

Finding Aid to the Mahjong Oral History Collection, 2011-2017

Summary Information

Title: Mahjong oral history collection

Creator: Annelise Heinz (primary)

ID: 121.8246

Date: 2011-2017 (inclusive)

Extent: 1.5 GB (digital)

Language: This collection is in English.

Abstract: The Mahjong oral history collection is a compilation of digital audio recordings and notes created by Annelise Heinz during the course of her research on mahjong play in modern American culture. The bulk of this information was captured in 2012.

Repository:

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Use: This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donor has not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, she has given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

Custodial History: The Mahjong oral history collection was donated to The Strong in December 2021 as a gift of Annelise Heinz. The digital collection was accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 121.8246; files were received via digital transfer.

Preferred citation for publication: Mahjong oral history collection, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong

Processed by: Julia Novakovic, March 2022

Revision Note: Revised in June 2022 to include additional recordings.

Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Becher, Ronnie
- Beller, Dorene
- Brodman, Arlene
- Chann, Katherine
- Feinstein, Linda
- Greenstein, Rita
- Grossman, Stephanie
- Gurock, Pamela
- Heinz, Annelise

- Israel, Ann
- Kraus, Charles
- Kraus, Linda
- Kraus, Nancy
- Kuo, Margaret
- Lean, Beth
- Lee, Emory
- Loui, Sharon
- Lubart, Zelda
- Lustbader, Martha
- Michelson, Judy
- Persicano, Rhoda
- Revitz, Arlene
- Rubel, Eva
- Rubel, Richard
- Salk, Reva
- Salk, Toby
- Sandberg, Elaine
- Schaffer, Hilda
- Shapiro, Ethel
- Shields, Susan
- Silverman, Alida
- Silverman, Seymour
- Troum, Marjorie
- Unger, Ruth
- Weiss, Avi
- Weiss, Toby
- Wu, Cecilia

Subjects

- Games -- History
- Mah jong
- Mah jong -- Social aspects -- United States
- Mahjong
- Mah-jongg
- Oral history
- United States -- Civilization -- Chinese influences

Historical Note

The Chinese tile-matching game mahjong (also spelled “mah-jongg”) enjoyed an immense spike in popularity in the United States and Europe during the early 1920s. A set of rules published in 1923 by Joseph P. Babcock (known as “The Red Book”) simplified the game for Americans and led to the spread of mahjong to Western audiences. Though the game’s ubiquity waned in the following decade, the National Mah Jongg League (a group of women in New York and other major cities) kept the tradition alive for later generations by standardizing its rules.

At its core, mahjong is a fast-paced game of chance and skill played by four people with 144 tiles. Mahjong sets often also include counters to keep score, dice for deciding how to deal the tiles, and a marker to indicate the dealer and round. The American variation of mahjong utilizes score cards, eight all-purpose tiles called jokers, and several distinct gameplay mechanics. Players are dealt a number of pictographic tiles of different suits, and they take turns drawing and discarding tiles with the goal of making melds (certain combinations of tiles). In 20th century America, mahjong developed into both a popular leisure activity and a cultural form; it became associated in particular with Asian immigrant communities and Jewish American women.

For more than a decade, Dr. Annelise Heinz, a historian of modern America, has been researching and writing about mahjong. In 2021, Oxford University Press published her book project, *Mahjong: A Chinese Game and the Making of Modern American Culture*. As of March 2022, Heinz is an Assistant Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oregon, where she teaches courses on women’s history, gender and sexuality, consumerism, and ethnicity and immigration.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Mahjong oral history collection is a compilation of audiorecordings, transcripts, and notes collected by Annelise Heinz for her book *Mahjong: A Chinese Game and the Making of Modern American Culture* (2021). As of March 2022, the [audio files are accessible online to researchers through the museum’s Preservica-Universal Access](#) portal; transcripts to these recordings will be created and added at a later date.

