



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Watson M. Perrygo Papers, circa 1880s-1979

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Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu |
| Title: | Watson M. Perrygo Papers |
| Identifier: | Record Unit 7306 |
| Date: | circa 1880s-1979 |
| Extent: | 6.16 cu. ft. (3 record storage boxes) (3 document boxes) (1 half document box) (1 16x20 box) (2 5x8 boxes) |
| Creator:: | Perrygo, Watson M., 1906-1984 |
| Language: | English |

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 7306, Watson M. Perrygo Papers

Historical Note

Watson M. Perrygo (1906-1984), field collector, taxidermist, and exhibits specialist for the United States National Museum (USNM), was born in Washington, D.C. As a young man, Perrygo was a frequent visitor to the USNM. He became a protege of the ornithologist, Alexander Wetmore, then Director of the Museum, with whom he went on weekend field trips in Maryland and Virginia.

Perrygo began his career at the USNM in 1927 as a scientific aide in the Division of Mammals and the taxidermy studio. In addition to the taxidermic and other collection-related work, Perrygo was sent on field trips to collect birds, mammals, and snakes unrepresented in the USNM. His collecting activities included trips to Haiti, 1929; again to Haiti in 1930 as a member of the Parish-Smithsonian Expedition; to West Virginia, 1936; to Tennessee, 1937; to Kentucky, 1938; to North Carolina, 1939; to South Carolina, 1940; and to Rampart Cave, Arizona, 1942, as assistant to A. Remington Kellogg to excavate skeletal remains of several species of mammals, birds, lizards, and snakes. Between 1946 and 1953, Perrygo also accompanied Wetmore to Panama on several occasions to collect birds.

Perrygo served as exhibits preparator and zoological exhibits worker in the Department of Zoology, USNM, 1952-1958, and as zoological exhibits worker in the Office of Exhibits, Museum of History and Technology (MHT), 1958-1960. He was in charge of taxidermy for MHT, 1960-1962, and for the Museum of Natural History (MNH), 1962-1964. Perrygo was an important figure in the exhibits modernization program at the USNM during the 1940s and 1950s.

After his retirement in 1964, Perrygo was an active participant in historical preservation projects in Maryland as president of the Charles County Historical Society and as a member of the Board of the Maryland Historical Trust. He also directed the museum exhibits program of the Botanical Garden

Museum, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. From time to time, Perrygo also did consulting work on exhibits in the Smithsonian Institution.

