



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Edward P. Henderson Oral
History Interviews, 1984-1985

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Edward P. Henderson Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9529
Date:	1984-1985
Extent:	16 audiotapes (Reference copies). 26 digital .mp3 files (Reference copies).
Creator::	Henderson, Edward P., interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9529, Edward P. Henderson Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

Edward Porter Henderson (1898-1992), was born in Columbus, Ohio. After serving in the United States Marine Corps during World War I, he received the B. S. and M. S. in Chemistry from the George Washington University. In 1920, he was appointed Assistant Chemist at the United States Geological Survey (USGS). In 1929, he transferred to the Smithsonian Institution (SI), as Assistant Curator of Physical and Chemical Geology in the Department of Geology of the United States National Museum (USNM), where he spent the rest of his career. In his early years at the USNM, he specialized in the analysis of ores and minerals, and made frequent field trips within the United States to collect ores and minerals for the USNM. He also assumed responsibility for the small collection of meteorites that had been amassed by his predecessor, George P. Merrill. In 1942, Henderson advanced to Associate Curator of Mineralogy and Petrology, and in 1964 to Curator of the Division of Meteorites.

In 1947, Henderson traveled to Japan with his fellow USNM Curator, William F. Foshag, at the request of General Douglas MacArthur. During their five month stay, they sorted and appraised Japanese gemstones recovered in Tokyo by the United States Army. The end of World War II also saw an increase in interest in meteorites, as the era of space exploration opened; thus Henderson's efforts became entirely focused on the collection and analysis of meteorites. He worked with amateur collectors, such as newsman Stuart H. Perry, in developing the national meteorite collection, and travelled to Europe, Russia, Asia and Australia in search of new specimens. Henderson was noted for his work on composition, classification and methods of analysis of meteorites. Henderson also supervised the exhibits modernization of the Mineral Hall, which reopened in 1957. He oversaw the renovation of chemical laboratory in the 1950s and was instrumental in acquiring an electron microprobe in 1963. After his retirement from the curatorship in 1965, he continued his work as honorary research associate until 1989. In 1970 he was awarded the Lawrence Smith Medal of the National Academy of Sciences for his contributions to the field of meteoritics.

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.

Henderson was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of his long and distinguished career as Curator of Meteorites and because of his many memories of life and colleagues in the USNM.

Descriptive Entry

Henderson was interviewed on nine occasions in 1984 and 1985 by Pamela M. Henson for the Smithsonian Archives Oral History Collection. The interviews cover his youth; education; career at the USGS; curatorship at the USNM, including his work on ores and minerals, stories about the Hope Diamond and other gemstones, his development of the meteorite collection and research techniques; his work on Japanese gemstones; his field trips in the United States and abroad; his life aboard a houseboat on the Potomac River; and reminiscences of colleagues and life at the United States National Museum.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Astronomy and astrophysics
- Chemistry
- Geology
- Interviews
- Meteorites
- Mineralogy
- Oral history

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Cooper, G. Arthur (Gustav Arthur), 1902-2000
- Foshag, William F. (William Frederick), 1894-1956
- Henderson, Edward P.
- Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Department of Mineral Sciences
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Division of Meteorites
- Perry, Stuart H., 1874-1957

United States National Museum. Department of Geology
United States. Army

Geographic Names:

Geological Survey (U.S.)

[Digital Content: Roland Wilbur Brown, 1893-1961, a paleobotanist, sits at his desk in "Stone Hall" at the National Museum of Natural History, 1958. \[Image no. SIA2010-1592 or 85-4024\]](#)

Interviews Transcript, pp. 27-87, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotape
 - Preservation Masters: 3 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 3: August 29, 1984**

Interviews Focuses on his career at the USNM, c. 1935-1957, including: reminiscences of colleagues, including Richard G. Paine and James H. Benn; his 1937 trip to Russia with John Putnam Marble and return via Ceylon and Japan; his routine duties in the USNM; the effects of World War II, especially special projects he worked on, steps to protect the collections during the war, and the post-war surge of interest in meteorites; William F. Foshag's observations of the Paricutin volcano in Mexico; exhibits modernization in the 1950s; pet snakes of museum staff and volunteers; marriage to Rebecca R. Rogers in 1941; reciprocal visits from Russians in 1950s; staff changes at the SI in the 1950s; his trip to Japan with Foshag in 1947 to sort, count, and appraise gemstones recovered by the U.S. Army, and travels within Japan with Mr. Takeo Kume.

