

NAME LIST

ALEXANDER WETMORE

INTERVIEW I

4/18/74

page*

name

4	Bent, Arthur Cleveland
5	Rosenberg, Charlie
7	Bahzarov, Yulasi'
7	Goldman, Edward Alphonso
9	Hollister, Ned
9	Walcott, Charles Doolittle
11	Baker, A. B.
11	Ravenel, William DeC.
11	Pearson, Louise M.
14	Abbot, Charles Greeley
15	Lord, General Herbert M.
16	Ainslee, Kate F.
18	Carmichael, Leonard
18	Ripley, S. Dillon
20	Dorsey, Harry W.
20	Dorsey, Nicholas W.
23	Keddy, John L.
23	Graf, John Enos
28	Morrow, Dwight W.

*Page number indicates first reference to name for this interview session. Subsequent references may be found in the body of the interview.

Oral History Interview

with

Alexander Wetmore
Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1944-52

held April 18, 1974
in his office in the Museum of Natural History

by Miriam S. Freilicher
and William A. Deiss
Interviewers

for the Smithsonian Institution Archives

FREILICHER: Dr. Wetmore, why don't you just, by way of a little bit of background, just say a few words concerning what we're going to talk about today, what you'd like to talk about.

WETMORE: Actually, I had long contact with the Smithsonian Institution before I was a formal member of the staff. Following my training in college, I was in the service of the former Bureau of Biological Survey, then in the U. S. Department of Agriculture, now called the Fish and Wildlife Service in the Interior Department. My work consisted largely of field exploration--study and travel concerned with birds and similar problems, and in making collections, identifying specimens, and so forth.

FREILICHER: Excuse me. [Tape recorder turned off.] Why don't you just go ahead and continue with your story then.

WETMORE: In connection with these materials, I worked regularly in the Division of Birds of the National Museum under the Smithsonian. In fact, in due course, I had a desk there with workspace that I could use more or less at will. I was occupied not only on my own material, but also, through my interest in comparative anatomy, with the collection of skeletons of birds. I did more or less routine work in arranging the old collections of osteological material that had not really been put in proper order since the former Division of Comparative Anatomy had been more or less broken up and abandoned.

For the Biological Survey, I did a good deal of work in the field, in the tropics, including nearly a year in Puerto Rico, making a study of the bird life in connection with agriculture.

Then the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty with Canada was put into effect, and there was interest immediately in what might be the status of such of our migrant birds from North America that in their travels went down into South America as far as Patagonia. I had a year in the field between the Chaco in Paraguay and northern Patagonia, making observations on these birds of ours down there as winter migrants. And also, naturally, studying and making

collections of the many interesting species in the local avifauna. It was those collections, when I returned, that I studied here in the museum, identifying them, writing reports, and so forth. My interest was in the travel and the scientific work it permitted. The administration in the Biological Survey, which was under the Department of Agriculture, was pretty stiff. I wanted no part of that.

These were the days when we had a per diem of five dollars to meet expenses when we were travelling. [Laughter] I figured on losing a dollar a day in travel in this country, two dollars a day in travel abroad. This I considered part of my contribution toward my education. It didn't trouble me. As one example of what could happen, on one official journey that I made to Florida by train--this was forty-five years, fifty years ago, perhaps--on the way I ate a meal in the diner where I tipped a waiter, say, thirty-five cents. About a year later, I got a letter--a demand--from the Controller, informing me that there was one state on the route to Florida which by law forbade tipping. As I gave no indication of where the expense item happened, they suspended it and would I remit immediately this amount against the account!

Well, as various new administrative operations were developed in the Survey, I managed to side-step them, when I was asked to

take charge, usually by proposing somebody else, or by going away in the field so that I wasn't available. But finally it came to a point where this was no longer possible. In the meantime, I'd become thoroughly familiar over a period of years with the Smithsonian, how it operated, and so on.

DEISS: Dr. Wetmore, yesterday when you and I were talking for a few minutes, you told a couple of stories about the first year or so you were with the survey and when you left the university and went to Alaska, I wonder if those might be interesting to relate.

