

# Artists in Time of War

## *The Service Men's Arts Center and Contact Bureau in Chinatown, San Francisco, 1942–1945*

BY LAWRENCE L. LOHR

*The young sailor remembered Pearl Harbor. He remembered it too well. He remembered the oil-slicked water, the inferno of blazing ships and the screams of mortally wounded companions. He remembered all these things. And he wanted to forget. . . . Some weeks ago the sailor came to San Francisco. And he wanted a taste of music. He needed the tonic of Mozart and Purcell; of Wagner and Verdi. He found it in the studios of Charles Cooper, founder and executive director of The Arts Personal Contact Bureau for Men in the Service.<sup>1</sup>*

The stories often have been told of highly talented young men such as the British poet Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), killed at Sambre Canal, France, or the British chemist and physicist Henry Moseley (1887–1915), killed at Gallipoli. Seldom related are accounts of how artists in time of war found opportunities away from the battlefronts to sustain themselves through their associations with other artists, both civilian and military. But in my own family, I found letters that reveal the existence of a unique arts center that flourished in the heart of Chinatown, San Francisco, during World War II, and

that served the needs of thousands of musicians, painters, poets, and sculptors who found themselves in uniform during those years of disruption and often tragic early death.

Charles Cooper, a concert pianist, founded the arts center in 1942 and served as its director until 1945. With his wife, Marie, my aunt, he established an unofficial club and hospitality center for “all service men interested in The Arts, visiting in San Francisco” at the site of their home and studios at 450 Grant Avenue. Here men of the armed forces used private practice rooms and studios; attended evening classes in drawing, painting, sculpture, and clay modeling; held concerts, recitals, and book discussions; joined groups in play reading, acting, creative writing; and learned about arts events throughout the city. As Marie estimated after the war, “We served about 10,000 young artists, musicians, writers, etc., in uniform.”<sup>2</sup>

I had never met Aunt Marie or her husband, Charles, until I visited them in San Francisco during the summer of 1959. Even my mother had never met this older sister of my father until

*Charles and Marie Cooper relax on the patio of their home and studios at 450 Grant Avenue in Chinatown, where from 1942 to 1945 they ran the Service Men's Arts Center and Contact Bureau.*

COURTESY OF LAWRENCE L. LOHR



1958, while he had not seen Marie since she moved west in 1935, marrying Charles in Reno. He was her piano instructor at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Maryland, and it was a happy second marriage for both. Yet, Marie seemed a close part of our lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, for not only did my father speak often of her and their early days in Pennsylvania, but would send us a detailed letter each Christmas as well, describing her life with Charles in Chinatown at the corner of Grant and Pine, where they rented the top floor of a Chinese pagoda-style building with a furniture store (later a jewelry store) on its ground level. Surrounding an open patio were ten small studios, with Charles's grand piano in one, Marie's in another, his bed in a third, and hers in a fourth. The remaining six rooms were sublet to various musicians, artists, and writers. Both Charles and Marie taught advanced piano students, while Charles also coached singers from the San Francisco Opera. They rarely cooked (there was only a small pantry kitchen), as it was so easy literally to "send out for Chinese." Whenever relatives or friends of my parents would travel to San Francisco, they were encouraged to visit Charles and Marie. They inevitably reported back about the unusual ambi-

ence of the Coopers' studios and the wonderful hospitality they received there. It is no wonder that their life was an intriguing mystery to us all.

Marie's Christmas letters hardly varied from one year to the next, with her descriptions of "one golden day after another" and her good intentions of "maybe getting back East this year," something she wouldn't do until 1961. While many of Marie's letters from the late 1930s and early 1940s have been lost, it was her letter of December 20, 1945, written to my father in North Carolina, that piqued my interest.<sup>3</sup> In it she described how the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., had requested the records of what became known as the Service Men's Arts Center and Contact Bureau of San Francisco. In 2001, I managed to locate these records in the library's online catalog. Apparently, they had been untouched since 1946, when Marie and Charles had sent them. When I requested photocopies of the records, I learned that first they would be microfilmed by the library's Manuscript Division.

After a wait of almost six months that seemed even longer, a box arrived containing more than a thousand pages. In it were the complete records of the arts center, including the register of visitors to the center, samples of poetry, musical and

radio programs, newspaper clippings, bulletins, photographs, and publicity materials. It is this material—supplemented by information supplied by some descendants of several of the servicemen who participated in the center’s activities—that forms the basis of this essay.

Against a backdrop of a city mobilized for war, and of a neighborhood whose residents were valuable participants in that effort, Charles and Marie ran “the only Center of its kind in the country”<sup>4</sup> for servicemen involved in the arts in the Bay Area during World War II. This is their story.



*A group of artists at work on the arts center patio.*

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## The Bay Area at War

by Janet Fireman

Amidst the horror and tragedy of war, Americans, and Californians especially, gained a lot. Despite understandable feelings of vulnerability, a common commitment, a sense of unity, and a dedication to a cause for the general welfare tied people of all backgrounds and classes together as never before. The great exception was racial fear, exacerbated by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which resulted in the appalling incarceration of Japanese Americans at “relocation centers.”

Meanwhile, wartime necessity and federal dollars triggered productivity, yielding a prosperity that had eluded the nation since the worst days of the Depression. For California, the war was transformative by stimulating the maintenance of cultural and political continuity, energizing industry, diversifying the population, inspiring creativity, and, in many ways, preparing the way for the state to assume a leadership role in the nation. Some say that California gained its majority through World War II; surely, it was changed forever.

The war brought the world to California, and with its ideal location, prewar manufacturing experience, and imaginative industrialists, the state responded as the “arsenal of democracy.” Although a military presence was nothing new, California became the garrison state, or “Fortress California.” The leading cities of southern California and the Bay Area were the nation’s principal staging and training grounds for the armed forces, as well as manufacturing hubs for war matériel, food processing, shipping, and domestic supply.

