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Singsings and Storytelling: Digitizing Audio Recordings

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Singsings and Storytelling: Digitizing Audio Recordings

Cristela Garcia-Spitz
University of California, San Diego • Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology
Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea Conference
September 23, 2019

Pig festival, singsing: decorated men with eagle feather headdresses dance, August 1962. Edwin Cook Papers. MSS 0187. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego. https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb4199428d

“For many practicioners, ethnography and the act of writing it, is a gift in kind to the people who made it possible. … The gift is made by way of memoralizing to others, remote in space or time, this instance of cultural humanity.”

-Donald Tuzin. The Melanesian Archive. In Preserving the Anthropological Record, 1995.

Tuzin Archive Ongoing Projects

- Collaborations with Pacific Libraries and Archives
- Several digitization projects, including collaborations with Anthropologists
- Papua New Guinea Highlands Dissertations
- Papua New Guinea Patrol Reports
- Kwaio Community Archive

https://lib.ucsd.edu/oceania

Grant Opportunity

Collections

Anthony Forge Papers

(69 reels)

Jane Goodale Papers

(64 reels, 38 cassettes)

Edwin Cook Papers

(63 cassettes)

Roy Rappaport Papers

(18 reels, 27 cassettes)

Stephen Leavitt Fieldnotes and Recordings

(153 cassettes)

Roger Keesing Papers

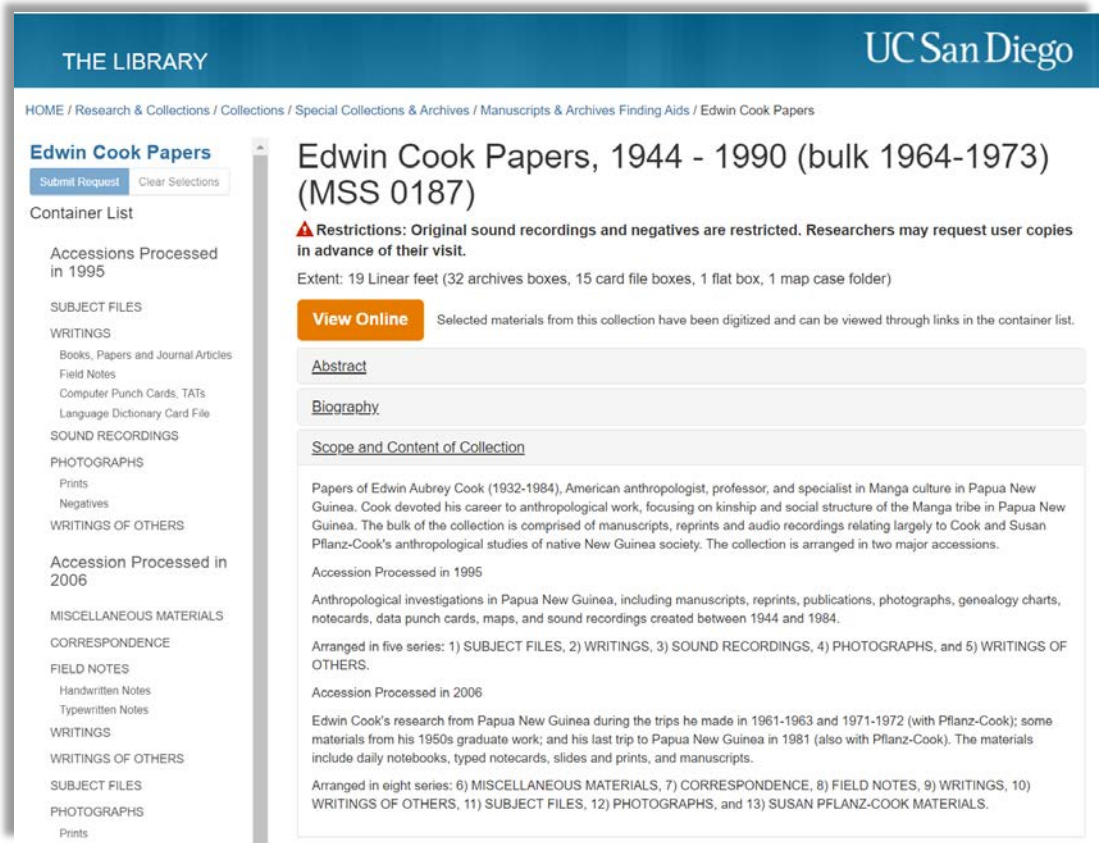
(151 reels, 181 cassettes)

Harold Scheffler Papers

(21 reels)

Selection of Materials

- Type of recordings
- Number of recordings
- Level of description
- “Rights”
- Geography



https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/findingaids/mss0187.html

