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Sidney Topol Papers

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An innovator and entrepreneur, Sidney Topol was a contributor to several key developments in the telecommunications industries in the latter half of the twentieth century. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts (1947) and an engineer and executive at Raytheon and later Scientific-Atlanta, Topol's expertise in microwave systems led to the development of the first effective portable television relay links, allowing broadcasts from even remote areas, and his foray into satellite technologies in the 1960s provided the foundation for building the emerging cable television industry, permitting the transmission of transoceanic television broadcasts. Since retiring in the early 1990s, Topol has been engaged in philanthropic work, contributing to the educational and cultural life in Boston and Atlanta.

The product of a pioneer in the telecommunications and satellite industries and philanthropist, this collection contains a rich body of correspondence and speeches, engineering notebooks, reports, product brochures, and photographs documenting Sidney Topol's forty year career as an engineer and executive. The collection offers a valuable record of Topol's role in the growth of both corporations, augmented by a suite of materials stemming from Topol's tenure as Chair of the Electronic Industries Association Advanced Television Committee (ATV) in the 1980s and his service as Co-Chair of a major conference on Competitiveness held by the Carter Center in 1988.

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Background on Sidney Topol

A pioneer in satellite technologies and entrepreneurial leader of Scientific-Atlanta, Sidney Topol's career spanned the nuclear age and space age and helped spur the globalization of telecommunication. His work on microwave systems with Raytheon in the 1950s and with satellite in the 1960s and 1970s helped lay the foundation for overseas broadcasting and made the cable television industry into a practical reality.

Born on Dec. 28, 1924, the son of Polish immigrants, Topol was a first generation American raised in a hard-working family in Dorchester. After an exceptional education at the Boston Latin School, and not yet 17 years old, Topol enrolled at Massachusetts State College in 1941 with the intention of studying chemistry, although Pearl Harbor changed that before his first semester had ended. Shortly after turning 18, he enlisted for service in the Army Air Corps and won admittance into a highly selective program to train meteorologists at the University of Michigan. When that program became over-enrolled just four months later, he chose to become a communications officer and was asked to join an elite group accepted into the radar school at Harvard and MIT, where he learned the details of every airborne radar known at the time. His stint in the Air Corps included nearly a year as a telephone officer in Tokyo and Nagoya, Japan, where he was introduced to point to point microwave, and established a solid foundation for his future career.

With the credits he had earned in the service, Topol completed



Sidney Topol

his BS in physics at the University of Massachusetts after only one more semester, and he was immediately hired by the Naval Research Laboratory as a Physicist. Assigned to a pioneering project on helical antennas working out of the radiation lab, Topol thrived at work, but after only two years in Washington, he decided to pursue a graduate degree under Samuel Silver, formerly of MIT but now at the University of California Berkeley. He realized quickly, however, that he enjoyed work more than study, and in 1949, he accepted an offer with Raytheon in Newton, Mass., to work on antenna design, making use of both the radar and antenna training he had received in the military.

Raytheon was an industry leader in communications technology, and Topol soon was author of several patents in antennas, including one that became the standard transportable radar used by NATO. He switched to point to point microwave design in about 1950, having gotten bored with antennas, and became a project engineer for a portable television relay link for electronic news gathering (ENG), and his work had strong implications for transmission in color and for the beginnings of standardization in the industry. The portable link was introduced at the National Association of Broadcasters convention in 1953.

Topol rose quickly at Raytheon, become Engineering Manager and then Director of Marketing for Raytheon-Europe, where he helped form Selenia Telecommunications, a highly-profitable joint venture in microwave technologies with Fin Mecannica, winning an early contract to build a microwave radar network to tie together the radars in Sweden. After several years working as General Manager for Selenia in Rome, he returned to the United States in 1965 to become General Manager of the Communications Division in Norwood, Mass.

Raytheon had begun work on satellite communications in the aftermath of Sputnik, and although he had begun thinking about satellites while in Europe, the technologies were still evolving. At Norwood, Topol helped oversee construction of the first global-scale "earth station" satellite dishes for the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT), which bounced voice and television transmissions off of stationary orbiting satellites as a means of distributing the signal around the world. The earth stations allowed, for the first time, the transmission of transoceanic television broadcasts without the need for relay links, much less wire connections.

