



Smithsonian Institution Archives

American Association of Museums
Centennial Oral History Interviews, 2006

Finding aid prepared by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
Contact us at osiaref@si.edu

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Introduction.....	1
Descriptive Entry.....	1
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	4

Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	American Association of Museums Centennial Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9620
Date:	2006
Extent:	11 compact discs (Reference copies).
Creator::	
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9620, American Association of Museums Centennial Oral History Interviews

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.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the American Association of Museums (AAM) and the 30th anniversary of the Museum Studies Department, The George Washington University, oral history interviews were videotaped with eleven of the AAM's Centennial Honor Roll honorees as a part of a special Museum Studies graduate seminar taught by Smithsonian Institution Archives historian, Pamela M. Henson. Interviews were recorded in digital video and deposited in the Smithsonian Institution Archives Oral History Collection.

Descriptive Entry

The AAM Centennial Honorees that were interviewed were Nina M. Archabal, Director of the Minnesota Historical Society; Rebecca A. Buck, Chief Registrar, The Newark Museum; Lonnie G. Bunch, Director, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution; Robert R. Macdonald, former Director, Museum of the City of New York; Marie C. Malaro, former Smithsonian Institution General Counsel and former Director, Museum Studies Department, The George Washington University; Kathleen

McLean, Principal, Independent Exhibitions; Keith E. Melder, former Curator, National Museum of American History; Harold K. Skramstad, former Director, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village; Kathy Dwyer Southern, Director, National Children's Museum; James M. Vaughn, Vice President, Stewardship of Historic Sites, National Trust for Historic Preservation; and W. Richard West, Director, National Museum of the American Indian. The interviews document their careers and reflections on the museum profession.

Graduate students Melanie M. Blanchard, Lauren A. Boegen, Reagan M. Furrow, Natascha L. Guluk, Heather T. Hawkins, Arthur Kim, Anthony Sankston Wallace, Elizabeth A. Pierson, Erica I. Nuckles, and Kimberly I. Robinson, from the GWU Museum Studies Program and the course instructor, SIA Historian Pamela M. Henson, conducted the interviews.

These interviews discuss their careers as outstanding museum professionals.

The AAM Centennial Interviews consist of 13.0 hours of digital video interviews and 379 pages of transcript. The original digital video files are preserved in security storage with Windows Media Video files available for reference.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Anniversaries
- Historic preservation
- Interviews
- Museum curators
- Museum directors
- Museum exhibits
- Museum registrars
- Museums -- Administration
- Museums -- Employees
- Oral history

Types of Materials:

- Compact discs
- Electronic images
- Electronic records
- Transcripts
- Video recordings

Names:

- American Association of Museums
- Archabal, Nina Marchetti, 1940-
- Blanchard, Melanie, interviewer
- Boegen, Lauren A., interviewer
- Buck, Rebecca A., 1946-
- Bunch, Lonnie G.
- Furrow, Reagan M., interviewer
- George Washington University. Museum Studies Program
- Guluk, Natascha, interviewer

Hawkins, Heather, interviewer
Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village
Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
Independent Exhibitions
Kim, Arthur B., interviewer
Macdonald, Robert R.
Malaro, Marie C.
McLean, Kathleen
Melder, Keith E.
Minnesota Historical Society
Museum of the City of New York
National Children's Museum
National Museum of African American History and Culture
National Museum of American History (U.S.)
National Museum of History and Technology
National Museum of the American Indian (U.S.)
National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States
Newark Museum
Nuckles, Erica, interviewer
Pierson, Elizabeth Annie, interviewer
Robinson, Kimberly, interviewer
Skramstad, Harold K.
Smithsonian Institution. Office of General Counsel
Southern, Kathy Dwyer
Vaughn, James M.
Wallace, Anthony S., interviewer
West, W. Richard

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: April 28, 2006

Interviews

Interview of Nina M. Archabal (1940-) by Heather T. Hawkins at the AAM 2006 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, discusses her childhood, education, and career. During her childhood, Dr. Archabal was connected with the arts in her community in Massachusetts. Upon relocating to Minnesota and beginning her own family, she found her roots at the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society. Her early interest in music history manifested itself in her doctoral dissertation on Carl Ruggles. The traveling exhibition based on this research launched her into the museum field. Her experiences at MHS, while varied and diverse, all rested on the importance of collaboration, mutual respect, inter-reliance, perseverance, and good business. During the interview, the design and creation of the History Center Museum in St. Paul is discussed at length. The project is the culmination of several years of planning, revising, and building. The construction of the Mill City Museum is also discussed. The opportunity presented itself in 1992 when the old Washburn A Mill caught fire. Dr. Archabal worked with a dedicated team to create the museum that invigorated the presence of the Minnesota Historical Society in Minneapolis. During her closing remarks, Dr. Archabal discusses what she believes are important things for young professionals in the field to know and understand, c. 1950s to 2006.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-42, of digital video recording, 1:09 hours.