Description

https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/findingaids/mss0027.html

Stephen Leavitt Fieldnotes and Recordings

Submit Request | Clear Selections

Container List

- FIELDNOTES
- TRANSCRIPTIONS OF RECORDINGS
- **RECORDINGS**

RECORDINGS

Request Box 5

Meeting of the Totems, 1984
Request Box 5 Folder 1-2

Ethnographic interview: Guria, Kumul myths, 1985
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Uritas Fight with Balanga
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Ethnographic interview: Bumbita villages rout Kamanakor, 1985
Request Box 5 Folder 5

Personal interview: Anien - On his illness, 1985
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Meeting of Salata and Balanga over land. Day 1, 1985
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Meeting of Salata and Balanga over land. Day 2, 1985
Request Box 5 Folder 8-9

Meeting of Salata and Balanga over land. Day 3 - Side B: Myths of routing Kwang
Request Box 5 Folder 10-11

Komsio songs and a myth, 1985
Request Box 5 Folder 12

Letter to Mantandan telling of wife's death, 1985

Recordings

Abelam people in the 1960s

- Anthony Forge Papers

Kaulong-speaking people of New Britain Island, 1962-1974

- Jane Goodale Papers

Manga culture in **Narak** language, 1958-1972

- Edwin Cook Papers

Tsembaga Maring of the Simbai Valley, 1962- 1963 and 1981-1982

- Roy Rappaport Papers

Bumbita Arapesh language of East Sepik in 1984-1986

- Stephen Leavitt Fieldnotes and Recordings

Varisi language speakers on Choiseul Island (1958-1961), among Baniata language speakers on Rendova Island (1967-1968) in the Solomon Islands

- Harold Scheffler Papers

Malaita in the Solomon Islands, Kwaio ritual, chanting and music, and history, 1963-1986

- Roger Keesing Papers

Digitization Process

Takes a Village

Project Team:

- **Erik Mitchell**, Audrey Geisel University Librarian, Principal Investigator
- **Lynda Claassen**, Director of Special Collections & Archives, Project Administrator
- **Cristela Garcia-Spitz**, Curator of the Tuzin Archive of Melanesian Anthropology, Subject Specialist
- **Stefan Elnabli**, Media Curation Librarian, Project Manager
- **Gabriela Montoya**, DAMS Product Manager, Liaison to the vendor
- **Ryan Johnson**, Metadata Analyst
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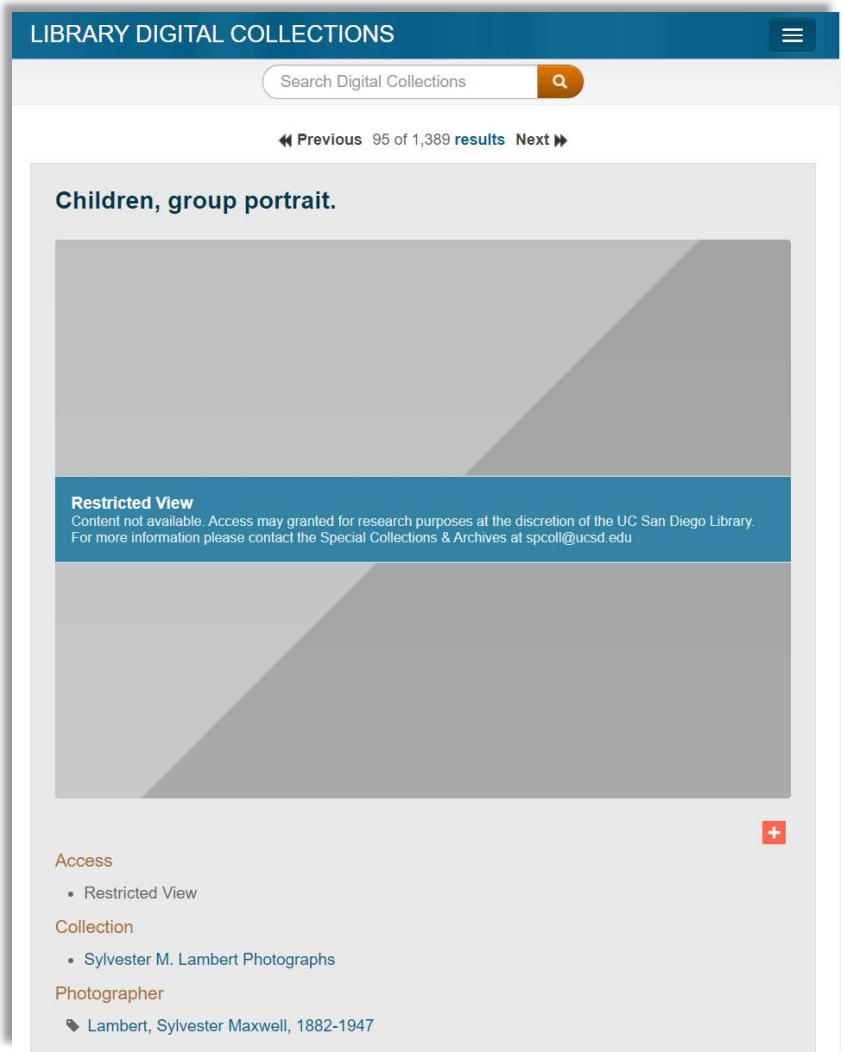
- **Lea Kolesky**, Student Library Assistant