WETMORE: This had nothing to do with the Smithsonian. My first season came between my sophomore and junior years when I worked with a field party on a survey in northwestern Wyoming. Had a very pleasant time there, and at the close, I stayed on alone, for the month of September, living in Jackson Hole as the winter was coming. In fact, I remained there until I barely got out on the last horse drawn stage before the snows came.

The next year, [Arthur Cleveland] A. C. Bent was beginning his work on the Life Histories of North American Birds--that long series of volumes published by the National Museum. He had made arrangements for a journey out through the Aleutian Islands on a

U. S. revenue cutter, and I was asked if I could go with him.

In order to do that, I had to make special arrangements with my university professors to finish the term requirements as we had to leave the early part of April. By the grace and kindness of the dean and the others, I was able to do this, except for one month of laboratory work in cytology which had to come later.

I joined Bent in Seattle, we travelled by revenue cutter to Unalaska, and then out through the Aleutian Islands as far as Attu, stopping at various of them, making studies and collections of birds. We came back to Unalaska toward the end of June. No further travel was available on the revenue cutters, so we were put ashore on the beach with nothing more to do. Bent was disgusted. He and two of the other men went off on a trading schooner in order to get to a steamer in Nome and so back down to the states.

In looking over my instructions, I found various suggestions as to what I might do, so that it was possible for me to stay up there on my own. At first, I'd made an arrangement with Charlie Rosenberg, who lived on Unimak Island, fox farming and so on, to come over and be with him. His wife, a competent Aleut girl, made me a nice money belt in which to carry my money. A Coast Survey boat, the Patterson, was to put me ashore on the western end of Unimak where, in due course, I'd get in touch with the Rosenbergs. When we got there, heavy fog that lay for twelve to fourteen hours

prevented landing. The skipper told me, "Sorry, can't wait any longer but I'll put you ashore at King's Cove." This was near the end of the Alaska Peninsula where a salmon cannery had been established that spring. So I loaded my gear in a small boat with the Aleut camp hand who I'd picked up in Unalaska and we rowed ashore where a tall, thin, sad looking gentleman was standing. It was raining, of course. I told him who I was, that I wanted to make observations on the wildlife there, and so forth. He listened to me, grunted a bit, then said, "What are you paying that Indian?" I said, "A dollar and a half a day." He said, "Okay, come ashore. That's what we're paying ours." [Laughter]

FREILICHER: I guess he didn't want you in if you were paying too much.

WETMORE: If I were paying more, I could not land as they'd have to raise the pay on all their Indians.

DEISS: An incipient labor problem!

WETMORE: Well, I had a very pleasant part of the summer there. I could get food supplies from the commissary at the cannery. They had boats running out to False Pass and other localities where they were seining salmon. So I'd go out and locate near one of these for two or three weeks, do my work, and in due course

get back to King's Cove again. The Aleut, (his name was Yulasí Bahzarov), knew about ten words of English but after a couple of weeks, we were getting on famously with conversation in a mixture of Russian, Aleut and who knows what else. We may have had a private language, I don't know! But at any rate, we got on wonderfully for all the rest of the summer. I was there until September, finally got passage south on a tramp steamer that came to pick up the canned salmon. And after a three week journey, landed in South Bellingham, Washington. I returned to the university, finished in a month on my remaining obligations for my degree.

I then came to Washington, where I was to go to Puerto Rico for the Biological Survey, to make a study of the bird life in relation to agriculture. In the beginning, I was supposed to be under the direction of [Edward Alphonso] E. A. Goldman, a skilled field man who was working in Panamá at the time. But we were delayed in getting away, in fact, I was in Washington for nearly two months, working most of the time in the Bird Division in the museum. And enjoying it very much indeed. Goldman was delayed, and finally I went off alone. So I went to Puerto Rico, arriving in December, and came back north the following September. During that period I travelled pretty well all over the island. I had some knowledge of Spanish on arrival. I lived for the first two

weeks or so with some young Americans who were teaching at the University in Rio Piedras. When I needed supplies of some kind or another, one of them would accompany me to the stores to serve as my interpreter. Finally, I went off up-country, was gone three months, where either I spoke Spanish, or else! On my return, when my friends wanted something or other special, (this same group of young professors), they'd ask me to do the interpreting for them! [Laughter]

That was an interesting study. Then the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act came along and with it the question as to what our migrant birds that travelled into South America were doing. So I was down there for a year travelling alone from the Chaco in Paraguay to northern Patagonia. . .work that was very interesting, especially as I was making collections of birds.