In 1971, Topol was lured away from Raytheon to join a small, twenty-year old telecommunications manufacturing firm in Georgia, Scientific-Atlanta. Given "free rein and the ability to make decisions" autonomously, Topol was able to focus his attention on communications technology, rather than the military applications that were core activities at Raytheon. Drawing on his expertise in satellite systems, Topol recognized an opportunity in the cable television industry, allowing cable companies to use satellite links to deliver content ranging from uncut films to sports broadcasts, but also an opportunity to develop television receiving equipment. By stepping up production of earth stations, he helped make satellite communication cost effective for cable companies, using "forward pricing" -- selling dishes for what they would cost when the economy of scale kicked in rather than the actual cost of production -- he helped spur investment in his approach. During his 19 years with Scientific-Atlanta, Topol oversaw the expansion of the firm from \$16 million in sales to over \$600 million, due in large part to his success in strategically positioning the company to become a global force in the satellite and cable television industries. As President (1971-1983), CEO (1975-1987), Chairman of the Board (1978-1990), and Director (1971-1997), Topol was instrumental in the merger of cable and satellite, which along with programming developed by HBO and the development of transportable earth stations developed by TelePrompTer an manufactured by Scientific-Atlanta, helped establish satellite-delivered television for the cable industry.

Deeply involved with professional and community organizations, Topol was a key figure involved in the jockeying over the introduction of High Definition Television (HDTV) and was Chair of the Electronic Industries Association Advanced Television Committee (ATV) during the late 1980s and early 1990s. He was asked to serve as co-Chair with Ann McLaughlin (former Secretary of Labor) and Jimmy Carter for the Conference on Competitiveness at the Carter Center in Atlanta (1988), and he was Chair of the Massachusetts Telecommunications Council (1993-1995). He slowly retired from Scientific-Atlanta in the 1980s and early 1990s, but was lured into becoming Director and Vice Chairman of Monitor Television Inc. (1991) before settling into a firmer retirement. Even then, he founded the Topol Group LLC, a consulting and investment firm, and expanding his charitable giving, supporting education and peace initiatives in the Middle East, among many other causes.

During his long career, Topol received many awards for his work as an innovator and entrepreneur in the satellite and cable industries, as well as for his philanthropic work. He has been awarded the Corporate Leadership Award by MIT (1980), the Vanguard Award by the National Cable Television Association (1980), the Polly Dunn Award of the Southern Cable Television Association (1991); he was an honoree of the Walter Kaitz Foundation of New York (1991) and of Women in Cable (1990); and he was awarded the Medal of Honor of the Electronic Industries Association (1989), the Association's highest award. Named Man of the Year by Boston Latin School (1982), he was also cited as Executive of Year by the College of Business Administration at the University of Georgia (1989), and is a member of the Satellite Hall of Fame (1991). His alma mater has recognized him with its Alumni Award from the School of Management (1990) and with an honorary doctorate (1985).

Scope of collection

The product of a pioneer in the telecommunications and satellite industries and philanthropist, this collection contains a rich body of correspondence and speeches, engineering notebooks, reports, product brochures, and photographs documenting

Sidney Topol's forty year career as an engineer and executive. At Raytheon and Scientific-Atlanta, Topol's insights into communications technologies and his business acumen were instrumental in building modern television broadcasting and the merger of satellite and cable television. The collection offers a valuable record of Topol's role in the growth of both corporations, augmented by a suite of materials stemming from Topol's tenure as Chair of the Electronic Industries Association Advanced Television Committee (ATV) in the 1980s and his service as Co-Chair of a major conference on Competitiveness held by the Carter Center in 1988. Since retiring from corporate life in the 1990s, Topol has been active in philanthropic work in Atlanta, Boston, and Washington, D.C.

The records for Topol's years at Raytheon and Scientific-Atlanta are relatively robust, providing insight into Topol's strategic thinking with regard to the development of satellite communications, cable television, and High Definition Television (HDTV). At Raytheon, Topol was a key figure in the development of microwave systems and in the installation of 100 foot earth stations for Intelsat, which became the major gateway for traffic to satellites and which allowed, for the first time, live television coverage in the United States from overseas.

Series descriptions

Series 1. Biographical

1962-2007

1 box

Materials relating to Sidney Topol's life and activities, including his vitae, newsclippings, interviews, and a transcript of an oral history conducted by E. Stratford Smith for the National Cable Center and Museum (1990-1991). This series also contains a handful of talks, presentations, and short articles by Topol, arranged chronologically (1972-1991), including transcripts of his testimony before congressional subcommittees on behalf of the electronics industry regarding high definition television (1988); his talk as recipient of the Electronic Industries Association's Medal of Honor (1989); and the Palmer lecture at Penn State University on Post-broadcast television (1990).

Series 2. Correspondence

1951-2001

10 boxes

Business and professional correspondence beginning during Topol's days as a project engineer at Raytheon, when he shepherded the development of electronic news gathering equipment, and extending through his later positions with the company developing the European market General Manager of the Communications Division, through his days as President, CEO, and Chairman of the Board at Scientific-Atlanta, spearheading its role as a leader in the cable and satellite television industry.

