

John Spragens Collection

1983

1 box (0.5 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 116



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The photojournalist John Spragens spent the better part of a decade living in Southeast Asia from 1966-1974, working for a variety of relief and peace organizations.

Taken by Spragens late in 1983, the black-and-white photographs in this collection document Cambodia shortly after the Vietnamese Army defeated Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and installed a new order.

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Background on John Spragens

Born in Fulton, Mo., on Aug. 8, 1944, John Spragens, but built a lifelong connection to Southeast Asia. After graduating from Florida Presbyterian College (now Eckerd College) in 1966, Spragens was involved in the civil rights struggle as a photographer for the Mountain Retreat Association in Montreat, N.C., and for the *Southern Patriot* newspaper, but with the war in Vietnam escalating, he registered as a conscientious objector and was assigned to alternate service with the International Voluntary Services, teaching high school in the Mekong Delta city of Tra Vinh.

Over the next decade, Spragens lived off and on in various places in Southeast Asia, taking photographs and working various jobs. After completing his service with the IVS, he worked as a Field Representative for the Committee of Responsibility in Saigon, assisting war-injured children seeking medical care, and then supported his photography and peace activities by taking a succession of positions to make ends meet until the end of the war, including working as a teacher of English in Hong Kong and Japan, as a freelance journalist and interpreter (1974), and with the Indochina Mobile Education Project and the Indochina Resource Center in Berkeley, California.

Returning to the United States in 1975, Spragens worked as a photojournalist for a string of newspapers in Texas, Florida, New York, and California until 1993, when he embarked on a seventeen year career in the computer software industry. He returned to Southeast Asia on a number of occasions. Spragens died of pancreatic cancer in his home in Eugene, Ore., on Feb. 10, 2013.

Scope of collection

Taken by John Spragens late in 1983, the black-and-white photographs in this collection document Cambodia shortly after the Vietnamese Army defeated Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and installed a new order. The numbered images were part of an exhibit "The culture and history of the Cambodian people," which was shown at the Robert Frost Library, Amherst College, in April 1986.

Inventory

Spragens, John: Kandal Province: Some of the bones found in the mass grave at Choeung Ek, about 15 kilometers southwest of Phnom Penh. The site is now a memorial to victims of the Pol Pot regime

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Skulls found in the mass grave at Choeung Ek. One was reported found with the blindfold still in place

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Sunday strollers at the Independence Monument in Phnom Penh. This is now a memorial to those who died during the Pol Pot Regime (1975-79)

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Third year students at Chhalitmonk School copy lessons into their notebooks (Phnom Penh)

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Members of an orphanage art group play music for traditional dancers (Kompong Chhang Province)

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: "Teachers are very strict in Cambodia, not like in an American school. They will hit you and make you stand in the hot sun if you don't obey them"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: "My sister and I used to prepare the sugar cane. Then we would sell it at a soccer game"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Fishing on a small tributary of the Tonle Sap River, Kandal Province. "The fishermen have to get up very early, at about four or five o'clock, to have a good catch. This means that the wife has to get up even earlier to prepare the breakfast"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Fishing on the Tonle Sap River, Kompong Chhnang Province. "My father and I would finish our second catch. Then we would swim until dinner was ready"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: These oxcarts are used to bring the harvest rice to the village for threshing (Kompong Cham Province). "The harvested rice was stored before the New Year, Then there would be a great celebration"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Setting fish out to dry at a riverside market (Kompong Chhnang Province). "After we catch the fish, my mother cooks it over an open fire. Then she lets it dry completely in the sun before selling in the market. She wouldn't let me help her because she thought I would do it the wrong way"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: A "production solidarity group" threshes rice (Kompong Chhnang Province). "When we lived at home our family would work in the hot sun and finish threshing before the sun set"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: About 100 chickens brought from farmers on the way to market in Phnom Penh. "Every two months a farmer would come to our home to sell chickens before heading off to Phnom Penh"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Gathering seedlings for transplanting (Kompong Chhnang Province). "My mother, aunt, and sister usually were the ones who worked in the hot sun in the ricefield. My father and I would do the harder work of carrying the rice sheaves to the storehouse at our home"

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Residents of the city's Orphanage no. 2 shovel freshly cooked rice out of huge pots. They take turns cooking (Phnom Penh)

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Children eating rice with a thin soup at Orphanage No. 2

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Fruit stall with bananas (Phnom Penh)

ca.1983 Dec.

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Spragens, John: Kompong Chhnang Province: Harvesting rainy season rice in Muong village

ca.1983 Dec.

unnumbered

Spragens, John: Kompong Chhnang Province: Road through farming village of Muong. Cart is pulled by water buffalo

ca.1983 Dec.

unnumbered

Spragens, John: Kompong Chhnang Province: Goods on sale in Skoun market include notebooks donated by Quakers

ca.1983 Dec.

unnumbered

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Copyright was retained by John Spragens.

Provenance

Acquired from John Spragens, May 1986, with support of Provost Richard O'Brien and a gift from Timothy Allman.

Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, July 2017.

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English

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