FREILICHER: You were completely on your own the whole time?

WETMORE: Yes. I was alone. Argentina during the war had been pro-German. In 1920 feelings were still pretty high, so that I was told in various places that Americans weren't popular and weren't welcome. My response was, "Here are my official papers; this is what I'm doing. What do you expect to do about it?" And they told me, "Nothing!" So I said, "Thank you very much." And I went along and lived more or less as I pleased. [Laughter] It was a little bit tough at times but not too bad!

I was down there for a year, came back, worked on my collections, did other work for the survey, partly in the field, with laboratory work in the office and over here in the museum. In fact, I had office space here in the Bird Division where I spent much of my time.

One of my firm friends was Ned Hollister, in the Division of Mammals, until he took the post of Director--Superintendent they called it in those days--of the National Zoological Park. He and I were close friends. I was out there often with him.

When he died suddenly, some time later, Dr. Charles D. Walcott, then Secretary of the Smithsonian, sent word that he would like to see me. When I called on him, he asked if I would consider the position as head of the zoo. This was administrative work, but in the Smithsonian this was quite different from the Department of Agriculture. I thought, "Well, if this is what I have to do, I think I'd better take it."

FREILICHER: Didn't it surprise you, that he came to you with this request or did you have any idea that they were interested in you?

WETMORE: One of my interests was in the anatomy and osteology of birds. I thought at the zoo I could undoubtedly have material available to develop the same type of

research that had been done so successfully in England. So I moved to the park in November and was there through the winter. In the big old office building there were rooms in the back that weren't in use. So I arranged laboratory space with water, gas, electricity and so on. By March I was all set to start some scientific work on bird material as it might become available. The zoo was in rather a low state with other bureaus in the Smithsonian at the time. Of course, this was a period when money had been scarce through the war, and effort was necessary for reestablishment in the period after. Along in March, Dr. Walcott, whom I came to know very well, asked me to come in again. He told me that he was considering some realignment of the bureaus in the Smithsonian, saying, "You're familiar with this place, I know full well. I'd like to have your ideas as to any changes that would be desirable from the present set-up." "No hurry," he said, "a few days, next week." After some consideration I returned the following week with perhaps two type-written pages that I said he might care to consider. He read them very carefully, smiled, and said, "This is fine. I've asked other people for such suggestions but they gave me too much! This is just what I wanted." [Laughter]

There was provision for a new position as another Assistant Secretary. He asked me if I would take that position. I told him I would be very happy to do that. I asked, "What will we do about

the zoo?" "Well," he said, "you keep an eye on it with Mr. [A.B.] Baker out there to take care of things. When you have somebody to suggest for your successor, let me know."

When the Natural History Museum was built, there were provisions for rooms for the Assistant Secretary in charge in the southwest corner of the third floor but they'd never been occupied. [William DeC.] Ravenel as head had been established in the old museum building on the south side of the Mall and did not care to move. The furniture and everything was there but more or less scattered around as the rooms had been used only partly for storage. So I asked that the desk be put over in the corner by the southwest window with the telephone on it. A few days later, Dr. Walcott introduced me formally to the staff, and I was established in the new position. (The Director's desk is still in that same place today.) [Laughter]

There was provision for my appointment as Assistant Secretary but none for any staff. My first need naturally was for an office clerk or secretary. Without too much difficulty, I found a girl in the office that handled details on incoming collections, shipments, and similar matters, Mrs. [Louise M.] Pearson. I talked with her and suggested that she might like to try this new position. As a result, she worked for me for the next thirty years, [Laughter] very successfully.

FREILICHER: You know, this is a very nice, a very interesting picture that you're painting about the way things were in those days in terms of administration at the Smithsonian, and I'm curious, you said earlier that you thought if you had to go into administration, you'd rather do it at the Smithsonian than at the Biological Survey. . . .