[Digital Content: L to R: Edward P. Henderson and William F. Foshag on a trip to Japan to do post-war work for the United States Army. The picture is entitled "Husks on Houses." He went to Japan with Foshag to sort, count and appraise gemstones recovered by the United States Army, 1945. \[Image no. 85-7029\]](#)

[Digital Content: Exhibit of drawings by Japanese and American children, organized by Teiichi Kobayashi and Rebecca Henderson, wife of Edward P. Henderson, at the Transportation Museum, Tokyo, 1951. \[Image no. 85-7040\]](#)

[Digital Content: At the request of the United States Army, Edward P. Henderson, curator of mineral sciences in the National Museum of Natural History, went to Japan to appraise gems confiscated by the Japanese government from Japanese citizens during World War II, 1966. \[Image no. 85-9063\]](#)

[Digital Content: William F. Foshag and Takeo Kume in Japan are standing in front of what appears to be living quarters with clothes hung to dry on lines, 1946. \[Image no. 85-7033\]](#)

[Digital Content: In Japan from left to right are Takeo Kume, Edward P. Henderson, Kokichi Mikimoto, and William F. Foshag. In 1946 National Museum of Natural History mineral science curators Henderson and Foshag travelled to Japan to sort, count and appraise gemstones recovered by the United States Army. Henderson later traveled within Japan with Takeo Kume, 1946. \[Image no. 85-11397\]](#)

Digital Content: National Museum of Natural History mineral sciences curator Edward P. Henderson made several trips to postwar Japan to appraise gems confiscated during the war. This group includes Takeo Kume (fourth from left in rear line) and Kokichi Mikimoto in center (seated with crutches), 1951. [Image no. 85-11396]

Digital Content: Edward P. and Rebecca Henderson arriving at their hotel in Yokohama, Japan, 1966. [Image no. 85-7039]

Digital Content: Edward P. Henderson (seated 2nd from right), curator of mineral sciences in the National Museum of Natural History, travelled to Japan several times to appraise gems confiscated by the Japanese government during World War II. Here he sits with a group of Japanese men who inspected diamonds. Apparatus for studying the gems can be seen on the table, 1966. [Image no. 85-7031]

Digital Content: Kokichi Mikimoto, 1945. [Image no. 85-11399]

Digital Content: Edward P. Henderson dancing with two dancers in Taiwan, 1966. [Image no. 85-7036]

Digital Content: Takeo Kume, whom Henderson met on a trip to Japan, stands beside the wife of a civilian officer and her dog, 1946 or 1951. [Image no. 85-7035]

Digital Content: From left to right: Sakikawa, Sunagawa and Edward P. Henderson seated at a table inspecting diamonds, 1966. [Image no. 85-7037]

Digital Content: Edward P. Henderson and Kikuo Suwa's father seated at a table in Suwa's house, 1966. [Image no. 85-11398]

Interviews Transcript, pp. 88-148, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours
Note:

- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Preservation Masters: 3 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 4: September 6, 1984**

Interviews Covers his career at the USNM, c. 1930-1970, including: *The World Is Yours*, a Smithsonian radio program during the depression; the working relationship of Secretary Abbot to Chief Clerk, Nicholas W. Dorsey; Smithsonian investment policies for private funds and a review of those policies in the 1970s; procedures for purchasing specimens; establishment of the Edward Porter Henderson Meteorite Fund; reminiscences of USNM director, A. Remington Kellogg, and Assistant Secretary, John L. Keddy.
Digital Content: A. Remington (Arthur Remington) Kellogg, 1892-1969, holding the skull of an Amazon river dolphin, 1955. [Image no. 78-3701]

Interviews Transcript, pp. 149-201, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 3 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 5: September 13, 1984**

Interviews Discusses his collection of and research on meteorites, c. 1935-1960, including: techniques for analyzing meteorites; stories about individual meteorites; his 1955 visit to the Vatican collection and subsequent exchange of specimens; use of the phase rule in meteorite analysis; reminiscences of John Putnam Marble, a research associate who worked on purifying uranium; reminiscences of Harrison Brown of the University of Chicago who compiled a bibliography on meteorites; reminiscences of Walter Nichiporuk, a Russian scientist; United States Air Force contract to study the projectile shapes of meteorites.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 202-241, 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 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 6: September 19, 1984**