Private industry surged—most importantly shipbuilding in the Bay Area and airplane construction in Los Angeles and San Diego—becoming the state’s most significant military contribution to the war. The bay’s spectacular resources led to expansion of existing naval facilities and construction of new bases that served as staging and training facilities, supply depots, and centers of ship construction at Hunters Point, Treasure Island, Alameda, Oakland, Mare Island, Vallejo, Richmond, and Sausalito. More than one million Pacific theater troops passed through Camp Stoneman at Pittsburg, one of the San Francisco Port of Embarkation’s staging centers where troops were processed for overseas duty.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:**

*The military established a secret radar station on Southeast Farallon Island, the largest of the Farallon Islands. Twenty-seven miles at sea from San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, the island also boasted a lighthouse, Farallon Island Light—at the time the seventh strongest lighthouse in the nation. This photograph was one of a number of images released by the military for the first time in December 1945.*

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*A Navy gun crew practices at Treasure Island, one of many military and naval bases in the Bay Area during the war. The island was taken over by the federal government in April 1942. Located in the heart of the bay, it was considered critical to the success of naval operations in the Pacific war.*

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Henry J. Kaiser spearheaded fantastic productivity and pioneering modernity through pre-assembly methods in Richmond, where his plant built one-quarter of all the Liberty ships and fully 30 percent of American wartime shipping—and in record time. Wartime industries also included fuel, synthetic rubber, agriculture, and electronics—and the brainiac developments of the Manhattan Project, centered in research labs at UC Berkeley and Los Alamos, where the first atomic bomb was developed, which, famously and horrifically, was utilized to end the war in August of 1945.

After years of Depression-era unemployment, Californians and others flocked to take up jobs in Bay Area cities. Once there, housing and services shortages, school overcrowding, transportation difficulties, and overtaxed utilities added to the stress of long working hours and fear of enemy attack. Richmond, for example, quadrupled in size during the first few years of the war.

Bay Area residents mobilized to provide housing, food, medical attention, and recreational opportunities to 1,650,000 servicemen on leave or on their way to and from the Pacific theater. In San Francisco, downtown and entertainment neighborhoods were crowded with





*Following Pearl Harbor, San Francisco became the most strategically important port in the country and a front line in the Pacific theater. Even the city's educational facilities played a role in the war effort, including industrial training in the use of sheet metal at this public school.*

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GIs who socialized in commercial clubs, ballrooms, and halls, and also in the USO (United Service Organizations) centers and at Red Cross dances, where swing music of the era was exceedingly popular. When services and resources didn't exist, civilians rushed to provide them.

Besides war industries, and the service industries required to support war work as well as the military, the Bay Area fostered scads of related volunteer services, most notably the Red Cross, the USO, and Civil Defense. Individuals and organizations volunteered for many pursuits, such as erecting barbed wire barriers on the coast,

providing camouflage to defense plants, spotting planes, constructing anti-aircraft gun emplacements, cultivating victory gardens, and, of course, donating blood.

As the war neared an end, and anticipating an Allied victory, representatives of forty-six nations met in San Francisco for an organizing meeting of the United Nations, hoping to prepare for permanent peace. Realization of that hope eluded those idealistic founders, but 800,000 servicemen and -women returned from war zones and relocated to California, full of hope for new life.



Approximately 7,000 servicemen found shelter at San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza from 1943 until December 1946, when crews dismantled the temporary barracks that provided sleeping quarters for up to eighty-eight servicemen. By August 1944, the War Department, desperate to provide additional housing, also sought to secure rooms in the city's major hotels to provide servicemen a place to rest from battle fatigue or shock. A few months later, the St. Francis and the Fairmont hotels began to build barracks and additional rooms specifically for military personnel.

SAN FRANCISCO HISTORY CENTER, SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY

### Recommendations for Further Reading

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## Chinatown during World War II

by Tiffany Tsang

Thousands of Chinese Americans living in San Francisco's Chinatown, where Charles and Marie Cooper also lived and worked, played an active and vital role in the war effort. The war afforded them the opportunity to redirect a history of xenophobia and discrimination that followed their arrival—in the tens of thousands—during and after the Gold Rush. During these years, some Chinese worked independently as gold miners, while most filled labor positions that were desperately needed in the burgeoning frontier communities and, later, urban centers.<sup>5</sup>

As employers chose to hire Chinese over white workers as a form of cheap labor, resentment grew and led to discriminatory legislation, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1888. Chinese immigration into the United States was banned and naturalization was prevented for those already present. This put a stop to the influx of new immigrants and effectively halted the growth of Chinese communities by barring the introduction of women into the already predominantly bachelor societies.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these obstacles, many Chinese decided to make California their permanent home and created small communities of their own, known as Chinatowns. San Francisco's Chinatown was the largest of all and, like others, was wholly self-sufficient. In these crowded quarters,

the Chinese established temples, public halls, stores, restaurants, and entertainment centers. While Chinatown was viewed by whites as a “foreign colony,” it essentially served as a protective enclave where the Chinese created a sense of community in a hostile land.<sup>7</sup>

World War II not only dramatically changed how Chinese Americans were perceived but also afforded them new opportunities that initiated them into mainstream America. Due to China's alliance with the United States, Chinese Americans were portrayed by the media as friends, while Japanese Americans were viewed as enemies. Worried about becoming targets of anti-Japanese violence, Chinese store owners often posted signs proclaiming “This is a Chinese shop.” With the Japanese internment, all of the Japanese-owned stores in or around Chinatown were taken over by Chinese Americans.<sup>8</sup>

