



Smithsonian Institution Archives

## Roxie C. Laybourne Oral History Interviews, 2001

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Smithsonian Institution Archives  
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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>	Roxie C. Laybourne Oral History Interviews
<b>Identifier:</b>	Record Unit 9610
<b>Date:</b>	2001
<b>Extent:</b>	17 audiotapes (Reference copies).
<b>Creator::</b>	Laybourne, Roxie C., 1910-2003 interviewee
<b>Language:</b>	English

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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9610, Roxie C. Laybourne Oral History Interviews

### Use Restriction

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

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## Historical Note

Roxie Collie Simpson Laybourne (1910-2003), ornithologist, received her B.A. from Meredith College in 1932, and her M.S. in plant ecology from the George Washington University in 1951. She began her museum career as a volunteer at the North Carolina State Museum in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1932, where she learned taxidermy and exhibit techniques. In 1944, Laybourne was appointed a museum aide in the Division of Birds at the United States National Museum. In 1946, she transferred to a permanent position on the payroll of the Bird and Mammal Laboratories, Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of Interior, while continuing to prepare specimens in the Division of Birds at the National Museum. She retired as a Zoologist from the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1974, but continued her career as a Research Associate of the National Museum of Natural History. In the 1960s, Laybourne created the field of forensic ornithology, studying minute fragments of bird feathers in order to identify which birds were ingested into aircraft engines, often causing crashes. The field expanded to cover endangered species and criminal investigations. Laybourne developed analytical techniques that used the barbules and nodes supporting the wings to identify bird fragments.

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

Laybourne was interviewed for the Oral History Collection to document her career as a Smithsonian scientist, especially her role in creating the field of forensic ornithology and training generations of naturalists.

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## Descriptive Entry

These interviews of Laybourne, conducted in 2001 by Pamela M. Henson of Smithsonian Institution Archives and Marcia Hecker-Skeans of the National Museum of Natural History, cover her education, career, and contributions to the field of forensic ornithology. The interviews also include reminiscences of colleagues including John Warren Aldrich and Alexander Wetmore. The collection consists of 14.5 hours of audio recordings and 185 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:

- Forensic ornithology
- Forensic sciences
- Forensic sciences
- Henson, Pamela M. interviewer
- Interviews
- Museum exhibits
- Museums -- Employees
- Museums and women
- Oral history
- Ornithology
- Taxidermy
- Women -- History

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- Aldrich, John W. (John Warren), 1906-1995
- Hecker-Skeans, Marcia interviewer
- Laybourne, Roxie C., 1910-2003
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Department of Zoology
- National Museum of Natural History (U.S.). Division of Birds
- North Carolina. State Museum
- United States National Museum
- Wetmore, Alexander, 1886-1978

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## Container Listing

### Interviews

- Interviews                    **Interview 1: January 13, 2001**
- Interviews                    Covers her youth and early interest in natural history, 1910-1936.
- Interviews                    Transcript, pp. 1-77, of audiotape recording, 2.5 hours.
- Interviews                    Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 2.5 hours  
Note:                            • Original Masters: 5 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes  
    • Preservation Masters: 5 digital .wav files  
    • Reference Copies: 3 cassette audiotapes, 5 digital .mp3 files.
- Interviews                    **Interview 2: January 27, 2001**
- Interviews                    Discusses her family history and education, field work, and early work at the National Museum of Natural History, 1920s-1950s.
- Interviews                    Transcript, pp. 1-70, of audiotape recording, 2.5 hours.
- Interviews                    Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 2.5 hours  
Note:                            • Original Masters: 5 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes  
    • Preservation Masters: 5 digital .wav files  
    • Reference Copies: 3 cassette audiotapes, 5 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews                    **Interview 3: February 10, 2001**
- Interviews                    Covers her early years at the National Museum of Natural History, reminiscences of colleagues, and marriage to Edgar G. Laybourne, 1940s-1960.  
[Digital Content: Edgar G. Laybourne, exhibits specialist with the United States National Museum, prepares a model of a reticulated python - for display in the National Museum of Natural History. He is painting the snake's skin on the cast, which will later be removed. \(Image no. MNH-36818A\)](#)  
[Digital Content: Edgar G. Laybourne, exhibits specialist with the United States National Museum, prepares a model of a reticulated python - for](#)

[display in the National Museum of Natural History. He is removing the plaster cast to reveal the snake model within. \(Image no. MNH-36905\)](#)

- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-40, 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
  - Preservation Masters: 4 digital .wav files
  - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes, 4 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 4: February 24, 2001**
- Interviews Discusses her development of the field of forensic ornithology by establishing methods for identification of bird wing fragments, 1950s-1980s.
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-36, 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
  - Preservation Masters: 4 digital .wav files
  - Reference Copies: 2 cassette audiotapes, 4 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 5: March 3, 2001**
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-43, of audiotape recording, 2.5 hours.
- Interviews Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 2.5 hours  
Note:
- Original Masters: 5 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
  - Preservation Masters: 5 digital .wav files
  - Reference Copies: 3 cassette audiotapes, 5 digital .mp3 files
- Interviews **Interview 6: March 17, 2001**
- Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-18, 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
  - Preservation Masters: 2 digital .wav files

- Reference Copies: 1 cassette audiotapes, 2 digital .mp3 files

Interviews                    **Interview 7: June 23, 2001**

Interviews                    Transcript, pp. 1-34, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews                    Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

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

Interviews                    **Interview 8: July 28, 2001**

Interviews                    Transcript, pp. 1-8, of audiotape recording, 0.5 hour.

Interviews                    Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 0.5 hour

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
  - Preservation Masters: 1 digital .wav files
  - Reference Copies: 1 cassette audiotapes, 1 digital .mp3 files