



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Nazaret Cherkezian Oral History Interview, 1986

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

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Historical Note.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Descriptive Entry.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	3

Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Nazaret Cherkezian Oral History Interview
Identifier:	Record Unit 9541
Date:	1986
Extent:	2 audiotapes (Reference copies).
Creator::	Cherkezian, Nazaret, interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9541, Nazaret Cherkezian Oral History Interview

Historical Note

Nazaret "Chic" Cherkezian (1924-1996), was born in Queens, New York. He attended New York University (NYU) where he received a B.A. in Journalism and completed all course work for an M.B.A. in Economic History.

Cherkezian began his career as a journalist in 1946 as a staff member of the *New York Herald Tribune*. In 1949, he entered the public relations field as Associate Director and Senior Press Representative for the New York University Office of Information Services. While at NYU, he helped found the Office of Radio and Television, where he was Associate Director and Producer from 1954 to 1957. During these years he helped to create the successful *Sunrise Semester* educational television series.

In 1957, Cherkezian began producing the weekly television series *Eye on New York* for WCBS-TV. He left commercial television in 1959 to become Director of Public Information for National Educational Television (NET). He advanced to Executive Producer in 1965, a position which he held until 1972. He was awarded fellowships by The Ford Foundation and National Association of Educational Broadcasters to continue development in this field.

Cherkezian came to Washington in 1973 to accept a post as Director of Programming for the National Public Affairs Center for Television (NPACT). His Smithsonian career began in 1974 when he became Telecommunications Coordinator for the Office of Public Affairs. Cherkezian was named Director of the Office of Telecommunications upon its creation in 1976, serving until his retirement in 1986. As Director of the Office of Telecommunications, Cherkezian was responsible for the Smithsonian's radio, television, and film productions. His many credits include *A Sense of Discovery*, *Here at the Smithsonian*, *Yorktown*, and *Peace Be Still*.

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.

Cherkezian was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of his role as one of the pioneers of public television and his tenure as a Smithsonian administrator.

Descriptive Entry

Cherkezian was interviewed in December of 1986 by John Peterson for a University of Maryland oral history seminar project. The interview covers his education and career in public affairs and television at New York University; experiences as producer for WCBS-TV in New York; public relations and television production for public broadcasting at National Educational Television; coverage of Watergate and Washington politics for the National Public Affairs Center for Television; and career as Director of the Office of Telecommunications at the Smithsonian.

The collection consists of 1.5 hours of audiotape recordings and 35 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Interviews
- Oral history
- Radio programs
- Television -- Production and direction

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Cherkezian, Nazaret
- National Educational Television and Radio Center
- National Public Affairs Center for Television
- New York University
- Peterson, John, interviewer
- Smithsonian Institution. Office of Public Affairs. Telecommunications Coordinator
- Smithsonian Institution. Office of Telecommunications
- WCBS-TV (Television station : New York, N.Y.)

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: December 3, 1986

Interviews

Covers his early work in journalism and the television industry and career at New York University, WCBS-TV, National Educational Television, National Public Affairs Center for Television, and the Smithsonian, c. 1946-1986, including: his education; his early interest in journalism and his work as a journalist during World War II and for the *New York Herald Tribune*; his founding of the Office of Radio and Television and development of public service programs for television industry at New York University; his study of the application of television in museums with a Ford Foundation Mass Media Leadership Fellowship and his first contact with the Smithsonian; his use of museum objects in early television; the creation of *Sunrise Semester* for WCBS-TV and the unprecedented success of this program; his work in commercial television for the program *Eye on New York* with Bill Leonard; his experience as executive producer for National Educational Television, especially his contact with Max Frankel, Lester Markel, Thomas G. Wicker and Clifton Daniel; his two years as director of programming for National Public Affairs Center for Television, especially his coverage of the Watergate hearings; the Smithsonian's early attempts to hire him as Coordinator of Telecommunications; his conversations with Julian Euell and decision to accept position as director of the Office of Telecommunications; his contract negotiations with David Wolper in Hollywood for a Smithsonian television series; the public response to programs such as *Monsters! Mysteries or Myths*; his decision to take the initiative in creating programs, especially the creation of *Smithsonian World*; his managerial style at the Smithsonian; his efforts to develop scripts appropriate for the PBS audience, such as his work on a program about the Multiple Mirror Telescope; the Smithsonian's expansion into various areas of telecommunications, especially the creation of *Here At the Smithsonian*, *Radio Smithsonian*, and *Smithsonian Galaxy*; the relocation of all staff members of the Office of Telecommunications to improved facilities at the National Museum of American History; his role as fund raiser for Smithsonian projects and attempts to market Smithsonian films; his belief in using budget to hire and develop good staff, not buy equipment; discussion of his favorite projects.

[Digital Content: William Grayson was Special Coordinator of the Smithsonian's Office of Telecommunications in 1976, and later became Senior Telecommunications Specialist from 1977 to until his death on April 15, 1980. \[Image no. 89-14120\]](#)

[Digital Content: Nazaret Cherkezian, 1924-1996, director of Office of Telecommunications \(OTC\) from 1976 until his retirement in 1986, stands beside equipment in Smithsonian Institution's OTC, 1984. \[Image no. 84-9185-4A or 84-9185.04A\]](#)

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-35, 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 Master: 3 digital audio .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes and 3 digital audio .mp3 files