



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Oral history interviews with
Henry Bascom Collins, Jr., 1985

Finding aid prepared by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
Contact us at osiaref@si.edu

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Oral history interviews with Henry Bascom Collins, Jr.
Identifier:	Record Unit 9528
Date:	1985
Extent:	7 audiotapes (reference copies). 14 digital .mp3 files (reference copies).
Creator::	Collins, Henry Bascom, 1899- interviewee
Language:	Language of Materials: English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9528, Oral history interviews with Henry Bascom Collins, Jr.

Access Restriction

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

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, Ales Hrdlicka 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

Eskimo prehistory. He was noted for his innovative interpretation of cultural sequences, based especially on his excavations at the Eskimo 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
Museum curators -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Audiotapes
Oral history
Transcripts

Names:

Arctic Institute of North America

Bureau of American Ethnology. Department of Anthropology (NMNH)
Collins, Henry Bascom, 1899-1987
Department of Anthropology (NMNH)
Division of Ethnology (NMNH)
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
Stewart, T. D. (Thomas Dale), 1901-1997
Stirling, Matthew Williams, 1896-1975
World War, 1939-1945

Preferred Titles:

Arctic Bibliography

Container Listing

Box 1

Transcripts of Interviews

Box 1 of 1

Interview 1: 5 March 1985

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

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

[Digital Content: Henry B. Collins, Jr. holding a recently caught fish, with Mrs. W. E. Colton seated next to him, circa 1927-1929. \[Image no. SIA2009-2050 or 4884\]](#)

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

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

[Digital Content: Henry B. Collins, Jr., in Florida, circa 1927-1928. \[Image no. SIA209-2049 or 4883-A\]](#)

Box 1 of 1

Interview 2: 12 March 1985

Box 1 of 1

Interview 3: 27 March 1985: Discusses his role in World War II, field work in Alaska, and marriage, c. 1930-1960, including:

[Digital Content: G. Herman Brandt and Henry B. Collins, Jr., At Cape Kialegak, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, 1929. \[Image no. SIA2009-2051 or 4891\]](#)

[Digital Content: Henry B. Collins, Jr., in Camp in Alaska, 1929. \[Image no. SIA2009-2048 or 4889-B\]](#)

Box 1 of 1

Interview 4: 23 September 1985

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

Audio Recordings of Interviews

Box 1 of 1

Interview 1: 5 March 1985

Box 1 of 1

Interview 2: 12 March 1985

Box 1 of 1

Interview 3: 27 March 1985

Box 1 of 1

Interview 4: 23 September 1985