



Marlin Perkins Papers (S0516)

Collection Number: S0516

Collection Title: Marlin Perkins Papers

Dates: 1873-1991

Creator: Perkins, Marlin, 1905-1986

Abstract: The Marlin Perkins Papers consist of newspaper clippings, correspondence, zoo animal feeding records, business contracts, equipment lists, maps, archaeological records, publications, and zoological findings, conservation and ecological writings, scrapbooks, photographs, and film. The materials in this collection are related to Marlin Perkins' involvement in national and international zoos, wildlife and nature conservation, *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*, *Zoo Parade*, and various other dealings involving wildlife.

Collection Size: 17.4 cubic feet
(353 folders, 2854 photographs, 32 16mm films, 29 audio cassettes, 14 audio disks, 16 items)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

Restrictions on Use: The Donor has given and assigned to the University all rights of copyright, which the Donor has in the Materials and in such of the Donor's works as may be found among any collections of Materials received by the University from others.

Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Marlin Perkins Papers* (S0516); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Carol Perkins on June 27, 1990 (Accession No. SA2955). Additions were made on August 2, 1990 by Carol Perkins (Accession No. SA2961); on August 22, 1991 by Carol Perkins (Accession No. SA3013); on February 15, 2005 by Gaye Buzbee Jacobs (Accession No. 3597); and on October 10, 2008 by Katherine Bang (Accession No. SA3815).

Related Materials: Additional materials related to the Marlin Perkins Papers can be found in the following collections:

Saint Louis Zoo Collection (S0194)

Howard F. Baer Papers (S0038)

Processed by: Processed by Western Historical Manuscripts Collection staff, August 1990.
Revised by Zack Palitzsch, February 2021.

Biographical Note:

R. Marlin Perkins was born in Carthage, Missouri in 1905, the youngest of three boys. His interest in wildlife was evident from a very young age and would often bring home snakes, possums, raccoons, turtles, and frogs to the dismay of his family. Perkins' mother died when he was seven years old and he was sent to live with his aunt in Pittsburg, Kansas. He lived there until high school, when he entered Wentworth Military Academy. His fascination with snakes grew and he would catch them and keep them in his dorm room closet. When his professor found out, he made Perkins release them in a field nearby. Following high school, Perkins attended the College of Agriculture at the University of Missouri - Columbia in 1924. Having become disenchanted with the College of Agriculture, Perkins wanted assurance of his passion for wildlife. After discussing it with his father, Perkins left the University of Missouri - Columbia at the end of his sophomore year to pursue a job involving wild animals. Perkins married Elise More in 1933 and they were married 20 before they divorced in 1953. They had one daughter, Suzanne, in 1937. Seven years after their divorce, Perkins married his second wife, Carol, in 1960. Carol shared Perkins' love for wildlife and often accompanied him during his travels to document wildlife. She also authored several children's books about animals.

Perkins began his career with the St. Louis Zoo in 1926 as a sweeper. With the donation of his personal collection of reptiles he rapidly rose to the position of Curator of Reptiles two years later. Soon after, while washing a Gaboon viper, Perkins was bitten on the hand by the venomous snake and spent three weeks recovering in the hospital. In September 1938, Perkins accepted the Curatorship of the Buffalo Zoological Gardens developing it into a modern and attractive small zoo. In May 1944, he was appointed Director of the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, and under his direction the Lincoln Park Zoo became internationally known. Perkins returned to St. Louis accepting the Directorship of the St. Louis Zoo on October 1, 1962. Upon his retirement in 1970, he was named Director Emeritus of the St. Louis Zoo, a position he held until his death in 1986.

During his early years at the Lincoln Park Zoo, Perkins began his remarkable career in television. Perkins' first television appearance on was in 1945 when he would often show the Lincoln Park Zoo animals on the studios of WBKB in Chicago. He continued to show animals on the show for two years until he decided transporting animals from the zoo in winter was not practical. His next television venture included the award winning, *Zoo Parade*, which was seen on television from 1950 to 1957 on NBC and was mostly filmed at the Lincoln Park Zoo. It was not until 1955 that the show started occasionally transporting Perkins abroad to film wild animals in their natural habitat. After gaining national attention as a notable zoologist, Perkins was asked to join Sir Edmund Hillary as the zoologist for Hillary's Yeti Expedition in the Himalayas. Often, Perkins would give his expert opinion on things such as yeti footprints and hair samples.

