

J. Alden Mason Puerto Rican survey records

1103

Finding aid prepared by Jody Rodgers.

Last updated on March 02, 2017.

University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

July 2009

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Mason, John Alden, 1885-1967
Title	J. Alden Mason Puerto Rican survey records
Call number	1103
Date [bulk]	1914-1915
Date [inclusive]	1914-1960
Extent	0.3 linear foot
Language	English
Abstract	<p>J. Alden Mason, noted archaeological anthropologist and linguist and curator of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, conducted ethnographic and archaeological research in Puerto Rico from 1914 to 1915. Holdings include field notebooks, most notably phonetic recordings of Puerto Rican folklore from Utuado, San German, Loiza, Copa, and Coamo. Notable items include a draft of the manuscript "Painted Cave Petroglyphs in Puerto Rico" from 1939 and correspondence regarding wax cylinder recordings. Included also are letters from Mason to his daughter, Kathy, and several translated tales sent to her.</p>

Cite as:

[Item name]. Box [Box number]. J. Alden Mason Puerto Rican survey records. Penn Museum Archives. Accessed [Date accessed].

Biography/History

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 men who told the stories 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.

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.

Scope and Contents

The records of the J. Alden Mason Puerto Rican Survey contain field notebooks, publication and research notes, a publication draft, correspondence, and letters to his daughter from Mason's expedition to Puerto Rico in 1914 to 1915. Mason recorded folktales and poetry in the native languages in Coamo, Loiza, San German, and Utuado, Puerto Rico.

The 20 field notebooks are contained in eleven folders and most have separated covers. They are hand-written phonetically in the local dialect. Mason has named the speakers in most books and often has included a few words of physical or dialectical description in English about each speaker. Folder one contains one hand-written and one type-written guide to the phonetics used by Mason. The notebooks are organized by date from 12/1/1914 to 4/19/1915 and roughly by speaker in each book. The field notebooks from Utuado are numbered from one to fourteen. There is one book from San German grouped with the Utuado books. Transcriptions from Loiza are numbered one to three, then six. The Coamo notebooks are numbered one and two. Following the Coamo notebooks is one folder of loose field notes from the R. Aitken excavations at Copa, Utuado, Puerto Rico in July 1915. Included with the loose notes is one photo map of "Juego de Bola" (ballgame). (Negative #58-140586)

The Utuado fieldbooks appear to be stories and folktales. Some pages in the San German book are labeled "music".

The field notebooks from Loiza appear to be mostly poetry with the exception of a typed page of a story sent to "Alegria" 10/23/1957 and a children's game song; "Arroz con Leche". With the Loiza material are typed notes indicating the original notes and Puerto Rican folklore in these books were "mostly transcribed and published." An additional note in the second Loiza book, relates to African vocabulary "presumably African Congo" used in several poems. The folklore from Coamo, taken down in April 1915, contains some English translation or clarification.

The publication and research notes consist of worksheets by Mason for publications in 1917 and 1921. Included are lists of photographs of Puerto Rico, captions for illustrations, list of figures from the catalogue of the American Museum of Natural History, and an explanation of "Plates" from the Catalogue of the American Museum of Natural History. Also in this folder is a list of 138 "photos for selection" from Capa Caguano. Several typed pages are labeled "Oviedo" and appear to be taken from "Historia general y natural de las Indias" by Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes. This material, published in Madrid in 1851, is in Spanish.

The publication draft of "Painted Cave Petroglyphs in Puerto Rico" is type-written and contains a handwritten note that material was sent to the American Congress in Lima, September, 1939.

The correspondence is dated from 12/8/1950 to 6/11/1968. The letters up to and including 1960 are written to Mason and by Mason. The letters from 1968 refer to the disposition of the wax recordings of the Puerto Rican folklore following Mason's death. Notable among the correspondents are: Thomas S. Haye, Librarian, University Library, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico; Richard E. Alegria, Museo de Universidad de Puerto Rico; Junius B. Bird, Associate Curator of Archaeology, The American Museum of Natural History; Dr. Otis Green, University of Pennsylvania; J.W. Ashton, Vice President, Indiana University; and George List, Supervisor, Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics at the University of Indiana. A copy of the agreement between the Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics and Mason concerning "material from Colombia, Arhuaco, and Goajiro, Puerto Rico" in

which Mason retained the rights to the wax recordings is with the correspondence. The Puerto Rican stories sent to his daughter consist of two typed letters to "Kathy" from November 1961 with hand-written notes on the back of one page. Eleven typed stories in English translation are enclosed in the folder.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

July 2009

Finding aid prepared by Jody Rodgers.

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Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence
- Field notes
- Manuscripts for publication

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Mason, John Alden, 1885-1967

SUBJECT(S)

- Ethnology
- Folklore

Collection Inventory

FIELD NOTEBOOKS 1914-1915.

	Box
Folklore-Utuado [1 of 6].	1
Folklore-Utuado [2 of 6].	1
Folklore-Utuado [3 of 6].	1
Folklore-Utuado [4 of 6].	1
Folklore-Utuado [5 of 6].	1
Folklore-Utuado [6 of 6].	1
Folklore-Utuado, San German.	1
Folklore-Loiza (1 of 2).	1
Folklore-Loiza (2 of 2).	1
R. Aitkin Excavations at Copa (July 1915).	1

CORRESPONDENCE.	Box 1
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PUBLICATION AND RESEARCH NOTES 1917-1921.	Box 1
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DRAFT OF "PAINTED CAVE PETROGLYPHS IN PUERTO RICO" 1939.	Box 1
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PUERTO RICAN STORIES SENT TO DAUGHTER 1961.	Box 1
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