System of Arrangement

Series I: Oral history recordings, 2012-2017

Series II: Transcripts and notes, 2011-2012

Contents List

Series I: Oral history recordings, 2012-2017

Scope and Content Note: This series contains digital audio recordings of interviews between Annelise Heinz and contributors to her research on playing mahjong in 20th century America. (These recordings each have an associated release form on file in the Brian Sutton-Smith Library & Archives of Play.) [Files in this series are accessible online through the museum's Preservica-Universal Access portal.](#)

Original file names are indicated in quotation marks; additional information such as the length of recording, participant names, part number (if needed), and date of recording are also listed.

Digital-I

Folder 1

Folder 01_Individual recordings

- "01a. Alida Silverman Part I.MP3" (0:47:17) – interview with Alida Silverman, part 1 of 2, recorded 10/16/2014
- "01b. Alida Silverman Part II.MP3" (0:26:23) – interview with Alida Silverman, part 2 of 2, recorded 10/16/2014
- "02. Avi Weiss.5.30.12.MP3" (0:19:04) – interview with Rabbi Avi Weiss, recorded 5/30/2012
- "03. Cee Cee Wu 3.27.13.MP3" (1:11:58) – interview with Cecilia ("Cee Cee") Wu, recorded 3/27/2013
- "04a. Dorene Beller1.5.23.12.MP3" (1:15:41) – interview with Dorene Beller, part 1 of 2, recorded 5/23/2012
- "04b. Dorene Beller2.MP3" (0:01:29) – interview with Dorene Beller, part 2 of 2, recorded 5/23/2012
- "05a. EmoryLeeA.8.16.12.MP3" (0:15:17) – interview with Emory Lee, part 1 of 2, recorded 8/16/2012
- "05b. EmoryLeeB.8.16.12.MP3" (0:35:13) – interview with Emory Lee, part 2 of 2, recorded 8/16/2012
- "06. Judy Michelson 4.12.13.MP3" (0:59:11) – interview with Judy Michelson, recorded 4/12/2013
- "07. Katherine Chann.MP3" (1:09:32) – interview with Katherine Chann, recorded 2/13/2017
- "08. Linda Feinstein.MP3" (0:16:24) – interview with Linda Feinstein, recorded 5/21/2012
- "09. Margaret Kuo.6.17.14.MP3" (1:36:34) – interview with Margaret Kuo, recorded 6/17/2014
- "10a. Marjorie.Meyerson.Troum1.MP3" (0:44:56) – interview with Marjorie Troum, part 1 of 2, recorded 8/21/2012
- "10b. Marjorie.Meyerson.Troum2.MP3" (1:35:08) – interview with Marjorie Troum, part 2 of 2, recorded 8/21/2012
- "11. NKraus.Phone.MP3" (0:45:35) – interview with Nancy Kraus, recorded 3/30/2012

