



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Frank C. Whitmore Oral History Interviews, 1989

Finding aid prepared by Smithsonian Institution Archives

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	4

Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Frank C. Whitmore Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9557
Date:	1989
Extent:	2 audiotapes (Reference copies).
Creator::	Whitmore, Frank C., interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9557, Frank C. Whitmore Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

Frank C. Whitmore, Jr. (1915-2012), research geologist for the United States Geological Survey (USGS), specialized in the systematics of fossil mammals. Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on November 17, 1915, he received the A.B. from Amherst College in 1938. He was awarded the M.S. in invertebrate paleontology in 1939 from Pennsylvania State University. He completed his graduate training in vertebrate paleontology at Harvard University, under Alfred Sherwood Romer, receiving the A.M. in 1941 and Ph.D. in 1942. In 1939, he married Martha Burling Kremers, and they had four children, Geoffrey Mason, John Kremers, Katherine Burling and Susan Hale Whitmore.

After graduation, Whitmore taught geology at Rhode Island State College from 1942 to 1944. He was appointed a Geologist at the USGS in 1944, but was detailed as a scientific consultant to the U.S. Army in the Philippines, Japan and Korea from 1945 to 1946. In 1946, he became Chief of the Military Geology Branch of the USGS, a position he held through 1959. He then transferred to the USGS Paleontology and Stratigraphy located in the Natural History Building (NHB) where he worked as a research geologist on the systematics of fossil mammals, especially Tertiary Cetacea. His field work focused on the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Plain, Panama, Kentucky and Alaska. He was also appointed a research associate of the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) during his tenure in the museum.

An active member of the paleontological community since the 1930s, Whitmore joined the Geological Society of America (GSA) while a graduate student, serving as vertebrate paleontology section chair in 1972. He was present at the formative meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP) in 1938 and remained active in that society, as well as the Paleontological Society (PS), the Geological Society of Washington, as President in 1970, and the Paleontological Society of Washington, as President in 1950.

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.

Frank C. Whitmore, Jr., was interviewed for the Oral History Collection by Cain because of his involvement with the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology from its inception to the late 1930s.

Descriptive Entry

The Frank C. Whitmore, Jr., Interview was conducted in 1989 by Smithsonian Archives visiting fellow, Joseph A. Cain, as part of a research project on the history of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology. Cain was a graduate student in history of science at the University of Maryland. The interview consists of 2.0 hours of audiotape and 55 pages of transcript. The Frank C. Whitmore, Jr., Interview discusses his education and career as a vertebrate paleontologist, especially his recollections of the founding of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, reminiscences of colleagues such as Alfred Sherwood Romer and William Berryman Scott, and reflections on the history of the field of vertebrate paleontology in the United States in the twentieth century.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Cetaceans
- Geologists
- Geology
- Geology, Stratigraphic\$yTertiary
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Paleontology
- Records of meetings, organizations, and professional societies
- Vertebrate paleontology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Cain, Joseph A., interviewer
- Geological Survey (U.S.)
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Department of Paleobiology

Society of Vertebrate Paleontology
Whitmore, Frank C.

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: August 8, 1989

Interviews

Covers his education, career, the SVP, colleagues, and the field of vertebrate paleontology, c. 1930-1989, including: 1938 meeting of the section of vertebrate paleontology of the PS; relationships of graduate students to older generation of paleontologists; Whitmore's visit to William Berryman Scott at Princeton University in 1941; comparison of the fields of invertebrate and vertebrate paleontology; various approaches to vertebrate paleontology during the 1930s and 1940s; Whitmore's graduate study under Alfred Sherwood Romer at Harvard University, 1938-1942; reminiscences of other graduate students in paleontology during the 1930s and 1940s; marriage and family; relationship of the Museum of Comparative Zoology to other northeastern museums; role of field trips in fostering interaction among vertebrate paleontologists; Whitmore's field trip to Uinta Basin, Utah, during summer of 1940; 1938 meeting of the section of vertebrate paleontology of the PS to consider formation of the SVP; relationship of vertebrate paleontologists to the PS and GSA; contributions of Romer, George Gaylord Simpson and Glenn L. Jepsen to development of the SVP; establishment of the journal, *Vertebrate Paleontology*; comparison of SVP and GSA meetings; democratic structure of the SVP; roles of amateurs and professional in SVP; Whitmore's early involvement in SVP; effects of World War II on vertebrate paleontology and the SVP; postwar changes in the field of vertebrate paleontology, including modern schools of taxonomy; increased role of biology in paleontology; Whitmore's post-war career as Chief of the Military Geology Branch, USGS, and return to research for Paleontology and Stratigraphy Branch, USGS, in 1959; importance of institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History to the field; and the importance of SVP in facilitating interaction among vertebrate paleontologists.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-55, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

Note:

- Original Masters: 4 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes