



Smithsonian Institution Archives

George C. Wheeler Oral History Interviews, 1989

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	George C. Wheeler Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9560
Date:	1989
Extent:	1 audiotape (Reference copies). 2 digital .mp3 files (Reference copies).
Creator::	Wheeler, George C. (George Carlos), 1897-1991, interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9560, George C. Wheeler Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

George Carlos Wheeler (1897-1991) was an entomologist specializing in the morphology and taxonomy of ants, especially ant larvae. He received the A.B. from the William M. Rice Institute in Texas in 1918, working under Julian Sorell Huxley and Hermann J. Muller. He continued his education at the Bussey Institution of Harvard University, studying entomology under William Morton Wheeler and Charles Thomas Brues. He received the M.S. in 1920 and the Ph.D. in 1921. From 1921 to 1926 he was an instructor and Assistant Professor of zoology at Syracuse University. In 1926, he joined the faculty of the University of North Dakota and remained there for the rest of his career, as Professor of biology from 1926 to 1965, Head of the Department of Biology from 1926 to 1963, and University Professor from 1965 to 1967. After his retirement in 1967, he was appointed University Emeritus Professor of Biology of the University of North Dakota, as well as a Research Associate of the Desert Research Institute of the University of Nevada.

Wheeler was encouraged to visit the Tropics by his advisor, William Morton Wheeler. Thus he spent the summer of 1924 studying ants at the Barro Colorado Island research station in the Panama Canal. During his long career, Wheeler concentrated his research on the morphology and taxonomy of ant larvae and on the ants of North Dakota and the desert. With his wife, Jeanette Norris Wheeler, he published numerous descriptions and monographs, including *The Ants of North Dakota* in 1963, *The Ants of Deep Canyon* in 1973, and *The Ants of Nevada* in 1986.

The Canal Zone Biological Area (CZBA) was established in 1923 on Barro Colorado Island 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 Oral History Project is part of the Smithsonian Institution Archives. The purpose of the project is to conduct interviews with current and retired members of the Smithsonian staff who have made significant contributions, administrative and scholarly, to the Institution. The project's goal is to supplement the published record and manuscript collections in the Archives, focusing on the history of the Institution and contributions to the increase and diffusion of knowledge made by its scholars.

Wheeler was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of his early visit to Barro Colorado Island shortly after creation of the research station and his friendship with many of the scientists who worked there. Additional information about the Canal Zone Biological Area can be found in the Records Relating to the Canal Zone Biological Area, Office of the Secretary, 1912-1965, and the Canal Zone Biological Area, Records, 1918-1964, also housed in Smithsonian Archives. The Oral History Project also has other audio and videotaped interviews on the history of the research station.

Descriptive Entry

The George Carlos Wheeler Interview was conducted for 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. The interview discusses Wheeler's education at the Rice Institute and Bussey Institution of Harvard University and his career as a professor of biology at the University of North Dakota, but focuses on his visit to the CZBA in 1924, shortly after it was founded. Wheeler reminisces about Barro Colorado Island and its denizens, including Nathan Banks, Graham Bell Fairchild, William Morton Wheeler, and James Zetek, and reads from his journal of his visit to the island. The interview consists of 1.0 hour of tape and 17 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Ants
- Entomologists
- Entomology
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Tropical biology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Banks, Nathan, 1868-1953
- Brues, Charles T. (Charles Thomas), 1879-1955
- Fairchild, G. B. (Graham Bell)
- Hagen, Joel B., interviewer

Harvard University
Huxley, Julian, 1887-1975
Muller, H. J. (Hermann Joseph), 1890-1967
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Barro Colorado Island
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Canal Zone Biological Area
Syracuse University
United States. Canal Zone Biological Area, Barro Colorado Island
University of Nevada. Desert Research Institute
University of North Dakota
Wheeler, George C. (George Carlos), 1897-1991
Wheeler, Jeanette
Wheeler, William Morton, 1865-1937
William M. Rice Institute
Zetek, James, 1886-

Geographic Names:

Panama

Preferred Titles:

The Ants of Deep Canyon (Monograph : 1973)
The Ants of Nevada (Monograph : 1986)
The Ants of North Dakota (Monograph : 1963)

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: June 7, 1989

Interviews

Covers his education, career, and visit to BCI, c. 1918-1989, including: Studies at Rice Institute under Julian Sorell Huxley and Hermann J. Muller; studies at the Bussey Institution of Harvard University with William Morton Wheeler and Charles Thomas Brues; teaching career at the University of North Dakota; research on ants and ant larvae; and a visit to the Barro Colorado Island research station in 1924, including reminiscences of Nathan Banks, Frederick Burgess, Graham Bell Fairchild, Ignacio Molino, Francisco Vitola, and James Zetek.

[Digital Content: Map of the Routes of the United Fruit Company Steam Ship Service, 1924. \[Image no. SIA2012-7659\]](#)

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-17, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Master: 1 audiocassette tape
- Preservation Master: 3 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes, 2 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 audiocassette tape, 2 .mp3 files