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National Museum of Natural History

Digitization and Documentation in North
American Collections: A History in Interviews

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Collection Overview

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Content Description

This project was intended to document some major institutional changes and challenges in cataloging and digitizing material culture in anthropological collections that have taken place over the past 30-50 years of museum practice. The project was initiated in 2015 by Dr. Candace Greene, who was concerned that the operational history of digitization in museum anthropological collections in North America was not well recorded. Much of this information was at risk of being lost or forgotten, and it was important to capture some of the institutional memory concerning the creation of electronic catalogs, from early database development to digital photographs to online access. Dr. Hannah Turner, whose research focuses on museum informational practices, was contracted to carry out interviews to gather oral history. This record includes: Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada (interviewee: Ann Stevenson); Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada (interviewee: Barb Rice); American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, USA (interviewee: Brian Carpenter); American Museum of Natural History, New York, USA (interviewee: John Hansen); National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USA (interviewee: DucPhong Nguyen); Phoebe A Hearst Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Berkeley, USA. (interviewee: Michael Black).