



Smithsonian Institution Archives

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

by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <i>osiaref@si.edu</i>
Creator:	Taylor, Frank A, (Frank Augustus), 1903- interviewee
Title:	Frank A. Taylor Interviews
Dates:	1974, 1979-1980, 1982, 2005
Quantity:	26 audiotapes (reference). 45 digital .mp3 files (reference copies).

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9512, Taylor, Frank A, (Frank Augustus), 1903- interviewee, Frank A. Taylor Interviews

Historical Note

Frank A. 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, W.P.A. 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:

- History of science and technology
- Museum architecture
- Museum curators -- Interviews
- Museum directors -- Interviews
- Museum techniques
- Records of meetings, organizations, and professional societies
- The Torch (Serial)

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Interviews
- Oral history

Names:

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

Container Listing

Box 1

Transcripts of Interviews

Interview 1: 30 January 1974

Interview 2: 6 February 1974

Interview 3: 27 February 1974

Interview 4: 13 March 1974

Interview 5: 20 March 1974

Interview 6: 27 March 1974

Interview 7: 3 April 1974

The Smithsonian Associates; the music room in the NMHT; Smithsonian administration; special exhibits; and centralization/decentralization of the Office of Exhibits, c. 1965-1971.

Interview 8: 11 April 1974

Interview 9: 17 April 1974

Interview 10: 24 April 1974

Interview 11: 10 July 1979

Interview 12: 17 September 1980

Interview 13: 13 November 1980

Interview 14: 26 November 1980

Interview 15: 4 December 1980

Interview 16: 29 April 1982

Interview 17: 4 April 2003

Interview 18: 26 May 2005

Box 2

Audio Recordings of Interviews

Interview 1: 30 January 1974

Interview 2: 30 January 1974

Interview 3: 30 January 1974

Interview 4: 30 January 1974
Interview 5: 30 January 1974
Interview 6: 30 January 1974
Interview 7: 30 January 1974
Interview 8: 30 January 1974
Interview 9: 30 January 1974
Interview 10: 30 January 1974
Interview 11: 30 January 1974
Interview 12: 30 January 1974
Interview 13: 30 January 1974
Interview 14: 30 January 1974
Interview 15: 30 January 1974
Interview 16: 30 January 1974
Interview 17: 30 January 1974
Interview 18: 30 January 1974