



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute  
Oral History Interviews, 2010, 2013

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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>
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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9624, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Oral History Interviews

### Access Restriction

The de Alba and Rubinoff interviews are restricted; permission must be secured from the interviewees. The Lombardo recording is restricted; permission must be secured from the interviewee. Contact [SIHistory@si.edu](mailto:SIHistory@si.edu) to request permission.

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## Historical Note

Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute interviewees included Annette Aiello, entomologist; Mercedes Arroyo, administrator; Georgina A. de Alba, educator; Richard Cooke, anthropologist; Olga F. Linares, anthropologist; Elena Lombardo, assistant director; Gloria Maggiori, administrator; and Roberta W. Rubinoff, researcher.

Annette Aiello (1941- ) staff scientist and curator of STRI's insect collections, focused her research on life histories, behavior, and evolution of tropical insects, especially moths and butterflies (Lepidoptera). She received the B.A. in Biology from Brooklyn College in 1972, the M.A. and Ph.D. in Biology from Harvard University in 1975 and 1978, with a thesis on "A Reexamination of *Portlandia* (Rubiaceae) and Associated Taxa." She was a STRI Research Associate from 1978 Research Associate, through 1992 through 1992, when she was appointed Biologist.

Mercedes Arroyo (1944- ) joined STRI in 1965 as a secretary after receiving a bachelor's degree in commerce and studying at the Canal Zone College. She also worked in technical accounting and was named Head of the Purchasing Department. Because of her extensive experience and knowledge, she continued for six years as a consultant to the Procurement Office, devoting all her time to customs and transport methods. She returned to university to study Public Administration Customs while serving as

Head of Department of Combres. For more than 10 years she organized several extracurricular events for STRI staff for special celebrations. She retired in 2005 after forty years at STRI.

Georgina A. de Alba (1951- ) was born in Cuba and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1959. She completed her undergraduate work at Georgetown University, her masters at Tulane University, and taught high school Spanish. In 1975 she moved to Panama with her husband who is Panamanian. Soon after she started working at STRI where she worked for nearly 30 years. She managed the fellowship and internship programs and was responsible for significantly increasing the number of applicants from Panama and other Latin American countries. With the return of democracy to Panama in 1990, she became involved in opening the Institute to the community at large, including a marine public education program, and she gave numerous talks and briefings about STRI's mission to public audiences. In the 2000s she focused on management and policy decisions that were strategically important for the future success of STRI.

Richard Cooke (1946- ), born in Guildford, Surrey, England, studied modern languages and archaeology at the University of Bristol. He obtained his Ph.D. at the London Institute of Archaeology in 1972 with a thesis on the archaeology of Cochl province, Panama. Cooke returned to Panama in 1973 and in 1974 was awarded a STRI post-doctoral fellowship under Dr. Olga Linares. Until 1983, when he joined the (STRI) staff, he worked as field assistant to archaeologist Junius Bird (American Museum of Natural History), as archaeologist on various Panamanian government projects and as archaeology professor at the National and Catholic universities. During the last ten years he directed excavations at a large pre-Columbian settlement on the central Pacific coast of Panama (Cerro Juan Diaz) in conjunction with Panama's Institute of Culture. In 2002 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for analyzing the cultural and biological materials obtained on this project. Cooke's major research interests focused on the history of fishing in tropical waters; the archaeology and palaeoecology of the Central American land bridge; and archaeozoology.

Olga Francesca Linares (1936- ) was born in Panama and received the B.A. in Anthropology from Vassar College in 1958 and the Ph.D. in Anthropology from Harvard University in 1964. She was an instructor of anthropology at Harvard University in 1964 and a lecturer of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania from 1966 to 1971. She was a STRI researcher from 1973 to 1978 and her work focused on a long-term study of the causes and consequences of major changes in the diverse rice-growing economies of the Jola, a rural population of farmers living in the Lower Casamance region of southern Senegal, West Africa. She also studied the multiple functions that kitchen or home gardens play in the household economy of rural and urban peoples. Linares also was a visiting associate professor at the University of Texas, Austin in 1974 and a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study at Stanford University in California, from 1979-1980 and as a visiting professor in 1982. Later she was a fellow at St. John's overseas at Cambridge University in England from 1986-1987. Linares retired from STRI in 2008 as senior research scientist and was appointed scientist emerita.

