



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Henry Bascom Collins Oral History Interviews, 1985

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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:	Henry Bascom Collins Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9528
Date:	1985
Extent:	7 audiotapes (Reference copies). 14 digital .mp3 files (Reference copies).
Creator::	Collins, Henry Bascom, 1899- , interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9528, Henry Bascom Collins Oral History Interviews

Access Restriction

Restricted. Contact SIHistory@si.edu to request permission.

Historical Note

Henry Bascom Collins, Jr., was born in 1899 in Geneva, Alabama. Upon receiving the B.A. in geology from Millsaps College in 1922, he traveled to Washington, D.C., to secure a field work position with geologist and Secretary of the Smithsonian, Charles D. Walcott. Collins joined instead the archeological field party exploring Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, under the leadership of Smithsonian anthropologist, Neil M. Judd, thus beginning a sixty-five year career in anthropology. Collins worked for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in 1923, but returned to the Smithsonian as aide in the Division of Ethnology, United States National Museum (USNM), from 1924 to 1925. After receiving his M.A. in anthropology from the George Washington University in 1925, Collins was appointed Assistant Curator of Ethnology, USNM. He advanced to Associate Curator in 1938 but the following year transferred to the Smithsonian's other anthropological unit, the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), as Senior Ethnologist. He served as acting Director of the BAE from 1963-1965, overseeing its dissolution and merger into the Department of Anthropology of the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). He was Senior Scientist in the department from 1965-1966, and upon retirement, continued his research as archeologist emeritus until his death in 1987.

Collins' first exposure to archeological investigations was in the Southwest assisting Judd. When he began his own research, he shifted focus to Southeast prehistory, especially pottery types found in mounds. In 1927, however, Smithsonian physical anthropologist, Aleš Hrdlička sent his aide, T. Dale Stewart, and Collins on a field trip to Alaska. Fascinated by the area, Collins devoted the next sixty years to the study of

Inuit prehistory. He was noted for his innovative interpretation of cultural sequences, based especially on his excavations at the Inuit village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island. In 1936, he was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences for this work. During World War II, he served as Director of the Ethnogeographic Board, an interagency liaison group which facilitated communications between academics and the military. Following the war, he was instrumental in establishing the Arctic Institute of North America, and from 1947 to 1967 served as Chairman of the committee responsible for producing the *Arctic Bibliography*.

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.

Collins was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of his long and distinguished career as an anthropologist and his role as a Smithsonian administrator.

Descriptive Entry

Collins was interviewed on four occasions in 1985 by Pamela M. Henson for the Smithsonian Archives Oral History Program. The interviews cover Collins' youth, education, career at the Smithsonian from field worker to acting director of the BAE, anthropological research, directorship of the Ethnogeographic Board, role in the Arctic Institute and *Arctic Bibliography*, as well as reminiscences of colleagues such as Matthew W. Stirling and Neil M. Judd.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Anthropology
- Archaeology
- Interviews
- Museum curators -- Interviews
- Oral history

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Arctic Institute of North America

Collins, Henry Bascom, 1899-1987
Ethnogeographic Board (Washington, D.C.)
Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
Hrdlička, Aleš, 1869-1943
Judd, Neil Merton, 1887-1976
National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Department of Anthropology
National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Division of Ethnology
Smithsonian Institution. Bureau of American Ethnology
Stewart, T. D. (Thomas Dale), 1901-1997
Stirling, Matthew Williams, 1896-1975
World War, 1939-1945

Preferred Titles:

Arctic Bibliography

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: March 5, 1985

Interviews

Covers his youth, education, and early career at the Smithsonian, c. 1899-1930, including: family history and youth; education at Millsaps College; 1922 trip to the Smithsonian; field work at Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon, New Mexico with Neil M. Judd; reminiscences of Aleš Hrdlička, especially his views on early man; graduate work at George Washington University; work at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History; appointment as aide in the Division of Ethnology of the USNM; archeological work in the Southeast; reminiscences of John L. and Mary Arnold Baer, Moreau B. Chambers, James Alfred Ford, and T. Dale Stewart; interest in Alaska, including analysis of the work of Diamond Jenness and recollections of field work.