Simultaneously, Chinese Americans themselves actively portrayed a more positive image of themselves through patriotic wartime activities. The residents of Chinatown raised hundreds of thousands of dollars through fundraisers such as Red Cross and Defense Bond drives. They organized rice bowl parties and parades. Everyone, including women and children, contributed to the war effort. In fact, the war allowed Chinese women to become involved in public life as never before, actively participating in the armed forces and the military and civil defense industries.<sup>9</sup>

All in all, 22 percent of all Chinese American adult males were drafted—a higher proportion than any other national group. Between twelve thousand and fifteen thousand Chinese Americans served in the armed forces. Most who joined simply wanted to serve their country and prove their allegiance. Some saw it as a chance to improve the socioeconomic status of Chinese Americans in the future.<sup>10</sup>

In many ways, they could not have made a more accurate prediction. The activities of Chinese Americans, whether through work on the home front or in military service, did a great deal to integrate them into society and demonstrated that they were worthy citizens. For the first time, Chinese Americans in much larger numbers than before were able to leave the restrictive ethnic-labor market in Chinatown and pursue meaningful work in all forms. Though they were responding to a national crisis, their public service garnered respect for their community and secured them a place in American society where they would continue to thrive and partake in postwar prosperity.<sup>11</sup>



OPPOSITE PAGE:

Female entertainers donating their act to a civil defense pageant salute a crowd of servicemen in Chinatown. From buying war bonds to enlisting in the armed forces, Chinese Americans demonstrated their patriotism and their eagerness to participate in the war effort.

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Civilian Exclusion Order No. 5, issued on April 1, 1942, called for the evacuation of residents of Japanese ancestry to War Relocation Authority centers. Many businesses in Chinatown, like this store on Grant Avenue, were operated by Japanese Americans, who responded to the order to vacate by staging close-out sales and boarding up their stores prior to evacuation.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION, PHOTOGRAPH BY DOROTHEA LANGE

## EXCERPT

### San Francisco Looks West: The City in Wartime

By John Dos Passos

Between 1942 and 1945, the social revolutionary and political author John Dos Passos (1896–1970) traveled to San Francisco to report on his impressions of the city in wartime for Harper's Magazine. Like a first-time visitor—as were many of the servicemen in the Bay Area—he walked the streets, talking to people and acquainting himself with the city's many offerings. His article, published in March 1944 and excerpted below, included his observations of Chinatown.

... down the hill to the right I've caught sight of accented green roofs and curved gables painted jade green and vermilion. That must be Chinatown. Of course the thing to do is to take a turn through Chinatown on the way down toward the business district. I find myself walking along a narrow street in a jungle of Chinese lettering, interpreted here and there by signs announcing

Chop Suey, Noodles, Genuine Chinese Store. There are ranks of curio stores, and I find myself studying windows full of Oriental goods with as much sober care as a small boy studying the window of a candy store. The street tempts you along. Beyond the curio shops there are drug stores, groceries giving out an old drenched smell like tea and camphor and lychee nuts, vegetable stores, shops of herb merchants that contain very much the same stock of goods as those Marco Polo saw with such wonder on his travels. In another window there are modern posters: raspberry-and-spinach-tinted plum-cheeked pin-up girls and stern lithographs of the Generalissimo; a few yellowing enlargements of photographs of eager-looking young broad-faced men in cadets' uniforms. The gilt lettering amuses the eye. The decorative scrollwork of dragons and lotus flowers leads you along. You forget the time wondering how to size up the smooth Chinese faces. At the end of the street I discover that an hour has passed and that I have been walking the wrong way all the time.

Harper's Magazine 188 (March 1944): 328–38.

## “NO STUFFED SHIRT SALON”

*On Grant Avenue, in the midst of San Francisco's Chinatown, there is an inconspicuous doorway opening on a flight of stairs. It has never, so far as anyone knows, led to an opium den or anything equally Oriental and sinister; before the late war it was a thoroughly American tea-room called The Courtyard, and during the war years and for a time after V-J day it was known as the Servicemen's Art Centre. In either state it was pleasantly full of life and cheerfulness.*

*One left the breath-taking rise of Grant, the crowds on the pavement, half tourist, half Chinese-American, the neon signs and gay gimcrackery of Chinatown's shops, the smell of incense coming enticingly from brightly lit doorways, and the far-off sound of Occidental dance music from the Shanghai Low night-club. One mounted the stairs, usually in company with a few Servicemen, and emerged into a courtyard open to the sky. The doors from this court opened into three or four studios of varying sizes, usually full of more Servicemen.*

*It was amazing (until you considered the wide net spread by the Army, Navy, and Marines) to discover how many men on leave wanted nothing more than an evening of playing the piano or painting or working on sculpture—or simply of talking shop with artists out of uniform. If some of the students who came regularly to act as assistant hostesses happened to be pretty girls, that did no harm whatsoever.<sup>12</sup>*

An excerpt from a novel published after the war, this description of the headquarters of the Service Men's Arts Center and Contact Bureau provides a colorful glimpse of the cultural home available to servicemen furloughed in and around San Francisco during World War II.

Established in May 1942, the Red Cross–sponsored arts center joined other USO and YMCA hubs as a refuge—a place to go to dance with the local girls, get a meal or a shave, write a letter home, and now, engage in the arts. As Charles and Marie recounted in their final report on the center's activities for the Library of Congress, the idea for the center began with Charles. Imagining himself one of the many servicemen pouring into San Francisco following the attack on Pearl Harbor, he sought to provide servicemen who were professional artists or students of the arts, or who merely had an interest in the arts, “some release from the regimentation and military discipline so foreign to the individualism of the artist.”<sup>13</sup>