Having been successful on *Zoo Parade*, Perkins discussed with *Zoo Parade* sponsor, Mutual of Omaha, about doing another animal documentary show, featuring wild animals from virtually

every corner of the world. Thus, *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* first aired in 1963, featuring Marlin Perkins and his long-time assistant Jim Fowler and continued to run for twenty-six seasons, winning dozens of awards including four Emmy Awards for outstanding program achievement. The show was featured on NBC from 1963 to 1971, until a prime-time scheduling conflict arose. From 1971 to 1972, *Wild Kingdom* was aired on Mutual of Omaha's own network until NBC picked it up again starting in 1973. From 1963 to 1985, Perkins served as the host until he was forced to leave due to his declining health. Jim Fowler took over as the host of *Wild Kingdom* after Perkins left until the program's end in 1988.

Although he never returned to college to complete his formal education, Perkins was the recipient of honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Missouri - Columbia, Northland College, Rockhurst College, MacMurray College, and College of St. Mary. Perkins remained extremely active in education and conservation throughout his life. His efforts included involvement with the American Cancer Society, public education regarding wildlife conservation, international consultation for zoo development and wildlife conservation, and the establishment and development of The Canid Survival and Research Center in 1971. He also published an autobiography in 1982 called *My Wild Kingdom*.

Marlin Perkins died in 1986 at the age of 81 due to lymphatic cancer. After his death, his widow, Carol Perkins, continued his legacy of wildlife conservation and education until her death in 2012. In 1991, the St. Louis Zoo founded the Marlin Perkins Society, which carried on Perkins' dream of conserving endangered species. The society has raised over \$28 million dollars since its inception to help the zoo care for and nurture endangered animals.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following 26 series and four subseries:

- Family Papers
- Correspondence
- Buffalo Zoo
- Lincoln Park Zoo
- St. Louis Zoo
- Other Zoos
- Yeti Expedition
- Zoo Parade
- Mutual of Omaha
- Zoology
- Conservation and Ecology
- Wolf Sanctuary
- Foreign Affairs
- Maps
- Symposiums and Banquets
- Field Notes and Journals
- Manuscripts
 - My Wild Kingdom*, Autobiography
- Publications
- Scrapbooks
- Awards
- Photographs

St. Louis Zoo
Lincoln Park Zoo
Glass Lantern Color Slides
Audio Recordings
Books
Audio Visual
Vinyl Records
Oversize

Scope and Content Note:

Family Papers

This series consists of sheet music, correspondence, estate plans, personal keepsakes, and notes regarding family business, Joseph D. Perkins, the Perkins estate, Marlin Perkins' autobiography, and the Perkins family heritage. This series also includes articles, correspondence, and newspaper clippings regarding Perkins' wife Carol Perkins and her involvement in wildlife conservation and ecology. The materials in this series date from 1873 to 1986 and are arranged chronologically.

Correspondence

This series contains correspondence regarding the St. Louis Zoo, the Buffalo Zoo, the Lincoln Park Zoo, *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* production, conservation, publications, and political issues. The correspondence documents the issues Perkins was faced with while being a curator and director of the zoos for which he worked. Correspondence of note include discussions with Mutual of Omaha and Don Meier Productions to produce *Zoo Parade* and the Emmy Award winning show *Wild Kingdom* as well as Perkins' agreements to be involved in Sir Edmund Hillary's scientific expedition to find the Yeti in the Himalayan Mountains. The materials in this series date from 1922 to 1985 and are arranged by topic.

Buffalo Zoo

This series consists of Buffalo Zoo animal feeding schedules, meeting minutes, employee bulletins, publications, brochures, and handwritten notes, which represent the activities of Perkins while acting as curator of reptiles and director of the zoo. Some of the activities with which Perkins was involved include communication with animal dealers, administration, animal diets, and managing equipment and labor. The materials in this series date from 1931 to 1964 and are arranged chronologically.

Lincoln Park Zoo

This series consists of Lincoln Park Zoo business records, publications, television scripts, animal feed price lists, articles regarding animal diets, lists from animal dealers, correspondence, and handwritten notes which document the activities of Perkins while directing the zoo. These activities include animal maintenance and diets, television appearances, managing newsletters, fund raising events, and lectures. The materials in this series date from 1899 to 1964 and are arranged chronologically.