Canoe-building: men carry a new canoe through Tukwaukwa village on Kiriwina, 1976. Edwin Hutchins and Dona Hutchins Collection, UC San Diego Library. https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb0172231g

Culturally sensitive material

- Field interviews contain confidential information and may need to be restricted
- Recognize the barriers to access
- Challenge to determine appropriate level of access and cultural protocols for each specific community
- Require partnerships to carry out the work



Discussion

- Build and strengthen collaborations made possible in the digital era
- Find partnerships and models for sharing the recordings once digitized

House-building: men construct frame, vertical poles are notched at top, betel nut palm (l) taboo with coconut frond tied around it, 1975. Edwin Hutchins and Dona Hutchins Collection, UC San Diego Library. https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8772989q

Thank you! & Questions

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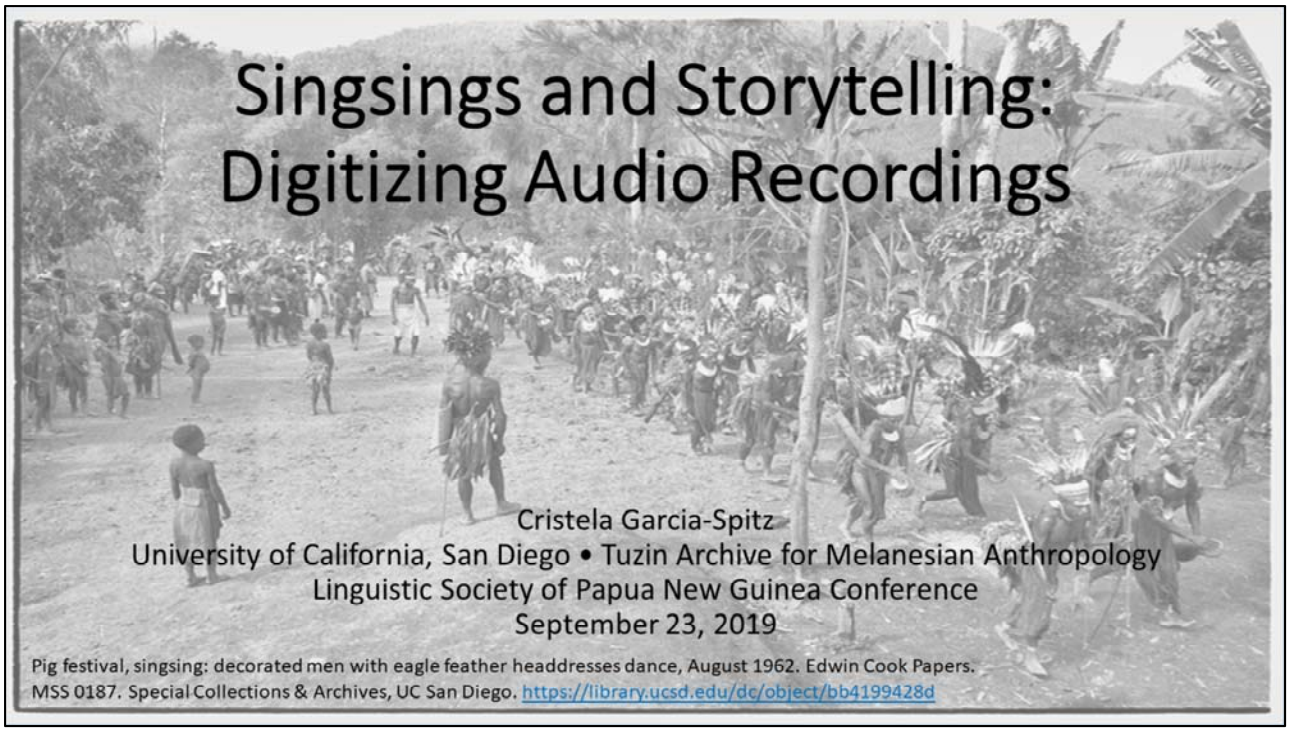