Interviews

Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1:09 hours

Note:

- Original Master: 1 digital video file
- Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews

Interview 2: April 28, 2006

Interviews

Interview of Rebecca A. Buck (1946-) by Natascha L. Guluk at the AAM 2006 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, covers many topics ranging from where Buck was born to her current job as Chief Registrar at the Newark Museum in New Jersey. She discusses her interests in collections care and briefly discusses her publications, including an upcoming book. Buck is also an adjunct professor at Seton Hall University. She discusses what classes she teaches, what she recommends for interns, and give a little advice to incoming museum professionals, c. 1946-2006.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-25, of digital video recording, 0:39 hours.

Interviews

Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 0:39 hours

- Note:
- Original Master: 1 digital video file
 - Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews

Interview 3: April 24, 2006

Interviews

Interview of Lonnie G. Bunch (1952-) by by Kimberly I. Robinson at the offices of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African American History and Culture, discussed his early life and influences; his major accomplishments starting with his first position at the Smithsonian Institution at the National Air and Space Museum; his work as founding curator at the California African-American Museum; his defining moments as Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs at the National Museum of American History which include his work on the *Smithsonian's America* exhibition in Japan and his work in curating *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden*; as well as his selection as the first person of color to be President of the Chicago History Museum. He also discussed his work and friendship with former director of the National Museum of American History, Spencer Crew and his aspirations for the newly established National Museum of African American History and Culture. He gave his observations on diversity in the museum field, c. 1950s-2006.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-28, of digital video recording, 0:50 hours.

Interviews

Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 0:50 hours

- Note:
- Original Master: 1 digital video file
 - Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews

Interview 4: April 29, 2006

Interviews

Interview of Robert R. MacDonald (1942-) by Anthony S. Wallace at the AAM 2006 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, provides an outlined chronology of his life and work in museums. MacDonald begins after he graduates from college and speaks about how he came into each institution he worked at and what he did while he was there. Mr. Macdonald also talks extensively on his belief in an ethical code for museums and why they should follow such a code. The process of creating the "Code of Ethics" is also spoken of along with what he believes to be the most important information for those just coming into the professional field of museum work, c. 1940s-2006.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-38, of digital video recording, 1:13 hours.

Interviews

Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1:13 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 digital video file
 - Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews

Interview 5: May 12, 2006

Interviews

Interview of Marie C. Malaro (1933-) by Pamela M. Henson at her home in Centerville, Maryland, discusses her childhood in North Haven, Connecticut; education in parochial schools; career as a lawyer for the Connecticut State Legislature and Office of General Counsel, Smithsonian Institution; and as director of the Museum Studies Department, The George Washington University. Malaro also discussed her publications on museum ethics and legal issues and changes in the non-profit sector during her career, c. 1930s-2006.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-49, of digital video recording, 1:34 hours.

Interviews

Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1:34 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 digital video file
 - Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews

Interview 6: April 28, 2006

Interviews

Interview of Kathleen McLean (1948-) by Lauren A. Bogen at the AAM 2006 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, details McLean's educational background and her experience at Friends World College. McLean discusses her early experiences at the Oakland Museum in Oakland, California and her career shift into her business, Independent Exhibitions. The interview discusses why McLean accepted a position at the Brooklyn Children's Museum. She explains why she is a radical in the museum field and details why she feels the museum community is heading down a conservative path. McLean discusses her work on the *Darkened Waters* exhibition. The interview touches on visitor services and the role of evaluation in exhibition development. Concepts from McLean's book, *Planning for People in Museum Exhibition* are discussed as well as McLean's personal favorite museums. Overall, she encourages collaboration between generations, innovation, imagination, and risk-taking but cautions against becoming too democratic in exhibitions and complacency in the current conservative trend in museums, c. 1950s-2006.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-33, of digital video recording, 0:55 hours.

Interviews

Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 0:55 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 digital video file
 - Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews

Interview 7: April 18, 2006

Interviews

Interview of Keith E. Melder (1932-) by Erica I. Nuckles on The George Washington University campus discusses his childhood including early

museum influences and his academic career in which he studied American history at Williams College and Yale University. He also shared memories of his early years at the Smithsonian Institution and the effect the political climate of the 1960s had on his work at the new Museum of History and Technology, now the National Museum of American History, c. 1930s-2006.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-22, of digital video recording, 1:08 hours.