Additional correspondence can be found in Series 3 (Subject Files), Series 4 (Raytheon), Series 6 (EIA/HDTV), and Series 7 (Carter Center), as well as in the Board of Directors files in Series 5 (Scientific-Atlanta).

This series is arranged chronologically by year, with an annual list of correspondents as kept in notebooks by Topol's office staff. In some years letters were kept separately from telexes and memoranda.

Series 3. Subject files

1964-2007

14 boxes

Dating primarily from the mid-1980s to 1992, the subject files reflect the varied interests and activities of Sidney Topol during the years when he might be considered a statesman of the telecommunications industry. These files include materials pertaining to his leadership on trade missions to China and the Soviet Union, as well as his role as advisor to the federal government agencies on legislation and policy regarding international competitiveness and trade. Some files document his political activities in both an advisory and supporting role and occasionally, as in the noted Renaissance Weekends, in a social role.

The series also includes files relating to Topol's participation in industry associations such as the Electronic Industries Association and National Cable Television Association, and his commitments to education, as a participant in the Education Summit (1989), and as a member of the board for a number of institutions and programs, and as a participant in a wide array of conferences and symposia, including his stint as a Fellow at Harvard's Center for Business and Government at the Kennedy School of Government.

Finally, the subject files document Topol's contributions to the business, civic, and cultural life in both Atlanta and Boston, as well as the honors and awards he received during his career.

Series 4. Raytheon Company

1950-1974

1 box

Beginning with Topol's earliest days at Raytheon, this series includes a series of engineering notebooks, correspondence, proposals, reports, product brochures, and calendars documenting his work in Europe and the United States.

Additional materials documenting some of the more important products developed by Topol at Raytheon, as well as photographs from various stages of his career there, are located in Series 8, while Series 2 contains most of his professional correspondence from this period.

Series 5. Scientific-Atlanta

1960-1997

13 boxes

Records of Topol's work as an executive with Scientific-Atlanta, including Annual reports (1960-1995), Board of Directors meeting materials (1971-1997), minutes of meetings, supporting documents, correspondence, reports and financial reports, and records of three committees: the Human Resources and Compensation (1985-1989), Pension Investment (1989, 1993), and the Audit Committee (1983-1995). In addition to a series of documents used in strategic planning (1980-1994), the collection includes a set of report by McKinsey and Co. on corporate opportunities and priorities (1982).

Two boxes of materials that are restricted until 2022 include information on executive compensation. Other materials in the collection relating to Topol's time at Scientific-Atlanta can be found in Series 3 (Subject files) and Series 2 (Correspondence)

Series 6. Electronic Industries Association HDTV Committee

1985-1994

2 boxes

Files from Topol's period as Chair of the Electronic Industries Association HDTV Committee, including correspondence, memoranda, minutes of meetings, reports, newsclippings, newsletters, drafts of reply comments to the Federal Communications Commission regarding the implementation of advanced television in the United States (1992), and related materials.

Series 7. Carter Center Consultation on Competitiveness

1979-1989

2 boxes

Topol's files as Co-Chair of a conference on competitiveness held by the Carter Center in 1988. The series includes planning materials, correspondence, conference papers and publications, and related materials. Participants included Roy Ash, Aden Bement Jr., Derek Bok, Richard E. Cavanaugh, Michael Dertouzos, Joseph Duffey, William Farley, Robert W. Galvin, C. Jackson Grayson Jr., George N. Hatsopoulos, Matina S. Horner, Mel Levine, Alan Magazine, Albert Shanker, Lawrence Summers, Brian Turner, Laura D'Andrea Tyson, Paul Volcker, An Wang, and Murray Weidenbaum.

Series 8. Audiovisual materials

1944-1992

2 boxes

In addition to photographs of Topol taken for publicity purposes, the series includes two albums of photographs documenting important Raytheon products developed by Topol: the PTRL, the first ENG Mode, System Testing (1951-1953) and the KTR Microwave Relay System equipment (ca.1956). Other photographs from Topol's time at Raytheon include some images from Selenia in Italy and Capdo, the Communications Division in Norwood, Mass.

Among the photographs from Topol's time at Scientific-Atlanta are ones that document a visit from Senator Sam Nunn and others, signing an order with William J. Bresnan of TelePrompTer (1977), a press conference held at Nieman Marcus when a Scientific-Atlanta earth station was the premier offering in the Christmas Catalogue (1979), trips to China (1980 and 1985), and White House briefing session meetings with President Ronald Reagan and Vice President George Bush.