Elena Guardia Lombardo (1946- ) grew up in Panama and then attended Sacred Heart College in Belmont, North Carolina, and Strayer Business School in Washington, D.C. She came to STRI in 1969, where she played various key administrative roles, with the objective of advancing and facilitating research and STRI's mission. She received the Smithsonian's "Robert Brooks Award" in 1991 in recognition of Excellence in Administration and since 1999 was a member of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and Executive Education alumni. Her duties included leading negotiations with the Panamanian government before and after transition of the Panama Canal, participating in national and international meetings and events on behalf of STRI, and promoting institutional initiatives throughout Latin America. She represented STRI on the Board of Directors of Fundacion NATURA, and at the Special Zone Management Committee for the recently declared Coiba Island National Park. She was a Board member of the Metropolitan Natural Park until 2006. Elena represented STRI on the Board of Directors of the Wetlands Regional Office, an IUCN Ramsar Convention program, headquartered at the City of Knowledge and was a founding member of the local NGO CIAM, an advocacy and privately funded group that supports activities and carries on research for determining legal actions directed towards

accountability of official government decision makers actions, as they relate to their supporting national policies towards conservation of the biodiversity and the environment.

Gloria Maggiori (1941- ) grew up in Colon, Panama, and attended Balboa High School in Panama City. After graduation, she married and started a family. However, in 1961, Adela Gomez, STRI administrative assistant and family friend, asked Maggiori to fill in for a staff member on vacation. She did this regularly for several years until she joined the staff in 1971 as transportation clerk. She advanced to Manager of Visitor Services and handled all STRI travel and visitor services for the many visiting scientists until her retirement in 2006.

Roberta Wolff Rubinoff (1939- ) received the B.A. in biology from Queens College in 1959 and the M.S. in environmental studies from Duke University. In 1962, she joined her future husband, Ira Rubinoff, to Panama where he was conducting his dissertation research on the fishes of Panama. In 1965 they returned to STRI in Panama where they were both appointed biologists. In 1979, she took a sabbatical leave and left Panama. In 1980, she was appointed Assistant Director and in 1986 she advanced to Director, Office of Fellowships and Grants at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., until her retirement in 2001.

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## 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.

As part of the celebration of the centennial of the Smithsonian's research in Panama, leading to the foundation of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), oral history interviews were conducted in 2010 and 2013 with STRI staff members from an array of professions and subject areas, by SIA Institutional History Division historian, Pamela M. Henson. Interviewees focused on women employees, administrative personnel, some of whom had arrived in the early 1960s. She later recorded additional interviews with STRI staff in Washington, D.C. Interviews were recorded in digital audio, and deposited in the Smithsonian Institution Archives Oral History Collection.

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## Descriptive Entry

These interviews discuss their careers at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, going back to the 1960s; expansion beyond Barro Colorado Island and downtown Panama City; research careers; changes in management practices as the Institute grew; relations between STRI, Panama, and the United States; effects of the new Panama Canal Treaty and changes in government, especially Manuel Noreiga; on STRI and its staff.

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Centennial Interviews consist of 16 hours of interviews and 428 pages of transcript.

## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Anthropology
- Entomology
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Tropical biology

Types of Materials:

- Compact discs
- Electronic records
- Transcripts

Names:

- Aiello, Annette
- Alba, Georgina A. de
- Arroyo, Mercedes
- Cooke, Richard G. (Richard George)
- Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
- Linares, Olga F.
- Lombardo, Elena
- Maggiori, Gloria
- Rubinoff, Roberta W.
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute

Geographic Names:

- Barro Colorado Island (Panama)

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## Container Listing

Oversize

Oversize                    **Interview 1: April 12, 2010**

Oversize                    Interview of Annette Aiello, entomologist, discussed her family and childhood in Brooklyn, New York; how interest in photography led to interest in natural history; college and graduate school with botany dissertation; career as a scientist; move to Panama with Dr. Robert Silbergleid and his subsequent death; shifting interests to entomology; reminiscences of colleagues including Richard A. Howard, Daniel H. Janzen, Egbert G. and Elizabeth M. H. Leigh, and Ricardo Cortez; ad her role in creating a collections management program at STRI, 1940s-2010.