WETMORE: Yes.

FREILICHER: Why was that? Why did you feel the Smithsonian. . . .

WETMORE: The Biological Survey necessarily was tied in with the fiscal operations of the Department of Agriculture, which were planned on a broad scale with large staff, widespread throughout the entire country. Necessarily, they were pretty stiff, in fact, with a great deal of red tape. Here, in a smaller group in the Smithsonian, directly under the Secretary and the assistant secretaries, there was much more freedom of operation.

FREILICHER: Did you think then that the Smithsonian was really a government agency or was it a lot more private?

WETMORE: More private. . . . while it was financed in part from federal money, it had it's own funds in addition. So there was a combination of the two. I realized that

there was far more freedom here, more opportunity, individually, than there was in a larger organization like the Department of Agriculture.

FREILICHER: Did people at the Smithsonian then consider themselves federal employees, or did they really think about the private operations? I guess I'm saying which was more emphasized?

WETMORE: Well, the staff and the operation were federal, of course. Guards and others were federal employees, paid from government payrolls, but they were administered under the Smithsonian, which gave a bit more freedom in operation.

FREILICHER: I see. When you were Assistant Secretary, were you on federal salary or was that a private salary?

WETMORE: I was on federal salary.

FREILICHER: How did you feel about the possibility of being so involved in administration that you would no longer be able to do your scientific work after you became Assistant Secretary?

WETMORE: I felt I could take care of that. In an independent status, I could arrange for others to do the

routine things and restrict my own operations to the planning and the upper level of the administration. And that's the way it worked out.

FREILICHER: And, in fact, this was the way things were done at the Smithsonian?

WETMORE: Yes, it was.

FREILICHER: You went on to take on more and more responsibility, really, through the years. . . .

WETMORE: Well, . . . in my post I was the actual head of the National Museum and all of its branches, and also had general supervision over the art galleries which were in our buildings here, and the libraries, and so forth. But, of course, these were only supervisory duties.

FREILICHER: Yes. Dr. [Charles Greeley] Abbot was the other Assistant Secretary at that time.

WETMORE: Yes.

FREILICHER: He was Assistant Secretary, if I'm correct, a couple of years before--I mean, he was the other Assistant Secretary for a couple of years before you. How come he wasn't given those duties of overseeing the museum?

WETMORE: Well, that was entirely foreign to his scientific interests.

FREILICHER: I see.

WETMORE: He was a physicist, an active physicist, interested in that type of work with no direct personal interest in these other matters. And I, on the other hand, had been a museum man all through my university career. I worked in the museum at the University of Kansas as a student doing that type of work while attending university classes. Dr. Abbot had no direct interest in these matters.

Things were. . .as I say, at a rather low ebb at that time; this was right soon after the war--a period of reconstruction; as the first thing, they had established a Bureau of the Budget, which the government never had before, with General [Herbert M.] Lord at the head of it.

FREILICHER: What was his name?

WETMORE: General Lord.

FREILICHER: General Lord?

WETMORE: And with Lord, I dealt on behalf of the Smithsonian for several years, fairly acrimoniously on many

occasions, but with personal understanding so that while we quarreled, we didn't actually fight, if you know what I mean. As the first thing that happened when I was established here, they sent a representative, Mrs. [Kate F.] Ainslee, one of their specialists, who was to spend a period of a month or two checking into our activities and finding where our appropriations could be reduced! That was her problem. [Laughter] Well, there was no chance for reduction, as finances were already about as low ebb as they could get.

Our appropriations were rather interesting at that time. They came in seven, distinct, separate acts of Congress. [END SIDE I, BEGIN SIDE II] One special one, for postage for the Institution, "paid postage," was--I recall--for four hundred and fifty dollars a year, (or it may have been seven hundred and fifty, I don't recall now). . . . [Laughter]

Well, as I said, Mrs. Ainslee came to see where we could be pruned down a bit further here and there. She was a pleasant person, well educated. She had had a pretty rough time in some organizations, so that she was almost astounded to be received in our way; you know, "Delighted to have you. Won't you see in detail what we're doing, just how we do it." After I talked to her, I said, "I'll arrange a schedule for you so you'll go every day to a different group, talk with them and see the operation so that

you can understand our problems." She wasn't accustomed to such courtesy at all! As a matter of fact, she was greatly pleased, became friendly, and she and I were in contact for a period until she finally went into other types of work.

