



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Frank A. Taylor Oral History Interviews,
1974, 1979-1980, 1982, 2005

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Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Frank A. Taylor Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9512
Date:	1974, 1979-1980, 1982, 2005
Extent:	26 audiotapes (Reference). 45 digital .mp3 files (Reference copies).
Creator::	Taylor, Frank A. (Frank Augustus), 1903-2007, interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9512, Frank A. Taylor Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

Frank Augustus Taylor (1903-2007) was a Curator of Engineering and Industries and administrator at the Smithsonian. He was born in 1903 in Washington, D.C., where he grew up. In 1922 he accepted a position as Laboratory Apprentice in the Division of Mechanical Technology of the United States National Museum (USNM), and in 1925 he advanced to Museum Aid. After receiving the B.S. in mechanical engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Taylor was appointed Assistant Curator in 1929. He became Curator of the Division of Engineering in 1933 and Head Curator of the Department of Engineering and Industries in 1948. Taylor also received the J.D. from Georgetown University Law School in 1934.

During his early years at the Smithsonian, Taylor worked to improve the exhibits and collections in the Arts and Industries Building of the USNM. During the depression, he was assistant director of the Historical American Merchant Marine Survey, WPA Federal Project #6, which was administered through the Smithsonian. In 1950, as chairman of the Exhibits Modernization Committee, he began planning the renovation program for exhibits in the USNM. In 1946 he also began the planning effort for a science and technology museum, and in 1954, the authorization for the National Museum of History and Technology was passed by Congress. In 1955 he was appointed Assistant Director of the USNM with special responsibility for planning the NMHT. Taylor oversaw construction of the building, hiring of staff, and development of exhibits. In 1958 he was appointed the first Director of the new museum which opened in January of 1964.

In the fall of 1962 Taylor was appointed Director of the United States National Museum with responsibility for both the National Museum of History and Technology and the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). In 1968 he became Director-General of Museums with responsibilities for Smithsonian-wide programs in conservation, exhibits and registration, the National Museum Act programs, and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. Taylor was active in the international museum community and worked closely with the American Association of Museums and the International

Council of Museums. He oversaw the 1965 Belmont Conference and Report on the needs of America's museums which led to the National Museum Act and the Museum Services and Facilities Act. Taylor was responsible for the development of the legislation and programs of the National Museum Act. Taylor retired on 23 January 1971 but continued to work at the Smithsonian as a Research Associate of Smithsonian Institution Archives and as Consultant to the Secretary until 1983.

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.

Taylor was interviewed for the Oral History Program because of his long and outstanding scholarly and administrative career during his sixty years at the Smithsonian.

Descriptive Entry

Taylor was interviewed by Miriam S. Freilicher on ten occasions between January and April of 1974, by Pamela M. Henson on seven occasions between July 1979 and April 2003, and by Henson and Cynthia Field in May of 2005. The interviews cover Taylor's youth and education, career at the Smithsonian from laboratory apprentice to Director-General of Museums, work on the Exhibits Modernization Program, development of the National Museum of History and Technology, role as an administrator and work in the international museum community.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Interviews
- Museum architecture
- Museum curators -- Interviews
- Museum directors -- Interviews
- Museum techniques
- Oral history
- Records of meetings, organizations, and professional societies
- Science -- History
- Technology -- History

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Compact discs
- Electronic records

Transcripts

Names:

American Association of Museums
Field, Cynthia R., interviewer
Freilicher, Miriam S., interviewer
Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
International Council of Museums
National Museum Act Program
National Museum of History and Technology (U.S.). Office of the Director
Taylor, Frank A. (Frank Augustus), 1903-2007
United States National Museum. Assistant Director
United States National Museum. Department of Engineering and Industries
United States National Museum. Director
United States National Museum. Director General of Museums
United States National Museum. Division of Mechanical Technology
United States National Museum. Exhibits Modernization Program

Preferred Titles:

The Torch (Serial)

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews **Interview 1: January 30, 1974**

Interviews Interview of Taylor discusses his youth and education; early years at the USNM as Laboratory apprentice, Museum Aid, and Assistant Curator of Engineering; and administration of the USNM, c. 1903-1930.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-30, of audio recording, 1 hour.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour

- Note:
- Original Master: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotape
 - Preservation Masters: 4 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 2: February 6, 1974**

Interviews Interview of Taylor covers his concepts of what a national museum of the United States should be; his career at the Smithsonian during the Great Depression and World War II, including the Historic American Merchant Marine Survey and the *War Background Series*, c. 1930-1948.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 31-58, of audio recording, 1 hour

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 3: February 27, 1974**

Interviews Interview of Taylor cover his years as Curator of the Division of Engineering and Head Curator of the Department of Science and Technology; *The World Is Yours* radio program; and development of the Exhibits Modernization Program and Office of Exhibits, c. 1945-1958

Interviews Transcript, pp. 59-89, of audio recording, 1 hour.

- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour
 Note: • Original Masters: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 • Preservation Masters: 4 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
 • Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 4: March 13, 1974**
- Interviews Interview of Taylor covers the development of the NMHT, including early concepts, spin off of the National Air Museum, aid from the Public Buildings Service of the General Services Administration, legislative history, and role of the Board of Regents and individuals, c. 1945-1960
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 90-119, of audio recording, 1 hour.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour
 Note: • Original Masters: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 • Preservation Masters: 4 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
 • Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 5: March 20, 1974**
- Interviews Interview of Taylor covers the construction of the NMHT, including securing appropriations, the joint Congressional oversight committee, architectural and sculptural design, programs of requirements and exhibits for the interior, and the building of a professional staff; and Taylor's advancement from Head Curator to Director, USNM, c. 1955-1964.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 120-164, of audio recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours
 Note: • Original Masters: 2 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 • Preservation Masters: 6 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 3 digital .wav files
 • Reference Copies: 2 audiocassettes; 3 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 6: March 27, 1974**

- Interviews Interview of Taylor covers the opening of NMHT, including public reaction to the building and its exhibits; and the development of museum studies and museum education, c. 1962-1967.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 165-192, of audio recording, 1 hour.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour
Note:
 - Original Masters: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 7: April 3, 1974**
- Interviews Interview of Taylor covers museum education;
- Interviews The Smithsonian Associates; the music room in the NMHT; Smithsonian administration; special exhibits; and centralization/decentralization of the Office of Exhibits, c. 1965-1971.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 193-233, of audio recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours
Note:
 - Original Masters: 2 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 6 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 3 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiocassettes; 3 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 8: April 11, 1974**
- Interviews Interview of Taylor discusses his work with the American Association of Museums, Belmont Conference and Report, Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities, Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and National Endowment for the Arts; and the legislative history of the National Museum Act and Museum Services and Facilities Act, c. 1965-1974.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 234-274, of audio recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours
Note:
 - Original Masters: 2 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes

- Preservation Masters: 6 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 3 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 audiocassettes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews

Interview 9: April 17, 1974

Interviews

Interview of Taylor covers his work with the American Association of Museums and the International Council of Museums, c. 1965-1974.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 275-301, of audio recording, 1 hour.

Interviews

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Preservation Masters: 4 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files

Interviews

Interview 10: April 24, 1974

Interviews

Interview of Taylor covers his responsibilities as Director-General of Museums, for the National Museum Act, Office of Exhibits, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, National Air and Space Museum, and to respond to the Subcommittee on Library and Memorials of the United States Congress, c. 1965-1974. Includes appendix with separate essays written by Taylor on the Mid-America Center Museum in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the American Institute of Design, and the National Museum of Natural History Research Center.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 302-320, of audio recording, 1 hour.

Interviews

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Preservation Masters: 4 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files

Interviews

Interview 11: July 10, 1979

Interviews

Interview of Taylor discusses the Institution's role in stimulating support for systematic biology, including plans for a systematic biology research center, his role in planning the Systematic Biology Symposium at the Belmont Conference Center with Richard S. Cowan and production of its report, *America's Systematic Resources: A National Plan*, development of the

systematics databases at the NMNH, the Ewing report on space needs of the NMNH, the role of curators in planning exhibits, failed plans for a systematics institute in Beltsville, Maryland, and his role in planning the Museum Support Center.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 321-356, of audio recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 6 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 3 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiocassettes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 12: September 17, 1980**

Interviews Interview of Taylor covers the evolution of the concept of a Museum of Engineering and Industries into a Museum of History and Technology; development of a Department of Engineering and Industries in the USNM; plans by H. J. F. Porter for a Museum of Engineering; Taylor's 1926 trip to Europe to study museums of science and technology; effects of World War II on his department; renewed planning efforts for the museum after WWII; and the addition of the Division of Civil History to the museum plans, c. 1922-1948.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 357-388, of audio recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 7" low-torque reel-to-reel and 1 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 5 7" low-torque reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 3 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiocassettes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 13: November 13, 1980**

Interviews Interview of Taylor summarizes his planning for the NMHT and exhibits modernization after World War II, including plans for a Museum of Man which would include anthropology and cultural history with science and technology; the roles of Leonard Carmichael, John Enos Graf, John L. Keddy, Carl W. Mitman and Alexander Wetmore; the Smithsonian Planning Committee; and promotion of the new museum to Congress and the business community, c. 1949-1953

Interviews Transcript, pp. 389-412, of audio recording, 1 hour.

- Interviews Interview of Taylor discusses administration, including the concept of the USNM versus a central Smithsonian Institution, administrative changes during the tenures of Secretaries Alexander Wetmore and Leonard Carmichael, the status of the non-science divisions within the USNM, and the administrative roles of Harry W. Dorsey, John Enos Graf and John L. Keddy, and the issue of centralization versus decentralization of operations, c. 1922-1970. Includes appendix with two essays written by Taylor to clarify discussions of the role of the Chief Clerk in the federal government and the USNM versus the central Smithsonian administration.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 469-488, of audio recording, 1 hour.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour
Note:
- Original Masters: 4 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 17: April 4, 2003**
- Interviews Interview of Taylor in honor of his 100th birthday discusses his youth in Washington, D.C., reminiscences of colleagues and advice for younger staff, c. 1910-2003.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 489-504, of audio recording, 1 hour.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour
Note:
- Original Masters: 1 audiocassette
 - Preservation Masters: 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette; 2 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 18: May 26, 2005**
- Interviews Interview of Taylor discusses the architectural design of the National Museum of History and Technology, c. 1955-1964.
- Interviews No transcript available.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2 hours
Note:
- Original Masters: 4 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 digital .wav files

- Reference Copies: 2 audiocassettes; 4 digital .mp3 files