



Smithsonian Institution Archives

## Richard S. Cowan Oral History Interviews, 1974

Finding aid prepared by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives  
Washington, D.C.  
Contact us at [osiaref@si.edu](mailto:osiaref@si.edu)

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Historical Note.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Descriptive Entry.....	2
Names and Subjects .....	2
Container Listing .....	3

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <a href="mailto:osiaref@si.edu">osiaref@si.edu</a>
<b>Title:</b>	Richard S. Cowan Oral History Interviews
<b>Identifier:</b>	Record Unit 9501
<b>Date:</b>	1974
<b>Extent:</b>	4 audiotapes (Reference copies). 4 digital .mp3 files (Reference copies).
<b>Creator::</b>	Cowan, Richard S., 1921-1997, interviewee
<b>Language:</b>	English

---

## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9501, Richard S. Cowan Oral History Interviews

---

## Historical Note

Richard Sumner Cowan began his career in 1948 at the New York Botanical Garden and received his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1952. Cowan joined the staff of the National Museum of Natural History in 1957 as an Associate Curator in the Department of Botany, where he continued his work in the systematic taxonomy of neotropical flora. In 1962 Cowan was appointed Assistant Director of the Museum of Natural History, and in 1965 he assumed the directorship of the museum. He has continued his work as Senior Botanist, National Museum of Natural History, since his retirement from administration in 1973. Cowan has served on many significant committees in the Institution and in many professional societies.

---

## Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives' record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also interviews conducted by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Cowan was interviewed for the Oral History Project because he has made significant scholarly and administrative contributions to the Smithsonian Institution during 17 years of service.

## Descriptive Entry

Cowan was interviewed by Miriam Freilicher on March 26 and April 2 and 25, 1974. The interviews include his reminiscences of his early career, the Department of Botany when he joined the staff, his work in administration, and changes within the National Museum of Natural History and the Institution in the 1960's.

---

## Names and Subject Terms

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

### Subjects:

- Botanists
- Botany
- Interviews
- Museum curators -- Interviews
- Museum directors -- Interviews
- Oral history

### Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Compact discs
- Electronic records
- Transcripts

### Names:

- Cowan, Richard S., 1921-1997
- Freilicher, Miriam S., interviewer
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Assistant Director
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Department of Botany
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Office of the Director
- New York Botanical Garden



Note:

- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Preservation Masters: 6 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 3 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 3 digital .mp3 files.