



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of American History*  
*Kenneth E. Behring Center*

Catherine Hann Papers, 1953-2006

NMAH.AC.0921

Susan B. Strange

November 2008

Archives Center, National Museum of American History  
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## Collection Overview

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Repository:</b> | Archives Center, National Museum of American History   |
| <b>Title:</b>      | Catherine Hann Papers  |
| <b>Identifier:</b> | NMAH.AC.0921   |
| <b>Date:</b>       | 1953-2006  |
| <b>Extent:</b>     | 0.6 Cubic feet (2 boxes)   |
| <b>Creator:</b>    | Hann, Catherine (Huynh bach Thuy)  |
| <b>Language:</b>   | English<br><br>Some materials in Vietnamese.<br><br>Collection is in English.  |
| <b>Summary:</b>    | Papers relating to Catherine Hann's life in Vietnam (1953-1981), her flight by boat to Malaysia and stay at Pulau Bidong refugee camp (February --September 1981), her immigration to the United States (September 1981), and her work in Maryland as a circuit board assembler, manicurist and esthetician. |

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Catherine Hann, March 18, 2006.

### Provenance

The December 14, 2002 oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Harris Ekman, student at St. Andrew's Episcopal School in Potomac, Maryland. Copyright granted by Ekman and Hann to St. Andrew's Library and Archives on December 14, 2002. Permission granted to the Smithsonian by letter dated January 18, 2006 from Library Director of St. Andrew's Episcopal School to make the transcript available for research by the public and to allow researchers to quote from the transcript. Permission letter on file.

### Separated Materials

In 2005, the Division of Work and Industry collected manicure tools and soldering test equipment from Hann; in 2006 the division collected facial and waxing-related objects from Hann. Clothing worn on the boat fleeing Vietnam was donated in 2006 to the Division of Home and Community Life, along with tweezers Hann purchased in Saigon and carried throughout her immigration experience. The wedding of Kinh Hann to Leila Poursedehi in 2008 is documented in the Archives Center Weddings Documentation Collection, collection number 1131. The Vietnamese wedding dress that Leila Poursedehi wore at their wedding dinner was donated to the costume collection in the Division of Home and Community Life in 2008.

## Location of Originals

Five photographs and naturalization papers retained by Catherine Hann.

## Processing Information

Processed by Susan B. Strange, April, 2006; revised, Susan B. Strange, November 2008.

## Preferred Citation

Catherine Hann Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

## Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

## Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

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## Biographical / Historical

Catherine Hann was born in Saigon, State of Vietnam, on November 14, 1953 as Huynh bach Thuy. (She changed her name to Catherine Hann when she became a naturalized American citizen on June 19, 1987.) Hann, her parents and younger siblings lived in Saigon where her father worked as an instructor at Truong Quan Y, a South Vietnamese Army medical school. In 1968 Hann's family moved further south to Rach-Gia in Kien Giang province to care for Hann's recently-widowed paternal grandmother. Hann, the eldest of twelve children, stayed behind in Saigon, living with a great-uncle, so that she could continue attending Gia Long High School, one of the most prestigious and academically challenging public schools for girls in the country.

After graduation from Gia Long in 1973, Hann attended the University of Science in Saigon where she studied to become a biologist. In 1975, Hann's father, who had worked in a South Vietnamese military hospital in Rach-Gia since his arrival there in 1968, was sent to a "re-education camp." Hann returned to Rach-Gia to be with her mother and to help support the family. She then began attending a teacher training program in Rach-Gia where she trained as a biology teacher. At the training program, Hann met Han Huu Vinh who became her husband in 1976. After graduation, Hann taught biology in a high school in Rach-Gia while her husband taught mathematics in the same school. Their son, Kinh, was born in 1977.

In addition to supplementing the family income with her teacher salary, she also purchased unprocessed rice or "rough rice," had it milled, and sold the resulting white rice. To make a little more money for the family, the hulls and other residue from the milling process were sold as hog food. The future looked bleak, and Hann and her husband decided to take their young son and flee the country.

