of how big it was when you donated it?

DL: It's hard to say. It could have been two thousand items, yes.

TL: Right, two thousand items, and it included guidebooks as well as ephemera and artifacts and pretty much the whole gamut of what we have now.

DL: Yeah, the collection included the guidebooks that I'd collected, and then guidebooks from many, many other fairs as well, hard copy books. I remember Eugene Neuhaus was a professor at Berkeley when I was there, and he had written a book on the 1915 fair and on the 1939 fair in San Francisco. And I had a copy of the 1915 fair book that he had written, and I had him autograph it for me. That was the kind of thing. I learned about books. Pisani Printing and Publishing Company put out a wonderful book on Treasure Island, and I was able to go to the company and buy an original copy of the book. I picked up badges, medallions, medals.

I picked up a piece of the Palace of Fine Arts, a lion's head that was on the end of one of the beams on the curving wall of the building. It had fallen into a

bush. The nails that held it up had rusted out, and it had fallen into a bush during a storm. I said to the guard there, "What do you do with it?" He said, "We throw that stuff away." So I said, "Can I have it?" He said, "Yes, you can." So I have about a forty-five pound lion's head that now hangs on the wall of the Special Collections Department. Things like that. It was all over the place, all kinds of things.

I tried to pick up anything I could because I thought all of it was interesting, interesting for what was produced during that period, interesting for the material that it supplied for any kind of research you wanted to do. Some of it was just stuff to enjoy looking at.

I remember one of the things I was really delighted to find was a model of the Tower of the Sun from the 1939-40 world's fair. I had wanted one when we were on the island, couldn't afford to buy one. We had some limitation as to what we could do. But I was able to buy one from an antique dealer when I saw it in the shop.

Another interesting thing, the Statue of Pacifica, of course, eighty-five feet high, absolutely fascinated me at the fair. When I went back to the fiftieth anniversary of the fair – I guess it was 1990 I went up there. There are three buildings remaining on Treasure Island from the 1939-40 fair, and they had this gathering in one of the large what had been planned to be an airplane hangar.

Just to digress for a moment. Treasure Island was supposed to become the San Francisco International Airport, and then two of the permanent buildings were hangars that were used for exhibits during the fair and then going to be converted.

And then, of course, the administration building for the fair is also an art deco permanent building on the island. Well, when the war broke out in 1941, the navy took over the island and gave San Francisco land south of the city, which has now become the international airport. Treasure Island would have never worked as an international airport with the size of planes we fly today. During the fair, however, the Pan American China Clipper that flew from San Francisco to China would take off and land – well, it would pick up passengers in the Yerba Buena Cove right next to Treasure Island, then motor out into the bay, and then take off from the bay.

TL: A hydroplane.

DL: Well, it wasn't a hydroplane, but it was a sea – I don't know what you call it, but it took off and landed on water. You could see it flying out over the Golden Gate Bridge. That was a fascinating thing.

TL: Okay. So let's get back to – I think we were talking about your collection. Did you at some point decide to branch out from San Francisco world's fair and do broader, or does it just happen to be whatever you happen to find in old bookstores and antique shops?

DL: One of the things that I always did during that age period was read. I read and read. I would come into Fresno, my folks would drop me off at the library, and I would spend the day at the library. I remember *Architectural Record* was a magazine that intrigued me. They had a lot of old copies of it, a whole file of copies, and I could look up world's fairs in them. They had covered a lot of that material. And I became fascinated by the whole subject of world's fairs.

St. Louis was particularly fascinating to me. I remember in a collection of books at school, I saw pictures of the Festival Hall at St. Louis in 1904, so I began looking for things on St. Louis. Kerman High School had a complete set of *National Geographic* magazines, going back to however early it began. I can't remember. I remember there were pictures of the world's fairs in the *National Geographic* magazines, and I would look for those.

So I began to be aware that there had been fairs all over the place, and I got interested. I remember I was fascinated by the fact that the Trans-Mississippi Exposition [Tennessee Centennial International Exposition] in Nashville, Tennessee had featured a full-scale reproduction of the Parthenon in Athens as one of their major exhibits. After the fair was over, the building remained and now Nashville has reconstructed that building entirely in granite material so it's a permanent structure. Beautifully done. And they have now just recently reconstructed the statue of Athena by Pheidias that occupied the space in Athens. The statue has been gone for hundreds and hundreds of years, but the reproduction is there and it's quite fascinating.

I just became interested in fairs, and I began looking, searching, trying to find. Mrs. Clear, one of the librarians in the children's department in the county library, would periodically give me something that she had. She had little sketched photos put together in booklets from the 1894 Midwinter Exposition, and she gave those to me to have as part of my collection. And I still have those in the collection.

