# Table of Contents

- Collection Overview ........................................................................................................ 1
- Administrative Information .............................................................................................. 1
- Historical Note.................................................................................................................. 1
- Introduction....................................................................................................................... 2
- Descriptive Entry............................................................................................................... 2
- Names and Subjects ......................................................................................................... 2
- Container Listing .............................................................................................................. 4
Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title: Records
Identifier: Record Unit 9522
Date: 1983
Extent: 3 audiotapes (reference copies).
Creator: Association of Curators Project (National Museum of American History)
Language: Language of Materials: English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation
Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9522, Association of Curators Project (National Museum of American History), Records

Access Restriction
(1) Restricted; (2) see finding aid for details on restrictions.

Historical Note

In 1983, the chair of the Association of Curators of the National Museum of American History (NMAH), Harold D. Langley, hosted a series of talks by senior curators "On Being a Curator." Informal remarks were followed by a question and answer period with curatorial staff. Margaret Brown Klapthor, J. Jefferson Miller, II, and John T. Schiebecker discussed their careers at the museum, focusing on development and curation of collections, and reminiscences of their museum years. Klapthor and Miller served on the NMAH Collections Committee and also addressed issues of collecting policies and curatorial methods. Their reminiscences span the years of the United States National Museum (USNM), the formation of a separate National Museum of History and Technology (NMHT), and its renaming as the National Museum of American History in 1980.

Margaret Brown Klapthor (1922-1994) received the B.A. from the University of Maryland and was appointed Museum Aid in the Division of History of the USNM in 1943. She advanced to Assistant curator in 1947, Associate Curator in 1952, and Curator in 1970. After forty years at the museum, she retired in 1983. Her curatorial work focused on the First Ladies gowns collection, White House china, and political campaign contributions.

J. Jefferson Miller, II (1928-2005) received the B.A. from The Johns Hopkins University and the L.L.B. from the University of Maryland. He changed careers after pursuing a fellowship in American decorative arts at Winterthur and receiving the M.A. in American culture history from the University of Delaware. He came to the Division of Ceramics and Glass of the NMHT as Assistant Curator in 1962, after completing
his master's degree. He served as Associate Curator from 1964 to 1969 and Curator from 1970 until his retirement in 1980. He then served as director of the Maryland Historical society from 1984 to 1989. His collecting and research focused on European ceramics and American art porcelains.

John T. Schlebecker, a noted scholar of agricultural history and a key player in the living historical farms movement, graduated from Hiram College in 1949 with a major in social science, earned the M.A. in history from Harvard University in 1951 and the Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1954. He was curator of agricultural history at the American History Museum from 1965 until his retirement in 1984, and also served as chair of the Department of History of Science and Technology in 1978.

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 reminiscences and interviews recorded by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Margaret Brown Klapthor, J. Jefferson Miller, and John T. Schlebecker, Smithsonian curators, were chosen to present their reminiscences because of their long and distinguished careers at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Descriptive Entry

Harold D. Langley, chair of the Association of Curators, NMAH, moderated these sessions in 1983, and they were recorded by Smithsonian Institution Archives Historian, Pamela M. Henson. The Association of Curators Project consists of 3 reminiscence sessions, totaling approximately 3.0 hours of audiotape recordings, 71 pages of transcript, and occupies 0.5 linear meters of shelf space. There are four generations of recordings: original tapes, reference tapes, digital audio preservation files and digital audio reference files. In total this collection is comprised of 3 original 5" reel-to-reel audiotapes, 3 reference copy audiocassette tapes, 6 digital audio .wav files, and 6 digital audio .mp3 files. The original tapes and preservation digital files are reserved in preservation storage.

Restrictions: The John T. Schlebecker interview may not be used without the permission of Schlebecker or his heirs or assigns. Contact the Institutional History Division of Smithsonian Institution at SIHistory@si.edu to request permission.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:
- History
- Museum curators -- Interviews
- Museum techniques
Records of meetings, organizations, and professional societies
Special events

Types of Materials:
Audiotapes
Interviews
Oral history

Names:
Association of Curators Project (National Museum of American History)
Division of Agriculture and Wood Products (NMHT), Division of Agriculture and Forest Products (NMHT)
Division of Ceramics and Glass (NMAH)
Division of History (NMAH)
Division of Political History (NMAH)
Klapthor, Margaret Brown
Miller, J. Jefferson
National Museum of American History (U.S.), Division of the History of Technology
National Museum of History and Technology (U.S.), Division of Agriculture and Mining
National Museum of History and Technology (U.S.), Division of Extractive Industries
Schlebecker, John T.
United States National Museum
Container Listing

Box 1

Transcripts of Reminiscences

Box 1 of 1  Session 1: 17 February 1983
Box 1 of 1  Session 2: 11 April 1983
Box 1 of 1  Session 3: 21 March 1983

Audio Recordings of Reminiscences

Box 1 of 1  Session 1: 17 February 1983
Box 1 of 1  Session 2: 21 March 1983
Box 1 of 1  Sessions 3: 11 April 1983