



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the Betty and John Messenger
papers, 1935-1998 (bulk 1947-1952)

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	Betty and John Messenger papers
Date:	1935-1998 (bulk 1947-1952)
Identifier:	NAA.2016-01
Creator:	Messenger, Betty, 1929- Messenger, John C. (John Cowan), 1920-
Extent:	3.97 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Betty and John Messenger papers mainly document the work of Betty and John Messenger with the Anang, Ibibo, and Efik peoples of Nigeria. Most of this fieldwork is focused on religion, art, language, and folklore. The Messengers were active in Southern Nigeria during the late 1940s to early 1950s and went on to publish extensively on the cultures they researched there. This collection consists of fieldnotes, correspondence, maps, records, an audio recording, negatives, prints, and 35 mm slides pertaining to their fieldwork in Nigeria.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Transferred to the National Anthropological Archives from Anthropology Collections in 2015.

Related Materials

Artifacts donated by Betty and John Messenger, including masks, carved figures, drums, and other ethnographic material from the Anang, Ibibio, and Efik peoples of Nigeria are held in the National Museum of Natural History's Anthropology collections in accession 2072478.

Processing Information

Original folder titles were mostly retained. Some folder titles have been created by the archivist and are placed within square brackets. Processed by Lea Sellon, November 2022

Preferred Citation

Betty and John Messenger papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

Access to the Betty and John Messenger papers requires an appointment.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Biographical / Historical

John Messenger (1920-2010) was an anthropologist who was active from the mid to late 20th century, best known for his research among the Anang, Ibibio, and Efik peoples of Nigeria, and the Anglo Irish on sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. John met his wife, Betty, while at Lawrence University where he received his B.S. in Geology. The two began their career of joint fieldwork with the Anang in Nigeria, where John conducted dissertation research focused on religion, art, folklore, and proverbs. John received his PhD in Anthropology and African Studies in 1957 from Northwestern University. He went on to teach at multiple institutions including Michigan State, Carleton College, Indiana University, Queen's University of Belfast, Notre Dame, and Ohio State University where he retired as professor emeritus. In addition to his work in Nigeria and Ireland, John conducted research in Monserrat and New Zealand. John Messenger was also heavily involved with the Central States Anthropological Society, serving as president in 1981.

Betty Messenger (1924-2020) was a Folklorist most known for her work on industrial folklore in Northern Ireland. She received her undergraduate degree from Lawrence University, following which she and John conducted fieldwork in Nigeria. Betty went on to receive her PhD in Folklore from Indiana University and taught English composition at Ohio State University. She was also an active member of the Central States Anthropological Society and held multiple positions in the organization.

Scope and Contents

The Betty and John Messenger papers concern the Messengers' fieldwork and research with the Anang, Ibibio, and Efik peoples of Nigeria. The couple's early work in Nigeria is documented in this collection through fieldnotes, correspondence, manuscripts, site maps, vocabulary indexes, travel account books, prints, negatives, an audio recording, and 35 mm slides. There is an accompanying notebook which identifies negatives and slides in the collection.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Selected Bibliography

1978. Messenger, Betty T. *Picking Up the Linen Threads*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1978.
1981. Messenger, John C., with Betty T. Messenger. "Sexuality in Folklore in a Nigerian Society" *Central Issues in Anthropology* 3, no. 1(1981): 29-50.
1960. Messenger, John C. "Anang Proverb-Riddles" *The Journal of American Folklore* 73, no. 289 (1960): 225-235.
1983. Messenger, John C. *Anthropologist at Play: Balladmongering in Ireland and Its Consequences for Research*. Maryland: University Press of America, 1983.
1983. Messenger, John C. *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland*. Illinois: Waveland Press, 1983.
1989. Messenger, John C. *Inis Beag Revisited: The Anthropologist as Observant Participant*. Wisconsin: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1989.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Anang (African people)
- Efik (African people)
- Ibibio (African people)

Cultures:

- Anang (African people)
- Efik (African people)
- Ibibio (African people)

Types of Materials:

- Manuscripts
- Maps
- Photographs
- Sound recordings

Places:

- Africa, West
- Nigeria

Container Listing

Box 1, Folder 1	[Papers relating to choice of hypothesis]
Box 1, Folder 2	[Ekam], 1950-1951
Box 1, Folder 3	Introduction of local government, 1947-1952
Box 1, Folder 4	Jeffreys material, 1935, 1952
Box 1, Folder 5	General area maps
Box 1, Folder 6	Maps of work sites
Box 1, Folder 7	Dealings with household steward, 1951-1952
Box 1, Folder 8	[Inah A. Ebong], 1983-1984
Box 1, Folder 9	Material from David Pratten, 1998
Box 1, Folder 10	Folklore materials
Box 1, Folder 11	[Efik vocabulary field notes index (1 of 2)]
Box 1, Folder 12	[Efik vocabulary field notes index (2 of 2)]
Box 2, Folder 1	[Anang fieldnotes (1 of 3)]
Box 2, Folder 2	[Anang fieldnotes (2 of 3)]
Box 2, Folder 3	[Anang fieldnotes (3 of 3)]
Box 2, Folder 4	[Travel account books]
Box 2, Folder 5	[Efik-English vocabulary books]
Box 2, Folder 6	[Can ghosts arise?]
Box 3, Folder 1	[Anang slides (1 of 2)]
Box 3, Folder 2	[Anang slides (2 of 2)]
Box 3, Folder 3	[Small prints]
Box 3, Folder 4	[Large prints]
Box 4	Betty's field notes

Box 5	Negatives
Box 6	Negatives
Box 7	Sound recording