- Introduction – thank the organizers and people for having me here (I've experienced a kind welcome in my first time to PNG)
- Come from a background in Archives and Digital Libraries, started to work with the Oceania collections 10 years ago, became the Curator 3 years ago after my predecessor Kathy Creely retired
- In my career, seen shift in the work, much more dynamic and collaborative today

➢ Using photographs from our collections; **Edwin Cook Anthropologist who worked in the Western Highlands with the Manga people in the 1960s**

https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb4199428d
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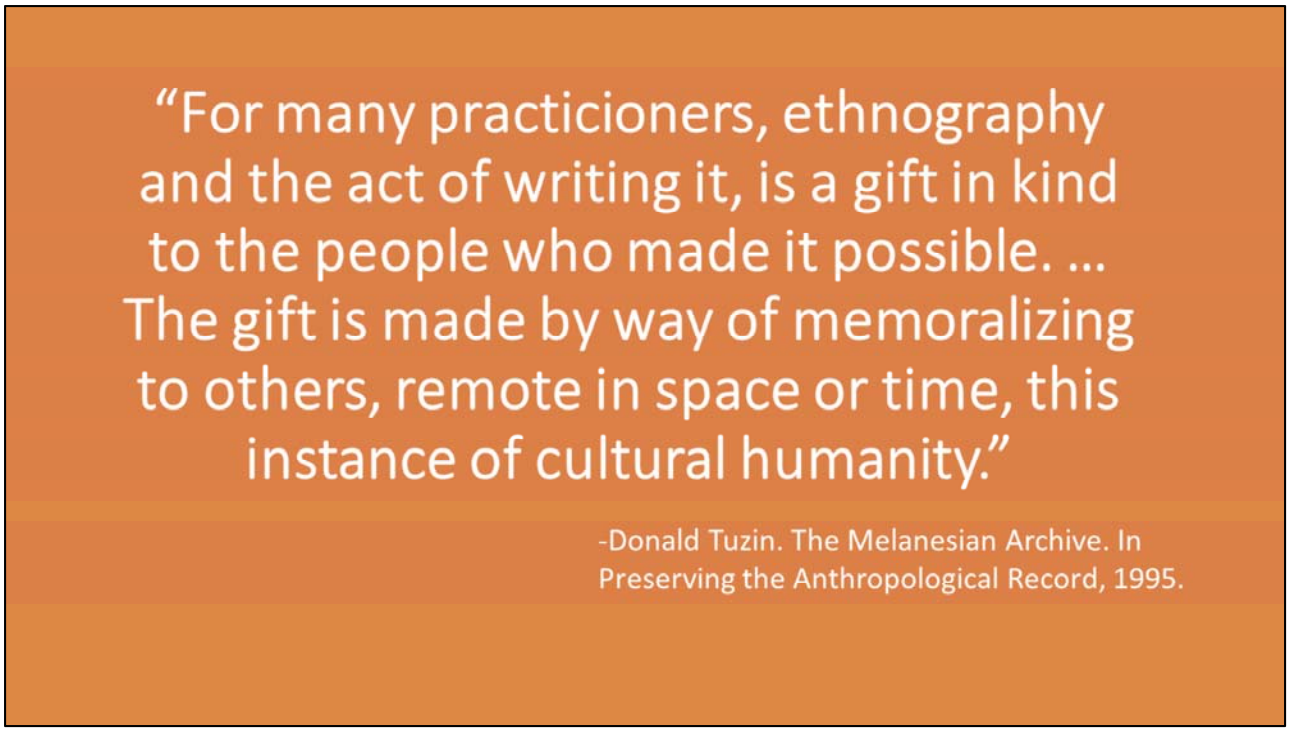

- Tuzin quote - background on the Melanesian Archive
- The Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology was founded in 1982 by Don Tuzin and Fitz John Porter Poole, professors in the UC San Diego Department of Anthropology.
- Focus on materials from PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji
- Created to address the problem of "Ethnographic Loss and Scatter," where ethnographic materials goes unpublished, accumulates in file cabinets and tucked away in attics outside of the region, the Tuzin Archive collects the field notes and other unpublished materials of anthropologists who have worked in Melanesia. Combined with the large collection of government documents, dissertations, books, journals, and other published material related to the region, the archive has made UC San Diego a center for Melanesian research, regularly visited by scholars from around the globe.

➢ Gift quote – Tuzin stressed the anthropologists' role as one of stewardship not ownership of records. And the archive was created to systematically preserve, disseminate and repatriate ethnographic materials.