Chronology

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>October 18, 1906</i> | Born, Washington, D. C. |
| <i>1926</i> | Helped USNM prepare natural history specimens for the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial |
| <i>1926</i> | Bird collecting in the vicinity of Ocean City, Maryland, with Alexander Wetmore and Frederick Charles Lincoln; learned how to collect and label birds |
| <i>July-November, 1927</i> | Worked part-time on the osteological specimens located in the attic of the Natural History Building |
| <i>1927</i> | Became permanent staff member of the USNM, as scientific aide, working half-time for the Division of Mammals and half-time for the taxidermy shop, and as field collector to collect birds and other natural history specimens for the USNM |
| <i>December, 1928-April, 1929</i> | Field collecting trip to Haiti with Arthur J. Poole |
| <i>February-June, 1930</i> | Field collecting trip to Haiti as a member of the Parish-Smithsonian Expedition. The expedition was sponsored by Lee Hamilton Parish and his parents, Samuel W. and Ella Parish. Perrygo sailed to Haiti with the Parishes on their yacht, the "Esperanza." The "Esperanza" made an unplanned stop in Cuba after a storm wrecked her mast. Perrygo collected bird specimens in Cuba while the yacht was being repaired. In Haiti, Perrygo continued to collect bird and other natural history specimens, mostly along the coastal region of Haiti, and collected live reptiles for the National Zoological Park. |
| <i>1931</i> | Went with USNM taxidermists Earl D. Reid and J. S. Warmbath to Bayhead, New Jersey to prepare a 1200 pound sailfish for exhibition |
| <i>1932</i> | Helped prepare natural history specimens for the George Washington Bicentennial |
| <i>April-July, 1936</i> | Field collecting trip to West Virginia to collect bird specimens with Carleton C. Lingeback |
| <i>September-November, 1936</i> | Field collecting trip to West Virginia with Carleton C. Lingeback |
| <i>April-July, 1937</i> | Field collecting trip to Tennessee with Herbert Friedmann (Alexander Wetmore joined them briefly in June) |
| <i>September-November, 1937</i> | Field collecting trip to Tennessee with Carleton C. Lingeback and Henry R. Schaefer |
| <i>April-July, 1938</i> | Field collecting trip to Kentucky with Henry R. Schaeffer and James Cole |
| <i>September-November, 1938</i> | Field collecting trip to Kentucky with Gregor Rohwer and Herbert G. Deignan |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>April-July, 1939</i> | Field collecting trip to North Carolina with Charles Wheeler and Gregor Rohwer |
| <i>September-November, 1939</i> | Field collecting trip to North Carolina with Charles L. Wheeler (Alexander Wetmore and John Enos Graf joined them briefly in October) |
| <i>April-July, 1940</i> | Field collecting trip to South Carolina with J. Southgate Hoyt and John C. Calhoun |
| <i>September-December, 1940</i> | Field collecting trip to South Carolina with J. Southgate Hoyt and John S. Webb |
| <i>March-May, 1942</i> | Accompanied A. Remington Kellogg, Assistant Director of the USNM, to Rampart Cave, Arizona to excavate sloth fossils as well as skeletal remains of several species of mammals, birds, lizards, and snakes. Also visited the Denver Museum and Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History to study their exhibit methods. |
| <i>1943-1964</i> | Worked as a taxidermist full-time |
| <i>1943-1964</i> | USNM taxidermists were involved in the gradual modernization of the mammal, bird, osteology, and sealife exhibits in the Natural History Building |
| <i>1946-1953</i> | Accompanied Alexander Wetmore (Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1944-1952) on their annual field collecting trips to Panama to collect birds (usually between March and May) |
| <i>1952-1958</i> | Exhibit preparator and zoological exhibits worker in the Department of Zoology, USNM |
| <i>October, 1957</i> | Visited several plastic manufacturing companies in New York City and Philadelphia to learn to make accessories from plastic for the exhibits |
| <i>November, 1957</i> | Visited the University of Kansas Museum to study its exhibits methods |
| <i>1958-1960</i> | Zoological exhibits worker in the Office of Exhibits, Museum of History and Technology (MHT) |
| <i>1960-1962</i> | Was in charge of taxidermy for MHT |
| <i>1962-1964</i> | Was in charge of taxidermy for the Museum of Natural History (MNH) |
| <i>1964</i> | Retired from the MNH |
| <i>1970-1978</i> | President of the Charles County (Maryland) Historical Society |
| <i>1970s-1983</i> | Member of the Board of the Maryland Historical Trust |
| <i>1977-1983</i> | Directed the museum exhibits program of the Botanical Garden Museum, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic |
| <i>August 5, 1984</i> | Died at home in Port Tobacco, Maryland |

Descriptive Entry

These papers consist of correspondence from Alexander Wetmore, field co-workers, and museum curators concerning authorization for field trips, instructions on natural history specimens desired and

areas to visit, and acknowledgments of specimens and camping equipment; correspondence from state game and fisheries agencies concerning hunting licenses and permits; letters of introduction; and a letter from Mamie Doud Eisenhower thanking Perrygo for restoration work on her Chippendale mirror, 1955. Other materials include field trip reports, 1936-1940; expense accounts; specimen lists; black and white photographs taken during Perrygo's field trips, 1929-1942; and color motion pictures of the Panama trips, 1950-1953, Skyline Drive, Virginia, and the USNM taxidermy studio.

Materials collected by Perrygo include instructions on taxidermy techniques and newspaper articles about Perrygo, William L. Brown, and taxidermy in general. Also included are photographs of USNM taxidermists, c. 1930s to 1973; mounted animal specimens and zoological exhibits; floor plan of the African and North American mammal halls, MNH; selected art work at the National Gallery of Art and exhibits in the USNM collected by William Henry Holmes for a postcard series, c. 1918; the yacht, "Esperanza," signed by the Parishes, 1938; the taxidermy studio at the Natural History Building, 1950s; and Alexander Wetmore, Lawrence L. Oliver, and Perrygo at Skyline Drive, Virginia, 1955. Also, there are materials that may have belonged to the Taxidermist and the Department of Living Animals, USNM, during the 1880s, including labels for the natural history exhibits; taxidermists' addresses; and photographs of incomplete taxidermy models and mammals used as taxidermy models.

Additional materials documenting Perrygo's field trips include journals and field notebooks kept by Perrygo, 1936 to 1940, and by Wetmore during trips to Panama, 1946 to 1953, which are part of the Collected Notes, Lists, Drawings and Catalogs on Birds, and Mammals, record unit 7215 and record unit 7217, respectively. In 1978, taped interviews with Perrygo were made as part of the Archives' Oral History Project (record unit 9516).