Charles envisioned his contribution to the war effort as a place where men “could be put in touch with other artists, both in and out of the armed forces, and with arts organizations, schools, and other activities during their visit in or through this area.” For six weeks in March and April 1942, he organized the project, obtaining endorsements from local artists and arts organizations and approval from top-ranking Army and Navy personnel. Dean S. Jennings, talent scout for servicemen for the National Recreation Association, reported on Charles's preparations: “He went to the city's art goods dealers first, coaxing them to donate paints, brushes, canvas, modeling clay. Next he approached art patrons, personal friends and business men, and talked them into donating musical instruments, typewriters, paper, tools, sheet music, books and office equipment. Art instructors, music publishers, draughtsmen, bookbinders, and ceramists soon got in line, and half a dozen radio stations jumped in with an offer of free time for any radio plays written by the boys.”<sup>14</sup>



*The Chinese pagoda-style building that housed the Service Men's Art Center and Contact Bureau, also known as Garden Court Studios, featured a picturesque roof garden with trailing vines and small trees. The quaint quarters were visited by thousands of servicemen who painted, sculpted, played music, and wrote poetry on its patio and in its studios. From around 1958 through 1969, it was the headquarters for the Institute of Music Research (later the International Center for the Arts), also directed by Charles Cooper.*

COURTESY OF LAWRENCE L. LOHR

## Resolved: That Art Shall Not Die During These Days of War

*Golden Gate Guardian*, July 25, 1942

War is hell, yes, it is a good many other things. It is a crazy montage, a dizzy kaleidoscope. It is music by DeBussy, lyrics by Saroyan. It is a painting by Dali. It is bursting bombs and flying shrapnel. The whine of a shell and roar of a motor. The marrow-chill of an ack-ack and the monkey-chatter of a machinegun. It is sergeants and KP, and six hour passes and the guardhouse. It is retreat and the PX, and it is jawbone and gigs. It is drama surpassing all drama because it is the greatest comedy and the greatest tragedy ever conceived. It is a suspension of living, an extension of living. It is tears and laughter and life and death, all rolled together, all rolled in one, all mixed up. And there must be someone to write the story and paint the picture and compose the song, so that we can know and remember and understand. . . . Let just one story be written, only one canvas be painted, just one song composed—the directors of the Bureau are determined that art shall not die during these days of war.



*The largest of the center's studios was used exclusively for painting, drawing, sculpture, and modeling in clay. Open daily until midnight, it was a haven for those men who wished to work continuously and undisturbed. The flexible hours were ideal for bringing sitters commissioned for portraits or live models for classes.*

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Charles reached deep into the city's cultural arenas: the San Francisco Art Association, San Francisco Symphony Association, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and other organizations. Approximately 264 civilian professionals and semiprofessionals in the fine arts—the city's cultural leaders—served as the center's board of directors, committee chairs, teachers, planners, and financial organizers.<sup>15</sup>

Initially, the board agreed to establish the center as the Arts Personal Contact Bureau, a meeting place where servicemen could make contacts and learn of arts events in the Bay Area. In a short time, however, the concept grew to include actual arts activities and experiences at the center itself. Art classes in the patio, music-making in the studios, play-reading before an open fire—these were offered in response to servicemen's requests to actively practice their art rather than passively enjoy others'. The Coopers interpreted the shift as "the result of a desperate need or deep frustration which military life had produced in them." Dean S. Jennings explained: "When the grapevine passed along the news that the center was no stuffed shirt salon but a real workshop, the GI Joes swelled in a torrent. As one youngster told Cooper, 'I'd have given six months' pay and all the girl shows and fancy dinners put together to be alone with a grand piano.' That's a kind of loneliness a lot of people don't understand."<sup>16</sup>

By September 1943, the bureau, now officially an arts center for servicemen, increased its studio space for painting, drawing, sculpture, and clay modeling. Despite tentative plans to expand regionally and perhaps nationally, the center was an exclusive outpost of cultural activity in the Bay Area. "So it remained throughout World War II," the Coopers wrote, "a unique contribution from a cultured and gracious community to those American youths in its midst for whom beauty and graciousness were a necessity even in war time."<sup>17</sup>

## “CHARLES COOPER’S BOYS”

*A pianist wanders in. His fingers itch for a brief respite from rifles and a return to the more important melodies. He is plunked down at a Steinway, and is off on the black and white stairway to his private heaven. Another lad, bored with being no one but himself, joins the play-reading group, and is anyone he wants to be. He is assured for a time that life can have precision, and point. Others whose souls speak in line and color are provided with studio, easel, material, model, and time. For the barracks-bludgeoned men who once were writers, rooms can be secured where in quiet they may search for the words that teach life. Fugitives from small talk will find good talk. Here they can discuss with passion and humor and wistfulness the great things.<sup>18</sup>*

Musicians, painters, sculptors, poets; doctors, shopkeepers, students, architects—these were “Charles Cooper’s boys.” Through word of mouth, flyers, posters, and numerous newspaper articles, they learned about the center and came to exercise their talents while also enriching the artistic life of the city.<sup>19</sup> They would not forget the kindnesses they found there: “. . . if anyone aside from myself, and there must have been a great many, received as much solace, pleasure and fortification from your unique effort that must be a reward. And I have met so many people in the arts in the ever widening circles that extend from Grant Ave. I will always remember,” wrote Private 1st class William J. Gordon.<sup>20</sup>

Typewritten case cards kept by the Coopers provide a portrait of strangers to a city who found at the center a home for self-expression and respite from the war. That of Ensign Robert F. Welborn of Denver, Colorado, “lawyer, poet, and music lover,” was typical:

CONTINUED ON P. 20



Hospitality committee chairs actor Reginald Travers (left) and sculptor Ralph Stackpole (below).