After two failed attempts to escape by boat, the Hanns were luckier the third time. A family friend obtained permission to build a fishing boat, a small wooden craft only 11.5 meters by 2.1 meters. Hann's family, one of the initiators and organizers of the scheme to use the fishing boat as a means of escape, hired a man who had served in the South Vietnamese Navy to navigate. At 2:05 a.m. on the morning of February 14, 1981, ninety-two people left Rach-Gia on the overloaded boat and headed southwest. Three days later the fishing vessel, towing another boat found stranded after being attacked by pirates, docked at Pulau Bidong, an island off the coast of Malaysia. After five months in the United Nations refugee camp on Pulau

Bidong, Hann, husband, son, brother, and husband's nephew were taken to Kuala Lumpur for processing in preparation for immigration to the United States.

Hann's husband's sister, a naturalized American living in Rockville, Maryland, was their sponsor, and on September 11, 1981, the five-member family group arrived in the United States. The five continued to live together for about four years before Hann's brother and her husband's nephew went out on their own. After being on welfare and receiving intensive English-language training, Hann and her husband gradually became self-sufficient. Hann's first job was working in the cafeteria at Montgomery College in Rockville which she left to work at Denro Labs doing electronic assembly. Hann's husband's first job was at Solarex testing solar panels.

After almost ten years in the electronic assembly field, a Vietnamese friend encouraged Hann to train as a manicurist, and in 1992 Hann graduated from the Aesthetics Institute of Cosmetology in Gaithersburg, Maryland. At first she only manicured her own nails, but a year or so later Hann began working on Saturdays at a busy nail salon while continuing to work full-time in the electronics industry. When she learned that doing facials and waxing was faster and more profitable than doing manicures, Hann obtained training and a license to become an esthetician. After her week-day employer, Orbital Science Corp., moved to Sterling, Virginia, in 2000, a long commute for Hann, she started working full-time as an esthetician and manicurist at Totally Polished in Potomac, Maryland.

Hann works six days a week at Totally Polished, and on her day off she spends the morning doing manicures and waxing for private clients in their homes. This hard work has enabled Hann and her husband to pay off the mortgage on their single-family house in Gaithersburg and purchase a rental house in Florida. Their only child, Kinh, also has done well, earning a Master's Degree from the University of Maryland and now (2006) working on his PhD in biomedical engineering. Kinh is employed by Digene Corporation; he bought a house three years ago; and, as his mother proudly states, he drives a brand new BMW. Hann's stated reason for fleeing her country was "for my son's future;" the family's hard work and sacrifices seem to have made her hopes come true.

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## Scope and Contents

The Catherine Hann Papers are divided into five series: Life in Vietnam, pre-1981; Stay in Malaysia, 1981; United States, 1981-2006; Oral History Interviews, 2002, 2006; and Photographs, 1955-2005.

Series 1 consists of four documents from Hann's life in Vietnam: an official copy of Hann's 1953 birth certificate, her college student ID, her Gia Long High School student ID and her 1974 South Vietnamese identity card.

Series 2 documents Hann's stay in the Pulau Bidong refugee camp off the coast of Malaysia and her family's medical processing in Kuala Lumpur. Especially interesting is a small diary Hann kept in 1981 documenting the building of the fishing boat, the voyage in the Gulf of Thailand, the stay at Pulau Bidong and Kuala Lumpur, and the family's first few months in the United States. There is an English translation of the diary. Other materials in this series include letters sent by relatives and friends to Hann in the refugee camp, papers documenting a family member's attempt to sponsor the family in the U.S., and hand-made Certificates of Commendation awarded to Hann's husband for his work in the refugee camp. The original letter with attached photographs from the U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur granting permission for the family to immigrate is included.