She was here in the beginning for a little over a week; came every day to a different group. When she didn't return, I waited a few days, then called her up and said, "You're not through yet, we want you to come back." The upshot of it was that she became our advocate before the Bureau of the Budget. Instead of cutting us down, she was helping gouge a little bit more money here and there wherever we could. I was quite amused. She, of course, knew what I'd had to do in order to appoint a secretary. Mrs. Pearson was personable, Mrs. Ainslee liked her, and she would say, "You be sure to put that position in your budget." And I said, "I certainly will." Well, she forgot that I was supposed to do it, and so she put it in also. [Laughter] When the appropriation came out, and I came to count one clerical position in my office, I found I had two. ...[Laughter]...inadvertently, just like that.

I had this corner room with the entry from the hall. The room where the secretaries and clerks now sit was full of storage cabinets, records of various expositions in which the Smithsonian had taken part. I told Ravenel, "I've got to have some privacy

here, move that stuff out." "Oh," he replied, "those are very valuable records." I said, "Yes, they're wonderful, but put 'em somewhere else where they'd be accessible but get 'em out of here." So, after a week or so, I had Mrs. Pearson established in that outside room, with the other door closed, of course. Mrs. Pearson was a competent woman, without much background in biology but intelligent with a good education, so that she developed quickly into a completely helpful office manager. When I retired, she continued to work for [Leonard] Carmichael, my successor, and then finally also briefly for [S. Dillon] Ripley, when she said she'd had enough and so retired!

She and her husband, who was a horticulturalist, bought forty-five, fifty acres down near West Point, where they raised azaleas and other things.

FREILICHER: That's wonderful. This devotion to the Smithsonian seems to be characteristic of employees at all levels.

WETMORE: Yes.

FREILICHER: Did you ever think about leaving, I mean, what, how did you feel through all those years? What was it like?

WETMORE: I--in fact, I don't think this needs to go on
the record. . . .

FREILICHER: Well, we can take it out later.

WETMORE: Alright. What I say is this; after a number of years of observation of the Washington scene, I decided it wasn't good administration for an individual to continue in a post of responsibility after age sixty-five. Things were moving too rapidly, changing too fast, so that he couldn't cope, couldn't keep up with them, which was bad for him and bad for the organization. I saw a number of places go down hill because of that.

The Secretary of the Smithsonian had been appointed for life always. That had been the custom. When I reached age sixty-five, I arranged at a meeting with the regents to explain to them my feeling, and that I'd appreciate it very much if they would appoint a successor for me. I would like to stay to continue my scientific work, if that was agreeable. But I felt that the Institution had better have another director. They were quite surprised, [Laughter], and said, of course, they'd meet my wishes. But it took them two years to get Carmichael. So I really stayed on until I was sixty-seven.

FREILICHER: But Dr. Abbot retired out of office, I think he was quite along in years, how did that happen? We can take it out later, in case you don't want it in at all? Okay. [Recorder turned off.]

WETMORE: We had a considerable reorganization here, beginning almost immediately--actually nothing the first year--but in the second year. And we had some assistance from others interested. Dr. Walcott, who was very well known in Congress, had been active for years. . . .

FREILICHER: What kind of a Secretary was he?

WETMORE: Excellent. He'd gotten along well in years at that time. He was interested in his scientific research in which he was doing very well. We had Harry [W.] Dorsey here as chief clerk, very competent man, been here for years, and with him, Nicholas [W.] Dorsey, Harry Dorsey's brother, as treasurer. Both of them were competent administrators, and took care of the routine operations. Of course, the Freer Gallery had come along in the meanwhile, but operated more or less independently.

When I came and began to look around, I found that the guard force operated in four separate units with no one man at the top administering it! It took a little doing, but finally it got squared around to where all the guards were under one captain,

including those in the Freer Gallery, which took a bit of diplomacy.