Tuzin Archive Ongoing Projects

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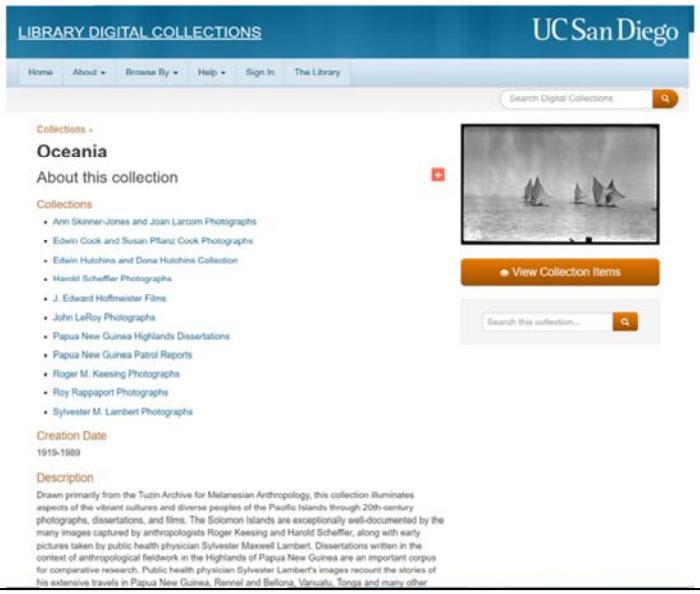


Archive designed with that in mind, there is a history of repatriation

Since the 1980s, the Archive has partnered with institutions like the countries national archives, universities, or cultural centers as repositories and additional ways of providing access to content for re-use. Collaborations have included shipping facsimiles (photocopies, microfilm, and now sending files on hard drives) to share materials.

Over the last several years, digitized primary source materials consisting of photographs and documents has been made available to build a high-quality **freely accessible** online resource.

- Worked to receive permission from over 80 authors to make their dissertations available online.
- A cooperative preservation project began in 1986 between the National Archives of Papua New Guinea and the UC San Diego Library to microfilm and index the PNG Patrol Reports, over 3,000 volumes of colonial reports dating from 1912-1976. In the 1 last five years, these reports have been digitized and are available online in searchable form with other historical documents and images.

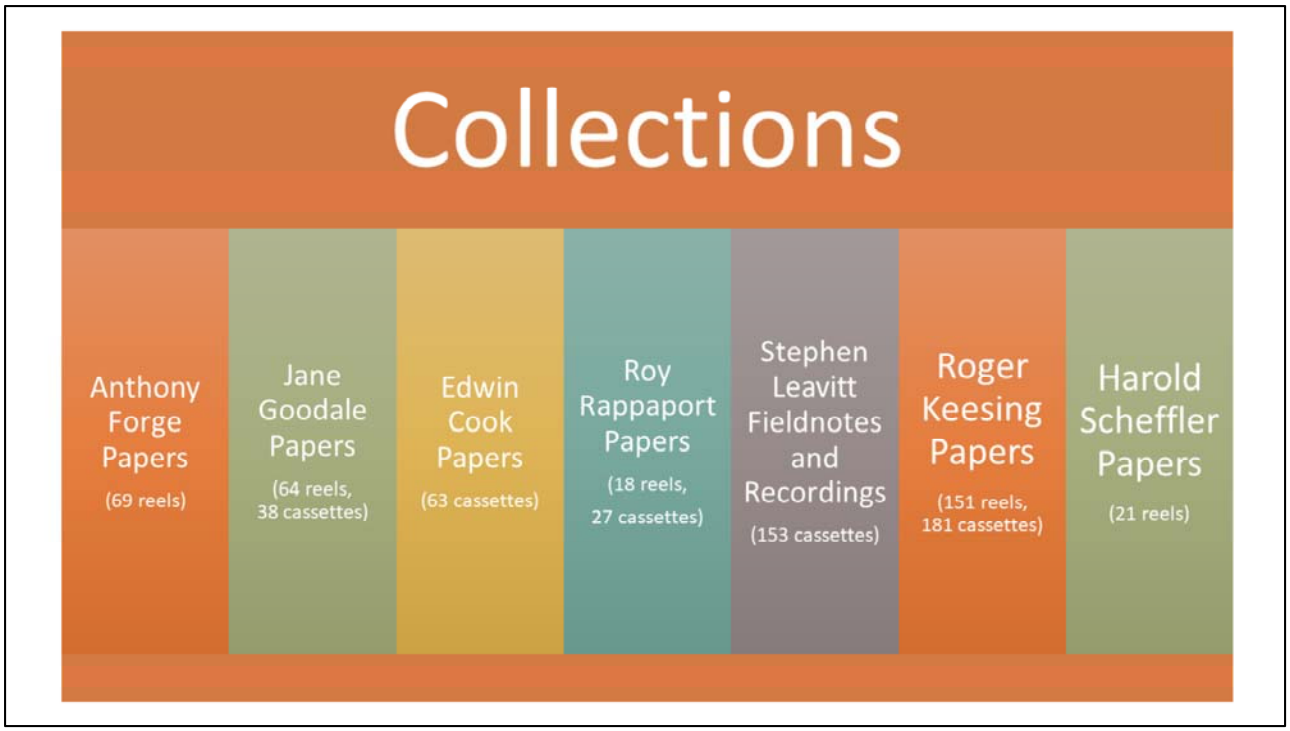
- Another collaboration is with the Kwaio people of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Upon receiving the papers of anthropologist Roger Keesing in the mid-1990s, the Tuzin Archive began consultations on how to appropriately repatriate the materials with the assistance of anthropologist David Akin, who also works with the Kwaio. Originally, materials were deposited in the Solomon Islands National Museum. In recent years, the Kwaio have built the first community-run archive in the Solomon Islands, which houses physical and digital copies of materials from the Roger Keesing Papers. The sound recordings are an important part of the collection that have not been transferred to the Kwaio yet.