The series also includes videotapes of interviews with Topol, speeches and presentations, and awards events, several that relate to Scientific-Atlanta or the cable television industry, and an audiotape of panel discussion concerning HDTV and competitiveness.

Inventory

Series 1. Biographical

1962-1997

1 box

Vita, biographical data

1980-1997

Box 1: BB1

Interview in *Georgia Trend*

1989

Box 1: BB2

Oral history, conducted by E. Stratford Smith for the National Cable Center and Museum

1990-1991

Box 1: BB3

Interview: "Leading the charge at the Massachusetts Telecommunications Council," *Mass High Tech*

1993

Box 1: BB4

Rickert, David: "Scientific Atlanta," Harvard Business School

1979

Box 1: BB5

Cook, Dennis: "The impact of satellite technology on cable TV"

1990

Box 1: BB6

Beakley, G. W.: "Overview of commercial satellite communications"

1979

Box 1: BB5

Newsclippings

1962-1978

Box 1: BB8

Newsclippings

1979

Box 1: BB9

Newsclippings

1980

Box 1: BB10

Newsclippings

1981-1985

Box 1: BB11

Newsclippings

1986-1989

Box 1: BB12

Newsclippings

1990-1997

Box 1: BB13

"Key articles, Scientific-Atlanta"

1965-1991

Box 1: BB14

Trends and directions: cable TV and satellite

undated

Box 1: BB15

Remarks at annual shareholders meeting, Scientific-Atlanta

1972

Box 1: BB16

Remarks at annual shareholders meeting, Scientific-Atlanta

1973

Box 1: BB17

"Applications of space technology to communications, earth resources and meteorological satellite ground stations"

1974

Box 1: BB18

"Industry trends and economic directions in satellite communications"

1974

Box 1: BB19

"Communications in the wired city," IEEE Communication Systems and Technical Conference

1974

Box 1: BB20

"Industry trends and economic directions in satellite communications"

1976

Box 1: BB21

Meeting notes, New Court Securities Corporation, New York

1976

Box 1: BB22

"Upward trends in telecommunications, marketing and finance"

1976

Box 1: BB23

Scientific-Atlanta Boston Stockbrokers Club

1976 Oct. 11

Box 1: BB24

"The growth and future of satellite communications"

ca.1977

Box 1: BB25

"New communications and control products for the home"

ca.1977

Box 1: BB26

Atlanta Society of Financial Analysts

1978

Box 1: BB27

"Small earth station satellite communications in the USA," International Astronautical Congress

1979

Box 1: BB28

Tsai and Co., New York

1979

Box 1: BB29

Georgia Tech Colloquium on Strategic Planning

1980

Box 1: BB30

Presentation and discussion, New York Society of Security Analysts

1981

Box 1: BB31

"The cable satellite connection for entertainment and business," International Association of Satellite Users

1981

Box 1: BB32

Trends and directions

ca.1982

Box 1: BB33

Southern Technical Institute commencement

1982

Box 1: BB34

"Trends for the future -- satellite and cable television," Financial Times Conferences on World Telecommunications, London

1983

Box 1: BB35

Tsai Forum discussion, New Yrpl

1984 Nov. 28

Box 1: BB36

Federal Reserve group, Atlanta (presentation)

1985

Box 1: BB37

"Learning from the past and looking into the future," Small Earth Station Symposium, Intelsat Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

1987

Box 1: BB38

New York Society of Security Analysts

1987

Box 1: BB39

American Association for the Advancement of Science

1988

Box 1: BB40

"Tied aid credit issue," foreword by Sidney Topol

1989

Box 1: BB41

Statement before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance

1988 Sept. 7

Box 1: BB42

"Consumer electronics, HDTV, and the competitiveness of the US economy," preface by Sidney Topol

1989

Box 1: BB43

Electronic Industries Association Medal of Honor

1989

Box 1: BB44

Palmer Lecture: "Post-broadcast television," Penn State University

1990

Box 1: BB45

High definition television (some thoughts)

1992 Feb. 1

Box 1: BB46

"Satellite television's global impact," CFIA Communications Seminar

1990 Oct. 29

Box 1: BB47

Marconi Council

1990

Box 1: BB48

Satel Conseil, Parts 1 and 2

1990

Box 1: BB49

Kaitz Foundation dinner

1991 Sept. 25

Box 1: BB50

Video Outlook (Cable labs)

1991

Box 1: BB51

"Satellite communications -- still emerging," *Microwave Journal* (editorial)

