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Oral history interviews with Roxie Collie Simpson Laybourne

Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title: Oral history interviews with Roxie Collie Simpson Laybourne
Identifier: Record Unit 9610
Date: 2001
Extent: 17 audiotapes (reference copies).
Creator: Laybourne, Roxie C., 1910-2003 interviewee
Language: English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation
Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9610, Oral history interviews with Roxie Collie Simpson Laybourne

Use Restriction
Restricted. Contact reference staff for details.

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.

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 Heacker-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, and occupies 1.0 linear meters of shelf space. There are two generations of tape for each session: original tapes and reference tapes. In total, this collection is comprised of 29 original 7" reel-to-reel tapes, 29 perservation digital .wav files, 17 reference copy audiotape cassettes, and 29 reference digital .mp3 files. Box 1 contains transcripts of the interviews and Box 2 contains transcripts of the interviews and cassette copies of the original reel to reel recordings, the originals of which are in security storage.

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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
- Museum exhibits
- Museums -- Employees
- Museums and women
- Ornithology
- Taxidermy
- Women -- History

**Types of Materials:**
- Audiotapes
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Transcripts

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