Collections are available online for free (~15,000 digital objects), see https://lib.ucsd.edu/oceania

Grant Opportunity

- Current endeavor
- CLIR – Council on Library and Information Resources, non profit organization & Mellon Foundation grant to focus on recordings at risk
- The nearly 800 reel-to-reel and cassette tape field recordings from seven collections include rare interviews, songs, performances, linguistic material, and oral histories collected in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands from the mid-to-late 20th century.
- Digitize bulk of the audio in the entire Melanesian Archive (current collections).
- Literally get to share those voices in the archive.

➢ Grant proposal available on the website https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/09/UCSD_redacted.pdf

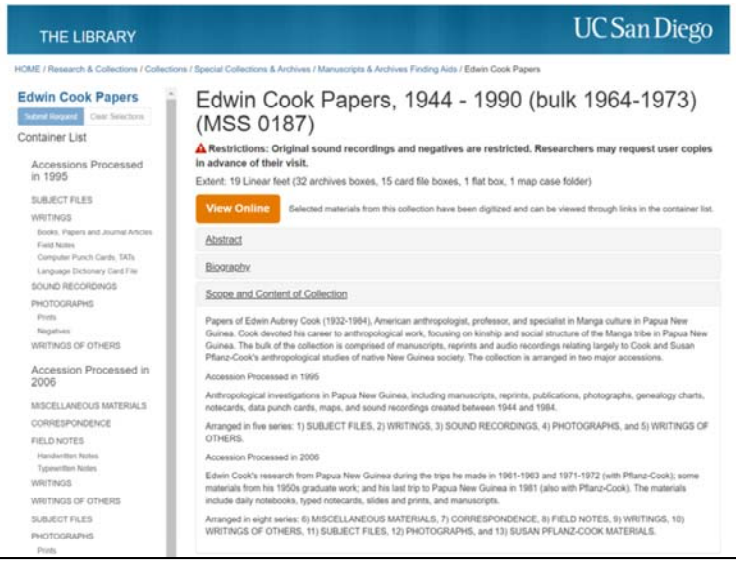


- These are the selected collections and the type of recordings in each collection.
- Each were donated to the Tuzin Archive by the anthropologists themselves or their heirs.
- Several of the recordings contain valuable linguistic as well as cultural knowledge; access to which is currently limited to scholars and researchers that are able to physically visit the archive and afford to have reproductions made. This project will unlock this content and make it available more broadly to scholars and native speakers.
- Images in some of these collections have already been digitized and made available online
- By digitizing the audio from this Archive, both the sights and sounds can be experience together, amplifying the collections reach and enabling new models of digital scholarship and teaching. The sound recordings are also valuable primary sources for communities in preserving their language

Selection of Materials

- Type of recordings
- Number of recordings
- Level of description
- "Rights"
- Geography

https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/findingaids/mss0187.html



1. Recordings include rare interviews, songs, performances, linguistic material, and oral histories
2. Size – large collections, grant primarily covers cost of digitization (vendor, shipping, supplies)
3. Level of description – finding aid with item level description
4. Rights – in the American sense, we have a deed of gift or license agreement to preserve the materials
5. Geography – covers 8 language groups from different regions of PNG and Solomon Islands

Bulk of the audio in the Tuzin Archive - %?
Map

Description

https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/findingaids/mss0027.html

Stephen Leavitt Fieldnotes and Recordings

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  - Request Box 5 Folder 10-11
- Komsio songs and a myth, 1985
  - Request Box 5 Folder 12
- Letter to Mantandan telling of wife's death, 1985

Current website – traditional archival description; listed by the Anthropologist not the people, place, time period