Of course, the Smithsonian had its private funds. The original Smithsonian sum was in the U.S. Treasury by act of Congress. The story, as I recall it, was that, by direction of Congress, the money had been invested in bonds of the state of Arkansas or something of that kind. As these hadn't made good, they were redeemed by a million dollars held in the Treasury Department, paying six percent interest. That's about as good an investment as I know. There were other funds also which were handled by a competent administrative group among the regents. These were subject to our own audit, which the Bureau of the Budget didn't like. In fact, I fought bitterly to prevent their attempts to take them over.

FREILICHER: From taking over the private funds?

WETMORE: Yes. I told Lord that they were reported annually, audited by a competent firm every year. Lord and I, as I say, battled over this. I remember very well one meeting somewhere over in those offices around the White House. At any rate, the arguments got a bit heated, so finally I said, "General, in my opinion, the Bureau of the Budget has no more concern with those private funds than you have here with the general policy of administration of the Treasury."

FREILICHER: Well, after we get the transcript typed up, you can decide what you want to do with it. I think that these stories are fascinating because they give us a flavor of what things were like in a simpler time when it was possible to talk to the Bureau of the Budget like that.

WETMORE: Well, why not? [Laughter]

FREILICHER: . . .or did. . .why not? Did things change very much by the time you retired?

WETMORE: Oh, my, yes, they changed completely. All this rough stuff was gone.

FREILICHER: What was replaced? What replaced the rough stuff? You developed. . . .

WETMORE: Well, they developed standard operations to run throughout the entire governmental set-up as far as federal funds are concerned. But the Smithsonian has some funds administered privately by the Secretary, under direction of the Board of Regents. They, the Board of Regents, have the actual say as to what shall be done with the money. That's not the concern of any other body. Of course, the Board of Regents are appointed by the Congress but that's another matter.

FREILICHER: Yes.

WETMORE: We have a very careful audit of all of our funds; always have had.

FREILICHER: Did you have to get any legal advice on this, I mean, was there a question of law? Where did you go for your assistance then? There was no legal counsel for the Smithsonian, as such, were there?

WETMORE: We didn't have regular counsel at that time. We employed lawyers from time to time as required. In fact, I really brought in the first lawyer we had on the staff. I had been a trustee of the National Geographic for a good many years, and was a close friend of the man who handled their legal matters so we finally had him as advisor for a period about the time of my retirement.

FREILICHER: I see.

WETMORE: Yes, we had very competent advice in all these matters.

FREILICHER: If I understand correctly, you--it was during your administration, either as Director of the museum or as Secretary, I'm not sure exactly when this happened--when the museum really, I mean, the Smithsonian really began to bring in professional administrators, people whose specialty, and I'm speaking of [John L.] Keddy and [John E.] Graf. . .

WETMORE: Yes.

FREILICHER: Were you then, were you Secretary then? I don't have dates.

WETMORE: Well, that started when I was Assistant Secretary.

FREILICHER: Yes. Was it your idea to bring in these men?

WETMORE: Yes.

FREILICHER: Why don't you tell us a little bit about that because I think that changed, that was a significant change. . . .

WETMORE: Well, . . .that's just pure routine. . . .

FREILICHER: Was it?

WETMORE: Yes, it's nothing.

FREILICHER: But it hadn't been done before.

WETMORE: Well, the problems we had hadn't arisen before.

FREILICHER: I see.

WETMORE: As far as I can see. Of course, the first thing I wanted was to make the appropriations uniform

instead of having these seven different pockets, perhaps with a little surplus here and there but what could you do with it. It couldn't be spent except for certain particular items.

The change took a number of years. In fact, first off, I thought it would be fine just to go ahead. Then I realized that the Bureau of the Budget wouldn't accept this, so we worked it around, pointing out the various difficulties, until little by little they made the combination themselves for us. [Laughter] So it worked out very well. . . .The Bureau of the Budget tried to curtail us in certain fields, as in archaeology, in the Bureau of American Ethnology.