Oversize                    Transcript, pp. 1-76, of digital audio recording, 01:43:38 hours.

Oversize                    Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 01:43:38 hours

- Note:
- Original Master: 1 digital audio .wav file
  - Reference Copy: 1 digital audio .mp3 file.

Oversize                    **Interview 2: April 12, 2010**

Oversize                    Interview of Olga F. Linares covered her childhood in Chiriqui Province, Panama; education at Oak Grove School in Maine; undergraduate degree from Vassar College; and graduate school at Harvard University with her Ph.D. work focused on archeology and social anthropology. Traces her early field work in West Africa; teaching at University of Pennsylvanis for seven years; return to Panama on NSF grant and marriage to STRI director Martin H. Moynihan; their home in Casco Antiguo; reminiscences of Helen F. Codere, Gordon R. Willey, Evon Z. Vogt, Betty Meggers, Clifford Evans, Jr., Stanley and Patricia Rand, and STRI administrator Adela Gomez; She closes with a discussion of the way STRI has expanded beyond Barro Colorado Island, c. 1930s to 2010.

Oversize                    Transcript, pp. 1-55, of digital audio recording, 01:19:26 hours.

Oversize                    Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 01:19:26 hours

- Note:
- Original Master 1 digital audio .wav file
  - Reference Copy: 1 digital audio .mp3 file.

Oversize                    **Interview 3: April 13, 2010**

Oversize                    Interview Georgina de Alba traces her childhood in Cuba; move to Tennessee in the United States when she was eight; move to New York City and school years at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Connecticut;

undergraduate degree in languages from Georgetown University; European travel after graduation; masters degree in Latin American studies at Tulane University; Eduardo de Alba's law degree at Louisiana State University; marriage to Eduardo; teaching experience in the US; decision to move to Eduardo's native country, Panama; teaching at the Panama Canal Zone College; request from Adela Gomez to work temporarily at STRI while Mercedes Arroyo was on maternity leave; early impressions of STRI; position as assistant to Adela Gomez in Ancon; work with Elena Lombardo and Ira Rubinoff; transfer to Tivoli offices; work on *STRI News*, creation of the Environmental Education Office with Nicholas Smythe as director and de Alba as assistant; work on Soberania National Park; appointment as Education Coordinator in 1980 and efforts to increase Latin American students studying at STRI; Masters in Public Administration at the London School of Economics; opening of the Tupper Center; relations with the University of Panama; reminiscences of the US invasion of Panama in December of 1989; creation of the STRI Visitor Center, monthly supplements about STRI in *La Prensa*, work o the 1996 Coral Reef Congress; and transition of STRI Panamanian staff from the US federal personnel system to the Panamanian personnel system; and recent changes in administration; c. 1951-2010.

Oversize Transcript, pp. 1-52, of digital audio recording, 01:59:22 hours.

Oversize Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 01:59:22 hours

- Note:
- Original Master: 1 digital audio .wav file
  - Reference Copy: 1 digital audio .mp3 file.

Oversize **Interview 4: April 15, 2010**

Oversize Interview of Elena Guardia Lombardo begins with her family history in Panama and the role of her father, Tomas Guardia, a civil engineer, on the Inter-American Highway; education at Sacred Heart College in North Carolina and Strayer School of Business in Washington, D.C.; first STRI position in 1969 as assistant to Adela Gomez; interactions with Smithsonian administrative staff in Washington, D.C.; wide range of assignments facilitating work of STRI scientists and director Martin H. Moynihan; creation of the Cali, Colombia, STRI office in 1973; her role as Acting Director of STRI on several occasions; development of the STRI marine programs by Ira Rubinoff; negotiations with Kuna Indian Congress for use of San Blas Islands for research; turmoil during presidency of Manuel Noreiga; work with European Union to secure funding for tropical research; constant support of her husband, Jacinto Lombardo, for her career; course at the John F. Kennedy School of Business at Harvard University; reminiscences of work with Ira Rubinoff, Assistant Secretary David Challinor, Ross B. Simons, and Michael H. Robinson; ensuring STRI's future in Panama within the 1977 Torrijos-Carter Treaty; 2000 transition from U.S. to Panamanian personnel system; role in securing International Mission Status for STRI; receipt of Smithsonian's Robert A. Brooks Award for Administrative Excellence; work on Alternatives to the Panama Canal Study in 1984; service representing STRI on international non-profit boards; growth of STRI from a local to an international center, especially in Latin America; her introduction of Cristian

