



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Phil Primack New England Country Fair Collection

NMAH.AC.1497

Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.

2021

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Phil Primack New England Country Fair Collection
Date:	1978-1983, undated
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1497
Creator:	Primack, Phil
Extent:	0.66 Cubic feet (3 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Black and white photographs, photographic negatives, contact sheets, color slides, and ephemera documenting selected New England country fairs, photographed and collected by Phil Primack.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Collection donated by Philip Primack February 14, 2020.

Related Materials

Materials at Other Organizations

Berea College, Special Collections and Archives

[Phil Primack Photographs and Papers, 1964-2000](#)

This collection is comprised of photographs, correspondence, writings, interviews and subject files of Phil Primack.

Processing Information

Processed by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archivist, October 2021; supervised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Phil Primack New England Country Fairs Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

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.

Biographical / Historical

The information for this biography was supplied by the donor, Phil Primack, in February 2020.

Philip N. Primack was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts on May 1, 1948 the son of Dr. Joseph E. Primack, DDS and Celia Piltch Primack. While attending high school in Haverhill, he took a summer job operating midway games at the amusement park in nearby Salisbury Beach, Massachusetts. The park's owner also owned a traveling carnival, Dean & Flynn Fiesta Shows, and Primack worked on its midway at fairs and carnivals across New England while attending Tufts University, from which he graduated with a BA in 1970.

At Tufts, Primack edited the campus newspaper, launching him on a decades-long reporting and writing career. After graduation, he went to work from 1970 to 1973 for *The Mountain Eagle*, a weekly newspaper in the eastern Kentucky coalfields. He maintained working and other ties to the *Eagle* for much of the rest of the 1970s, sometimes taking time off to pursue freelance work and other projects. During the 1970s, Primack occasionally returned to the midway to support the meager wages of freelance writing.

In 1983, Primack went to work for *North Shore: Sunday*, a weekly in Massachusetts and, from 1988 to 1996, for *The Boston Herald*. In addition to his positions as a staff reporter, Primack has written extensively for a wide range of regional and national publications, including *The Boston Globe*, *Commonwealth Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Washington Monthly*, *The Nation*, and *Boston Magazine*. His photography has been included in some of these publications and other outlets, including articles he has written for in-flight airline magazines.

Primack researched, wrote and took photographs for his book, *New England Country Fair* (Globe Pequot Press, 1981) with the bulk of the images taken between 1975 and 1980. While the book arose from Primack's midway experiences, it covers the full gamut of the country fair experience from that era, including 4-H goat judging, blue-ribbon produce, sideshows, horse racing, beauty pageants, and additional subjects. Studs Terkel wrote about the book, ". . . captures the fine feeling of small-town Yankee American gently showing off."

Primack has worked as a speech writer and policy aide to elected officials and agencies at the state and federal levels and as a consultant, editor, writer, and researcher for various organizations and non-profits, including the Ford Foundation, The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, and the Barr Foundation. He has also taught journalism courses at Tufts University, Boston University, Northeastern University, and other institutions. In addition to his BA in political science from Tufts, he earned a Master of Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School in 1987.

Primack continues pursuing writing projects and resides in Medford, Massachusetts.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains original notes, interviews, collected ephemera, black and white photographs, photographic negatives, contact sheets, and color slides, conducted, gathered, and taken by Phil Primack in support of the writing of his book *New England Country Fair!*. The material centers on country fairs in the New England states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

Arrangement

The collection is divided into three series.

Series 1: Notes, Interviews, Publications, and Ephemera, 1978-1983, undated

Series 2: Black and White Photographs, Photographic Negatives, Contact Sheets, and Color Slides, 1978-1980, undated

Series 3: Audio, undated

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Fairs
- Fairs -- New England
- Fairs -- New England -- Directories
- Fairs -- Photographs
- Fairs -- United States

Types of Materials:

- Audio cassettes -- 1980-1990
- Black-and-white negatives
- Color slides -- 1970-1990
- Contact sheets -- 1980-1990
- Cookbooks -- 20th century
- Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints

Container Listing

Series 1: Notes, Interviews, Publications, and Ephemera, 1978-1983, undated

Scope and Contents: This series contains notes, interview transcripts, publications, and ephemera conducted and collected by Phil Primack in support of the writing of his book *New England Country Fair!*. The material centers on fairs in the New England states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