[Digital Content: Aleš Hrdlička, as a young man, 1903. \[Image no. SIA2009-4246 and 4816\]](#)

[Digital Content: Henry B. Collins, Jr. on U.S.S. Boxer, 1927. \[Image no. SIA2009-2052 and 4893\]](#)

[Digital Content: Henry B. Collins, Jr., ethnologist with the Department of Anthropology, United States National Museum, now the National Museum of Natural History, conducted field work in Florida in the winter of 1927-1928. In this photo, Collins holds up a recently caught fish. Mrs. W. E. Colton is seated next to Collins, c. 1927-1928. \[Image no. SIA2009-2050 and 4884\]](#)

[Digital Content: Henry B. Collins, Jr. with Skull Collection at the USNM, 1928. \[Image no. SIA2009-2053 and 4892\]](#)

[Digital Content: Aleš Hrdlička, 1930. \[Image no. SIA2009-4245 and 31513 and MNH-31513\]](#)

[Digital Content: Henry B. Collins, Jr., in Florida, c. 1927-1928. \[Image no. SIA2009-2049 and 4883-A\]](#)

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-85, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.

Interviews

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 4 .mp3 files

Interviews

Interview 2: March 12, 1985

Interviews

Covers his career at the BAE, reminiscences of Matthew Williams Stirling, activities with the Cosmos Club, and creation of the Arctic Institute, c. 1930-1950, including: reminiscences of Stirling as chief of the BAE and his field work in New Guinea and Mexico; reminiscences of BAE staff members;

development of the archeological collections; Judd's luncheon group at the Cosmos Club; the formation of the Arctic Institute after World War II.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 86-153, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 4 .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 3: March 27, 1985**

Interviews Discusses his role in World War II, field work in Alaska, and marriage, c. 1930-1960, including: effects of World War II; directorship of the Ethnogeographic Board; work of the Smithsonian War Committee; reminiscences of his field work in Alaska, including archeological digs and colleagues; marriage to Carolyn Walker Collins.

[Digital Content: At Cape Kialegak, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, Henry B. Collins, Jr., archaeologist with the Department of Anthropology, United States National Museum, now the National Museum of Natural History, who was on his third season of field work to Alaska, stands with assistant G. Herman Brandt \(left\) in a barren field on a hillside, 1929. \[Image no. SIA2009-2051 and 4891\]](#)

[Digital Content: While conducting field work in Alaska in 1929, Henry Bascom Collins, Jr., \(1899-1987\), archaeologist with the Department of Anthropology, United States National Museum, now the National Museum of Natural History, cleans bones in his camp at Cape Kialegak, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, 1929. \[Image no. SIA2009-2048 and 4889-B\]](#)

Interviews Transcript, pp. 154-212, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 4 .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 4: September 23, 1985**

Interviews Covers reminiscences of Smithsonian colleagues, the Institute for Social Anthropology, the River Basin Surveys, and the history of the BAE, c. 1923-1966, including: reminiscences of entomologists such as Adam Geide Boving, August Busck, Austin H. and Leila F. Clark, and Carl Heinrich; reminiscences of geologists such as Ray S. Bassler, Richard G. Paine and Jessie G. Beach; reminiscences of anthropologists such as Aleš Hrdlička and Immanuel Moses Casanowicz; creation of the Institute for Social

Anthropology by Julian Haynes Steward; creation of the River Basin Surveys by Matthew Stirling; the history of the BAE, including its dissolution in 1965 and merger with the Department of Anthropology, NMNH.

[Digital Content: Portrait of Henry Bascom Collins, Jr., 1962. \[Image no. SIA2010-1581\]](#)

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 213-235, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interviews

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotape
- Preservation Masters: 2 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 cassette audiotape; 2 .mp3 files