



Smithsonian Institution Archives

A. Gilbert Wright Interviews, 1983

by Smithsonian Institution Archives

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Creator:	Wright, A. Gilbert, (Arthur Gilbert), 1909- interviewee
Title:	A. Gilbert Wright Interviews
Dates:	1983
Quantity:	9 audiotapes (reference copies).

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9523, Wright, A. Gilbert, (Arthur Gilbert), 1909- interviewee, A. Gilbert Wright Interviews

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, in 1909, Wright developed an interest in natural history, taxidermy, and museum curatorship in his youth. After receiving a 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 the fifties, Wright prepared exhibits for the main FSM building, a "museumobile," and historical site museums throughout the state. In 1961, Wright was appointed 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 Programs 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. When the Office of Exhibits was reorganized in 1972, Wright became a writer/editor in the Office of the Exhibits Editor until his retirement in 1975.

In the early 1970s, Wright began teaching courses in museology at 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.

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.

Wright was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of his long and wide-ranging experience in the museum field.

Descriptive Entry

Wright was interviewed by Pamela M. Henson on five occasions between May and November of 1983. The interviews cover Wright's youth; early interests in museums, natural history, and taxidermy; his education; museum career at the Illinois State Museum, Peabody Museum of Natural History, Florida State Museum, National Park Service, and Smithsonian Institution; internship at the Buffalo Museum of Science; teaching at George Washington University; reminiscences of colleagues such as Arthur Sterry Coggeshall, Ralph H. Lewis, Alexander Wetmore, and John E. Anglim; and his publications and professional activities.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Entomology
- Museum curators -- Interviews
- Museum techniques
- Zoology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Interviews
- Oral history

Names:

- Anglim, John E.
- Coggeshall, Arthur Sterry.
- Exhibits Editor's Office (NMNH)
- Florida State Museum
- George Washington University. Museum Studies Program.
- Henson, Pamela M. interviewer.

Illinois State Museum
Lewis, Ralph
Museum Studies Program. George Washington University.
National Museum of Natural History. Assistant to the Director for Exhibits Planning.
Office of Exhibits Programs (NMNH)
United States. National Park Service
Wetmore, Alexander, 1886-1978
Wright, A. Gilbert (Arthur Gilbert), 1909-

Container Listing

Box 1

Transcripts of Interviews

Interview 1: 26 May 1983

Interview 2: 1 June 1983

Interview 3: 28 June 1983

Interview 4: 7 July 1983

Interview 5: 15 November 1983

Audiotapes of Interviews

Interview 1: 26 May 1983

Interview 2: 1 June 1983

Interview 3: 28 June 1983

Interview 4: 7 July 1983

Interview 5: 15 November 1983