



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Tropical Rainforest Exhibit Oral
History Interviews, 1992, 1994

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Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Tropical Rainforest Exhibit Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9565
Date:	1992, 1994
Extent:	20 audiotapes and 1 videotape.
Creator::	
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9565, Tropical Rainforest Exhibit Oral History Interviews

Use Restriction

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Historical Note

Museum exhibits are the result of a complex interplay between researchers, educators, and design specialists. These interviews focus on a case study of the evolution of a tropical rainforest life group at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in the 1960s and 1970s, which first emerged as a *Hall of Botany* in 1960, was redefined as a *Hall of Living Things* in 1968, was eventually built for an exhibit on environmental issues called *It All Depends: How Man Affects and Is Affected by His Natural Environment*, in 1974, and was later moved to the *Hall of South American Anthropology* in the Natural History Building. The interviewees include: Stanwyn G. Shetler, Curator of Phanerogams, NMNH, member of the exhibit committee for the original Hall of Botany; Reginald "Bud" J. Sayre, Preparator, Natural History Laboratory, who participated in an expedition to Kaieteur Falls in British Guiana to collect specimens and make molds and drawings of the site for the rainforest part of the exhibit in NMNH; Sophy Burnham, former Assistant Curator of the Smithsonian Museum Service, who was instrumental in creating a film, *The Leaf Thieves*, which documents the creation of the exhibit; Richard Sumner Cowan, former Director, NMNH, who also participated in the Kaieteur Falls Expedition to collect materials for the original *Hall of Botany*; Joseph Shannon, former Designer, NMNH, who worked on the design of the *Botany Hall* and later the *Hall of Living Things*; Paul N. Perrot, former Assistant Secretary for Museum Programs, who was involved in providing support, recommendations, and facilitating the exhibit work, and who helped establish an Office of Exhibits Central at the Smithsonian; James A. Mahoney, former Chief of the Office of Exhibits Central, who worked on many aspects of the rainforest exhibit; David B. Lellinger, Curator of Ferns, NMNH, a member of the original exhibit committee and participant in several collecting field trips for the exhibit; and

Thomas E. Lovejoy, III, Counselor to the Secretary for Biodiversity and Environmental Affairs, on the role of tropical rainforests as icons for the environmental movement.

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 reminiscences and interviews recorded by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Tropical Rainforest Exhibit Oral History Interviews were compiled to document the exhibit processes of the National Museum of Natural History.

Descriptive Entry

Steven W. Allison, Smithsonian Predoctoral Fellow, from Cornell University, Department of Science and Technology Studies, conducted these interviews as a part of his doctoral research into the relationship between exhibition and research in natural history museums. These interviews cover the relationship between research and exhibition at the NMNH; the changes in meaning of the rainforest as it was reinterpreted for different exhibits; and the impact of trends in public education about science and the role of an icon, such as the rainforest, in discussions of the environment. Interviews of Sayre include both audiotaped and videotaped sessions and include many visuals from the exhibit.

The Tropical Rainforest Exhibit Oral History Interviews consist of 16 interview sessions, totaling approximately 18.5 hours of audiotape recordings, 0.40 hours of videotape recordings, and 313 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Botany
- Conservation of natural resources
- Ecology
- Interviews
- Museum exhibits
- Museum techniques
- Oral history
- Rain forests
- Tropical biology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes

Transcripts
Videotapes

Names:

Allison, Steven W., interviewer
Burnham, Sophy
Cowan, Richard S., 1921-1997
Hall of Botany (NMNH)
Hall of Living Things (NMNH)
Hall of South American Anthropology (NMNH)
It All Depends: How Man Affects and Is Affected by His Natural Environment (Exhibition) (1974:
Washington, D.C.)
Lellinger, David B.
Lovejoy, Thomas E.
Mahoney, James A.
National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
Office of Exhibits Central
Perrot, Paul N.
Sayre, Reginald J.
Shannon, Joe
Shetler, Stanwyn G.
Smithsonian Museum Service