- Over the coming years, what's needed is to enhance the metadata about the people, the language and its use in the time period.
    - Details of the language are only tangientially mentioned in the finding aid for the collection.
- At UCSD, do not have anyone who speaks the languages so will take partnerships and collaborations to do this work
- This current year during the grant, we will be focusing on the digitization process

Digitization Process

- Urgency of digitizing and preserving the sound recordings from these collections
- The UC San Diego Library has prioritized reformatting these recordings not only because of their uniqueness and importance to Pacific Studies and the cultural heritage of the Pacific Island communities, but also to safeguard against the deterioration of the physical materials and format obsolescence. As noted in the Condition Statement, the materials have been stabilized in their current condition in a secure, climate-controlled environment, but the acetate base of the reels and magnetic tape of the cassettes will continue to degrade and be susceptible to deformation because of the physical materials respective formats and age. Most 5 date from the 1960s, making the recordings over 50 years old, and were recorded on a fragile formats (quarter inch reel to reel or audio compact cassette).

Manual labor – physically inventorying and shipping the materials to MediaPreserve, quality control and unpacking materials upon return; spreadsheets that will make your eyes hurt to process and get the files into our system; this year of the grant is the tedious work

Process is pretty straightforward; grant covers the cost of digitization by a vendor
What's written on the box is the current metadata already in the finding aid for the collection

- Digitization offers a means of returning the knowledge and recorded history to the Pacific Island communities. With a strong tradition of oral history, song, and performance as expressions of culture, the singsings and storytelling captured in these sound recordings are a way that Pacifi Islanders impart their cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge. Therefore, it is important to return the voices and sounds to the communities; some of these recordings have never been heard in the communities and are currently out of reach as they are presently stored on magnetic media in the Library. The sound recordings are also valuable primary sources for communities in preserving their language.

Takes a Village

Project Team:

- **Erik Mitchell**, Audrey Geisel University Librarian, Principal Investigator
- **Lynda Claassen**, Director of Special Collections & Archives, Project Administrator
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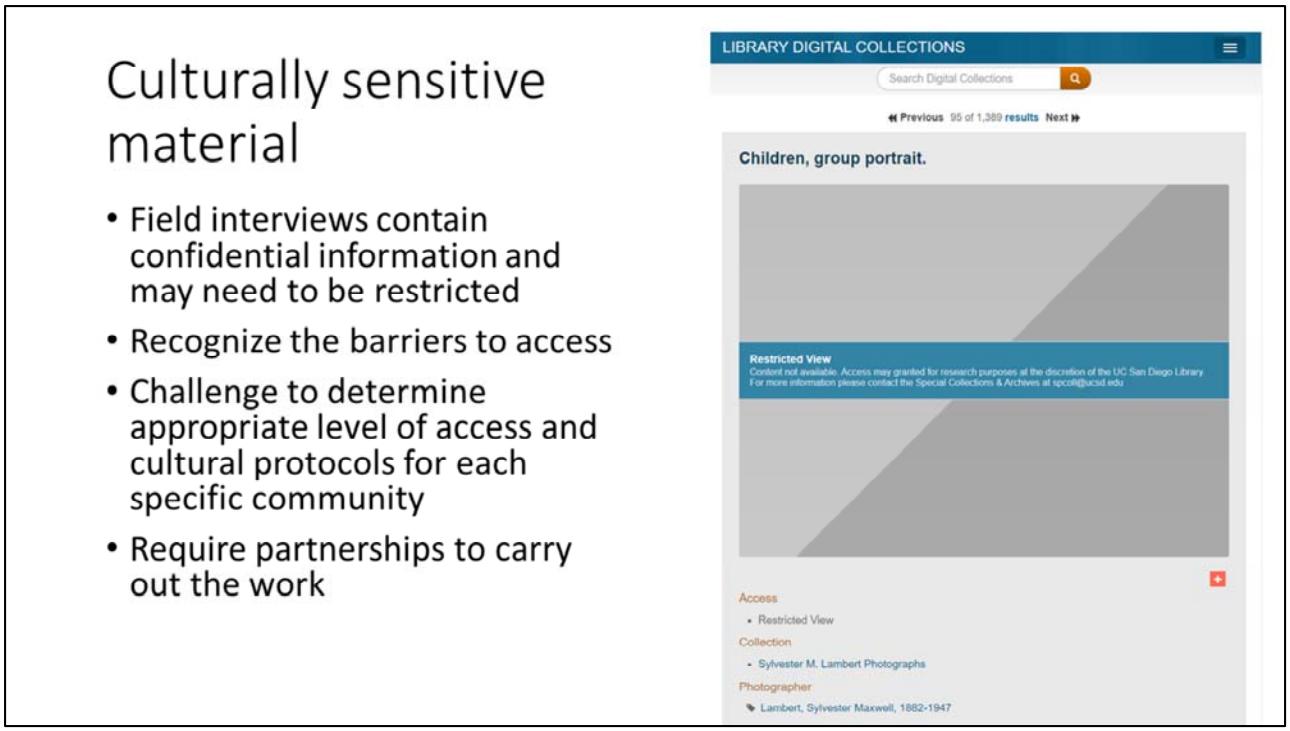
Canoe-building: men carry a new canoe through Tukwaukwa village on Kiriwina, 1976. Edwin Hutchins and Dona Hutchins Collection, UC San Diego Library. https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb0172231g