St. Louis Zoo

This series consists of St. Louis Zoo business transactions, public communications notes, publications, public education, zoo growth and development, animal exchange bulletins, animal maintenance and care, filming, and handwritten notes which represent the activities of Perkins while directing the zoo. Some of these activities include collecting scientific information on animals and plants, communication with stakeholders, developing gardens, class lectures, building the ZooLine Railroad, rehabilitating the Bird-Cage, administration, inspections, and animal feedings. The materials in this series date from 1926 to 1968 and are arranged chronologically.

Other Zoos

This series consists of brochures, notes, reports, a constitution, programs, advertisements, flyers, a contract proposal, exhibit recommendations, newsletters, correspondence, business transactions, and bulletins regarding Marlin Perkins' involvement in other national and international zoos, mostly concerning animal care, breeding, and zoo infrastructure. Notable additions to this series include development plans for building and operating zoos, as well as blueprints for the improvement of the Smithsonian Institute's National Zoological Park. The materials in this series date from 1934 to 1983 and are arranged chronologically.

Yeti Expedition

This series consists of correspondence, articles, and handwritten notes regarding the Sir Edmund Hillary's expedition to the Himalayas in search of the yeti or abominable snowman. Materials of note in this series includes a manuscript documenting the journey to find a yeti as well as a written agreement that should a yeti be found and captured, the Lincoln Park Zoo would be the first zoo to exhibit it. The manuscript notes that yeti hair was found as well as distinct yeti footprints. The materials in this series date from 1959 to 1961 and are arranged chronologically.

Zoo Parade

This series consists of correspondence, awards, copyright documents, progress reports, film subjects and routes, itineraries, business records, articles, publications, maps and handwritten notes regarding the *Zoo Parade*, a television program that discussed and featured animals from the Lincoln Park Zoo, hosted by Marlin Perkins. Materials of note include film and production schedules, income and royalties assigned to Perkins, and awards given to Perkins and the producers of the show. The materials in this series date from 1947 to 1959 and are arranged chronologically.

Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom

This series consists of awards, business and financial records, filming schedules, film scripts, show ideas, program synopses, documents for international travel, equipment lists, schedules and itineraries, program guidelines, show descriptions, awards, calendars, publications, maps, and handwritten notes regarding *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*. Materials of note in this series include program synopses, film scripts, and correspondence documenting Perkins' world travels and filming schedules. The materials in this series date from 1948 to 1985 and are arranged chronologically.

Zoology

This series consists of articles, publications, and general bibliographies regarding the science of zoology. Some of the materials in this series include information on animal health and medication, collecting reptiles, snake bites, animal diseases, insects, teaching animals, marine wildlife, breeding, animal diets, animal anatomy, and animal experimentation. The materials in this series date from 1896 to 1974 and are arranged chronologically.

Conservation and Ecology

This series consists of flyers, wildlife laws, publications, newsletters, reports, lists of conservation organizations, newspaper clippings, correspondence, brochures, animal domestication laws, and handwritten notes regarding the interests and activities of Carol and Marlin Perkins in the fields of conservation and ecology. The materials also include information relating to Missouri wildlife, national animal preservation, various endangered species, the Serengeti Research Institute, conservation organizations, legislation, wildlife art, afforestation, rabies, the fur industry, animal protection, animal relocation and research, population control, pollution, and public education. The materials in this series date from 1942 to 1980 and are arranged chronologically.

Wolf Sanctuary

This series consist of news releases, advertisements, publications, flyers, and guides regarding the establishment and development of the Wild Canid Survival and Research Center as well has the reproduction and care of wolves. Also included in this series are program schedules for the Symposium on Endangered and Threatened Species in North America, which was hosted by the Wolf Sanctuary and included speakers such as French explorer Jacques Cousteau and environmentalist Margaret Wentworth Owings. The materials in this series date from 1974 to 1986 and are arranged chronologically.

Foreign Affairs

This series consist of correspondence, handwritten notes, newspaper clippings, business records, publications, articles, manuscripts, travel documents, and itineraries and schedules which represent the international concerns and activities of Carol and Marlin Perkins. The series also documents the Perkins' visits to various wildlife institutions in Australia, China, India, Nepal, New Zealand, and Thailand. The material in this series date from 1960 to 1974 and are arranged alphabetically by country.

Maps

The materials in this series consist of maps of countries, cities, oceans, and regions of the world. In addition to general territorial maps, this series also documents subjects such as whale travel, war, exploration, and transportation. Also included in this series are maps of the moon's orbit path, airway travel, and constellations. The materials in this series date from 1921 to 1981 and are arranged alphabetically by region.