- “12. Pam Gurock.5.30.12.MP3” (0:26:26) – interview with Pamela Gurock, recorded 5/30/2012
- “13. RevaSalk.5.22.12.MP3” (1:00:33) – interview with Reva Salk, recorded 5/22/2012
- “14. RitaGreenstein.5.21.12.MP3” (1:31:40) – interview with Rita Greenstein, recorded 5/21/2012
- “15a. Sandberg1.Mar.15.2012.MP3” (0:36:33) – interview with Elaine Sandberg, part 1 of 2, recorded 3/15/2012
- “15b. Sandberg2.Mar.15.2012.MP3” (0:07:29) – interview with Elaine Sandberg, part 2 of 2, recorded 3/15/2012
- “16a. Sharon.Loui.A.MP3” (0:15:17) – interview with Sharon Loui, part 1 of 2, recorded 5/2/2012
- “16b. Sharon.Loui.B.MP3” (0:35:13) – interview with Sharon Loui, part 2 of 2, recorded 5/2/2012
- “17. Stephanie Grossman 4.23.13.MP3” (0:44:12) – interview with Stephanie Grossman, recorded 4/23/2013
- “18. Susan Shields.MP3” (0:41:36) – interview with Susan Shields, recorded 5/3/2013
- “19. Toby Weiss.5.30.12.MP3” (1:04:57) – interview with Toby Weiss, recorded 5/30/2012
- “20a. Zelda.Lubart.5.23.12.MP3” (0:58:59) – interview with Zelda Lubart, part 1 of 2, recorded 5/23/2012
- “20b. Zelda.L2.5.12.12.MP3” (0:06:17) – interview with Zelda Lubart, part 2 of 2, recorded 5/23/2012
- “21. Ann Israel.6.19.14.MP3” (0:43:34) – interview with Ann Israel, recorded 6/19/2014
- “22a. Beth Lean.6.17.14.MP3” (0:23:19) – interview with Beth Lean, part 1 of 2, recorded 6/17/2014
- “22b. Beth Lean.2.MP3” (0:08:54) – interview with Beth Lean, part 2 of 2, recorded 6/17/2014
- “23a. TobySalk.4.20.12.MP3” (0:38:18) – interview with Toby Salk, part 1 of 2, recorded 4/20/2012
- “23b. TobySalk.8.1.12.MP3” (1:01:07) – interview with Toby Salk, part 2 of 2, recorded 8/1/2012

Folder 2

Folder 02_Group recordings

- “01. Eva.Richard.Rubel.5.30.12.MP3” (0:56:16) – group interview with Eva Rubel and Richard Rubel, recorded 5/30/2012
- “02a. Nancy Kraus.Group.15.22.12.MP3” (1:44:45) – group interview with Arlene Brodman, Nancy Kraus, Rhoda Persicano, and Ethel Shapiro; part 1 of 2, recorded 5/22/2012
- “02b. Nancy Kraus.Group.2.MP3” (0:21:15) – group interview with Arlene Brodman, Nancy Kraus, Rhoda Persicano, and Ethel Shapiro; part 2 of 2, recorded 5/22/2012
- “03. Revitz Lustbader.MP3” (2:11:30) – group interview with Martha Lustbader, Arlene Revitz, and Stacey Revitz; recorded 2/20/2015

- “04a. Riverdale.Game_5.30.12.MP3” (1:35:18) – group interview with Ronnie Becher, Pamela Gurock, and Eva Rubel; part 1 of 2, recorded 5/30/2012
- “04b. Riverdale.Game.2.MissCallMoment.MP3” (0:11:33) – group interview with Ronnie Becher, Pamela Gurock, and Eva Rubel; part 2 of 2, recorded 5/30/2012
- “05a. Riverdale.Game.5.30.12.MP3” (1:35:18) – group interview with Ronnie Becher, Pamela Gurock, and Eva Rubel; part 1 of 2, recorded 5/30/2012
- “05b. Riverdale.Game.2.MissCallMoment.MP3” (0:11:33) – group interview with Ronnie Becher, Pamela Gurock, and Eva Rubel; part 2 of 2, recorded 5/30/2012
- “06. Seymour Silverman.Hilda.5.29.12.amr” (0:44:39) – group interview with Seymour Silverman and Hilda Schaffer, recorded 5/29/2012

Series II: Transcripts and notes, 2012

Scope and Content Note: This series holds digital text documents created by Annelise Heinz, including transcripts and notes about interviews. Files in this series are currently accessible on-site at The Strong.

Original file names are indicated in quotation marks; additional information such as a file description, interviewee names, and date of interview, is also provided.

Digital-II

Folder 1

Folder 01_Transcripts and notes

- “01. Kraus.TRANSSCRIPT.docx” – transcript and notes from interview with Charles Kraus and Linda Kirschner Kraus, 2/22/2012
- “02. Ruth Unger.docx” – notes from interview with Ruth Unger, 6/1/2012