



Smithsonian Institution Archives

A. Gilbert Wright Papers,
circa 1936-1981 and undated

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Historical Note.....	1
Descriptive Entry.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	4
Series 1: GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1936-1981. ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY.....	4
Series 2: COLLECTED PROFESSIONAL MATERIALS, CIRCA 1938-1978, AND UNDATED.....	5
Series 3: PHOTOGRAPHS AND SLIDES, CIRCA 1953-1973, AND UNDATED.....	6

Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	A. Gilbert Wright Papers
Identifier:	Record Unit 7331
Date:	<i>circa</i> 1936-1981 and undated
Extent:	1.4 cu. ft. (2 document boxes) (1 half document box) (1 3x5 box)
Creator::	Wright, A. Gilbert, (Arthur Gilbert), 1909-1987
Language:	Language of Materials: English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 7331, A. Gilbert Wright Papers

Historical Note

A. Gilbert Wright (1909-1987) was a zoologist and exhibits curator with diverse interests in natural history, exhibits preparation, and writing. Born in Carthage, Illinois, Wright developed an interest in natural history, taxidermy, and museum curatorship in his youth. After receiving the B.A. in biology from Carthage College in 1932, he was appointed zoologist at the Illinois State Museum (ISM) in 1933. Wright gained broad museum experience as a Rockefeller Foundation intern at the Buffalo Museum of Science in 1937-1938. During his ISM tenure, he published two volumes, *The Illinois State Museum, Guide to Exhibits* and *Common Illinois Insects*. He received the M.S. degree in zoology from the University of Illinois at Urbana in 1946. Wright served briefly as chief of the School Service Department of the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale in 1947-1948. In 1953 he left the ISM to accept a position as curator of exhibits at the Florida State Museum (FSM) in Gainesville. During his tenure at FSM, Wright developed exhibits for the main museum building, a "museumobile," and historical site museums throughout the state. In 1961, Wright was appointed chief of the Museum Planning Branch of the National Park Service for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis. The project was abruptly terminated in 1963 due to cost overruns for the Gateway Arch. Wright then joined the staff of the Office of Exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution, as assistant chief with responsibilities for planning exhibits renovation in the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). In 1971-1972 Wright was assistant to the director of the NMNH for exhibits planning and during this time developed the Insect Zoo. From 1972 until his retirement in 1975, he was a writer/editor in the Office of Exhibits Central.

In the early 1970s, Wright began teaching courses in museology at the George Washington University. After his retirement, he directed their new Museum Studies Program until 1978. Throughout his career, Wright was an active member of the American Association of Museums and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Researchers should consult the A. Gilbert Wright oral history interviews (Record Unit 9523), in the Smithsonian Institution Archives, for extensive information on Wright and his career.

Descriptive Entry

The papers of A. Gilbert Wright provide partial documentation of most aspects of his professional career. Included are materials concerning Wright's tenure as a Rockefeller Foundation Intern at the Buffalo Museum of Science, 1937-1938; his work at the Florida State Museum, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, and the Smithsonian Institution; and his teaching career at the George Washington University (GWU). Less well represented are records documenting his thirteen-year career at the Illinois State Museum, and his brief tenure at the Peabody Museum of Natural History. The collection includes both personal and professional correspondence received and written by Wright between 1936 and 1981. The correspondence includes a voluminous exchange with his long-time friend, Roscoe Wilmeth, as well as letters documenting most of his professional appointments. A small group of collected materials from Wright's professional work include his report on a tour of United States museums taken during the Rockefeller internship; teaching records from his GWU course on museology; publications written by or concerning Wright; and records documenting his work at the Smithsonian, especially the By-Word Program at the National Museum of Natural History. The collection also includes photographs and slides, many of which were taken by Wright. Included are images of Wright; the muralist, Jay H. Matternes; Florida State Museum exhibits and personnel; and Smithsonian exhibits, laboratories, and research areas.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Entomology
- Museum curators
- Museum exhibits
- Museum techniques
- Taxidermy
- Zoologists
- Zoology

Types of Materials:

- Black-and-white photographs
- Color transparencies
- Manuscripts

Names:

- Buffalo Museum of Science
- Carthage College (Carthage, Ill.)
- Florida State Museum
- George Washington University
- Illinois State Museum
- Matternes, Jay H.
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)

National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). By-Word Program
O. Orkin Insect Zoo
Rockefeller Foundation
Smithsonian Institution. Office of Exhibits Central
Smithsonian Institution. Office of Exhibits Programs
United States. National Park Service
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Wright, A. Gilbert (Arthur Gilbert), 1909-1987

Geographic Names:

Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (Saint Louis, Mo.)

