



Smithsonian Institution Archives

History of Smithsonian Folklife
Oral History Interview, 2005-2006

Finding aid prepared by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	History of Smithsonian Folklife Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

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Historical Note

Folklife studies are carried on in several organizational units of the Smithsonian Institution: the Department of Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), the Festival of American Folklife (FAF), and the National Museum of American History (NMAH), and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Dr. Walker began his project on the study and exhibition of folklife at the Smithsonian, focusing on the Folklife Festival and then expanded his interview scope to include other Smithsonian cultural scholars and solicit their views on the FAF and cultural studies, exhibition and public programming at the Smithsonian.

JoAllyn Archambault (1942-), Director of the American Indian Program at the National Museum of Natural History, is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. She earned her doctorate at the University of California in Berkeley in 1984. She was a faculty member of the Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1983-86), and the Director of Ethnic Studies, California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, California (1978-83). As curator of Anthropology at the NMNH since 1986, she organized various exhibitions, including *Plains Indian Arts: Change and Continuity, 100 Years of Plains Indian Painting, Indian Baskets and Their Makers*, and *Seminole Interpretations*.

Spencer Crew (1949-) received the A.B. in history from Brown University in 1972 and holds a master's degree (1973) and a doctorate from Rutgers University (1979). He was assistant professor of African-American and American History at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, 1978-1981; historian, 1981-1987, curator 1987-1989, Department of Social and Cultural History, chair, 1989-1991, deputy director, 1991-1992, acting director, 1992-1994, director, 1994-2001 of NMAH. He then served as historical consultant to the National Civil Rights Museum, in Memphis, Tennessee, from 1987-1991; consultant to the Civil Rights Institute, in Birmingham, Alabama, 1991-1994; and executive director and chief executive officer for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center from 2001-2008; and was appointed Clarence Robinson Professor at George Mason University in 2008. At the Smithsonian, Crew curated several exhibitions, most notably *Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration, 1915-1940*

William W. Fitzhugh (1943-), an anthropologist, specialized in circumpolar archaeology, ethnology and environmental studies. He received his B.A. from Dartmouth College in 1964. After two years in the U.S. Navy, he attended Harvard University where he received his PhD in anthropology in 1970. He joined the Anthropology Department at NMNH in 1970. As director of the Arctic Studies Center and Curator in the Department of Anthropology, NMNH, he has spent more than thirty years studying and publishing on arctic peoples and cultures in northern Canada, Alaska, Siberia and Scandinavia. His archaeological and environmental research has focused upon the prehistory and paleoecology of northeastern North America, and broader aspects of his research feature the evolution of northern maritime adaptations, circumpolar culture contacts, cross-cultural studies and acculturation processes in the North, especially concerning Native-European contacts. He curated four international exhibitions, *Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimos*; *Crossroads of Continents: Native Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*; *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*; and *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*.

Rayna D. Green (1942-) curator and Director of the American Indian Program at the NMAH, received the B.A. in 1963 and M.A. in 1966 from Southern Methodist University, served in the Peace Corps as a history instructor and library director for the Teacher Training School in Harar, Ethiopia, and the Ph. D. in Folklore and American Studies from Indiana University in 1973. A member of the Cherokee tribe, she administered National Native American Science Resource Center, Dartmouth College, before joining the staff of the Smithsonian in 1984. She has written extensively of Native American culture and foodways. Her research and exhibit projects include a documentary narrative with Julia Child, *In the Kitchen with Julia*, following on her co-curation of the long-running popular exhibition *Bon App tit: Julia Child's Kitchen at the Smithsonian*.

Thomas W. Kavanagh (1949-), an anthropologist, received the B.A. from the University of New Mexico in 1971, the M.A. from The George Washington University in 1980, and the Ph.D. from University of New Mexico in 1986. He began his career at Indiana University and then joined the staff of the Smithsonian Institution. A scholar of Comanche Indians of Oklahoma, he has published extensively on the Comanches and was appointed Consulting Anthropologist for the Comanche Nation. In the 2000s, he served as director of the Seton Hall University Museum. His publications include *Comanche Ethnography* (2008), *Comanche Political History* (1996), *North American Indian Portraits: Photographs from the Wanamaker Expeditions* (1996), and "Comanche" in the *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 13 (Plains), Smithsonian Institution (2001).

Roger G. Kennedy (1926-2011) graduated from Yale University in 1949 and the University of Minnesota Law School in 1952, and pursued a diverse career in banking, television production, historical writing, foundation management, and museum administration. He was appointed Director of the National Museum of History and Technology (NMHT) in 1979, renamed it the National Museum of American History, and left in 1992 to become Director of the National Park Service. He focused on social and cultural history, and oversaw controversial exhibits including *A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans & the American Constitution* and *Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration, 1915-1940*.

Keith E. Melder (1932-) studied American history at Williams College (B.A. 1954) and Yale University (M.A. 1957; PhD, 1964). He was an intern at the NMHT in 1958 and returned in 1961 as Curator of Political History until his retirement in 1996. His research focused on America political movements, especially the Women's Movement and the Civil Rights era. Melder was also interviewed for two other Smithsonian Institution Archives projects, Record Unit 9603, African American Exhibits at the Smithsonian, and Record Unit 9620, the American Association of Museums Centennial Honorees Oral History Project, as well as for the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project of the Capitol Hill Historical Society.

Clydia Dotson Nahwoosky (1933-2009), a Cherokee, and her husband Reaves, a Comanche Nation member, worked most of their lives to preserve American Indian tribal culture. Originally from Oklahoma, they spent 20 years in Washington, D.C., as cultural activists. In the 1970s, Clydia was director of the Indian Awareness Program for the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife. In 1986 both Nahwooskys entered the seminary, and the Rev. Clydia Nahwoosky was an active pastor and a member of the Board of National Ministries and the American Baptist Churches USA General Board.

