



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Archivists Oral History Interviews, 2011

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Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Smithsonian Archivists Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9630
Date:	2011
Extent:	0.25 cu. ft. (1 half document box)
Creator::	Smithsonian Institution
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9630, Smithsonian Archivists Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

There are numerous archives across the Smithsonian that provide documentation for museum collections and the history of the Smithsonian. The Archives of American Art was founded in Detroit, Michigan, in 1954 as an independent research institution committed to encouraging and aiding scholarship in the visual arts in America from the 18th century to the present. After a successful pilot project, the Archives was incorporated in 1955 with a national board of trustees. In 1970, the Archives of American Art officially became a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution and its headquarters were moved to Washington, DC. In 1976, the archives opened a Midwest Regional Office at the Detroit Institute of the Arts. Today the archives maintains research centers located in New York City and Washington, DC, as well as affiliated reference centers located at the Fine Arts Department of the Boston Public Library; the American Art Study Center of the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco; the Amon Carter Museum Library in Fort Worth, Texas; and The Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

The Archives Center at the National Museum of American History was founded in 1982 to identify, acquire, and preserve archival records in many media and formats to document America's history and its diverse cultures. Center staff arrange, describe, preserve, and make collections accessible to support scholarship, exhibitions, publications, and education. The Center offers these services in a professionally managed reference facility and through online databases, finding aids, and other forms of publication. It also provides expert advice on accepted archival practices and standards and strives to clarify the role that organized archives play in American life. To encourage cooperation with other organizations and attract financial support, the Center actively pursues alliances inside and outside the Smithsonian.

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.

American University history student Allison Earnest conducted oral history interviews of Smithsonian Institution archivists to document the history of Smithsonian's archival programs, for an oral history seminar taught by Smithsonian Archives historian Pamela M. Henson.

Descriptive Entry

John A. Fleckner and Liza E. Kirwin were interviewed about their pioneering careers at the Smithsonian and the development of archival programs at the Institution.

Liza E. Kirwin (1957-) received the B.A. in art history from the Johns Hopkins University in 1979, the M.L.S., Library and Archival Science, The Catholic University of America, with a concentration in archival management in 1984, and Ph.D. in American Studies, University of Maryland at College Park, in 1999 with a dissertation on "It's All True: Imagining New York's East Village Art Scene of the 1980s." She began her career in 1979 as an archivist at the Maryland Hall of Records in Annapolis, Maryland. From 1979 to 1999, she was an Archives Technician at the Archives of American Art, serving as Southeast Regional Collector from 1983 to 1999, and Curator of Manuscripts from 1999-2011. She also served as Acting Director of AAA in 2011. Her publications include *To-dos, Illustrated Inventories, Collected Thoughts, and other Artists' Enumerations from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art* based on an exhibit of the same title and *With Love: Artists' Letters and Illustrated Notes*.

John A. Fleckner (1941-) served as director of the Archives Center at the National Museum of American History from its founding in 1982 until his retirement in 2007. He was a history graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, receiving the M.A. in 1965, and received the B.A. from Colgate University in 1963. At the State Historical Society of Wisconsin from 1971 to 1982, Fleckner directed a thirteen-member archival network affiliated with the Society and, with the help of others, made the Area Research Center system a national model. He has also been a faculty member in the Department of Museum Studies at The George Washington University.

The History of Smithsonian Archivists Oral History Interviews consist of 4.3 hours of digital audio interviews and 99 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Archivists
Art -- History

Collectors and collecting
Interviews
Museum archives
Oral history

Types of Materials:

Compact discs
Electronic records
Sound recordings
Transcripts

Names:

Archives of American Art
Earnest, Allison, interviewer
Fleckner, John A., 1941-
Kirwin, Liza
National Museum of American History (U.S.). Archives Center

Geographic Names:

United States -- History

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: November 4, 2011

Interviews

Interview of Liza Kirwin covers her educational background; her career at the Maryland Historical society; work as an Archives Tech, as the Southeast Regional Collector and as the Curator of Manuscripts at the AAA; her dissertation work on the East Village art scene; her experiences with self-taught artists and Folk Art as Southeast Regional Collector; and her views on the digital age in archival work and the digitalization of collections at the Archives, funded by the Terra Foundation, c. 1970s-2011.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-42, of digital audio recording, 1:11:55 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 1:11:55 hours

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

Interviews

Interview 2: November 18, 2011

Interviews

Interview of John Fleckner discusses his educational background; experiences in Nepal in 1966 and 2011; his work at the Wisconsin State Historical Society; and his responsibilities as the Chief Archivist at the Archives Center. Fleckner also described the core topical areas for the collections at the Museum, including advertising and marketing, American music and the history of technology; as well as the creation of the Society of American Archivists best practices; the development of the Smithsonian Institution Research Information System (SIRIS); and his views on the digital age in archival practices and the digitalization of collections at the Archives Center, c. 1960s-2011.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-57, of digital audio recording, 1:58:19 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recording of Interview: Total recording time: 1:58:19 hours

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