So it was all of that. I mean, people were interested, and they knew I was interested. They gave me things. We shared ideas. We talked about it. I had a student, Mildred Boyd, in a current events class. I still teach that class. She had come to San Francisco in 1915 on two occasions for the world's fair, and she described what she had seen to me of the fair and how splendid it was. Of course, it was a very important thing because she met the man she married and then moved to California, here in Fresno, and stayed here till – she was well into her eighties before she passed away.

So we would talk about the fair, and she always reminded me that the Fountain of Energy was probably as magnificent a fountain as she had ever seen, standing right in the front of the Tower of Jewels at the 1915 fair.

TL: So it made a big impression on more than just you, obviously. Fairs have been important to a lot of people. Let's talk about other fairs then. You've been to more than just the 1940 San Francisco fair. You went to the 1962 Seattle fair.

DL: I went to Seattle in 1962. I wanted to go to another fair. I rode a Continental Trailways bus from Fresno to Seattle. It was a package deal. Continental Trailways in those days was sort of a deluxe bus ride, but it was still a bus ride. Anyway, it took twenty-four hours to get there, and then I had a hotel room for three nights and I got on the bus and came back. I spent three days at the fair. I thought Seattle was a delight. It was not a major exposition on the scale of say the 1915 fair in San Francisco or the 1939 fair in New York or Brussels in 1958, but it was a gem of a fair.

One of the things that was unique about this fair was that most of the buildings were permanent buildings. The Space Needle was built for that fair, and it's still a landmark identifying the city of Seattle. The Science Pavilion is still there and doing scientific exhibits. The arena that they built is still in use. They remodeled the opera house, which was adjacent to the fair site, for that fair. They have now remodeled it again or built a new one, but a significant period of time has passed. The big indoor arena was remodeled to use for sporting events after the fair closed. The fountain, a major huge fountain stood in the center of the fair. I run into it in pictures every so often. It's still shown as one of those landmarks in Seattle.

It was a delightful fair. I discovered Belgian waffles, I remember, at that fair, Belgian waffles with strawberries and whipped cream. Whoever had the booth, they really knew how to make whipped cream. There were little private spots. There were interesting little places to go and see and exhibits to look at. I did happen to go to what turned out to be a topless show, which was sort of startling to me because I was still a relatively naive person in 1962. But it was a wonderful fair. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

TL: Did they have like an international village where you found the Belgian waffles?

DL: They had international cuisine in various areas. Along the fountain there they had a lot of booths that sold products from other countries, and food in particular. So you could really get a sampling of international foods at this fair.

TL: Very interesting. Then the other fair you went to, of course, after that was the 1974 Spokane fair. Do you want to speak about that?

DL: I took my daughter to Spokane in 1974. We flew up there. I'd gotten a hotel which was right across from the red gate. They had a series of gates, each identified by a color, and there were large, huge butterflies that sort of identified the gate as you walked in. It was one of those occasions we did everything as much as we could. They had passports to the exposition in 1974, and you would go into the various exhibits and they would stamp your passport as having visited that exhibit. Each of us had a passport, and we got every single exhibit stamped in our passport during that time.

I took a lot of pictures. There were some intriguing fountains. One of them was all bathroom plumbing fixtures put together to form cascades of water into a fountain. It was really quite intriguing. The Canadian exhibit I remember had a Mountie standing guard by the door, and I took my daughter's picture next to the Mountie. They had a wonderful cascade, because a river ran through the area, so we could go down and ride the tram that went across so you could see the waterfall. That was kind of fun.

They had a huge tent that had an IMAX film program in there. IMAX in 1974 was extremely unusual. The only other place that I knew that had an IMAX was in Washington, D.C., at that time. I'm sure they were elsewhere, but it was a very unusual thing. And they had a wonderful film on America that they showed in the IMAX pavilion there. It was very entertaining and very unique because I think it was about a sixty-foot high screen. It was just huge.

They had young men from the colleges in the area running little jitneys. What do you call them? I'm trying to remember. The Chinese use them.

TL: Rickshaws?

DL: Rickshaws, yes, but they weren't really rickshaws because they pulled them on bicycles. They were sort of mounted with the bicycle. So we used those a lot. And they had a wonderful ride called the Sky Float, and you could go from one side of the exposition to the other riding the Sky Float, and we rode it many, many times. I just thought it was an occasion when we would do everything we could as much as we could. We went to the amusement section, but we went to every single exhibit. My daughter had a very good time, and we had a lot of fun doing it.