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## THE SERVICE MEN’S ARTS CENTER AND CONTACT BUREAU

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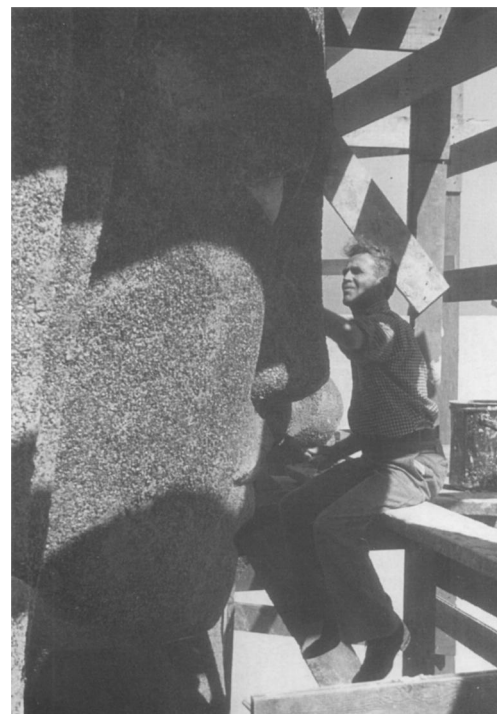
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Darius Milhaud, *Composers*  
Ralph Stackpole, *Sculpture*  
Reginald Travers, *Drama*  
William A. Gans, *Painting*  
William Christensen, *Dance*  
Pierre Monteux and Mary Pasmore, *Music*  
Oscar Lewis, *Literature*  
Gaetano Merola and Hans Leschke, *Opera and Chorus*  
Edwin Grabhorn, Herbert Fahey, and Peter Fahey, *Arts and Crafts*







*Charles Cooper in concert, date unknown. While living in New York between 1915 and 1920, Charles gave at least six recitals at the Aeolian Hall. Critics of his San Francisco performances praised him as “a matured and significant artist” with a “facile technique and an active emotional spirit. . . . He is an artist with ideas of his own. His feeling beats an independent path toward beauty.” In an August 1958 letter to her family, Marie described her husband as “an extraordinarily uninhibited creature.”*

COURTESY OF LAWRENCE L. LOHR

## CHARLES COOPER

Charles Harry Cooper<sup>21</sup> was born February 28, 1888, in San Francisco, where he studied piano with Benjamin Fabian, Hermann Geness, Hugo Mansfeldt, and Oscar Weil. In 1910, he attended the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory in Berlin. From 1911 to 1914, he studied piano with English-born Harold Bauer in Vevey, Switzerland, and in Paris, where he was a protégé of Edward J. de Coppet, founder of the Flonzaley Quartet.

At the outbreak of World War I, he returned to the United States and became a New York City resident and concert pianist, giving recitals in New York, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. From 1922 to 1930, he served on the piano faculty of the Peabody Conservatory (now part of Johns Hopkins University) in Baltimore, after which he returned to San Francisco and moved to Chinatown, where he taught piano, coached opera singers, and founded the arts center. He authored "Rhythmetron: Tonal Realization of Structural Form in Music" (1958), an unpublished treatise on music theory now on file in the Library of Congress. He also recorded a number of piano works on Ampico piano rolls, some of which are still available. He died in San Francisco on May 8, 1971.

## MARIE COOPER

Minnie Marie Lohr was born on June 24, 1892, in Dallas, North Carolina. Much of her childhood was spent in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and in Gettysburg, where she lived with an aunt and uncle following her mother's death and where she received instruction in piano. Following her marriage on December 16, 1918, she and her husband moved to Baltimore. There she obtained a teaching certificate at the Peabody Conservatory in 1922.

From 1923 to 1930, Marie remained at Peabody as an instructor and continued her studies in piano and harmony under the direction of Charles Cooper, whom she married on October 6, 1935, in Reno, Nevada, after her divorce in 1934. She died in a San Francisco nursing home on November 30, 1981.



*The daughter of a Lutheran minister, Marie Cooper attended Lenoir College (now Lenoir-Rhyne College) in Hickory, North Carolina, and later the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, where she studied under Charles's direction and taught piano. During their thirty-six-year marriage, she and Charles each maintained a studio for instructing advanced piano students at their Chinatown residence.*

COURTESY OF LAWRENCE L. LOHR

## Case Cards, Service Men's Arts Center and Contact Bureau

**SIMMS, Silas, Stewarts Mate 1c—Sculpture,  
Painting, NAVY  
Cooks School  
Tr. Island  
Home address: Newton, Kansas**

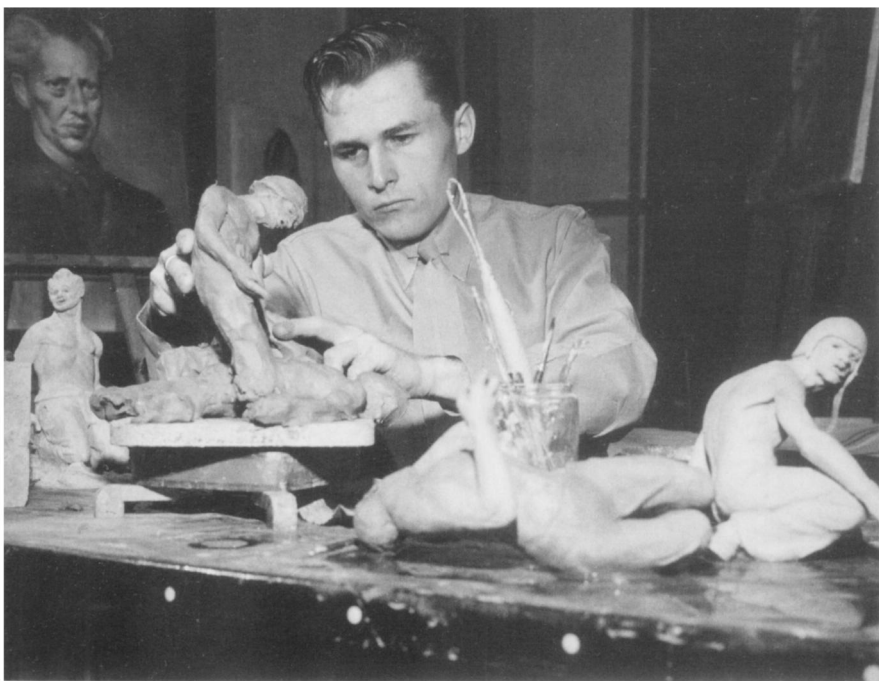
Mate Simms is a young colored boy who had some art training at the Univ. of Kansas and had attracted some attention by his work when war interrupted. . . . Has spent uncounted hours working in the art studio . . . extremely talented, especially in the clay modeling work. Has done some figures of dancers inspired by one of the successful negro ballets now on tour which are remarkably strong, and most unusual. . . . He was especially grateful for the interest of sculptress Ruth Cravath, who—when we got permission for Simms to work at Ralph Stackpole's stoneyard—gave him his first taste in working in stone.