Interviews	Interview of Richard S. Cowan
Interviews	Transcript, pp. 1-22, of audiotape recording, 1 hour.
Interviews	Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1 hour Note: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Original Masters: 1 audiotape cassette• Preservation Masters: 2 7" reel-to-reel tapes; 2 digital .wav files• Reference Copies: 1 audiotape cassette, 2 digital .mp3 files
Interviews	Interview 5: July 13, 1992
Interviews	Interview of David B. Lellinger
Interviews	Transcript, pp. 1-43, of audiotape recording, 2 hours.
Interviews	Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 2 hours Note: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Original Masters: 2 audiotape cassettes• Preservation Masters: 3 7" and 1 7" low torque reel-to-reel tapes; 4 digital .wav files• Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes, 4 digital .mp3 files
Interviews	Interview 6: July 23, 1992
Interviews	Interview of James A. Mahoney
Interviews	Transcript, pp. 1-34, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.
Interviews	Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1.5 hours Note: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Original Masters: 2 audiotape cassettes• Preservation Masters: 2 7" and 1 7" low torque reel-to-reel tapes; 3 digital .wav files• Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes, 3 digital .mp3 files
Interviews	Interview 7: July 28, 1992
Interviews	Interview of James A. Mahoney
Interviews	Transcript, pp. 1-37, of audiotape recording, 2 hours.
Interviews	Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 2 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 audiotape cassettes
 - Preservation Masters: 3 7" and 1 7" low torque reel-to-reel tapes; 4 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes, 4 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 8: July 16, 1992**

Interviews Interview of Paul N. Perrot

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-38, of audiotape recording, 2 hours.

Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 2 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 audiotape cassettes
 - Preservation Masters: 3 7" and 1 7" low torque reel-to-reel tapes; 4 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes, 4 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 9: July 21, 1992**

Interviews Interview of Reginald "Bud" J. Sayre

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-27, of audiotape recording, 1 hour.

Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1 hour

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 audiotape cassette
 - Preservation Masters: 2 7" reel-to-reel tapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiotape cassette, 2 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 10: July 21, 1992**

Interviews Interview of Reginald "Bud" J. Sayre

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-15, of videotape recording, 0.75 hours.

Interviews Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1 hour

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 videotape cassette
 - Preservation Masters: None
 - Reference Copies: 1 videotape cassette

Interviews **Interview 11: August 5, 1992**

- Interviews Interview of Reginald "Bud" J. Sayre
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-64 of audiotape recording, 2 hours.
- Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 2 hours
Note:
 - Original Masters: 2 audiotape cassettes
 - Preservation Masters: 3 7" and 1 7" low torque reel-to-reel tapes; 4 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes, 4 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 12: August 6, 1992**
- Interviews Interview of Joseph Shannon
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-39, of audiotape recording, 1 hour.
- Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1 hour
Note:
 - Original Masters: 1 audiotape cassette
 - Preservation Masters: 2 7" reel-to-reel tapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiotape cassette, 2 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 13: July 14, 1992**
- Interviews Interview of Stanwyn G. Shetler
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-27, of audiotape recording, 1 hour.
- Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1 hour
Note:
 - Original Masters: 1 audiotape cassette
 - Preservation Masters: 2 7" reel-to-reel tapes; 2 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 1 audiotape cassette, 2 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 14: April 26, 1994**
- Interviews Interview of Thomas Lovejoy
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-20, of audiotape recording, 1 hour.
- Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1 hour
Note:
 - Original Masters: 1 audiotape cassette

- Preservation Masters: 2 7" reel-to-reel tapes; 3 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 1 audiotape cassette, 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews **Interview 15: May 5, 1994**

Interviews Interview of Thomas Lovejoy

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-14, of audiotape recording, 0.5 hours.

Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 0.5 hour

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 audiotape cassette
 - Preservation Masters: 1 7" reel-to-reel tapes; 2 digital .wav file
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassette, 1 digital .mp3 file

Interviews **Interview 16: May 13, 1994**

Interviews Interview of Thomas Lovejoy

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-16, of audiotape recording, 0.5 hours.

Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 0.5 hour

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 audiotape cassette
 - Preservation Masters: 1 7" reel-to-reel tapes; 2 digital .wav file
 - Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassette, 1 digital .mp3 file