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Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title: Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute History Interviews
Dates: 2010, 2013
Quantity: 0.5 cu. ft. (1 document box)

Administrative Information

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

Use Restriction
Restricted. Contact reference staff for details.

Historical Note

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

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.

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 Manual Noreiga; on STRI and its staff.

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Centennial Interviews consist of 16 hours of interviews in 11 original digital .wav audio files and 10 digital .mp3 reference files.

Permission must be secured to use some of the interviews in this collection.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:
Subjects:
Anthropology
Entomology
Tropical biology

Types of Materials:
Compact discs

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

Geographic Names:
Barro Colorado Island (Panama)
Container Listing

Box 1
Transcripts of Interviews
Interview 1: 12 April 2010
Interview 2: 12 April 2010
Interview 3: 13 April 2010
Interview 4: 15 April 2010
Interview 5: 16 April 2010
Interview 6: 16 April 2010
Interview 7: 10 May 2010
Interview 8: 27 February 2013

Box 2
Audio Recordings of Interviews
Interview 1: 12 April 2010
Interview 2: 12 April 2010
Interview 3: 13 April 2010
Interview 4: 15 April 2010
Interview 5: 16 April 2010
Interview 6: 16 April 2010
Interview 7: 10 May 2010
Interview 8: 27 February 2013