Symposiums and Banquets

This series consists of menus, invitations, bulletins, programs, and tributes regarding symposiums and banquets. These materials document dinners, conferences, banquets, and luncheons held by the Explorer's Club, zookeeper associations, YMCA, park associations, and other national and international societies and organizations relating to zoo keeping and nature conservation. The materials in this series date from 1948 to 1987 and are arranged chronologically.

Field Notes and Journals

This series consist of handwritten notes taken by Marlin Perkins in the field or written later from memory. Topics included in these field notes and journals include Perkins' trips to Panama, Lapland, Serengeti, India, Peru, and Australia as well as his notes on humpback whales, notes on his personal thoughts, and date books for Mutual of Omaha. The date books include handwritten notes regarding *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* and appointments. The materials in this series date from 1910 to 1984 and are arranged chronologically with the Mutual of Omaha date book volumes at the end of the series.

Manuscripts

This series consists of manuscripts written by various members of the Perkins family for publication. This series includes one subseries regarding Marlin Perkins' autobiography, *My Wild Kingdom*, which takes up the bulk of this series. Also included are comic books illustrating the events that happened during the filming of *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* as well as a draft of *The Shattered Skull*, a children's book written by Carol Perkins regarding Africa, archaeology, and wildlife. The materials in this series date from 1931 to 1982 and are arranged chronologically by publication date.

The *My Wild Kingdom*, Autobiography subseries includes multiple handwritten and typed drafts of Perkins' autobiography. Included amongst the drafts are edits and notes from both Perkins and his editor as well as captions created for the illustrations and photographs included in the autobiography. The materials in this subseries date from 1931 to 1982 and are arranged chronologically.

Publications

This series contains books, periodicals, articles, brochures, newsletters, and flyers regarding Marlin and/or Carol Perkins as well as topics on animals and wildlife. The books included in this series are written and signed by Marlin and Carol Perkins, including *My Wild Kingdom*, *The Sound of Boomerangs*, *Little Pierre*, and *I Saw You From Afar*. Additionally this series contains newspaper clippings and comic strips relating to Marlin Perkins, his work with zoos, and his television shows *Zoo Parade* and *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*. Other notable materials include published archaeological research articles and notes regarding Mayan cities, prehistoric objects, archeological laboratories, and the Cahokia Mounds in Illinois. The materials in this series date from 1938 to 1989 and are arranged alphabetically.

Scrapbooks

This series contains scrapbooks relating to Yetis and the Yeti Expedition, Marlin Perkins' 80th birthday, and the Perkins Plaza at the St. Louis Zoo. The materials that comprise this series are photocopies of the original scrapbooks, which are not included in this collection. The scrapbooks in this series date from 1980 to 1987 and are arranged chronologically.

Awards

This series includes awards received by both Carol and Marlin Perkins. Some of the awards presented to Carol and Marlin Perkins include certificates of appreciation, TV Forecast Award, distinguished achievement awards, and awards of merit. There are also numerous awards for the TV shows *ZooParade* and *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*, which were both hosted by Marlin Perkins. Of notable interest includes a program from the 1966 Emmy Awards ceremony and honorary doctoral degrees from multiple colleges and universities including the University of Missouri-Columbia and Rockhurst University. The materials in this series date from 1947 to 1986 and are arranged alphabetically.

Photographs

This series contains photographs related to the Perkins family, the Buffalo Zoo, the St. Louis Zoo, the Lincoln Park Zoo, snakes, primates, big cats, mammals, birds, the Yeti Expedition, the Wolf Sanctuary, *Mutual of Omaha*, and reptiles. In addition to photographs, this series also contains glass color slides, which depict vipers and Perkins with dolphins. This series includes three subseries: St. Louis Zoo, Lincoln Park Zoo, and Glass Lantern Color Slides. The materials in this series date from 1924 to 1991 and are arranged chronologically.

The St. Louis Zoo subseries contains photographs depicting Perkins' involvement as a Curator of Reptiles during his first stretch of employment with the St. Louis Zoo as well as his return as Director in 1962. This subseries also includes photographs of Perkins and other associates hunting and capturing snakes in Missouri, Arkansas, and Florida. The materials in this subseries date from 1927 to 1969 and are arranged chronologically.

The Lincoln Park Zoo subseries contains photographs depicting animals being cared for at the Lincoln Park Zoo. Many of the photographs also include a name and description of the animal portrayed in the picture. Animals depicted include large and small primates, birds, reptiles, marsupials, and other mammals. Some of these animals appeared on the show *Zoo Parade*, which was filmed at the Lincoln Park Zoo. The materials in this subseries date from 1948 to 1961 and are arranged according to animal type.