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Fieldwork
- Museum exhibits
- Taxidermists
- Taxidermy

Types of Materials:

- Black-and-white photographs
- Clippings
- Manuscripts
- Motion pictures (visual works)

Names:

- Museum of History and Technology (U.S.). Office of Exhibits
- National Gallery of Art of the Smithsonian Institution
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
- Parish-Smithsonian Expedition (1930)
- Perrygo, Watson M., 1906-1984
- United States National Museum. Department of Zoology
- United States National Museum. Division of Mammals
- United States National Museum. Taxidermist
- Wetmore, Alexander, 1886-1978

Geographic Names:

Arizona
Haiti
Kentucky
North Carolina
Panama
Skyline Drive (Va.)
South Carolina
Tennessee
West Virginia

Container Listing

Series 1: CORRESPONDENCE, 1928-1973

This series consists of incoming correspondence documenting, for the most part, Perrygo's field trips from 1936 to 1940. In addition there is some correspondence pertaining to Perrygo's trips to Haiti in 1929 and 1930 and to West Virginia in 1952.

Box 1

| | |
|------------|---|
| Box 1 of 8 | Abbot - Cuban |
| Box 1 of 8 | Deignan - Friedman |
| Box 1 of 8 | Graf, John Enos |
| Box 1 of 8 | Grimes - Mabry |
| Box 1 of 8 | Maryland Game and Inland Fish Commission, 1933-1973 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Maule - Miller |
| Box 1 of 8 | Oliver, Lawrence L., 1936-1940 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Palmer - Pruette |
| Box 1 of 8 | Reid - United States |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1928 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1930 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1936 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1937 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1938 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1939 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1940 |
| Box 1 of 8 | Wetmore, Alexander, 1942 |

- Box 1 of 8 Wetmore, Alexander, 1946-1951, 1966, 1969
- Box 1 of 8 Wheeler-Wilson
- Box 1 of 8 Letters of introduction, 1928, 1936-1948
- Box 1 of 8 Scientific collecting permit correspondence
- Box 1 of 8 Unidentified correspondence

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Series 2: MATERIALS DOCUMENTING FIELD TRIPS, 1929, 1936-1942, 1947-1948

Box 1

- Box 1 of 8 Expense account, South Carolina, June-July, 1940
- Box 1 of 8 Expense account, South Carolina, September-December, 1940
- Box 1 of 8 Receipts, Panama trips, 1947-1948
- Box 1 of 8 Receipts, Tennessee, 1937
- Box 1 of 8 Reports on field trips, written by W. M. Perrygo, 1936-1940
[Digital Content: Reports on field trips, written by W. M. Perrygo, 1936-1940](#)
[\[Image nos. SIA2015-004693 to SIA2015-004724\]](#)
- Box 1 of 8 Specimen and camp equipment lists, 1942
[Digital Content](#)
- Box 1 of 8 Specimen lists, Haiti, 1929 (typewritten list of fishes)
[Digital Content: Specimen lists, Haiti, 1929 \[Image nos. SIA2015-004725 to SIA2015-004743\]](#)
- Box 1 of 8 Specimen lists, birds, South Carolina, 1940 (notebook)
[Digital Content: Specimen lists, birds, South Carolina, 1940](#)

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Series 3: MATERIALS ON TAXIDERMY AND EXHIBITS

Box 2

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Box 2 of 8 | Taxidermy techniques (2 folders) |
| Box 2 of 8 | Taxidermists' addresses, c. 1880-1910 (bound volume) |
| Box 2 of 8 | Miscellaneous notes documenting botanical specimens in exhibit cases, undated |

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Series 4: NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Box 2

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Box 2 of 8 | Articles concerning William L. Brown's statement, "that an ash tray made of an elephant's foot can cost a hundred dollars or more," September, 1954 |
| Box 2 of 8 | Newspaper articles on W. M. Perrygo, 1936, 1979 |
| Box 2 of 8 | Newspaper articles on MNH exhibits, SI Building, and on H. C. Oberholser's plan for a bird census |
| Box 2 of 8 | Cartoons, taxidermy humor |