Undated

Box 1: BB52

Articles

1993-2001

Box 46: 1071

Awards and events

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Curriculum vitae

1990

Box 46: 1073

Family

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"Cable Satellite Connection:Sid Topol and the Advent of 'Post-broadcast Television'," Ann Hiester and Victoria Liv

1997

Box 46: 1075

Oral history transcript

1991

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Oral history research

1972-1975, 1991

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Series 2. Correspondence

1951-1996

10 boxes

Correspondence

1951-1963

Box 2

Correspondence

1964-1973

Box 3

Correspondence

1974-1976

Box 4

Correspondence

1976-1978

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Correspondence

1978-1979

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Correspondence

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Correspondence

1982-1984

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Correspondence

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Correspondence

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14 boxes

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Advanced Television Systems (ATS) Workshop, Paris, France

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Kane, F. J.: Requiem of an engineer
1957
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Report: SSB scatter study
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Product market report, Raytheon Europe
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Report: "Analysis of the effect of Raytheon Co. acquiring Farinon Electric Company"
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Study of the high-speed digital data link markets
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Technical proposal: Earth receiving system for satellite TV distribution
1971
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Report: Data transmission services -- Arthur D. Little, Inc. to Microwave Communications of America
1969-1974
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Technical proposal: DATRAN Trunk Radio System
1971
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Report: An intercity microwave relay system, Portland-Seattle-Spokane
1971
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Selenia product brochure: Portable microwave relay equipment
undated
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Air Transport World '70: Raytheon Target: Expanding Airline Market
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Program on Information Resources Policy, "The elephant and the blind men: the phenomenon of HDTV and its would be stakeholders"
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Before the Federal Communications Commission, "In the matter of Advanced Television Systems and Their Impact Upon the Existing Television Broadcast Service"
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Report of Presidents Commission on Industrial Competitiveness
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Pacific Telecommunications Council, 10th Annual Conference morning plenary

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The great celebration of satellites in space: Sidney Topol speech

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The Cable Channel: The Next Step in Civilization, Spring edition
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Society of Satellite Professionals International, Satellite Hall of Fame Awards
1991 Feb. 13
Videotape: VHS
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Foreigners Buying Up America: Benefit or Threat (Dub Forum)
1992 Apr. 13
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 9
Ten
1981 Feb. 26
Videotape: U-Matic
Box 45: 10
First Boston High Technology Conference, Scientific-Atlanta
1986 Dec. 17
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 11
Scientific-Atlanta, Inc. NYSSA presentation
1987 Sept. 4
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 12
Society of Satellite Professions Presents: The Great International Celebration of Satellites in Space
1987 Oct. 15
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 13
First Liberty made possible by Mutual America
undated
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 14
CSPAN interviews with Sidney Topol
Undated
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 15 A-D
The great celebration of satellites in space: Sidney Topol speech
1987 Oct. 15
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 16
The Cable Channel 1988 NCTA Convention: Sidney Topol interview
1988
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 17
Scitrek: Sidney Topol 2003 Technology Hall of Fame Inductee
2003
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 18
Sid Topol Story (old version)
undated
Videotape: VHS
Box 45: 19
Hearing on HDTV--Panel II
1988 Jun. 23
Videotape: VHS
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Atlanta Journal & Constitution: Now you Know"/Topol

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Box 45: 22

The Satellite Sky #307

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Videotape: VHS

Box 45: 23

Sidney Topol Video Clips: Master

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Box 45: 24

Scitrek: Sidney Topol 2003 Technology Hall of Fame Inductee

2003 Nov. 1

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Box 45: 25

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1989 Feb. 15

Videotape: VHS

Box 45: 26

CSPAN Interview: Sidney Topol

1988 Mar. 3

Videotape: VHS

Box 45: 27

Administrative information

Access

Access to boxes 27 through 35 (except card and gift lists) restricted until 2022. Access to boxes 38 and 39 is restricted.

Provenance

Gift of Sidney Topol, 1994-2010.

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On Sidney Topol, see:

Cameron, Judith, "War comes to Lewis Hall: College buddies recall Pearl Harbor bombing," *UMass Magazine* 16, 2 (2012 Spring)

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The Hauser Oral and Video History Collection of the Barco Library at the Cable Center contains three oral histories with Sidney Topol:

Nelson, Steve, Oral history with Sidney Topol, 2000 Sept. 12

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Language:

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ATV Task Force.
Artificial satellites in telecommunication--United States.
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Carter, Jimmy, 1924- .
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University of Massachusetts Amherst--Alumni.

Contributors

Topol, Sidney [main entry]
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Genres and formats

Annual reports.
Letters (Correspondence).
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