**CHANN, Alden, Pfc—Art, ARMY  
C-2, 7th Mt 2nd Div.  
Camp Luis Obispo  
Calif.  
Home address: Minneapolis, Minn.**

Pvt. Chann is a very serious Chinese-American artist . . . discovered the Art Center when visiting S.F. on a 3 day pass. So interested with activities here, he haunted the Center and even postponed his return six hours, thereby travelling all night, in order to enjoy the society as long as possible, which he found here. . . . One evening, he and five other artists started one of the most interesting discussions ever held at Center, on the subject of design in space thru purely linear means. . . . Chann said he never could express what a "wonderful" experience it had been, in the "arid desert of army life."

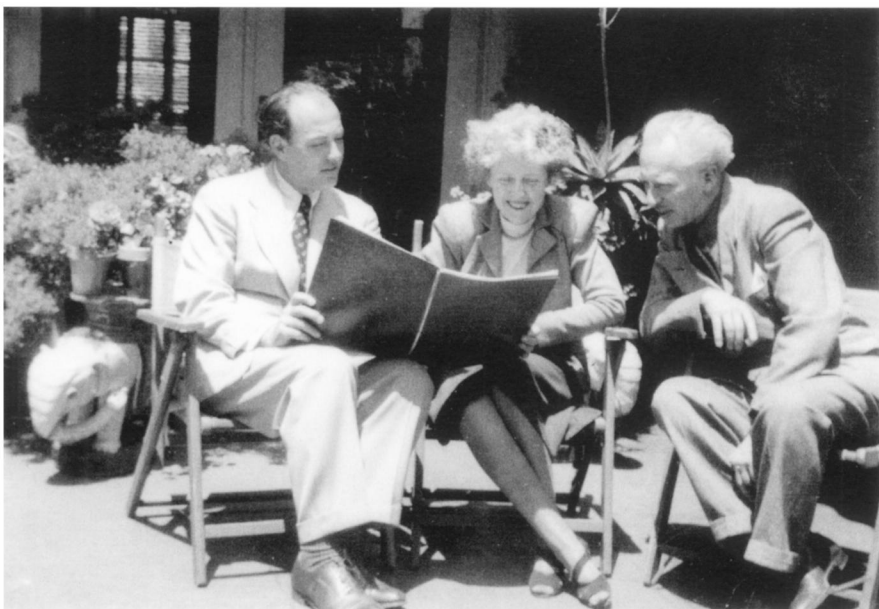
*Ensign Robert Welborn saw our poster out front at Headquarters during a lonely stroll through Chinatown. Intensely interested, he immediately came up. Altho after Bureau Hours, we entertained him here for an hour or more, and then arranged an evening for him with Ensign and Mrs. Jackson Burke, on Russian Hill; to talk poetry with Marielouise; fine books and printing with Jackson; and share their fine collection of musical recordings. He voiced to us his deep appreciation for this service, saying that had he not come up he would have been forced to spend a lonely evening in a "beer parlour." Also expressed the fear that the "mould of navy life" might destroy the urge for self-expression, if not stimulated by some contact with other writers. . . . Ensign Welborn returned next day to thank us again and say "Good-by." On the chance of his being sent to Hawaii, we gave him three cards of introduction to personal friends in Honolulu who love music and books . . . thereupon he presented them and began some friendships which have become permanent.<sup>22</sup>*

As Charles observed, "The project that had begun as an idealistic experiment, had unfolded step by step along an untried path, serving always the individual needs of a special kind of man."<sup>23</sup> Many of these "special" men were musicians and artists who had highly successful careers both before and after the war, including Zelman Brounoff (1909–1990), violinist; Kenneth Burdette Lee (1912–1974), choral conductor; Halsey Stevens (1908–1989), composer; Robert Milford Caples (1918–1996), painter; Paul A. Loesche (1905–1966), cellist and composer; and William J. Gordon (n.d.), painter.



*A portrait of Charles Cooper (upper left) graced the studio where William Kennedy worked in clay. A veteran of a year and a half at the time this photograph was made, Kennedy exhibited twelve statuettes he created at the center at San Francisco's Gump's Art Gallery.*