Acknowledgements – Project team from across the Library; I am the only one designated to work on the Melanesian Archive, but leverage the rest

- Group working together like in the image

Kathy, Founders & Supporters of the Archive, Donors over the years
Ethnographic materials - Voices of those represented in the collections

https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb0172231g
https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8772989q
https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb1025479r
https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb3619363p
https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb4916302c



Based on the descriptions, there are recordings such as field interviews which may contain culturally sensitive and confidential information which may need to be restricted. One of the challenges after the digitization is complete will be to determine cultural protocols of the country and specific community by consulting with the anthropologists or donors of the collections, scholars who work in the region, Pacific Island cultural heritage and academic institutions, and connecting with community members directly when possible.

Having the recordings in digital form will facilitate this process.

Determine the appropriate level of access, ethical responsibilities and sensitivity of the information contained in the recordings to make informed decisions.

For field interviews or other recordings that may need to remain restricted, the metadata will be available in our system. An example of an image from the Roger Keesing Photographs with a metadata-only restricted view is available at https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2492473r. Currently work is underway to build a virtual reading room environment to facilitate access to restricted content. In cases of recordings that may be made available to specific audiences, access may be granted upon registration and agreement to the terms of use.

- learn what are the interests of the community?
- local access for less networked communities
- affects of digitization
- map showing San Diego vs. PNG/SI
- recognize barriers to access, challenges of informed consent

Geographically removed from area/people, no one with knowledge of the language at my insitution; will take building partnerships to bring it here

Discussion

- Build and strengthen collaborations made possible in the digital era
- Find partnerships and models for sharing the recordings once digitized

House-building: men construct frame, vertical poles are notched at top, betel nut palm (l) taboo with coconut frond tied around it, 1975. Edwin Hutchins and Dona Hutchins Collection, UC San Diego Library.
https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8772989q

- Upon completion of this grant, there is potential for further collaboration with Pacific Island communities to repatriate materials to their place of origin.
    - How can these be used? Teaching tools, ways of promoting storytelling/sharing, documenting current narratives

- The ability to share and better utilize the sound recordings is dependent on converting them to digital form. Mobile access is improving and there are increasingly new ways of sharing content digitally. Part of the Archive's outreach effort includes distributing digital content through tools like LibraryBox, an open source, portable digital file distribution tool.

- Respectfully and responsibe processs

    - Once in digital form, there are more possibilities to provide access and enhance collaborations with communities. Recently, an open source, portable digital file distribution tool called LibraryBox has served as a mechanism to share files. This device acts like a mobile hotspot to enable downloads of digital files without internet connection. This is

especially useful in remote areas where internet connectivity is unreliable if present at all. The UC San Diego Library has shared materials using LibraryBox with the Fiji National Archive and the Kwaio Community Archive. Most recently the Papua New Guinea Museum is using LibraryBox for an oral history project and exhibit.

- Another objective for the Tuzin Archive is to explore new ways of using primary sources for digital scholarship. Last summer, the Curator of the Tuzin Archive co-taught a summer course called Patrolling the Past to Explore the (de)Colonial Gaze . In the 5-week course, students performed subject analysis on a volume from the recently digitized PNG Patrol Reports, and shared insights using Knit, the UC San Diego Digital Commons platform based on the open source software Commons in a Box .
- These collaborations demonstrate ways in which the UC San Diego Library works to bridge the distance, share content, and explore new possibilities for teaching and research that will be facilitated by having the sound recordings in digital form.

- Need researchers, especially from here, to do this type of work

- Takes many hands to build types of digital resources and materials are a culmination of the work of many people
- Please come find me during the conference for a demo of the website or library box

- Greater challenge will be to determine how to proceed once the materials are digital
- For scholars, digital access to the photographs and sound recordings together improves the analysis and use of the materials, especially to engage in new forms of digital scholarship and teaching. There is also potential for further collaboration with communities, especially partnering and sharing with pacific scholars.
- Seen the possibilities; encouraged by developments in technology and want to explore more

Thank you! & Questions

cgarciaspitz@ucsd.edu