The Glass Lantern Color Slides subseries contains glass slides depicting vipers, their x-rays, and Perkins diving with dolphins in pre-scuba gear. The glass slides are stored in a separate box from the rest of the materials in the Photographs series. The materials in this series are undated.

Recordings

This series consists of audio cassette tapes, Dictaphone dictabelts, and a vinyl record. The audio cassette tapes contain an oral interview with Carol Perkins discussing Marlin Perkins' life, family, and accomplishments; a transcript of the recording is available. The vinyl record contains a recording in which Perkins discusses a vaccine used to keep kittens happy. There was no

description given for the dictabelts and the St. Louis Research Center has no way to play the recordings. The series also includes 29 Norelco mini cassettes which have recordings regarding animals such as caribou, wolves, and the Komodo dragon. The materials in this series date from 1948 to 1991 and are arranged chronologically.

Books

This series contains five books published by Carol and Marlin Perkins. The books include *Little Pierre* and *The Sound of Boomerangs* by Carol Morse Perkins, *My Wild Kingdom* by Marlin Perkins, and *"I Saw You From Afar": A visit to the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert* by Carol Morse Perkins and Marlin Perkins. This series also includes *In Search of a Whale* by Allen W. Eckert, which has an introduction by Marlin Perkins. The books in this series are dated from 1966 to 1982 and are arranged chronologically.

Audio Visual

This series consists of 16mm film reels related to African safaris, the Yeti Expedition, episodes from *Wild Kingdom*, Christmas at the Zoo, various animals, and lectures from Marlin Perkins. The materials in this series date from 1933 to 1973 and are arranged by subject.

Vinyl Records

This series contains vinyl records regarding Marlin Perkins and his appearance on radio and television programs in the 1950s. Specific programs that the recordings depict are the *Tex and Jinx* radio talk show and the Emmy Award winning children's program *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*. This series also includes sound effects used in *Zoo Parade* as well as a children's story by the Children's Record Guild called *Train to the Zoo*. The vinyl records in this series date from 1950 to 1956 and are arranged chronologically.

Oversize

The oversize series contains sheet music, newspaper articles, calendars, newspapers, certificates, and awards related to Carol and Marlin Perkins as well as nature and wildlife. Materials of note include posters for *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* as well as a yeti hair specimen found during the Yeti Expedition with Sir Edmund Hillary. Additionally, this series contains a *Zoo Parade* scrapbook that includes newspaper clippings regarding the show. The materials in this series date from 1914 to 1987 and are arranged chronologically.

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	f. 39	Snow Leopard Club membership card, no date
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	f. 69	Zoo development plans, 1961-1974
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- f. 124 Bibliography of Zoology books, 1952
- f. 125 Birds, articles and booklets, 1969-1977
- f. 126 Diet, articles, 1945, 1969
- Box 010 f. 127 Diseases, articles, booklets, and pamphlets, 1934-1943
- f. 128 Experiments and studies, articles and newspaper clippings, 1940-1951
- f. 129 Feline, articles, 1956, 1970
- f. 130 Gestation, bibliographies and tables, 1953
- f. 131 Health and medicine, booklets, flyers, and pamphlets, 1924-1941
- f. 132 Insects, articles and booklets, 1896, 1935-1945
- f. 133 Mammals, articles, booklets, correspondence, and pamphlets, 1942-1955
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- f. 140 Animal research, correspondence, handwritten notes, and newspaper clippings, 1971-1976
- f. 141 Arkaroola-Mount Painter Sanctuary, articles, brochures, and policies, 1969
- f. 142 Birds, articles, brochures, newsletters, and a report, 1949-1980
- f. 143 *Chinchilla, the Fur of the Future*, 1949
- f. 144 Citizen action, articles, brochures, correspondence, and pamphlets, 1970-1971
- f. 145 Conservation, list of organizations and a poster, 1979-1980
- f. 146 *Exotic Animals: Ecological and Socioeconomic Considerations*, December 1968
- f. 147 Fossils, Chicago Natural History Museum, 1958
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- f. 149 Grzimek, Bernard, articles, brochures, correspondence, handwritten notes, newspaper clippings, and pamphlets, 1956-1973
- f. 150 Hawaiian wildlife, booklets, brochures, and a magazine, 1970-1975
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