

# **J. Alden Mason American Section records**

**0048**

**Finding aid prepared by Bryce Little Jody Rodgers.**

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Last updated on March 02, 2017.

University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

6/19/2015

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
<b>Creator</b>	Mason, John Alden, 1885-1967
<b>Title</b>	J. Alden Mason American Section records
<b>Call number</b>	0048
<b>Date [bulk]</b>	1924-1964
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1898-1968
<b>Extent</b>	1.2 linear feet
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>J. Alden Mason, noted archaeological anthropologist and linguist, was born in Orland, Indiana and attended school in Philadelphia attaining his A.B. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1907. He pursued his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley completing his dissertation on the ethnography of the Salinan Indians of California. Mason was influenced by Alfred J. Kroeber while at Berkeley and Edward Sapir of the University of Pennsylvania. The J. Alden Mason curatorial years (1922-1967) produced three archival boxes of correspondence and in-house memos, along with Section reports, research notes and articles and notes for publication. This material, in addition to personal records of Dr. Mason and evidence of his scholarship were arranged into series and placed in chronological order.</p>

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## Biography/History

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J. Alden Mason, noted archaeological anthropologist and linguist, was born in Orland, Indiana and attended school in Philadelphia attaining his A.B. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1907. He pursued his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley completing his dissertation on the ethnography of the Salinan Indians of California. Mason was influenced by Alfred J. Kroeber while at Berkeley and Edward Sapir of the University of Pennsylvania. Following the completion of his Ph.D., Mason was chosen to represent the state of Pennsylvania for two seasons in Mexico at the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology, a joint enterprise between Mexico and the United States. He then spent more than a year in Puerto Rico recording folktales in original dialects. His association with the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology brought him into close contact with Franz Boas of Columbia University.

In 1914, Mason traveled to Puerto Rico to learn about the folktales of the native people. He visited Utuado, Coamo, San German, and Loiza and transcribed in the local dialect various tales, poetry, and some music. His field notebooks contain the names of the storytellers along with brief comments from Mason about their appearance, dialect, or diction. Some of these stories, songs, and poems have been transcribed and published. Wax recordings of the material exist at the Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics at the University of Indiana. Several stories were translated and sent to Mason's daughter, Kathy.

Mason's curatorial career began in 1917 as an Assistant Curator of Mexican and South American Archaeology at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. He married Florence Roberts in 1921. Mason remained at the Field Museum until 1924 when he assumed an Assistant Curator position at the American Museum of Natural History. Mason held this position briefly as he moved to The University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania as Curator in 1925. He gave 25 years of service to the Museum, becoming Emeritus Curator of the American Indian Section in 1955.

Collections added during the Mason curatorial years include the remarkable gold objects from Cocle, Panama; the Piedras Negras expeditions; Shotriddle's Northwest Coast collections; the vast Academy of Natural Sciences collections including the pre-1879 Haldeman and the large Gottschall Collections, originally loaned but then acquired in exchange; Frank Speck collections from eastern Canada; the large and meticulously documented Osborne (Guatemalan textiles) and Stephens (North American ethnographic) collections; various Colombian and Panamanian gold collections and the Mayer Brazilian, Broad Costa Rican, and Monday Mexican archaeological collections; and jade Northwest Coast objects from Emmons.

Mason published regularly in *The Museum Journal*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, and *American Anthropologist*, serving as editor of *American Anthropologist* from 1945 to 1948. His published works included "The Language of the Papago Indians" and "The Languages of the South American Indians" among others.

In addition to linguistics, Mason developed wide interests in his fieldwork including archaeology, ethnology, and folklore, particularly from Latin America. After 1916, he focused on the Uto-Aztecan languages of northern Mexico and the southwestern part of the United States. He also worked in four eastern states in the United States, and Puerto Rico, Colombia, Panama, and Guatemala. He was Field Director of the first Eldridge R. Johnson Piedras Negras Expedition returning with "Lintel 3" a Maya carved stone wall-panel on loan to the Penn Museum from 1931 to 1946 and stone stelae dating to A.D.

514.

When Mason retired from the museum in 1955, he continued his contributions including a dig at Chiapas, Mexico in 1958 while serving as Editor and Archaeological Advisor to the New World Archaeology Foundation. Mason held this post until his death in 1967.

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## Scope and Contents

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John Alden Mason was hired from the Field Museum of Natural History, and his tenure (1926-1955) is well-documented, including a large professional correspondence with geographical subdivisions, offerings of collections (also geographically organized), in-house memos, a set of notebooks (1922-1952), lecture notes and bibliographies, and a long-term file on his lifelong interest in American rock art. Mason made 22 expeditions of varying scope during his active curatorship and his scholarly and field activities completely encompassed the Americas. Materials on his pre-1926 activities include the 1909 expedition for the Museum, 1913 Great Slave notes later published by Yale, 1914 Puerto Rican work for Columbia, Tepecano linguistics in west Mexico, and Santa Marta excavations for the Field Museum in Colombia. The bulk of Mason's correspondence and his linguistic fieldnotes were transferred to the American Philosophical Society on his death, and his library was sold to Southern Illinois University during his lifetime. He remained active as Emeritus Curator up to his death in 1967.

American Section files were unarranged when transferred to the Archives. Curatorial files have been subdivided into "curatorial" proper as a sub-series (arranged, in general, "chronologically" by holders of assistant curatorships); an "exchanges, loans, deaccessions and thefts" sub-series, grouping documents on the movements of American objects (to be used in connection with the records of the Registrar's Office, established in 1929); an "inventories" sub-series containing various topical and other lists of objects in the American collections; a "collectors and collections" sub-series arranged alphabetically (includes Heye and a separate alphabetical list for Alaska) by the name of the donor or seller or title of collection; and a "general administration" sub-series encompassing index cards, exhibit labels, various American Section reports starting with Mercer, documents on American topics with no discernible connection, miscellaneous financial transactions, etc.