TL: How old was she then?

DL: Well, let's see. In 1974 she was about eleven, twelve years old.

TL: Oh, that's a good age.

DL: Yeah, it was a good age.

TL: And was it well attended? Did people seem to flock to it?

DL: There seemed to be, I think, good crowds at the fair. There were excellent crowds. There were lines to get into some of the most popular exhibits, but they moved pretty rapidly. It was very entertaining. It was interesting, I was back there to that site a couple of years ago, I was in Seattle [Spokane]. They're reconstructing the gates that they had for the fair, and the Southern Pacific Tower, which was on the grounds, is still there. It was there before the fair, and it remained during the fair, and it's still there. The big tent is no longer a tent, but the structure is there for you to look at. They've converted it into a large park, which of course is what it was intended to be. It was a way of rehabilitating the downtown of Spokane, and it proved to be quite successful.

TL: It's interesting because, of course, in 1974 Disneyland had been in existence for quite a while, so people had more entertainment options. I'm curious to know whether or not that had an impact on the attendees at world's fairs, whether it was seen as still as exciting and innovative in the day and age before there was Disneyland and Disney World.

DL: Well, I think what helped Spokane was its location because Disneyland and those kinds of attractions are a long way away from Spokane. The population is not as great in the Pacific Northwest, but certainly Spokane was a lot closer. I remember I was quite intrigued by the fact that when we flew into the airport in Spokane in '74, they had the jetways for you to get off the plane. Those didn't come to Fresno till the last few years. Their airport was quite modern and quite up to date, and I think that was partly done because of the fair.

It certainly increased the shopping in the area, and there were a lot of attractions that took you out of the city. I remember we could get on a boat at the fair and go up the river several miles and see some of the areas. I think Whitworth College was along the river there. So we were able to just enjoy the community.

When I went back two years ago, it came back to mind very clearly the things that I'd seen during that time of the city as well as the fair, although Spokane is much larger now than it was in 1974.

TL: Given that you had materials from both 1962 and 1974 from the fairs, at what point did you decide to end your collection in 1940, to stop that timeframe at that point?

DL: My primary interest in fairs – I mean, I love going to fairs. I would go to all of them if I could. But my major interest in fairs was 1851 through 1940. Fairs

before World War II were very different than the fairs after World War II. Fairs before the war, generally there was an exposition corporation that would put together a plan and build buildings according to that plan, and there would be a kind of cohesive design for the entire fair. The corporation would build the buildings, and the exhibitors would exhibit inside those buildings. So you would go from one court to another. The buildings would all correlate with each other. There would be a cohesive design.

For example, in 1915, they spoke of the fair as being a city of domes because the eight main exposition palaces formed a rectangular block with courts spaced through that section, and each building had a dome on it. Then at one end was the Palace of Fine Arts, which still exists in San Francisco. At the opposite end of that eight exposition block was the Palace of Machinery, which was, by the way, large enough for Lincoln Beechey to take off and land his biplane inside the building. Out in front was the domed Festival Hall, the domed Palace of Horticulture, with the Tower of Jewels in the center of that south wall. It was a cohesive plan. Everything came together. The coloring, everything, was done according to a palette that had been determined by the Director of Artistic Appearances. Even the sand was tinted in order to keep the colors cohesive.

After World War II, world's fairs today, for the most part, companies build their own buildings, and sometimes I think they try to outdo one another in uniqueness, not necessarily goodness of design. They're more a hodgepodge kind of arrangement, and we don't see that same cohesiveness. There was an architectural unity to the prewar fairs that I don't think the postwar fairs have had.

One of the things that fascinates me about world's fairs is to look at the architecture of those fairs. I mean, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition opened America's eyes to classical design and influenced architecture in America tremendously. The 1915 fair, along with beauty of design, showed that you could put together a design that would allow people to move freely and comfortably. The 1915 fair was designed in such a way as to make it easier for people to move. Nineteen-four in St. Louis, people had complained that the distances were so great, they didn't do that in San Francisco. Of course, they made a block of buildings so that people could avoid the breezes that blow off the bay in San Francisco. And it worked out very effectively. In fact, they made a significant profit on the 1915 fair and they're still awarding scholarships from that money. So it was a very, very successful fair. But the architecture was the intriguing thing.