Samper to STRI and his role as director; reminiscences of the US invasion of Panama in 1989; assessment of her role at STRI; and reminiscences of the adventure of travel through jungles of Latin America, c. 1946-2010.

Oversize Transcript, pp. 1-84, of digital audio recording, 01:51:28 hours.

Oversize Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 01:51:28 hour

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 digital audio .wav files
  - Reference Copies: 2 digital audio .mp3 files.

Oversize **Interview 5: April 16, 2010**

Oversize Interview of Mercedes Arroyo discussed her education at St. Mary's Academy and the Canal Zone College; taking Civil Service test; job offer from Adela Gomez; visits to Barro Colorado Island twice weekly; accounting duties when STRI budget was small and less complicated than today, but all purchases, payroll, paperwork and checks had to go through Washington, D.C., so paychecks etc. could be delayed; U.S. Embassy took over processing payroll; she processed all the payroll and tax accounts; responsibilities included both procurement and accounting; acquiring items from U.S. government surplus; purchasing everything from live crickets to sophisticated scientific equipment; shift of duties to procurement; difficulties of President Manuel Noreiga years, with currency restrictions; was responsible for accountable property; expansion and new buildings greatly increased contracting workload; transition to computers; expansion of staff; administrative change from Dr. Moynihan to Dr. Rubinoff as director; return to school and receipt degree in Customs Broker and Public Administration; her service as STRI customs broker; c. 1950s-2000s.

Oversize Transcript, pp. 1-30, of digital audio recording, 02:11:08 hours.

Oversize Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 02:11:08 hour

- Note:
- Original Master: 1 digital audio .wav file
  - Reference Copy: 1 digital audio .mp3 file2.

Oversize **Interview 6: April 16, 2010**

Oversize Interview of Gloria Maggiori covered her childhood; invitation to work at STRI from Adela Gomez; career at STRI from 1959 to 2006; learning administrative procedures; overseeing travel arrangements; U.S.-Panamanian relations before, during, and after the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1990; and reminiscences of Mercedes Arroyo, Adela Gomez, Martin H. Moynihan, Ira Rubinoff and many others, c. 1950s-2015.

Oversize Transcript, pp. 1-57, of digital audio recording, 02:00:25 hours.

Oversize Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 02:00:25 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 digital audio .wav files

- Reference Copies: 2 digital audio .mp3 files.

Oversize

**Interview 7: May 10, 2010**

Oversize

Interview of Roberta Rubinoff included her childhood; education; marriage to STRI director Ira Rubinoff; fish research; and remiscences of colleagues such as Egbert Leigh, Martin H. Moynihan, Stanley and Patricia Rand, Neal Smith, and Nicholas Smythe, c. 1940s-1970s.

Oversize

Transcript, pp. 1-29, of digital audio recording, 02:11:27 hours.

Oversize

Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 02:11:27 hour

Note:

- Original Masters: 2 digital audio .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 digital audio .mp3 files.

Oversize

**Interview 8: February 27, 2013**

Oversize

Interview of Richard E. Cooke focused on his education in England; early research in Panama; work with Junius Bird of the American Museum of Natural History; research with Olga Linares, STRI anthropologist; appointment to STRI staff in 1983; and subsequent research on the Grand Cocolé of Panama, c. 1960s-2000s.

Oversize

Transcript, pp. 1-45, of digital audio recording, 02:36:45 hours.

Oversize

Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 02:36:45 hours

Note:

- Original Master: 1 digital audio .wav file
- Reference Copy: 1 digital audio .mp3 file.