Interviews Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1:08 hours
Note:

- Original Masters: 1 digital video file
- Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews **Interview 8: April 13, 2006**

Interviews Interview of Harold K. Skramstad (1941-) by Arthur B. Kim, on The George Washington University campus covers his career a museum consultant, discusses his youth in relation to his work in museums; education at George Washington University and the Smithsonian; careers at the National Museum of History and Technology, Chicago Historical Society, and Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village; academic writings for *Daedalus* and *A Handbook for Museum Trustees*; and perspectives on the past and future of museums, c. 1940s-2006.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-38, of digital video recording, 1:22 hours.

Interviews Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1:22 hours
Note:

- Original Masters: 1 digital video files
- Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews **Interview 9: April 29, 2006**

Interviews Interview of Kathleen Dwyer Southern (1946-) by Elizabeth A. Pierson at the AAM 2006 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, begins with a discussion of her background in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and quickly turns to her college life at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Ms. Southern reminisced about how she chose her career path and important influences in her life. She reflected back on some wonderful experiences she had throughout her career, discussing the role of nonprofit organizations in the arts, which have played a significant role in her career from early on through the present. She then discussed her shift to the role of director at two historic houses. It was an interesting turning point in her career and this became an interesting portion of the interview as she reflected on what the positions required of her and what she was willing to give at that time in her life, both professionally and personally. The remainder of the interview focused on her role as President and CEO of Port Discovery Children's Museum and her current position as President and CEO of the National Children's Museum (NCM) in Washington, D.C. She discussed the creation and vision for the

NCM and plans for it to reach beyond national boundaries to children and families throughout the world, c. 1950s-2006.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-53, of digital video recording, 1:35 hours.

Interviews Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1:35 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 digital video files
 - Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews **Interview 10: April 28, 2006**

Interviews Interview of James M. Vaughn (1943-) by Reagan M. Furrow at the AAM 2006 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, Vaughn is Vice President, Stewardship of Historic Sites for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He discussed his youth and education; as well as his career within the museum field while he worked at the Strawberry Banke Museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire; the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware; the San Diego Historical Society in San Diego, California; The Hermitage in Hermitage, Tennessee; and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. In addition, he discussed his professional associations with both the American Association of Museums and the American Association for State and Local History. Finally, he discussed the role of the historic house museum in the 21st century and offered suggestions to students and persons interested in beginning a career in the museum field, c. 1950s-2006.

Interviews Transcript, pp. 1-25, of digital video recording, 0:48 hours.

Interviews Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 0:48 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 1 digital video files
 - Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file

Interviews **Interview 11: April 25, 2006**

Interviews Interview of W. Richard West (1943-) by Melanie M. Blanchard at his office at the NMAI covers where he was born and grew up, his family and cultural background, and the area in which he was raised. West discusses his experience as a member of the Cheyenne culture; and recounts stories of how he and his brother were influenced by their parents, relatives, and also the campus community at Bacone College. He recalls his father's art and art career, especially how the senior Mr. West's work was exhibited, how he used museum and gallery visits as educational experiences for Mr. West and his brother, and also how the senior Mr. West viewed the concept of American Indian art in relation to traditional art. Mr. West discusses the three pieces of his father's artwork which hang in his office at NMAI. He reminisces about a visit that he and his brother made with their father to New York City in 1956 to film a movie called *Off to Adventure*. On this trip,

the senior Mr. West took his sons to view the collection of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. Mr. West next focuses on his educational and professional background, including his degrees, both in American history, at the University of Redlands in California and Harvard University. Mr. West then pursued a law career, graduating from Stanford University School of Law and working at the Washington, D.C., law firm of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver, and Jacobson. His move to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1988 is briefly discussed. Mr. West's career with the National Museum of the American Indian began in 1990 with his appointment as the founding director. He also discusses the first issues he dealt with as a new director of a museum of such a unique character as the NMAI, including some of his mentors, problems encountered in the creation of NMAI, and tasks that the Museum had to take on in order to create the current museum. The Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA) and the National Museum of the American Indian Act (1989) are touched upon with a story concerning a speech given to an American Association of Museums session concerning repatriation. He then discusses exhibition issues with the NMAI collection, both at the George Gustav Heye Center in New York and the NMAI on the National Mall. The interview closes with Mr. West presenting his view of the future of the NMAI and also the future for Mr. West himself, including issues of cultural exhibitions, the relationship of American Indians to the collections, and the role of the founding director of such an institution, c. 1940s-2006.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-26, of digital video recording, 1:25 hours.

Interviews

Video Recordings of Interviews: Total recording time: 1:25 hours

Note:

- Original Masters: 1 digital video file
- Reference Copies: 1 digital Windows Media Video file