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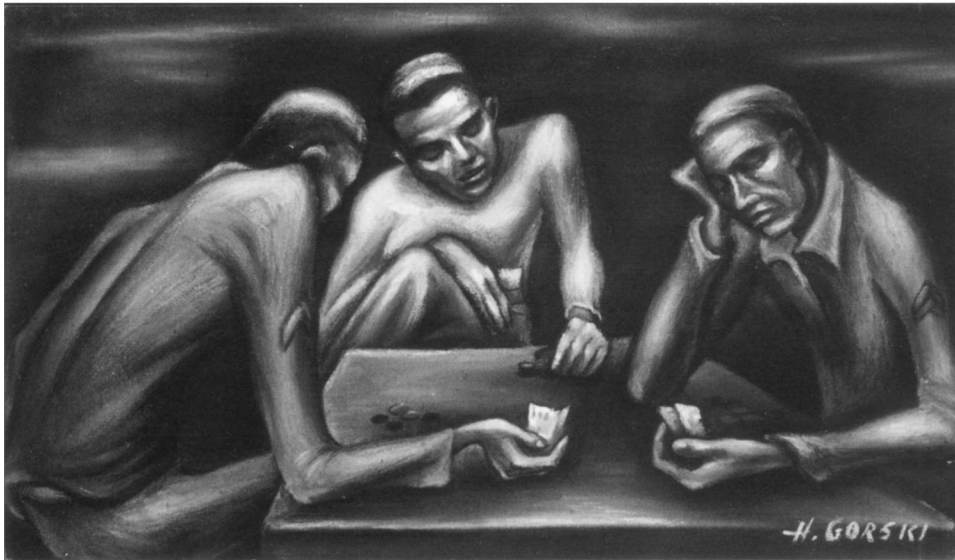
*Halsey Stevens, showing the Coopers his 1944 Serenade for Viola (or Clarinet) and Piano, which he wrote while assigned to the U.S. Navy Reserves in the Bay Area. Dedicated to the Coopers, it was published in 1971 by Editio Helios. During his Navy years, Stevens studied composition with Ernest Bloch at the University of California, Berkeley. After the war, he served on the faculty at the University of Southern California's School of Music, for many years as chair of its Composition Department.*

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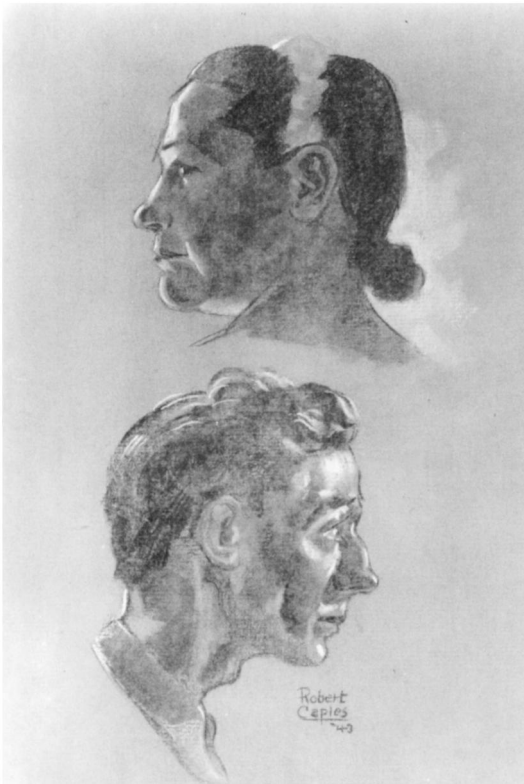
*Larry Lewis of the Army Transport Service, working in tempera and poster paint. A former student of the Arts Student League in New York, Lewis spent "every spare minute of his three days off the post . . . in the art room, where he produced many colorful and unusual paintings, which were hung here and attracted the most favorable comments."*

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*Off Duty, by Henri P. Gorski*

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*Crayon Studies, by Robert M. Caples. Following the war, Caples was a cartoon artist for major animation studios in Los Angeles and won awards in many southern California art shows. "They say painting is like a battlefield," he offered in a 1986 interview. "You're constantly fighting something in your painting until you come to a solution and then go on to the next one."*

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*Portsmouth Square, San Francisco, by Charles B. Rogers*

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*Robert J. Grant, a cellist with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, playing with a quintet of servicemen.*

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*Geary and Franklin, by William O'Connor*

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## STRANGE CITY

Above the streets the cold grey towers loom  
And in the misted skies the stars are lost;  
Below, in futile protests night lamps loom  
Like poor, pale flowers faded by the frost.  
Among these man-made canyons chill winds sweep  
Weeping for long, lost dawns that never came.  
No one wakens, (there are none that sleep)  
And no one whispers a remembered name.

Here time at dusk was halted suddenly  
Leaving a changeless city, still and grey  
With no relentless breakers of a sea  
Of hours to wear the aging stone away.  
I seek solace, and I find no pity . . .  
I am a stranger in this strange city.

O. A. ALPERS  
*First Honorable Mention*  
*Annual Poets Dinner*  
*California Writers Association*  
*March 18, 1944*  
*Claremont Hotel, Berkeley, Calif.*

MANUSCRIPT DIVISION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

## WAR AND I

The warrior drums across the seas  
Have rolled another war,  
Embattled Britain stands at bay  
Still proud above the roar.  
As keel on the keel the sharks of steel  
Are sliding down the way  
The hawks of death in airy stealth  
Are pouncing on their prey.

And once again America  
Is gathering her strength  
To hold the arteries of life  
Across the ocean's length;  
To turn the tide, at Britain's side  
To smash the pagan Hun  
And when at peace the battles cease  
To right that which is done.

For this I must be merciless  
For this I must be brave  
For this I know the arts of war  
For this I face the grave.

GRADY L. MCMURTRY



*In January 1944, Kenneth Lee (seated at piano) was transferred to the Shoemaker Naval Base near Oakland, where he became a Navy Chaplain's Assistant, Specialist 3rd class. Among his duties was directing the Navy choir.*

COURTESY OF MARY ALICE PARKER

#### **“LIKE VETERANS OURSELVES”**

*Among the host of benefits from your program is its important contribution to the mental health of our fighting men, particularly in times like these when difficult adjustments are demanded, and men break as well as machines. . . . I have but one regret regarding your program: I regret that it is not available to the men in our Armed Forces—wherever they are.”<sup>24</sup>*

By October 1944, more than 3,000 servicemen—Navy, Army, and Marines—had “already beaten a path to Cooper’s big studios in San Francisco. . . . Currently they are pouring into them at a rate of 500 a month—amateurs and professionals alike—getting started on postwar careers in the only kind of class the Army and Navy do not teach.”<sup>25</sup> To this number were added thousands of servicemen who attended local arts events or who were given cards of introduction to pursue their interests locally or abroad.

