



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Curtis W. Sabrosky Oral History Interviews, 1988

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Curtis W. Sabrosky Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9583
Date:	1988
Extent:	5 audiotapes (Reference copies).
Creator::	Sabrosky, Curtis W. (Curtis Williams), 1910- , interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9583, Curtis W. Sabrosky Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

Curtis W. Sabrosky (1910-1997), was born on April 3, 1910, in Sturgis, Michigan, and became an Entomologist specializing in Diptera. He received the A.B. in biology from Kalamazoo College in 1931, the M.S. in zoology from Kansas State College (KSC), later Kansas State University, in 1933, and the Sc.D. from Kalamazoo College in 1966. From 1936 to 1944, he taught at Michigan State College (MSC), and served in the Public Health Service during World War II. In 1946, he joined the staff of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), first with the Bureau of Entomology and later with its Systematic Entomology Laboratory (SEL) as a Research Entomologist, and serving as Research Director from 1967 to 1973. From 1980 to 1988, he was a Cooperating Scientist at SEL, as well as a Research Associate of the Department of Entomology, National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). A specialist on issues of taxonomic nomenclature, from 1963 to 1985, he served as a member of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN).

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 student on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Curtis W. Sabrosky was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of his long and distinguished career as Research Entomologist, and because of his memories of work and colleagues in the National Museum of Natural History.

Descriptive Entry

The Sabrosky interviews were conducted by Pamela M. Henson, historian, Smithsonian Institution Archives, in March of 1988. The interviews cover his education; career at the USDA; work with the National Entomological Collection maintained by the NMNH; interests in issues of taxonomic nomenclature, development of International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (the Code), especially his work with the ICZN; work with the Entomological Society of America (ESA); and reminiscences of colleagues, notably J. Chester Bradley, Roland W. Brown, J. F. Gates Clarke, and Carl F. W. Muesebeck. This collection is comprised of three interview sessions, totaling 5.0 hours and 217 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Biology -- Classification
Entomology
Interviews
Museum curators -- United States -- Interviews
Oral history

Types of Materials:

Audiotapes
Transcripts

Names:

Bradley, J. Chester (James Chester), 1884-1975
Brown, Roland W. (Roland Wilbur), 1893-1961
Clarke, J. F. Gates (John Frederick Gates), 1905-1990
Department of Entomology (NMNH)
Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature
Muesebeck, Carl F. W. (Carl Frederick William), 1894-
Sabrosky, Curtis W. (Curtis Williams), 1910-
Systematic Entomology Laboratory (U.S.)
United States. Bureau of Entomology
United States. Department of Agriculture

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: March 15, 1988

Interviews

Discusses his childhood in Sturgis, Michigan; education; early employment at MSC; fieldwork; publications; experiences during the Great Depression; interest in taxonomy; career at USDA; creation and development of the Code, including: Childhood interest in insects; education at KSC and Kalamazoo College; how he was hired by MSC as Instructor in Entomology; reminiscences about professors at Kalamazoo College, Frances Diebold and William H. Prager; the career success of Kalamazoo graduate, Gilbert Otto, subsequent attention paid to Kalamazoo College graduates, and benefit to Sabrosky's career; progression of his career into entomology, in spite of his academic background; experiences working under Reginald Henry Painter (Professor at KSC) and summer fieldwork in Arizona, focusing on flies; fieldwork, while at MSC, on cherry fruit flies in Southwest Michigan; emergence trapping done at his home in Alexandria, Virginia, with gypsy moth in 1980s; attendance of International Congress of Entomology in Berlin in 1938; first visit to NMNH; early practices of Smithsonian, including identification and handling of its entomology collection and catalog; his work on Chloropidae with Painter; reminiscences about Ray Hudson, head of the Department of Economic Entomology at MSC, and first lecture given as instructor; coursework he taught and faculty of MSC Entomology Department; visits to Europe prior to World War II, collections viewed in Europe, and experiences in areas under influence of Adolf Hitler; visits to British Museum of Natural History to use collections and John Smart; collections used and deposit of his own types at Smithsonian; his time in the reserve corps of officers of Public Health Service, stationed in Atlanta, Georgia, and Manning, South Carolina; Carl F. W. Muesebeck at USDA and the process of being hired as Entomologist at the USDA; details of the USDA department, office location, structure, staff members, departmental support, Agricultural library and staffing; effect of budget crisis in USDA department in 1946-1947; working under John L. Keddy, John Graf, and Edward Chapin; changes over the years in materials sent to and processed by department; involvement in Entomological Society of Washington; his residences in Washington, D.C.; Robert Evans Snodgrass and *Anatomy of the Honeybee*; review process for publications in department by the in-house manuscript committee; developing interest in international nomenclature; development of the Code and roles of Norman Rudolf Stoll, Richard Blackwelder, and William I. Follett in its creation; and changes made to the Code at the Paris Congress of Zoology, 1953.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-89, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

Note: • Original Masters: 4 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes

- Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes

Interviews

Interview 2: March 25, 1988

Interviews

Covers USDA and NMNH staff; the formulation and evolution of the first and second Code; growth of the Diptera collections of Smithsonian and USDA; and involvement in the ESA, including: Reminiscences about Roland Wilbur Brown and the book he wrote on paleontology; Serge Mamet, Francis Hemming, and Al Ruffin; the ICZN, the Code and Paris, France, meeting of 1948; reactions of Richard Eliot Blackwelder, J. Chester Bradley, and Sabrosky published in *Science*, to changes in the Code; Zoology Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1953 and resulting publication of *Copenhagen Decisions on Zoological Nomenclature*; Chester Bradley and preparation of the "Bradley draft" of the Code with J. Douglas Hood; demonstration of issues with the Code, citing example of naming species by Brigadier W. H. Evans; discussion of Richard V. Melville as secretary of the ICZN; story of Article 23B on Fifty-year Rule at the Copenhagen Congress; recollections of interactions of Ernst Mayr and Bob Usinger; discussions on the second Code, the individuals on the committee, and similarities of the French and English Code; discussion of and members of the Society of Systematic Zoology including Blackwelder's participation; purchase of Stanley S. W. Bromley collection by USDA; work on role of flies as possible vector for polio; work in Cairo, Egypt, studying fly infestation and effects of treatments, residual sprays, and the possibility of developing resistance, and species *Musca* he found; discussion of Muesebeck's retirement; proposition of and failure to create National Institute of Systematics; changes in location of USDA staff across Washington, D.C., area; discussion of the growth of the Diptera collection over the years, with specific collections named; purchase and shipment of the Nikolai I. Baranov Collection from Pakistan; and reminiscences about Museum Registrar, Helena M. Weiss.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-80, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

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

Interviews

Interview 3: March 28, 1988

Interviews

Discusses USDA and Entomology department at NMNH; reminiscences about colleagues; work with the ESA and other professional organizations; including: Tenure as President of the ESA;

- Note:
- reminiscences of Paul W. Oman and John Frederick Gates Clarke; relationship between USDA and Entomology Department at NMNH in collections, staffing, informal working relationships; work location changes at NMNH, Silver Hill, Maryland, and Beltsville, Maryland; ESA support of NMNH's

Entomology Department and a committee site visit involving Theodore Dru Alison Cockerell; work with ESA committee on international relations; involvement with International Congresses of Entomology, including arrangement of locations, speakers such as T. R. E. Southwood and Thomas Odhiambo; opening of the *Insect Zoo* at NMNH; reminiscences about ESA secretaries; and involvement with the American Association of Zoological Nomenclature.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-36, of audiotape recording, 1.0 hour.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 1.0 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 2 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Reference Copies: 1 cassette audiotape