OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

**Title:** Emiliano Martinez Collection

**Collection Dates:** 1984

**Extent and Forms of Material:** .15 cubic feet (1 box)

**Creator:** Emiliano Martinez

**Repository:** Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. archivescenter@si.edu 202-633-3270 www.americanhistory.si.edu/archives

**Collection Number:** AC0176

**Administrative/Biographical History:** The story of Emiliano Martinez, a Cuban refugee, came to the attention of the public through the press as an example of the ingenuity and survival skills of recent immigrants to this nation.

Martinez fled Cuba in one of the freedom flotillas of 1980. He spent almost a year in a refugee camp at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas and arrived in Washington, D.C. in April 1981. He shared apartments with other Cuban refugees, but in October 1982, the special assistance he was receiving from the government for eighteen months ran out. Not knowing English, without a job, and not wanting to live on the largesse of others nor in an abandoned building in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood of Washington, D.C. as did other impoverished Cubans, Martinez made his home in one of the largest pieces of undeveloped land in the area - the National Zoo.

At first he lived in a hole, but then he used his carpentry skills to build his hut. The hut was completed in December 1982 and he lived there until he was forced to leave in March 1984. The approximately six foot high, seven by twelve foot wooden structure was camouflaged by surrounding foliage. He sold aluminum cans to a Safeway grocery store for which he received twenty-four cents a pound and averaged sixty-five dollars a month.

One of the zoo's staff noticed smoke from his stove one evening and the zoo police told him to leave. He moved to a boarding house in Adams-Morgan.

**Scope and Content:** The collection consists of a newspaper story from the Washington Post of March 12, 1984, and a forty-five minute cassette of an interview (in Spanish) held by Richard E. Ahlborn with Martinez. Ahlborn, a curator in NMAH Division of Community Life, was assisted by Juana Martin, a social worker.

For more information contact the Archives Center at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270
There is also a transcription in Spanish of the interview; six photographs of the hut taken by a Zoo photographer; a covering memorandum from Ahlborn; a copy of Martinez's earnings from the sale of cans; and a diagram of his hut.

**Provenance:** Transferred from the Division of Community Life, September 1985.

**Languages:** Interview conducted in Spanish.

**Subject-Topical:**
Carpentry  
Poverty  
Hispanic Americans – 1950-2000  
Emigration and immigration  
Housing  
Political refugees

**Subject - Geographical:**
Fort Chaffee (Ark.)

**Form / Genre:**
Audio cassettes  
Oral history  
Clippings – 1940-1990  
Interviews – 1980-2000  
Audiotapes  
White photoprints – Silver gelatin

**Container List**

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<td>Accounting sheet of monthly earnings of Emiliano Martinez</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Photographs of Martinez’s hut at National Zoo; and sketch of hut floor plans</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Cassette tape: 45 minute interview of Emiliano Martinez by Richard Ahlborn, and Juana Martin</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Transcripts of taped interview of Emiliano Martinez (in Spanish)</td>
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Robert S. Harding, November, 1985  
Rev. Amanda Loeb, June 2010

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