



Smithsonian Institution Archives

History of Tropical Biology  
Oral History Interviews, 1997

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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>	History of Tropical Biology Oral History Interviews
<b>Identifier:</b>	Record Unit 9606
<b>Date:</b>	1997
<b>Extent:</b>	2 audiotapes (Reference copies).
<b>Creator::</b>	
<b>Language:</b>	English

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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9606, History of Tropical Biology Oral History Interviews

### Access Restriction

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

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## Historical Note

As part of her research for her Smithsonian postdoctoral fellowship project, in 1997 Catherine A. Christen conducted oral history interviews with two orchid specialists who had conducted research in the neotropics. On July 1, 1997, she interviewed Robert L. Dressler (1927- ), curator and co-ordinator for the Orchidaceae Section of the *Flora MesoAmericana* at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Dressler received the B.A. from the University of Southern California in 1951 and the Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1957. He was on the staff of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute from 1963 to 1987, when he was named a research associate. On July 2, 1997, Christen interviewed William Louis Stern (1926- ), professor of botany, University of Florida. Stern received the B.S. from Rutgers University in 1950, the M.S. in 1951 and the Ph.D. in 1954 from the University of Illinois. He was curator and then chair of the Department of Botany, National Museum of Natural History, from 1960 to 1967. In 1967, he was appointed professor at the University of Maryland. From 1978 to 1979, he was program chairman for systematic biology at the National Science Foundation. In 1979, he was named chairman of the Department of Botany at the University of Florida. In 1985 he returned to teaching there as professor of botany. In Florida, he changed his research focus to studies on the vegetative anatomy and systematics of the orchid family.

## 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.

The History of Tropical Biology Oral History Interviews were compiled by Smithsonian fellow Catherine A. Christen as part of her research on the history of tropical biology at the Smithsonian.

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## Descriptive Entry

These interviews of Robert L. Dressler and William Louis Stern, conducted by Catherine A. Christen, cover their involvement with the Association for Tropical Biology and the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute during the 1960s.

The collection consists of two interview sessions, totaling approximately 1.5 hours of recordings and 57 pages of transcript.

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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:

- Botany
- Interviews
- Museum curators -- United States -- Interviews
- Oral history
- Professional associations
- Science -- History
- Tropical biology

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Association for Tropical Biology
- Christen, Catherine A. (Catherine Ann), interviewer
- Dressler, Robert L., 1927-
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
- Stern, William Louis, 1926-

Geographic Names:

Panama

