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Collection Overview

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)
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.

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**Chronology**

- **October 18, 1906** Born, Washington, D. C.
- **1926** Helped USNM prepare natural history specimens for the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial
- **1926** Bird collecting in the vicinity of Ocean City, Maryland, with Alexander Wetmore and Frederick Charles Lincoln; learned how to collect and label birds
- **July-November, 1927** Worked part-time on the osteological specimens located in the attic of the Natural History Building
- **1927** 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
- **December, 1928-April, 1929** Field collecting trip to Haiti with Arthur J. Poole
- **February-June, 1930** 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.
- **1931** Went with USNM taxidermists Earl D. Reid and J. S. Warmbath to Bayhead, New Jersey to prepare a 1200 pound sailfish for exhibition
- **1932** Helped prepare natural history specimens for the George Washington Bicentennial
- **April-July, 1936** Field collecting trip to West Virginia to collect bird specimens with Carleton C. Lingebach
- **September-November, 1936** Field collecting trip to West Virginia with Carleton C. Lingebach
- **April-July, 1937** Field collecting trip to Tennessee with Herbert Friedmann (Alexander Wetmore joined them briefly in June)
- **September-November, 1937** Field collecting trip to Tennessee with Carleton C. Lingebach and Henry R. Schaefer
- **April-July, 1938** Field collecting trip to Kentucky with Henry R. Schaeffer and James Cole
- **September-November, 1938** Field collecting trip to Kentucky with Gregor Rohwer and Herbert G. Deignan
April-July, 1939
Field collecting trip to North Carolina with Charles Wheeler and Gregor Rohwer

September-November, 1939
Field collecting trip to North Carolina with Charles L. Wheeler (Alexander Wetmore and John Enos Graf joined them briefly in October)

April-July, 1940
Field collecting trip to South Carolina with J. Southgate Hoyt and John C. Calhoun

September-December, 1940
Field collecting trip to South Carolina with J. Southgate Hoyt and John S. Webb

March-May, 1942
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.

1943-1964
Worked as a taxidermist full-time

1943-1964
USNM taxidermists were involved in the gradual modernization of the mammal, bird, osteology, and sealife exhibits in the Natural History Building

1946-1953
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)

1952-1958
Exhibit preparator and zoological exhibits worker in the Department of Zoology, USNM

October, 1957
Visited several plastic manufacturing companies in New York City and Philadelphia to learn to make accessories from plastic for the exhibits

November, 1957
Visited the University of Kansas Museum to study its exhibits methods

1958-1960
Zoological exhibits worker in the Office of Exhibits, Museum of History and Technology (MHT)

1960-1962
Was in charge of taxidermy for MHT

1962-1964
Was in charge of taxidermy for the Museum of Natural History (MNH)

1964
Retired from the MNH

1970-1978
President of the Charles County (Maryland) Historical Society

1970s-1983
Member of the Board of the Maryland Historical Trust

1977-1983
Directed the museum exhibits program of the Botanical Garden Museum, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

August 5, 1984
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).

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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:**
- 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

Return to Table of Contents
Series 5: PHOTOGRAPHS

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
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)
Series 6: MOTION PICTURES, 1950-1953

Box 3

Box 3 of 8  Wetmore-Perrygo Expedition to Panama, 1950, Reel 1 of 2: Chiman & 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: Chiman & 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, Rio 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: Chiman, Maje and Cerro Campana (USE COPY)

Box 4 of 8  Wetmore-Perrygo Expeditions to Panama, 1950-1953, VHS Cassette 2 of 2: Rio 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: Chiman, 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: Rio 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: Chiman, 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: Rio 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: Chiman, 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: Rio 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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