Ethel Raim (1936-), Artistic Director of New York's Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CTMD), researched ethnic music and worked closely with community-based traditional for almost five decades. Raim also had a distinguished career as a performer, recording artist, music editor, and singing teacher. In 1963 she co-founded and was musical director of the *Pennywhistlers*, who were among the first to bring traditional Balkan and Russian Jewish singing traditions to the folk music world. Raim served as music editor of *Sing Out!* magazine from 1965 to 1975. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, she developed ethnic programs for the Newport Folklife Festival and the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife. In 1975 Raim joined Martin Koenig as Co-Director of the Balkan Folk Arts Center, which developed into the CTMD in New York City.

Joanna Cohan Scherer (1942-) received the B.A. from Syracuse University in 1963 and the M.A. from Hunter College, City University of New York in 1968. A specialist in visual anthropology especially of Native Americans, historical photography, women and photography, North American Indian photography, and cultural anthropology. She joined the staff of the Anthropology Archives of the National Museum of Natural History in 1966 and in 1975 advanced to served as anthropologist and illustrations editor for the Smithsonian's multivolume series *Handbook of North American Indians*.

Robert D. Sullivan (1949-) was educated at St. John Fisher College with a B.S. in anthropology in 1970, the M.A. in education management from the University of Rochester in 1979, and pursued the Ph.D. in human studies (ABD) at The George Washington University until 2006. He served as Chief of Museum Education at Rochester Museum and Science Center from 1970 to 1980, Director at the New York State Museum from 1980 to 1990, and Associate Director for exhibitions at National Museum of Natural History from 1990 to 2007.

Peter Corbett Welsh (1926-2010) was a curator and historian at the Museum of History and Technology, now known as the National Museum of American History. He was born on August 28, 1926, in Washington, D.C. He received his B.A. from Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio, in 1950 and completed a post-graduate year of study at the University of Virginia. He received his M.A. from the University of Delaware where he was the first recipient of the Hagley Fellowship in 1956. Welsh served in the United States Army, 1951-1954. Prior to coming to the Smithsonian Institution, he was Research Assistant and Fellowship Coordinator at the Eleutherian-Mills Hagley Foundation, 1956-1959. Welsh was Associate Curator in the Smithsonian's Department of Civil History, 1959-1969, and served as editor of the Smithsonian's Journal of History in 1968. As Curator he played a major role in the development of the *Growth of the United States* hall for the opening of the Museum of History and Technology which depicted American civilization from the time of discovery through the mid-twentieth century. Welsh was Assistant Director General of Museums, 1969-1970, and assisted with the implementation of the National Museum Act through seminars on improving exhibit effectiveness. He also served as Director of the Office of Museum Programs, 1970-1971. After Welsh's tenure at the Smithsonian, he became the Director of both the New York State Historical Association and the Cooperstown Graduate Program, 1971-1974. He then served as Director of Special Projects at the New York State Museum in Albany, 1975-1976; Director of the Bureau of Museums for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; President of The Welsh Group, 1984-1986; and Curator (1986-1988) and Senior Historian (1988-1989) of the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, New York. In 1989, he became a full-time, independent museum consultant and lecturer, and was a visiting professor of the State University of New York (SUNY) in 1992. Welsh was a contributor to numerous scholarly journals. He authored *Tanning in the United States to 1850* (1964), *American Folk Art: The Art of the People* (1967), *Track and Road: The American Trotting Horse, 1820-1900* (1968), *The Art of the Enterprise: A Pennsylvania Tradition* (1983), and *Jacks, Jobbers and Kings: Logging the Adirondacks* (1994).

Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA) 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.

Smithsonian predoctoral fellow, William S. Walker, of Brandeis University, conducted a series of oral history interviews on the history of folklife presentation at the Smithsonian, as part of his dissertation research.

Descriptive Entry

The History of Folklife at the Smithsonian Oral History Interviews consist of 13.2 hours of analog and digital audio interviews, on 4 audiocassette tapes, 23 digital .wma and .mp3 audio files, and 369 pages of transcript. Each interview recording has two generations either an original and reference audiocassette or original digital audio files in Windows media audio or .mp3 format and .mp3 files for reference. The original analog cassettes and digital audio files are preserved in security storage with audiocassettes and .mp3 files available for reference.

Restrictions: Some of the interview sessions do not have deed of gift forms and permission must be secured from the interviewee or their heirs or assigns to use the interviews.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Exhibitions
- Folklife studies
- Museum curators

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Sound recordings -- Compact disks

Names:

- A Nation of Nations (Exhibition) (1976: Washington, D.C.)
- Growth of the United States (Exhibition)
- Nahwoosky, Clydia
- Nahwoosky, Clydia, interviewee

National Museum of American History (U.S.)
National Museum of History and Technology
Smithsonian Folklife Festival
United States National Museum. Exhibits Modernization Program
Walker, William S., interviewer
Welsh, Peter C.

Container Listing

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Transcripts of Interviews

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Box 1 of 2	Interview 3: 26 August 2006
Box 1 of 2	Interview 4: 11 March 2008
Box 1 of 2	Interview 5: 3 June 2009
Box 1 of 2	Interview 6: 22 June 2009
Box 1 of 2	Interview 7: 15 July 2009
Box 1 of 2	Interview 8: 18 August 2009
Box 1 of 2	Interview 9: 7 September 2009
Box 1 of 2	Interview 10: 11 September 2009
Box 1 of 2	Interview 11: 3 November 2009
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Box 2

Audio Recordings of Interviews

Box 2 of 2	Interview 1: 2 August 2005
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