Interviews Covers the development of the meteorite collection and reminiscences of colleagues, c. 1920-1970, including: Smithsonian support for the meteorite collection; Merrill's creation of the collection; competition with other museums; South American collectors, such as Clay Preston Butler and Mark C. Bandy; post-World War II surge of interest in meteorites and the growth of the collection; techniques for separating iron and nickel and improving analyses of meteorites; reminiscences of Foshag, especially his research interests, Paricutin observations, and health problems; unsuccessful attempts to acquire the Nininger collection of meteorites; evaluation of meteorite collections in other museums; meteorite collecting trips in the U.S.; reminiscences of Secretary Abbot, including his investments in platinum and diamonds and his preaching at the Congregational Church; reminiscences of Foshag as Head Curator of the Department of Geology; reminiscences of G. Arthur Cooper as Head Curator of the Department of Geology, including establishment of a fund for tektites, the split of the Department of Geology into the Department of Paleobiology and Department of Mineral Sciences in 1963, and acquisition in 1963 of the electron microprobe; reminiscences of field work with Brian H. Mason of the American Museum of Natural History and his appointment as Curator at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH).

[Digital Content: Kurt Fredriksson, Curator and Geochemist, 1964-1992, at the Division of Meteorites, Department of Mineral Sciences, National Museum of Natural History. Fredriksson is operating a Scanning Electron Probe used to study meteorites, 1967. \[Image no. MNH-783C\]](#)

- Interviews Transcript, pp. 242-282, 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 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 7: September 27, 1984**
- Interviews Describes the gem collection and preservation of meteorites, c. 1929-1984, including: the state of the gem collection when Henderson arrived in 1929; security in exhibition cases; identification of gems for the public, including Otis Beall Kent and Chauncey Mitchell DePew; acquisition of a star sapphire; development of cultured pearls by Kokichi Mikimoto; donation and trading of gems with dealers; stories concerning the Hope Diamond; security in the gem collection; development of the gem collection by Curator Paul E. Desautels; techniques developed for preserving meteorites, including enclosures and air conditioning.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 283-333, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.
- Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours
Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 3 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 3 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 8: October 5, 1984**
- Interviews Covers international contacts concerning meteorites, grants, honors, and Henderson's retirement in 1965, c. 1937-1965, including: relations with Russia, especially 1960 trip, exchanges, visitors to Washington, D.C., meteorite fall movie, and colleagues; exchanges with European collections; field work in Australia with Brian H. Mason; grants from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to purchase collections, acquire an electron microprobe, and analyze lunar samples; receipt of an honorary degree in 1963 from University of Bern, Switzerland, and the Lawrence Smith Medal of the National Academy of Sciences in 1970; his retirement in 1965; establishment of the Henderson Meteorite Fund.
- [Digital Content: Rebecca Henderson, wife of Edward P. Henderson, Curator in the Department of Geology at the National Museum of Natural History,](#)

accompanied her husband on his trip to Australia to collect meteorites. She sits in a land vehicle named Rockhound I near Undoolya Gap in Central Australia, 1965. [Image no. 85-7032]

Digital Content: Edward P. Henderson, following his retirement as Curator of the Division of Meteorites in the Department of Mineral Sciences at the National Museum of Natural History, made a trip to Australia to collect meteorites. Pictured are sheep-shearing pens in Nocolèche, Australia, 1965. [Image no. 85-7030]

Digital Content: From Left to Right: Douglas Boerner, Oliver Chalmers; and Edward P. Henderson are prospecting with metal detectors in Henbury, Australia, location of the Henbury Crater, 1965. [Image no. 85-7038]

Interviews Transcript, pp. 334-390, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 3 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 9: March 22, 1985**

Interviews Covers his reminiscences of life in the Natural History Building, c. 1929-1985, including: the switchboard telephone system; the supply requisition system; security procedures; work with federal agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations and United States Customs Bureau; Smithsonian vehicles for field work; museum shops; dining facilities; shipping procedures, especially for large meteorites; the USNM versus the central Smithsonian Institution; staff interaction when museum was smaller; staff socializing, including watermelon parties; reminiscences of colleagues, especially Ales Hrdlicka, Jessie G. Beach, Doris Mable Cochran, Paul Marchand and Ray S. Bassler.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 391-492, of audiotape recording, 2.5 hours.

Interviews Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2.5 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 3 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 5 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 3 cassette audiotapes; 5 digital .mp3 files