FREILICHER: [Recorder turned off] Well, would you say that you had some goal, some overriding idea of the way you wanted the National Museum to be and the Smithsonian throughout your administration?

WETMORE: Oh, certainly, very definitely.

FREILICHER: Why don't you tell us a little bit about what your dreams were and how close you reached them.

WETMORE: Well, they were really to continue the history and operations of the place as it had been set up in the very beginning, but where it had been considerably curtailed

simply through the lack of money and for other reasons. The main idea was to get back on a better base financially.

FREILICHER: Yes.

DEISS: Well, what did you feel had been curtailed? What did you feel had been curtailed?

WETMORE: Been curtailed?

DEISS: What had been curtailed?

WETMORE: Oh, they cut down on the money, money we should have had.

FREILICHER: I think Bill meant were there certain functions or certain areas in the Smithsonian which were more or less affected by these cuts or did the whole Smithsonian suffer?

WETMORE: Well, the whole Institution. As one example, when I came to look over the guard force, I found that they were being paid eighty-five dollars a month, and that those on day service had to furnish their own uniforms. Well, things like that are impossible. The average pay of curators ran from eighteen hundred to twenty-four hundred a year. One curator had an "in" with somebody or other and got six thousand. To get the staff and the level of operations up through funds, that's what we needed.

FREILICHER: What about travelling funds or field work. . . ?

WETMORE: There weren't any.

FREILICHER: There just was nothing?

WETMORE: There just weren't any.

FREILICHER: How did they get their work done?

WETMORE: I'll tell you how we got some finally.

FREILICHER: Yes, tell me.

WETMORE: You probably know that Walcott, at the very end, tried to raise additional funds. He was ill and shouldn't have attempted it. He was a grand man, a man of great force and drive. We had a man who was supposed to advise on sources of additional endowment to the Smithsonian--can't remember his name off-hand--he was a good man, but at any rate, they arranged a special meeting in February. . . I think it was, when we took those interested all over the Smithsonian. We put up a series of booths, one for each activity, all around a large room like this, had the meeting. Everybody was there from the President on down--big show and speeches, of course--and at the end, those in attendance were taken around in groups of two or three to these various booths to explain what we were doing.

I made the acquaintance of one man--my memory's not too good on some of these things, too far back now--but the chap, a financier from New York, a very good man, fine chap, at the end of all this, he asked, "Do we have a chart to show the Smithsonian funds and how they were expended? . . . Here," he said, "there's something very interesting; here's something that talks to me. Explain this to me." I showed him the Smithsonian funds, the private funds, all the income from them, how it was being handled. And what had happened, as various matters had come along that had to have financing for which there were no government funds, then they'd take a little bit from the Smithsonian, handle it that way. We figured that up, and it came to around twenty-five thousand dollars, all from the private income that was being used in that way. This gentleman, who was a guest at the White House at the time, said, "I'll mention this to the President." So we got that twenty-five thousand dollars additional. Dr. Abbot and I laid it out very carefully, apportioning it among the various activities for field work. And that was the first money really extra of that kind since I had been here.

A short story about one of our new regents may interest you. As he came to his first regents' meeting a little diffidently, one of the others looked at him, recognized him, and said, "Hey, Dwight [W. Morrow], come on in, come on up the head of the table. Money talks these days." [Laughter] We managed finally to get a

general salary increase, a small sum for each member of the staff, you know. And we went on from there until things loosened up a bit to an easier state, but it was rough going in the beginning.

FREILICHER: Did you find time to do much of your own work, your own research?

WETMORE: By working a twelve hour day, yes. [Laughter]

FREILICHER: What about your field trips?

WETMORE: Well, I got away once a year after the first two years. The first year I did stay home. There was an International Ornithological Congress somewhere in Europe that I should have attended, but I stayed home. I thought I'd better. But that was the only time as I got away somewhere every year when we were organized a bit.