The Crystal Palace in 1851 was an amazing building. The Eiffel Tower, built for the 1889 fair in Paris. I mean, it still stands as a landmark of the city. There was a huge controversy when it was built, and some couldn't wait for it to be torn down. People would die protecting it if they thought of tearing it down today. No, it became a landmark. Well, the Space Needle in Seattle became a landmark for the city of Seattle. And even today, the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia, the main building there is still a model of design and was copied by the building of the Reichstadt in Berlin. It's interesting how fairs have influenced.

Yet, you look at the 1894 fair in San Francisco, the Japanese Tea Garden. The first Japanese garden in America still exists from that 1894 fair, and it is a gem of tranquility in a busy city. The whole area where the de Young Museum is

located in the California Academy of Sciences, that whole area was the site of the 1894 fair and developed for that reason. So it remains something of a landmark even to this day.

TL: Let's fast forward thirty years to 2005 when you went to another world's fair. Now it's called expos, but Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that experience?

DL: Well, before I talk about Aichi, I'd like to go back just a little bit earlier because you and the staff of the Special Collections Department put together a symposium in San Francisco. I went up to it and took the people that wanted to go on a tour of exposition sites in San Francisco. But it was absolutely thrilling to see eighty-some people sitting there discussing world's fairs, presenting papers, stimulating conversation. People who had come from all over the world. It was just an amazing thing. I thought this is what I always hoped would happen with this collection. I felt that it had meaning and purpose, and certainly you have made that possible in that symposium and the availability of the collection to people who want to do research.

As an outgrowth of that, the director of the Bureau of International Expositions came to that symposium, and in August of that year, 2005 – I don't know what time it was there, but it was like seven in the morning I get a phone call and this was his assistant from Paris asking if I would like to go to the three days that closed the exposition, Expo 2005, in Aichi, Japan, at their expense. I thought for maybe two or three seconds and said, "Yes, I think I can do that." (laughs)

It turned out to be a marvelous adventure. I just thought, so completely unexpected and such a delight. I mean, they treated us royally. We had business class tickets on the plane to Japan. I knew I was doing well when the hors d' ouevres for the first meal turned out to be lobster. And they had a very luxurious taxi to take us in, a nice hotel, and they bussed us out to the fair on the three days and took us into all the buildings, gave us badges to wear that – well, I could show that badge and I could move right into any exhibit I wanted to see, bypassing all the lines. And there were huge lines.

It was a fascinating fair. Everything was temporary, except maybe for the Japanese garden that was built. I think that probably would remain. But it was going to revert back to a park as it had been, and in order to avoid changing the contours of the park, they built a large sort of an esplanade where you walked around the fairgrounds and the land undulated underneath this walkway, and the buildings were built in various groupings so that it didn't really destroy the contours of the land. I understand that when the fair was over they took all of that out and restored the park completely.

They had expected something in the neighborhood of fifteen million people and had about twenty-five million attend the fair. The buildings were very simple. The whole construction was very, very simple construction. But the exhibitors had decorated the buildings. I remember the Dutch exhibit, they had used a lot of Delft tile that was really just beautifully done. The Spanish had brought in some wonderful tile that they covered their building with, and they were very intriguing.

All the way along, the innovative designs on these basically plain boxes just really gave excitement to the fair.

There were large exhibits. It was a huge fair. We couldn't possibly see it all in three days, but we could get around to see a great deal. And they had us doing things all the time. I mean, we went from one exhibit to another. They had some very special performances that were put on that were just extremely entertaining. We got a lot of Japanese culture. They had a large exhibit hall that we went to, and there were performances put on there. The closing exercises were held there, and the crown prince of Japan came to those exercises. And they had big screens so people could see everything on the television screens that they set up, in addition to seeing the people speak from the podium.

The food was great. We went to a fabulous dinner on the last night. I can't even begin to think what it must have cost, but it was just uniquely Japanese and extremely good. We went to a banquet where the awards were given for the exhibitors at the fair that night, and we sat with the Dutch group. That was fascinating.

We saw things. I mean, I don't know that we saw that much of Japan, but we saw a great deal of the exposition because that's where we spent our time. But it was a fascinating thing to see. To see all the countries that exhibited, the things they brought in to represent their country, it was like taking a world tour. It really was. You had an opportunity to take a look at the country in its exhibit. You could buy rugs from Afghanistan. There were all the Arab countries. They had exhibits in the individual pavilions. I remember the Irish had a pavilion there. The United

Kingdom, of course, had a wonderful exhibit. The Russians had a fabulous exhibit all put together.

There were objects to look at, pictures to see. The American exhibit featured, among other things, live pictures from Mars that were being broadcast. They were directly brought into the exhibit. I remember I got to ride one of those new kind of motorcycle – not motorcycles but the thing you stand on and you move the handle forward and back and it moves you around. I can't remember what it's called.

