



Smithsonian Institution Archives

A. Myra Keen Oral History Interview, 1983

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	A. Myra Keen Oral History Interview
Identifier:	Record Unit 9527
Date:	1983
Extent:	1 audiotape (Reference copy).
Creator::	Keen, A. Myra (Angeline Myra), 1905-1986, interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9527, A. Myra Keen Oral History Interview

Historical Note

Angeline Myra Keen (1905-1986), an invertebrate paleontologist and malacologist, was an international expert on the systematics of marine mollusks. She influenced her profession as a researcher and fieldworker, teacher and advisor, curator and exhibitor, author and public speaker. Her work was of interest both to academic scholars and to shell collectors.

Raised in Colorado, Keen became an amateur naturalist and photographer in her teens, and pursued her research interests in birds and insects at Colorado College, graduating with an A.B. in 1930. She earned an M.A. in psychology from Stanford University the following year, and then a doctorate in psychology from the University of California at Berkeley. Finding herself with no employment prospects, graduating in the depression year of 1934, she volunteered to help identify shells in the Stanford geology department's collection. This was the beginning of Keen's serious study of shells and her thirty-eight year association with Stanford. She had some coursework in biology, geology, and statistics, but was self-taught in malacology.

In 1936 Keen was appointed Curator of paleontology in the department of geology, and began teaching there during the Second World War. She was appointed Assistant Professor of paleontology in 1954 and Curator of malacology in 1957. Despite her stature, Keen waited until 1960 for appointment as a tenured Associate Professor and until 1965 for a full professorship, becoming one of three women professors in the sciences at Stanford. Upon her retirement in 1970, she was made Professor of Paleontology Emeritus and Curator of Malacology Emeritus, and taught two more years.

Keen's research focused on molluscan systematics, but ranged widely within the field to include recent marine mollusk fauna of the Panamic Province and marine molluscan Cenozoic paleontology, neontology, and zoogeography of western North America. Keen was particularly interested in bivalve systematics and nomenclature. She spent many years adding to, cataloging, and systematically arranging the

Cenozoic mollusk collection at Stanford. She also wrote fourteen books and sixty-four papers in the field of malacology.

Keen was the primary teacher of students in malacology at Stanford, advising advanced degree candidates in geology and biology. She also taught courses in advanced paleontology, biological oceanography, and curatorial methods.

Keen's professional honors included Phi Beta Kappa, a 1964 Guggenheim Fellowship, and appointment as Fellow of the Geological Society of America and as fellow of the Paleontological Society. She received the Fellows Medal from the California Academy of Sciences in 1979, becoming the first woman to do so. She served as President of both the American Malacological Union and the Western Society for Malacology, and chaired the Committee on Nomenclature of the Society of Systematic Zoology.

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 student on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

The Keen interview was donated to the Oral History Collection because of her long career and many contributions to the field of American malacology.

Descriptive Entry

Keen was interviewed by Eugene V. Coan, malacologist and former student of Keen's, because of her long career and many contributions to the field of American malacology. The interview includes her reminiscences about her education, research interests, fieldwork, colleagues, and students. The interview complements the A. Myra Keen papers, also located in the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Interviews
- Invertebrate zoology
- Mollusks
- Oral history
- Paleontology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

Bartsch, Paul, 1871-1960
Coan, Eugene V., interviewer
Keen, A. Myra (Angeline Myra), 1905-1986
Oldroyd, Ida Shepard, 1857-
Oldroyd, Thomas
Robertson, Robert
Stanford University

Container Listing

Interview

Interview

Interview 1: September 1983

Interview

Covers her early life, training, and subsequent career at Stanford University, c. 1905-1983, including: early life and education in Colorado; early research interests in birds and insects; study for Ph.D. degree in psychology from University of California, Berkeley; volunteer position identifying shells for Ida S. Oldroyd; study of mollusk distribution in the western United States; employment by Stanford University Department of Geology; fieldwork on northern Pacific coast, Mission Bay, and Gulf of California; reminiscences about Ida and Thomas Oldroyd, Elsie and Emery Chace, Hubert Gregory Schenck, Paul Bartsch, Fred Baker, Junius Henderson, and others; disposition of Hemphill and Oldroyd collections; reminiscences about former students, including Frances Wagner, Cortez Hoskins, Robert Robertson, Lee Smith, Priscilla Militante, James H. McLean, and Judith Terry Smith; travels abroad, especially to study at the British Museum (Natural History).

Interview

Transcript, pp. 1-20, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interview

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Master: 1 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotape
- Reference Copies: 1 cassette audiotape