Our first addition was John Graf as an assistant. He was a very good man who I had known well; had dealt with him as a fellow member of the Cosmos Club, and other activities. He was in the Bureau of Entomology as assistant chief but wasn't getting a good deal there. I sounded him out a bit, found he might be amenable to coming over to the Smithsonian. So I called on his boss, his chief, and told him that we needed a new administrative man in the Smithsonian. I said, "I've been looking around, and I've come

to tell you that I'm going to put a proposition up to John Graf." "Oh," he said, "you can't do that. We can't let him go." I replied, "That'll have to be his decision." Well, I knew well he'd come to us, and he did.

FREILICHER: This was when Dr. Abbot was Secretary. . . ?

WETMORE: Yes.

FREILICHER: . . .and, but it was your idea? Did Dr. Abbot agree? I mean, where, at what place in the structure did John Graf appear? Did he report to you?

WETMORE: Well, . . .the regents were very kind. They realized that I wasn't getting as much done in my scientific work as they said I should. So they gave instructions that we get another assistant.

FREILICHER: I see.

WETMORE: And we were able to do that on a federal grant rather than out of the Smithsonian funds. Later on, I got Jack Keddy to come in the same way. Between the two of them, we got along wonderfully.

Graf and I had dealt with finances in the Cosmos Club for years, (this has nothing to do with the Smithsonian. . .)

FREILICHER: That's okay.

WETMORE: The Cosmos Club, wonderful organization, but it had never had to be too definite in its administrative matters. As it grew a bit, and expenses were high (and so on), if they had money in the treasury, they'd go ahead and spend it. If they didn't, they wouldn't, and that was it. Graf, a couple of others and I--I was a member of the board--set up a budget. They found it interesting and all that, but they'd never accept it. So every year they were out about ten thousand in the hole and had to borrow the money. Finally they made a mistake, they elected me president, and that year by generally twisting the arms of the board, they adopted a budget. That year we ended the year with a dollar and ninety-eight cents in the black. [Laughter] And paid a little bit off on the other details of debts, too.

Well, that was just the Cosmos Club.

FREILICHER: But John Graf did some good things for the Smithsonian along the same lines, didn't he?

WETMORE: Yes, he was a wonderful man, a perfect administrator. He knew all the ins and outs, knew everybody. Keddy also, with his training in the Bureau of the Budget, was another excellent addition. We used to argue a lot, but did not fight!! We got on. We came along very well. With those two here,

especially when Graf came, then I could get away. Of course, I'd keep in touch, be where I could get back. If I could, I'd go off to Panamá for two, three, four months, get some field work done, get a little exercise, and rest my mind a little. . . .

DEISS: Was that while you were Secretary?

WETMORE: While I was Assistant Secretary. . .

DEISS: You were Assistant Secretary.

WETMORE: . . .and Secretary, during both periods. It began when I was Assistant Secretary under Dr. Abbot.

He was perfectly agreeable to it. There was no friction there of any kind at all.

DEISS: It's always been traditional, hasn't it, for the Secretary and people like the assistant secretaries to be allowed to do a great deal of their own research and field trips, if necessary?

WETMORE: Oh, yes. Well, for field trips and investigations. What I was doing in Panamá was gathering material for these books. Trying hard now to write the fourth one. I'm not getting along with it very rapidly, unfortunately.

FREILICHER: Well, you know, we're right at the end of this tape,
so I think that this is probably enough for today's
session and I want to thank you very much.

WETMORE: Are you getting anything out of this?

FREILICHER: Oh, sure, sure we are. Okay. There we go.

[END OF TAPE]

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION ARCHIVES--ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

A. Wetmore 4/18/74

Procedures followed in the preparation of this manuscript:

8/8/74 ph Typist instructed to make a verbatim transcript

10/74 ph Transcript reviewed by ^{reviewer} ~~interviewer~~ for transcription errors:

- ✓ a. by comparing transcript with taped record in its entirety
- b. by comparing transcript with taped record where accuracy of transcription was in doubt
- c. on basis of recall of content

ph Transcript proofread and corrected: 10/74 10/74

10/19/74 ph Transcript sent to respondent for review

 Not returned by respondent

11/74 Respondent's revisions have been made in ink

1/75 ph The manuscript has been retyped after revision by the respondent:

- ✓ a. in its entirety
- b. pages:
Elsewhere respondent's revisions have been made in ink

✓ The oral record has been preserved