Box 3	Midway passes and Phil Primack self portrait, ephemera and photograph, 1978
Box 1, Folder 1	Fourteenth Annual Stratham Fair (Stratham, New Hampshire) program, 1981-07-24-1981-07-26
Box 1, Folder 2	Skowhegan State Fair (Skowhegan, Maine) advertisement, 1981-08-13-1981-08-22
Box 1, Folder 3	The Tolland County 4-H Fair (Rockville, Connecticut) program, 1981-08-14-1981-08-16
Box 1, Folder 4	World's Fair (North Waterford, Maine) program, 1981-08-20-1981-08-23
Box 1, Folder 5	Union Fair (Union, Maine) pamphlet, 1981-08-24-1981-08-29
Box 1, Folder 6	Plymouth State Fair (Plymouth, New Hampshire) pamphlet, 1981-08-27-1981-08-30
Box 1, Folder 7	Hopkinton Fair (Contoocook, New Hampshire) pamphlet, 1981-09-03-1981-09-07
Box 1, Folder 8	105th Annual Deerfield Fair (Deerfield, New Hampshire) pamphlet, 1981-10-01-1981-10-04
Box 1, Folder 9	Centennial History of the Deerfield Fair (Deerfield, New Hampshire), 1976
Box 1, Folder 10	Notes and transcriptions, 1981, undated
Box 1, Folder 11	Eastern States Exposition, program and ephemera, 1981
Box 1, Folder 12	Book reviews and correspondence, 1981-1983, undated
Box 1, Folder 13	New England Country Fair! Primack, Phil, book, 1982
Box 1, Folder 14	Death Riders Motorcycle Thrill Show, souvenir program and notes, undated
Box 1, Folder 15	"Elkanah Watson-A Man of Vision" Hunt, Martin, undated

Box 1, Folder 16 "New Hampshire Fairs 1722-1970", undated

Box 1, Folder 17 T.N.T. Mud Wrestling, entry blank, undated

Box 1, Folder 18 Topsfield Fair Cookbook, Volume II (Topsfield, Massachusetts), undated

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Series 2: Black and White Photographs, Photographic Negatives, Contact Sheets, and Color Slides, 1978-1980, undated

Scope and Contents: This series contains original black and white photographs, photographic negatives, contact sheets, and color slides taken by Phil Primack in support of the writing of his book *New England Country Fair!*. The material centers on fairs in the New England states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

Box 2, Folder 1	Marshfield Fair (Marshfield, Massachusetts) rides and midway, photographic negatives, 1978-09
Box 2, Folder 2	Marshfield and Northampton (Massachusetts) rides and midway, photographic negatives, 1980
Box 2, Folder 3	Marshfield Fair (Marshfield, Massachusetts) 4-H goat judging, photographic negatives and contact sheets, 1980-08
Box 2, Folder 4	Marshfield Fair (Marshfield, Massachusetts) 4-H track, photographic negatives and contact sheets, 1980-08
Box 2, Folder 5	Rochester, New Hampshire, contact prints and photographic negatives, 1980-10
Box 2, Folder 6-9	Photographic prints, unidentified, undated
Box 3	Bangor, Maine, ox and horse pulling, images of beached Wiscasset schooners, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1978-07
Box 3	Bangor, Maine, ox pulling, midway, Phil Primack self-portrait, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1978-07
Box 3	Deerfield, New Hampshire and Topfield, Massachusetts, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1978-10-1981-10
Box 3	Marshfield Fair, Massachusetts, track racing, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1980-08
Box 3	Marshfield Fair, Massachusetts, midway, midway people, others, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1980-08
Box 3	Marshfield Fair and Northampton Fair, Massachusetts, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1980-08-1981-09
Box 3	Northampton, Massachusetts, fair, demolition derby, "Strange People", midway, other, contact sheets, slides, and photographic negatives, 1980-09
Box 3	Stratham, New Hampshire, beauty pageant, "skills" contests, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-07

Box 3	Rockville, Connecticut, 4-H Fair, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-07
Box 3	Skowhegan, Maine, disco dolls, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-08
Box 3	Skowhegan and Waterford, Maine, mud wrestling, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-08
Box 3	Waterford, Maine, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-08
Box 3	Plymouth, New Hampshire, State Fair, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-08
Box 3	Rutland, Vermont, Thrill Riders (auto daredevils); Hopkinton, New Hampshire, fair, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-08-1981-09
Box 3	Deerfield, New Hampshire, Eastern States Expo, fair midway, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-09
Box 3	Deerfield, New Hampshire, "Strange People", fairway attraction, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-09
Box 3	Big E pitchman, contact sheets and photographic negatives, 1981-09
Box 3	Lee, New Hampshire, country fair, "Strange People", Madam Jean; Rochester, New Hampshire, contact sheets, slides, and photographic negatives, 1981-09
Box 3	Marshfield Fair, Marshfield, Massachusetts, fair rides, midway, "Strange People", carnies, photographs and slides, undated

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Series 3: Audio , undated

Scope and Contents: This series contains two audio cassette tapes with interviews and recordings from Phil Primack's research for his book *New England Country Fair!*.

Box 2, Folder 10, Cassette AC1497.OTC0001	"Big E pitchman", undated 1 Sound cassette Notes: "The one labeled 'Big E pitchmen' was taped at the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, Massachusetts. The early part of the name is of various vendors. Where I have the tape set begins with a 'wonder knife' salesman." The tape also conntains the spiel of "master pitchman" Al Spino. Letter from Phil Primack dated 2019 November 18.
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Box 2, Folder 11, Cassette AC1497.OTC0002	Rick Thibodeau and Maine interviews, undated 2 Sound cassettes Notes: This cassette includes the interview with Rick Thibodeau (see transcript, Box 1, folder 10) and "strip show" material from Skowhegan. Side 2 "is an absolutely wonderful recording of the two men pictured on pages 8-9 (New England Country Fair!) telling stories about the fair, horse swapping, and other thigs in accents as pure as the driven down east Maine wind." Letter from Phil Primack dated 2019 November 18.
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