



Smithsonian Institution Archives

## G. B. Fairchild Oral History Interviews, 1989

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <a href="mailto:osiaref@si.edu">osiaref@si.edu</a>
<b>Title:</b>	G. B. Fairchild Oral History Interviews
<b>Identifier:</b>	Record Unit 9559
<b>Date:</b>	1989
<b>Extent:</b>	2 audiotapes (Reference copies). 3 digital .mp3 files (Reference copies).
<b>Creator::</b>	Fairchild, G. B. (Graham Bell), interviewee
<b>Language:</b>	English

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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9559, G. B. Fairchild Oral History Interviews

### Use Restriction

Restricted. Contact [SIHistory@si.edu](mailto:SIHistory@si.edu) to request permission.

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## Historical Note

Graham Bell Fairchild (1906-1994), was born in Washington, D.C. In his youth, Fairchild was introduced to tropical biology while visiting Barro Colorado Island (BCI) research station of the Canal Zone Biological Area (CZBA) with his father, David Grandison Fairchild. He received the B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. in entomology from Harvard University where he studied under William Morton Wheeler, Joseph Charles Bequaert, and Thomas Barbour. Before and during his years at Harvard he also worked at the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ) studying the collections.

Fairchild began his career as an entomologist stationed in Brazil with the Yellow Fever Commission of the Rockefeller Foundation, from 1935 to 1937. From 1938 to 1971, he worked as an Entomologist at Gorgas Memorial Laboratory in Panama City, Panama, and from 1958 to 1971 he served as Assistant Director. At Gorgas his research focused on the taxonomy of medically important insects, especially Tabanidae and Psychodidae. During his years in Panama, he observed the development of the BCI research station from a small university consortium to Smithsonian aegis as the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI).

The Canal Zone Biological Area was established in 1923 on Barro Colorado Island (BCI) in the Panama Canal as a reserve for scientific study of the tropics. Originally designed as a consortium of universities and government agencies by Thomas Barbour, William Morton Wheeler, James Zetek, and others, CZBA was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution in 1946 and in 1966 was renamed the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

## 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 conducts 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.

Graham Bell Fairchild was interviewed for the Oral History Collection by Hagen because of his involvement with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in its early years.

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## Descriptive Entry

The Graham Bell Fairchild Interview was conducted for the Smithsonian Archives on June 7, 1989 by Joel B. Hagen, a Smithsonian postdoctoral fellow, as part of his research on the history of the Canal Zone Biological Area. This interview discusses Fairchild's reminiscences of CZBA and the scientists involved in its development, notably James Zetek, William Morton Wheeler, and Thomas Barbour; his father's interests in the tropics; the development of STRI under Smithsonian administration; the biology faculty at Harvard and the MCZ; and his career in medical entomology.

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Entomology
- Horseflies
- Insects as carriers of disease
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Psychodidae
- Tropical biology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Barbour, Thomas, 1884-1946
- Fairchild, David, 1869-1954
- Fairchild, G. B. (Graham Bell)
- Gorgas Memorial Laboratory
- Hagen, Joel B., interviewer
- Harvard University
- Harvard University. Museum of Comparative Zoology

Rockefeller Foundation. Yellow Fever Commission  
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute  
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Canal Zone Biological Area  
Wheeler, William Morton, 1865-1937  
Zetek, James, 1886-

Geographic Names:

Barro Colorado Island (Panama)  
Brazil  
Panama

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## Container Listing

### Interviews

Interviews

#### **Interview 1: June 7, 1989**

Interviews

Covers his education and career as an entomologist, focusing on his experiences in Panama and his work with other scientists affiliated with BCI, c. 1921-1989, including: Early influence of his father, David Fairchild; first trip to the tropics, 1921; early trip to BCI with his father, 1924; reminiscences of BCI and its establishment and funding, especially concerning William Morton Wheeler, Thomas Barbour, Allison Vincent Armour, and Barbour Lathrop; Fairchild's early interest in entomology; his education, including his work at Harvard with Joseph Charles Bequaert; work with the Rockefeller Foundation in the Yellow Fever Commission run by Cleveland C. Soper; his education at Harvard, including his studies with Charles Thomas Brues, Merritt Lyndon Fernald, William Henry Weston, and William Morton Wheeler; reminiscences of William Morton Wheeler and Thomas Barbour; work at the MCZ; "Eateria" get-togethers held by Thomas Barbour; friendship between his parents, the Wheelers, the Barbours, and Frank M. Chapman; establishment of Gorgas Memorial Laboratory by group from the American College of Physicians and Surgeons and early fundraising; early history of Gorgas with descriptions of Herbert C. Clarke and Lawrence H. Dunn; work at Gorgas and description of staff, especially Daniel M. Jobbins, Lloyd E. Rozeboom, and W. H. W. Komp; work with insect disease vectors; the scientific community in Panama, especially interaction with BCI, Canal Zone health authorities, and U.S. Army; training of Panamanians in natural history; reminiscences of James Zetek, including personality traits, interactions with other scientists, and management of BCI; discussion of mosquito control in the early days of the Canal Zone and cooperation with the U.S. Army; two versions of the establishment of BCI; changes at BCI in 1960s under Martin Humphrey Moynihan; scientists at BCI; and the Smithsonian development of the BCI research station.

[Digital Content: Graham Bell Fairchild, entomologist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute \(STRI\), is at work in a laboratory, c. 1960s. A microscope sits in front of him on a table. \[Image nos. 92-12932 or SIA2011-1338\]](#)

[Digital Content: A group of naturalists at Barro Colorado Island, Panama. L to R: Gordon Stanhope Dodds, James Zetek, Ignacio Molino, Nathan Banks, George C. Wheeler, Graham Bell Fairchild, Frederick Burgess, David Grandison Fairchild, and William Morton Wheeler, shortly after the biological field station opened there, 1924. The station is now the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. \[Image no. 92-12929\]](#)

[Digital Content: On Allison Armour's yacht off Casablanca. L to R: William Morton Wheeler, Mrs. Jordan Mott, Graham Bell Fairchild \(standing\), David Grandison Fairchild, Allison V. Armour \(standing\), and Jordan Mott, 1925. This group was involved in creating what is now the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. \[Image no. 92-12930\]](#)

[Digital Content: Graham Bell Fairchild in the field above Rio Boqueron, Colon, Panama, 1957. \[Image no. 92-15744\]](#)

Digital Content: Trail marker on Barro Colorado Island for Shannon Trail and leading to Snyder-Molino, AMNH (American Museum of Natural History), and Balboa trails, at RCS 18, c. 1950s. Barro Colorado Island is part of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama. [Image no. 92-15293]

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-37, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

Note:

- Original Masters: 2 cassette audiotapes
- Preservation Masters: 3 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 3 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes; 3 digital .mp3 files