Series 3 describes Hann's life in the United States as she transitioned from refugee to financially successful American citizen. Uncommon pieces of ephemera are cancelled checks repaying a loan from the United States Catholic Conference for the purchase of plane tickets from Malaysia to the United States. Also included are papers from Hann's seventeen years in the electronics industry, textbooks for

manicurist training, a ledger and checkbook from Hann's short-lived Nails & Beauty Spa, Inc., and daily schedules with earnings from her current job at Totally Polished.

Series 4 consists of the original audiocassettes, reference CDs and typed transcript of an oral history conducted by Susan B. Strange, associate curator, with Hann on March 7, 2006, as well as a typed transcript of a December 14, 2002, interview with Hann conducted by Daniel Ekman, a student at St. Andrew's Episcopal School in Potomac, Maryland.

Original photographs in Series 5 document Hann's life in Vietnam, her husband's work in the refugee camp, the family's departure from Pulau Bidong, and Hann at work at Fairchild Space Co. Also in Series 5 is a folder with photocopies of seven photographs taken in 2005 by a Smithsonian staff member of Hann working at her manicure table. Smithsonian negative numbers are included with the photocopies; releases from the photographer, Hann, and the woman having a manicure, are in the Archives Center's control file for this collection. In the same folder are photocopies of five photographs (originals retained by Hann) showing Hann's life in Vietnam; the Archives Center scan number is printed on each photocopy. Hann granted copyright in these five photographs to the National Museum of American History on April 22, 2006; the release form is in the Archives Center's control file.

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## Arrangement

The collection is divided into five series with chronological arrangement.

Series 1: Life in Vietnam, 1953-1981

Series 2: Stay in Malaysia, 1981

Series 3: United States, 1981-2006

Series 4: Oral History Interviews, 2002, 2006

Series 5: Photographs, 1955-2005

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Beauty culture
- Emigration and immigration
- Manicuring
- Naturalization
- Refugees
- Small business
- Vietnamese Americans -- Biography
- Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Checkbooks
- Correspondence

Diaries -- 20th century  
Identity cards  
Interviews  
Oral histories (document genres)  
Photographs -- 1950-2000  
Photographs -- 2000-2010

Names:

United Nations. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.  
United States Catholic Conference. Migration and Refugee Services

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Life in Vietnam, 1953-1981

Box 1, Folder 1          Personal Identification Documents

Box 1, Folder 1          [South Vietnamese identity card for Huynh Bach Thuy : black and white photoprint affixed to card], ca. 1968  
*1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 2.5" x 4".)*

[Image\(s\): \[South Vietnamese identity card for Huynh Bach Thuy : black and white photoprint affixed to card\].](#)

Huynh Bach Thuy changed her name to Catherine Hann when she became a naturalized American citizen in 1987; photographer unidentified.

Unrestricted research use on site by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.

#### Local Numbers

AC0921-0000018.tif (AC Scan)

Names:            Hann, Catherine (Huynh bach Thuy)

Topic:            Identification cards -- Vietnam

Genre/            Photographs -- 1960-1970

Form:

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## Series 2: Stay in Malaysia, 1981

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Diary, 1981, with English Translation<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>   |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Certificates of Commendation, Pulau Bidong<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>  |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Affidavit of Relationship with Letter   |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Letters Received<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>  |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | English Language Studies<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>  |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Medical Documents   |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Handouts for Airline Passengers<br><a href="#">Image(s)</a>   |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Permission for admission to U.S. with Forms I-94; Calendar Pages for Days Traveling to U.S.   |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | <p>[Letter from the Embassy of the United States of America in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, authorizing admission of five Vietnamese refugees into the United States: letter with five affixed black-and-white passport-style photoprints.], 1981<br/><i>1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 8" x 10.5".)</i><br/><a href="#">Image(s)</a></p> <p>Hann, Catherine (Huynh bach Thuy), Collector<br/>United States. Department of State, Author<br/>With date stamp: "Aug 21 1981." Each of the five black-and-white photoprints is approximately 1.75" x 1.25"; photographer unidentified.</p> <p>Unrestricted research use on site by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.</p> <p>Local Numbers<br/>AC0921-0000024.tif (AC Scan)</p> <p>Bibliography<br/>Reproduced in article by Carol Squiers in "Click: Photography Changes Everything" SI website, early 2010.</p> <p>Names: Intergovernmental Committee for Migration<br/>Topic: Emigration and immigration</p> |

Political refugees  
Refugees, Vietnamese

Place: Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)  
Malaysia

Genre/  
Form: Letters -- 1980-1990  
Passport portraits  
Passports

Culture: Asian Americans  
Vietnamese Americans

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## Series 3: United States, 1981-2006

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Work in Circuit Board Industry, 1983-2000, and Resume   |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Reimbursements to Catholic Conference for Plane Tickets from Kuala Lumpur to Washington, D.C., 1985, 1987 |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | Naturalization and Name Change, 1987  |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | Manicurist Training Textbook and Diploma, 1992  |
| Box 1, Folder 14 | Esthetician Training Textbook   |
| Box 1, Folder 15 | Nails & Beauty Spa, Inc., 1996-1997, Checkbook  |
| Box 2, Folder 1  | Nails & Beauty Spa, Inc., 1996-1997, Permits, Advertising Flier, and Business Ledger                      |
| Box 2, Folder 2  | Manicurist and Esthetician Licenses, 1999, 2005   |
| Box 2, Folder 3  | Employment at Totally Polished, Potomac, Maryland, 2000-2006  |
| Box 2, Folder 4  | Beauty Supply Catalogs and "Nails" Magazine, 2003-2006  |
| Box 2, Folder 5  | Gia Long High School Reunion, Houston, Texas, 2005  |

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## Series 4: Oral History Interviews, 2002, 2006

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Box 2, Folder 6 | Original Audio Cassettes, 2006 Oral History |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | Reference CD's, 2006 Oral History           |
| Box 2, Folder 8 | Transcript, 2002 Oral History               |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | Transcript, 2006 Oral History               |

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## Series 5: Photographs, 1955-2005

Box 1, Folder 11 [Photographer Barney Stein with Jackie Robinson : black-and-white photoprint], [circa 1960.], circa 1948  
*1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 8" x 10".)*  
[Image\(s\): \[Photographer Barney Stein with Jackie Robinson : black-and-white photoprint, ca. 1960.\]](#)  
Jackie Robinson holds microphone while Stein sits beside him. In ink in lower margin: "To Ron - A True Dodger - [signed] Barney Stein". Photographer unidentified.

Unrestricted research use on site by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.

## Local Numbers

AC1178-0000001.tif (AC Scan)

Names: Robinson, Jackie  
Stein, Barney  
Topic: Baseball  
Microphones  
Sports -- 1950-1960  
Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1940-1950 -- Black-and-white photoprints --  
Silver gelatin

Box 2, Folder 10 Vietnam, Malaysia, and United States  
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 2, Folder 10 [Vietnamese refugees leaving Pulau Bidong refugee camp for processing in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia : color photoprint], 1981  
*1 Item (Color photoprint on paper.; 3.5" x 5".)*  
[Image\(s\): \[Vietnamese refugees leaving Pulau Bidong refugee camp for processing in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia : color photoprint\], 1981.](#)  
Huynh Bach Thuy, third from left, changed her name to Catherine Hann when she became an American citizen in 1987; photographer unidentified.

Unrestricted research use on site by appointment. Photographs must be handled with gloves unless protected by sleeves.

## Local Numbers

AC0921-0000011.tif (AC Scan)

Names: Hann, Catherine (Huynh bach Thuy)  
Topic: Emigration and immigration  
Refugees, Vietnamese  
Place: Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)  
Genre/Form: Photographs -- 1980-1990 -- Color photoprints

Culture: Vietnamese Americans

Photocopies of photos in Vietnam and at Totally Polished, 1955, 1961, 1973,  
1979 and 2005

[Image\(s\)](#)

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