



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Vermont Structural Slate Company
Videohistory Collection, 1989

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Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu |
| Title: | Vermont Structural Slate Company Videohistory Collection |
| Identifier: | Record Unit 9547 |
| Date: | 1989 |
| Extent: | 3 videotapes (Reference copies). 5 digital .wmv files and .rm files (Reference copies). |
| Creator:: | |
| Language: | English |

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9547, Vermont Structural Slate Company Videohistory Collection

Historical Note

The Vermont Structural Slate Company (VSS) in Fair Haven, Vermont, was founded in 1859. As of 1989, it was one of only twenty remaining companies nationwide that produced slate. The company operated several quarries, including the oldest active quarry in Vermont, the Eureka quarry, which opened for slate production in 1852. VSS employees have continued to use nineteenth century machinery for most quarrying and manufacturing operations. The owners, however, have attempted to upgrade the facility with more modern equipment.

Introduction

The Smithsonian Videohistory Program, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation from 1986 until 1992, used video in historical research. Additional collections have been added since the grant project ended. Videohistory uses the video camera as a historical research tool to record moving visual information. Video works best in historical research when recording people at work in environments, explaining artifacts, demonstrating process, or in group discussion. The experimental program recorded projects that reflected the Institution's concern with the conduct of contemporary science and technology.

Smithsonian historians participated in the program to document visual aspects of their on-going historical research. Projects covered topics in the physical and biological sciences as well as in technological design and manufacture. To capture site, process, and interaction most effectively, projects were taped in offices, factories, quarries, laboratories, observatories, and museums. Resulting footage was duplicated,

transcribed, and deposited in the Smithsonian Institution Archives for scholarship, education, and exhibition. The collection is open to qualified researchers.

Descriptive Entry

William Worthington, museum specialist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (NMAH), recorded quarrying techniques at VSS on October 12 and 13, 1989, to document remaining nineteenth century industrial techniques before the installation of modern equipment. For example, Worthington recorded the operation of the old cableway system that removed slate from the Eureka pit, as well as the more modern use of cranes, diesel shovels, and dump trucks. Worthington also documented various methods and equipment used in making slate shingles.

The videohistory shoot included both interviews with employees and detailed visual documentation of their work, as well as overall tours of the quarry, its operation, and its environs. Brad Bauman, chief engineer, guided Worthington around the site and explained various processes involved in slate manufacture, while Everett Beayon, the last employee familiar with the cableway system, returned from his retirement to demonstrate and explain the operation of the system. Joseph Root described selecting and extracting slate from the quarry, and Raymond Cull demonstrated the signaling system used to communicate with crane operators for the removal of slate from the pit. A number of other employees appeared throughout both sessions, but were not interviewed.

This collection consists of two interview sessions, totalling approximately 4:00 hours of recordings and 63 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
- Science -- History
- Technology -- History

Types of Materials:

- Transcripts
- Videotapes

Names:

- Bauman, Brad
- Beayon, Everett
- Cull, Raymond
- Root, Joseph
- Vermont Structural Slate Co.
- Worthington, William E., 1948- , interviewer

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Session 1: October 12, 1989

Interviews

At the Eureka Quarry of Vermont Structural Slate Company, documented quarrying operations and equipment, with an emphasis on the older cableway transportation system, c. 1859-1989, including: installation and function of "dead log" anchors for cableway systems; overview of the Eureka quarry pit; "shelf technique" method for slate removal from quarry walls; cableway system for lifting rocks out of the quarry; use of electromagnetic signaling system for communications between quarry floor workers and engine house or crane operators; dumping operation of rubbish box; control of the cableway operations from an engine house. Visual documentation included: features of the cableway carriage; specialized hardware designed for attaching the slate slabs and rubbish box to cranes for removal from the quarry floor; engine house equipment and furnishings.

Interviews

Transcript, 1-42 pages, of videotape recording, 2 hours 20 minutes.

Interviews

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2 hours, 20 minutes

Note:

- Original Masters: 7 Beta videotapes
- Preservation Masters: 7 Motion jpeg 2000 and 7 mpeg digital files
- Dubbing Masters: 3 U-matic videotapes
- Reference Copies: 2 VHS videotapes, 3 Windows Media Video and 3 Real Media digital files

Interviews

Session 2: October 13, 1989

Interviews

In the roofing shed and rubbish heaps at the Vermont Structural Slate Company, documented the process of making slate roofing shingles, c. 1989, including: sawing, splitting, trimming and hole punching of shingles; disposal of waste created in trimming process; preparation ("plugging") of large slate slabs for placement on the roofing; shed conveyor; panorama of VSS grounds with narration; pick-up shots with narration of the "stick" support and the terminus for the cableway system. Visual documentation included: step-by-step tour of all operations in the shingle making process; pallets of imported Spanish slate sold by VSS; overview of other VSS workshops and the area surrounding the Eureka quarry; the "stick" cableway support and the terminus slate rubbish heap.

Interviews

Transcript, 1-21 pages, of videotape recording, 1 hour, 40 minutes.

Interviews

Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour, 40 minutes

Note:

- Original Masters: 5 Beta videotapes
- Preservation Masters: 5 Motion jpeg 2000 and 5 mpeg digital files
- Dubbing Masters: 2 U-matic videotapes
- Reference Copies: 1 VHS videotape, 2 Windows Media Video and 2 Real Media digital files