The J. Alden Mason curatorial years (1922-1967) produced three archival boxes of correspondence and in-house memos, along with Section reports, research notes and articles and notes for publication. This material, in addition to personal records of Dr. Mason and evidence of his scholarship were arranged into series and placed in chronological order.

The Correspondence series is divided into location specific writings and notes and in-house materials with specific sections devoted to J. Alden Mason's trips to Central America and Guatemala. Correspondence with specific scholars/excavators are contained in their own folders and include Robert Zingg, Anna O. Shepard, George S. Fisher. Letters relating to collections offered to the Museum, proposals for research and professional contacts of Dr. Mason complete the series.

The highlights of the Research series are notes related to specific excavations or museum objects, for example, the Walum Olum and petroglyphs.

The Personal series provides a window into Mason's years as a graduate student and his trip to Europe in 1924.

Added to this collection are a group of small collections sent to the museum or to Mason personally. This series is filed in Box 14.

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## Administrative Information

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## Controlled Access Headings

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### PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Butler, Mary, 1903-1970
- Fisher, George S.
- Gordon, G. B. (George Byron), 1870-1927
- Jayne, Horace Howard Furness, 1898-1975
- Mason, John Alden, 1885-1967
- McHugh, Jane
- Mercer, Henry C., 1856-1930
- Shepard, Anna Osler, 1903-1973
- Uhle, Max, 1856-1944
- Vaillant, George C., b.1901-d.1945

### SUBJECT(S)

- Anthropological museums and collections
- Anthropology
- Archaeological expeditions

## Collection Inventory

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### CORRESPONDENCE, 1926-1958.

	Box
North American Curatorial 1926-1955.	12
Middle America Curatorial 1926-1967.	12
South America Curatorial 1926-1955.	12
Collections Offered-Middle America 1928-1958.	12
Collections Offered-South America 1898-1948 (1 of 2).	12
Collections Offered-South America 1898-1948 (2 of 2).	12
Collections Offered-North America 1927-1953.	12
Proposal for founding Institute of Latin American Culture Researches (early 1930s).	
	Box
In-House Correspondence 1926-1929.	12
In-House Correspondence 1930 (Central America trip).	12
In-House Correspondence 1934-1939.	12
In-House Correspondence 1938 (Guatemala trip).	12
In-House Correspondence 1940-1951.	12

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Professional 1926-1958.	12
A.E. Anderson 1934 (Huastecan vessels).	12
Oetteking, Bruno.	12
Anna O. Shepard 1942-1943 (Mexican object in plumbate report).	12
Robert Zingg 1953 (Maya lectures, Mexican codices).	13
Margaret Plass 1955.	13
Shell Heap-Damariscotta, ME 1955.	13

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**AMERICAN SECTION, 1930-1948.**

	Box
Educational Slide Lectures 1930-1931 (correspondence).	13
Educational Slide Lectures 1930-1931 (drafts and lists).	13
"Value of Some of My Indian Material"-Catalogue of section purchases 1933-1934.	13
Section memos and financial records 1929, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1952.	13
Section Reports 1931,1941-1943 (1 of 2).	13
Section Reports 1931,1941-1943 (2 of 2).	13
Records Placed in Vault 1942.	13
List of Pueblo Bonito sherd lots available-AMNH 1943.	13



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Section Reports 1944-1948 (1 of 2).	13
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Section Reports 1944-1948 (2 of 2).	13
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**RESEARCH, 1937-1956.**

	Box
Notes on the Walum Olum.	13
Washington County excavation notes-George S. Fisher 1937.	13
James W. Dickey report on excavation at Tunja and Puerta Servies,Colombia 1937.	13
Proposals for research by members of American section 1939.	13
Notes on Shotridge and Shotridge Collection c.1942.	13
Notes on Eight Chiriqui Whistles 1944.	13
Maya Pottery-list of original drawings 1950.	13
Research on Henry C. Mercer for article-Pennsylvania Archaeologist 1956.	13
S.W. Fernberger Peyote study.	13
Petroglyph Correspondence 1933-1957.	13
Petroglyph Manuscript and notes 1939, 1950.	13
Petroglyph photos and drawings 1914,1936,1942 (1 of 2).	13
Petroglyph photos and drawings 1914,1936,1942 (2 of 2).	13

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**PUBLICATIONS, 1927-1955.**

Proposed Publications by American Section 1928.

Box

Drafts of Published Articles (n.d.-1927) (1 of 2).

14

Drafts of Published Articles (n.d.-1927) (2 of 2).

14

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**PERSONAL, 1913-1968.**

Box

Mason's class notes and bibliographies as a student 1913-?.

14

Diary of European trip 1924.

14

Notes on American artifacts in European Museums 1924.

14

Lectures and academic record 1925-1964.

14

Bibliography of Mason's writings; list of negatives 1959-1968.

14

Mary Butler's file on Mason, papers, library 1968.

14

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**NON-MUSEUM COLLECTIONS, 1926-1941.**

Box

Nicaragua Clay Cylinder Cells (B. Marin) n.d.	14
Caribbean-Antigua, B.W.I. 1931.	14
Hernandez de Alba, Hacienda Segovia 1936.	14
Gold Objects-Veraguas, Panama 1940.	14
A.T. Anderson Excavation-Melbourne, FL. 1941.	14