TL: Segway or something?

DL: Segway, yeah, that's what it is. I remember I ran it up and down the hall. They had a big movie going on, eight-screen movie going on in their auditorium. They had a very special car on exhibit. They had a model of Orville and Wilbur Wright's first airplane hanging in the ceiling, and the day after the exposition ended, that was taken out and hung in the new airport at Aichi. They had some very nice reception rooms that we were allowed to go to, and those had all been sold at auction on TV, like on Japanese eBay, and after the fair closed they were all picked up and taken to whoever had purchased them. It was fascinating.

There were huge, huge crowds of people, basically a very polite group of people. Still, when you've got that kind of a crowd, it's going to be difficult to move around. And the Japanese garden that they had put together was just exquisite. They had misters that played over the water, and every so often a cloud of smoke or steam or whatever it was would come out and give a whole new effect. Flowers, everything, it was beautifully done.

TL: Who would have thought a little boy from Kerman many years later in Aichi, at another world's fair, so many years later.

DL: The thing that's been fascinating for me in looking back is the fact that world's fairs have given me kind of an entrée into a whole lot of things. When I was in Belgium, I went to the Atomium from the 1958 world's fair. I went to the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It wasn't only a landmark, it was also an exposition, something to see. It's been fascinating. It's given me an opportunity to look.

For example, the 1915 fair, the French pavilion at the 1915 fair was a two-thirds scale reproduction of the Palace of Legion of Honor in Paris. Well, I didn't get to the 1915 fair, obviously, but Alma Spreckles did, and she was so entranced by the building that she gave that building to San Francisco as a permanent structure up in Lincoln Park. It is the European Museum of San Francisco. So I benefited from that 1915 fair because this incredibly beautiful building is there for us to look at today, and to see the exhibits that come through, and to see the permanent collection of European art in San Francisco. San Francisco has a fine collection of European art. Now the de Young Museum has the American art, and the Museum of Modern Art, which is another new building in San Francisco, has all the modern art in San Francisco.

So we find that the fairs promoted the city, they promoted the arts, the culture. See, before World War II, people didn't travel the way they travel today, so a world's fair was an opportunity for you to see the world without going a great distance or many different places. You could actually get a feeling of what a country was like, what the people were like, because many times they brought

people from those countries to staff their exhibits, so you were talking with and sharing with people who had been there or lived there and knew about it. The only thing comparable today that I can think of is probably Disney World in Florida. At Epcot Center they have a number of nations with exhibit buildings in the style of the country, and they staff them with people from those countries for a year or two years at a time, and you get a bit of that feeling.

But you could do that with world's fairs prior to 1940, and it was fascinating. People traveled to see, for example, the 1893 world's fair in Chicago, and they went back home and said, "Wow, we can do those kinds of things," and it began a whole spate of world's fairs across this country. From 1876 to 1940, there were just numerous fairs. Omaha, Nebraska; Nashville, Tennessee; San Francisco. California had three fairs in San Francisco, two fairs in San Diego. That's five right there just in this state. There was a proposed fair for 1929 [1928] in Long Beach that wasn't able to take off. But people went to them and they enjoyed what they saw.

New York had a fair in 1940 while San Francisco had one also. They called it the World of Tomorrow. It was really interesting because the 1939 fair in San Francisco looked back in its design and construction to the traditional form of world's fairs. The fair in New York at that time was more a modern fair with Ford doing their building, General Motors doing their building. It was a whole different kind of a fair. Then the Trylon and Perisphere, these two objects were the symbol of that fair. And it was a modern world's fair as opposed to a classical world's fair

in San Francisco. And it gave us all an opportunity to see what the world might be like.

TL: The world of tomorrow.

DL: The world of tomorrow.

TL: Well, thank you, Don. I appreciate you sharing all your memories. Is there anything else you wanted to add or augment?

DL: You know, it's interesting. World's fairs might seem to be just a small area, considering all that's available for people to learn about. But world's fairs are a window to our history, window to the past, and they give us a chance to see the world as it was in those days. I think that the old fairs, before 1940, certainly are worthy of research because they show architectural trends, they show kinds of city planning that was taking place, they show the kinds of products that people had and did with in those days, they show how people dressed. It's fascinating to look at the photos of the crowds and see the changes that take place.

All of these are things that I think can be very effective in learning about our past, because I think it's important to learn the past when we repeat our mistakes and we don't know the heritage that we have and the richness of what our country has produced, and what the world has produced, and we can see it in these old fairs.

TL: Thank you, Don.

[end of interview]