Following the war, in her December 20, 1945, letter to relatives in North Carolina, Marie wrote of the closing of the center: “We have discontinued our Art Center for ‘the boys’ now that the need is past—and have been taking a much longed for rest. . . . We have lived the Service for nearly four years now—and feel almost like veterans ourselves.” Charles would resume an active musical career. As for Marie, “I am gradually ‘reconverting’ to civilian life.”<sup>26</sup>

LAWRENCE L. LOHR is Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The author of more than 130 research articles and 25 book reviews in physical chemistry, he has served as Research Associate at the University of Chicago, Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and Program Officer at the National Science Foundation. He has also published several articles on choral music and Civil War history. He received his undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and his graduate degrees at Harvard University.

## NOTES

### ARTISTS IN TIME OF WAR: THE SERVICE MEN'S ARTS CENTER AND CONTACT BUREAU IN CHINATOWN, SAN FRANCISCO, 1942-1945, BY LAWRENCE L. LOHR, PP 5-25

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance received in locating records from Donna Baker (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Lee Cox (San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum), Dave Fowler (Museum of the City of San Francisco), Peter Hanff (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), Sandy Hunter (California Art Gallery, Laguna Beach), Ursula McLean and Elizabeth Schaaf (Peabody Conservatory of Music, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore), Judy Mollica (Alumnae Association of Mills College, Oakland), Ann Whipple (Book Club of California), and Robert Cutietta (Thornton School of Music, University of Southern California). Alys Glaze (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.) prepared the previously unorganized records for microfilming during 2001. Zelman Brounoff of Dallas kindly lent me the logbook that his father, violinist and Pharmacist's Mate Zelman Brounoff, maintained in the music room at Shoemaker Naval Base near Oakland. Mary Alice Parker of Hickory, North Carolina, provided photographs and other information about her father, Navy Chaplain's Assistant Kenneth B. Lee. Robert Bridges, formerly of San Francisco and now of London, England, provided valuable information about his great uncle, Charles Cooper. Special thanks go to William M. Tuttle Jr. (Department of History, University of Kansas, Lawrence) for encouragement and valuable suggestions.

Caption sources: "Resolved: That Art Shall Not Die During These Days of War," *Golden Gate Guardian*, July 25, 1942, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress (page 16); "Cooper Scores with Piano Recital Here," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 11, 1931, and "S.F. Pianist Wins Praise for Recital," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 6, 1934, Chronicle Collection, California Historical Society (page 18); [www.halseystevens.com/bio](http://www.halseystevens.com/bio) (page 21); Arts Center Records, Library of Congress (page 21); "Caples Paints Lesson in Art with Skill, Ease," *Daily Courier*, February 21, 1986 (page 22); Mary Alice Parker (Kenneth Lee's daughter), conversation with author (page 25).

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Anspacher, "Art for Soldiers and Sailors—Painters, Writers of Peace Time

Get Chance for War," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 6, 1942, in Container, Service Men's Arts Center and Contact Bureau of San Francisco Records (hereafter cited as Arts Center Records), unnumbered microfilm, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Minnie Marie Lohr Cooper to Lawrence Lohr (the author's father), 20 December 1945, author's collection.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 12-15.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Shih-Shan Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 56-57; Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 488.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 239-46.

<sup>8</sup> Benson Tong, *The Chinese Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 69; Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 371; Roger Lotchin, *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 170.

<sup>9</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 372; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 223-60.

<sup>10</sup> Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 827.

<sup>11</sup> Lotchin, *The Way We Really Were*, 164-82.

<sup>12</sup> Lenore Glen Offord, *And Turned to Clay* (London: Jarrolds Publishers Ltd., 1950), 5; first published as *My True Love Lies* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1947).

<sup>13</sup> Charles Cooper, Resumé and Final Report of the Service Men's Arts Center and Contact Bureau, San Francisco, California, April 1942-August 1945, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>14</sup> Cooper, Resumé and Final Report, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress; Dean S. Jennings, *Recreation*, October 1944, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>15</sup> Cooper, Resumé and Final Report, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>16</sup> Cooper, Resumé and Final Report, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress; Jennings, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>17</sup> Cooper, Resumé and Final Report, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>18</sup> "Gentlemen, The Arts," *Scuttle Butt*, October 24, 1942, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>19</sup> Jennings, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress; for example, "Army Men Exhibit Works at Museum," *Golden Gate Guardian*, September 10, 1942; Zilfa Estcourt, "Women in War—Musical Club's Program, Talented men in Uniform Will Entertain Tomorrow," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 6, 1943, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>20</sup> Arts Center Records, Library of Congress. William Gordon, Private, 217th C. A. (A. A.), visited the center on August 8, 1942. His work was exhibited at the Art Institute, Chicago, 1938-39, 1940-42, and 1948-51. He is listed in *Who Was Who in American Art* (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Biographical information about Charles Cooper was assembled from many sources, including his Social Security application and death records, records of the Peabody Conservatory of Music, reviews of recitals in California and Nevada by his students, and communications with his grandnephew Robert Bridges. Also see Richard Aldrich, *Concert Life in New York: 1902-1923*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), for dates of Cooper's New York recitals between 1915 and 1920; George Kehler, *The Piano in Concert*, vol. 1 (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982), 263 for a brief biographical sketch of Cooper together with programs of his Boston and New York recitals between 1915 and 1917.

<sup>22</sup> Case cards, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>23</sup> Cooper, Resumé and Final Report, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>24</sup> Lieutenant C. A. Rehling, U.S. Navy Reserves, to Charles Cooper, 26 September 1942, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>25</sup> Jennings, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.

<sup>26</sup> Cooper to Lohr, 20 December 1945, Arts Center Records, Library of Congress.