Container Listing

Series 1: GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1936-1981. ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY.

Box 1

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Box 1 of 4 | Folder 1 B-W, general, 1953-1976 |
| Box 1 of 4 | Folder 2 Buffalo Museum of Science, 1936-1938. Correspondence concerning Wright's Rockefeller Foundation internship at the museum. Correspondents include Chauncey J. Hamlin and Arthur Sterry Coggeshall. |
| Box 1 of 4 | Folder 3 Florida State Museum (FSM), 1953-1961. Letters written and received by Wright during his career as Curator of Exhibits at FSM. Included is correspondence with Arnold B. Grobman, Director of FSM, concerning Wright's appointment and subsequent work. |
| Box 1 of 4 | Folder 4 Illinois State Museum, 1953-1955. Correspondents include Paul W. Parmalee and Thorne Deuel. |
| Box 1 of 4 | Folder 5 Wilmeth, Roscoe, 1948-1949, 1953-1957, 1960-1966, 1969, 1981. Wilmeth worked for Wright as a student volunteer at the Illinois State Museum in the late 1930s. He went on to become an anthropologist with the National Museum of Canada, and remained a close friend of Wright's until his death in 1981. |
| Box 1 of 4 | Folder 6 Wright, A. Gilbert. Personal and employment correspondence, 1953-1964. Includes correspondence and related materials concerning his appointments with the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution, as well as letters exchanged with friends. |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: COLLECTED PROFESSIONAL MATERIALS, CIRCA 1938-1978, AND UNDATED.

Box 1

Box 1 of 4 Folders 7-9 By-Word Program, National Museum of Natural History, circa 1970s. Materials include notes, bibliographical references, and scripts.

Box 2

Box 2 of 4 Folder 1 Exhibit Editor's Office, Office of Exhibits Central, Smithsonian Institution, 1971. Includes memoranda and draft scripts.

Box 2 of 4 Folder 2 National Museum of Natural History. Survey of Osteological Specimens for Fish Area, Hall 28, undated.

Box 2 of 4 Folder 3 "Report on the Museum Tour of the Rockefeller Interns," by Gilbert Wright, 1938

Box 2 of 4 Folder 4 Teaching records. Anthropology 291: Museology, 1977-1978. Syllabus, class attendance records, and related materials from a class taught by Wright at the George Washington University.

Box 2 of 4 Folders 5-7 Miscellaneous publications written by or concerning A. Gilbert Wright

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: PHOTOGRAPHS AND SLIDES, CIRCA 1953-1973, AND UNDATED.

Box 3

- Box 3 of 4 Folder 1 Photographs of A. Gilbert Wright, undated
- Box 3 of 4 Folder 2 Photographs of Jay H. Matternes at work on vertebrate paleontology mural at the National Museum of Natural History, circa 1965. Photographs taken by Wright.
- Box 3 of 4 Folders 3-4 Photographs of Florida State Museum building, exhibits, and personnel, circa 1953-1961. Includes exhibit scripts. Many of the photographs were taken by Wright.

Box 4

- Box 4 of 4 35mm color slides. Many were taken by Wright. Includes NMNH research areas and laboratories, 1973; the Insect Zoo, 1971-1972; Paleobiology Hall, NMNH, including the Jay H. Matternes murals, 1969-1971; art objects in the collections of the Freer Gallery of Art, 1973; the David J. Hasinger tiger in a NMNH model shop, 1969; NMNH exhibits, especially the Art of Organic Forms, 1968; and Washington, D. C. landmarks.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)