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Institution Archives

Divisional Records, 1866, 1954-1997

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Divisional Records
Date:	1866, 1954-1997
Identifier:	Accession 20-126
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Administrative Information

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Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 20-126, National Museum of American History.
Division of Physical Sciences, Divisional Records

Descriptive Entry

This accession consists of records created and maintained by Uta C. Merzbach, Associate Curator and Curator, 1964-1988. Merzbach earned her Bachelors and Masters degrees in Mathematics from the University of Texas, Austin in 1952 and 1954 respectively. She then completed her Ph.D. in Mathematics and the History of Science at Harvard University in 1965.

Merzbach was the Smithsonian's first curator of mathematical instruments and collected primarily objects made and used in the United States, but also collected objects from outside of the United States. The research and collections of the Division of Physical Sciences principally focused on the history of astronomy, meteorology, chemistry, classical physics, geology, astrophysics, and mathematics. The Division of Mathematics and its predecessors were concerned with the history of mathematical calculating instruments, both domestic and foreign, collecting such artifacts such as planimeters, slide rules, mechanical calculators, digital electronic computers, and astrolabes.

These records document Merzbach's collecting activities for the division; her interactions with researchers, museums, corporations, and the general public; her work on mathematics symposia held at the National Museum of American History (NMAH); and her research and publications. Of note are the materials related to Merzbach's work on the cooperative Computer History Project between the American Federation of Information Processing Societies and the Smithsonian Institution. The project started in 1967 and meant to collect and document the people and objects responsible for the development of the computer.

Some records date to when the division was previously known as the Section of Physical Sciences and Measurements, the Section of Mathematics and Antique Instruments, the Section of Mathematics, the Division of Mathematics, the Division of Physical Sciences and Mathematics, and the Division of Physical and Biological Sciences respectively; as well as from when the museum was known as the United States National Museum, the Museum of History and Technology, and the National Museum of History and Technology. Additionally, some records date to before and after Merzbach's time at the Smithsonian.

Materials include correspondence, memoranda, picture postcards, acquisition records, transcripts, reports, lecture and presentation records, symposia materials, timelines, publications and writings, bibliographies, images, an audiotape, ephemera, and clippings.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Computers -- History
- Congresses and conventions
- Historical museums
- Mathematical instruments
- Mathematicians
- Mathematics -- History \$y 19th century
- Mathematics -- History \$y 20th century
- Museums -- Acquisitions
- Museums -- Public relations
- Science -- History
- Women mathematicians
- Women museum curators

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Black-and-white photographs
- Clippings
- Color photographs
- Color transparencies
- Drawings
- Manuscripts
- Picture postcards
- Transcripts

Names:

- American Federation of Information Processing Societies
- Harvard University
- Merzbach, Uta C., 1933-
- Museum of History and Technology (U.S.). Section of Mathematics
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Mathematics
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Physical Sciences and Mathematics
- National Museum of American History (U.S.). Division of Physical and Biological Sciences
- National Museum of History and Technology (U.S.). Division of Mathematics
- United States National Museum. Section of Mathematics and Antique Instruments
- United States National Museum. Section of Physical Sciences and Measurements
- University of Texas at Austin

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Box 4 of 4	"Early Auditory Studies: Activities in the Psychology Laboratories of American Universities," by Audrey B. Davis and Uta C. Merzbach, 1975
Box 4 of 4	"Georg Schentz and the First Printing Calculator" - Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology, No. 36, by Uta C. Merzbach, 1977
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