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Series 5: PHOTOGRAPHS

Box 2

- Box 2 of 8 Elephants, location and dates unknown
- Box 2 of 8 Haiti expedition, 1928-1929:
[Digital Content: Photograph list - Haitian Expedition, 1928-1929](#)
[Digital Content: Photographs - Nos. 1-100, Haitian Expedition, 1928-1929](#)
[Digital Content: Photographs - Nos. 100-206, Haitian Expedition, 1928-1929](#)
 Note: • Photograph #s 1-100
 • Photograph #s 101-206
 • Voodoo marking from St. Michel
 • Haitian currency
 • Photograph list
- Box 2 of 8 Tennessee, 1937; Kentucky, 1938
[Digital Content: Photographs - Tennessee, 1937; Kentucky, 1938](#)
- Box 2 of 8 Living Animals, Department of, c. 1880s
- Box 2 of 8 Mammal species, USNM
- Box 2 of 8 Museum of Natural History, floor plan for African and North American Big Game halls
- Box 2 of 8 Brown, William L., nature scenes, location and date unknown, B&W prints and negatives
- Box 2 of 8 North Carolina, 1939
- Box 2 of 8 Lawrence, L. Oliver
- Box 2 of 8 Panama trips, 1947 and undated
- Box 2 of 8 Parish-Smithsonian Expedition to Haiti, 1930
[Digital Content: Photographs - Parish-Smithsonian Expedition to Haiti, 1930](#)
- Box 2 of 8 Postcard series (2 folders)
- Box 2 of 8 Rampart Cave
[Digital Content: Photographs - Rampart Cave, Arizona, 1942](#)
- Box 2 of 8 Reginald "Bud" Sayre and W. M. Perrygo

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|------------|--|
| Box 2 of 8 | Skyline Drive, Virginia |
| Box 2 of 8 | USNM Staff |
| Box 2 of 8 | Taxidermist, USNM, c.1930-1973 |
| Box 2 of 8 | West Virginia, 1936 and undated (also, 571 nitrate negatives of field trips in cold storage) |
| Box 2 of 8 | Original photograph album, Haiti trip, 1928-29 (no photographs but handwritten notes) |

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Series 6: MOTION PICTURES, 1950-1953

Box 3

- Box 3 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expedition to Panama, 1950, Reel 1 of 2: Chimán & Maje (#1)
[Digital Content: Documentary Film - Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953](#)
- Box 3 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expedition to Panama, 1950, Reel 2 of 2: Chimán & Maje (#2)
- Box 3 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expedition to Panama, 1951: Cerro Campana & El Valle (#3)
- Box 3 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expedition to Panama, 1952: East Coast, Río Indio (#4)
- Box 3 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expedition to Panama, 1953: Sona, Bullfights (#5)
- Box 3 of 8 USNM Taxidermy Studio, 1950s (#6)
- Box 3 of 8 Misc. (#1)
- Box 3 of 8 Panama, 1950 (#1)
- Box 3 of 8 Panama, 1950 (#2)
- Box 3 of 8 Panama, 1951 - Campana & El Valle (Original) (#3)
- Box 3 of 8 Panama, 1952 - East Coast (Original) (#4)
- Box 3 of 8 Panama, 1953 - Sona (Original) (#5)

Box 4

- Box 4 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, VHS Cassette 1 of 2: Chimán, Maje and Cerro Campana (USE COPY)
- Box 4 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, VHS Cassette 2 of 2: Río Indio and Sona (USE COPY)
- Box 4 of 8 Shot logs for Panama expedition films, 1950-1953

Box 5

MASTERS (NOT FOR USE):

- Box 5 of 8 Watson M. Perrygo Films, 1950s, 3/4" videotape transfer master of original 8mm film, Tape 1 of 1: Taxidermy studio, Skyline Drive, and home scenes
- Box 5 of 8 Watson M. Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, 3/4" videotape transfer master of original 8mm film, Tape 1 of 2: Chimán, Maje and Cerro Campana
- Box 5 of 8 Watson M. Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, 3/4" videotape transfer master of original 8mm film, Tape 2 of 2: Río Indio and Sona
- Box 5 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, 3/4" videotape transfer of original 8mm film, audio with narration and segments of the Alexander Wetmore and Watson M. Perrygo oral history interviews, Tape 1 of 2: Chimán, Maje and Cerro Campana
- Box 5 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, 3/4" videotape transfer of original 8mm film, audio with narration and segments of the Alexander Wetmore and Watson M. Perrygo oral history interviews, Tape 2 of 2: Río Indio and Sona
- Box 5 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, 3/4" videotape copy of 8mm film, use dub of edited master with sound, Cassette 1 of 2: Chimán, Maje and Cerro Campana
- Box 5 of 8 Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, 3/4" videotape copy of 8mm film, use dub of edited master with sound, Cassette 2 of 2: Río Indio and Sona

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Series 7: LARGE FORMAT MATERIALS

Box 6

Box 6 of 8 "Esperanza," 1938 (photograph)

Box 6 of 8 Exhibits labels, c. 1890s

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Series 8: COPY NEGATIVES

Box 7

Box 7 of 8 Copy Negatives, Numbers 1-320

Box 8

Box 8 of 8 Copy Negatives, Numbers 321-575

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