



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Albert Bierstadt
Letter Collection, 1860-1900,
in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie Ashley

Funding for the processing and digitization of this collection
was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Albert Bierstadt letter collection
Identifier:	AAA.bieralbe
Date:	1860-1900
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Creator:	Bierstadt, Albert, 1830-1902
Language:	English .
Summary:	This small collection measures 0.2 linear feet and comprises 13 letters written by renowned Hudson River School landscape painter Albert Bierstadt between 1860 and 1900. The majority of the letters were penned in the last two decades of his life and discuss his painting, the inspiration he found in nature, his studio, and concerns relating to commissions and finances.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The collection was acquired by the Archives of American Art in a series of accessions between 1955 and 2001. Six letters were donated by Charles Feinberg in 1955-1957; one letter was donated by Letitia Howe in 1976; one letter was donated by Mrs. Miles Reber, granddaughter-in-law of General Nelson in 1976; two letters were purchased from Charles Hamilton Autographs in 1956; one letter was purchased from Steele in 1956; and one letter was purchased from Scott J. Winslow Associates in 2001.

Related Material

Also found at the Archives of American Art are the Robert Neuhaus papers concerning Clyfford Still and Albert Bierstadt, 1884-1984 (bulk 1941-1984). A circa 1875 photograph of Bierstadt by Bierstadt Brothers given to the Archives by an unknown donor is available in the Archives of American Art's Photographs of Artists Collection I and online.

Alternative Forms Available

The letters of **Albert Bierstadt** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2008. The letters have been scanned in their entirety and total 30 images.

Processing Information

Portions of the collection were microfilmed as separate collections on reels D8 and 2787. Other letters were not microfilmed but maintained as separate manuscript collections. All of the related letters by Bierstadt were compiled as one collection and described by Stephanie Ashley in 2007 and digitized in 2008 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Albert Bierstadt letter collection, 1860-1900. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection has been digitized and is available online via the Archives of American Art website.

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Biographical Note

Albert Bierstadt was born in Solingen, Germany, in January 1830. His family emigrated to the United States when he was two years of age and settled in Bedford, Massachusetts.

In 1853 Bierstadt traveled to Germany to study painting at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. In 1858, following his return to the United States, he gained national attention for organizing a large exhibition of paintings including fifteen of his own works. Bierstadt drew inspiration from the painters of the Hudson River School, and regularly visited the White Mountains of New Hampshire to make sketches for his landscape paintings.

In 1859 Bierstadt traveled to the Colorado and Wyoming territories sketching landscapes in the company of a United States government survey expedition. On his return he took studio space at the new Tenth Street Studio Building in New York City and began a series of large-scale western landscape paintings, including *Yosemite Valley* and *Thunderstorm in the Rocky Mountains*. These paintings, known for their theatrical and romantic depiction of the grandeur and drama of the American West, brought Bierstadt great popularity during the 1860s.

Bierstadt's paintings were widely exhibited in the United States and abroad and commanded some of the highest prices in American art at the time, although his reputation began to decline somewhat in the 1880s in the face of changing public tastes.

Bierstadt was a member of the Century Association from 1862-1902 and a member of the National Academy of Design from 1860 until his death in 1902.

Scope and Content Note

This small collection measures 0.2 linear feet and comprises 13 letters written by renowned Hudson River School landscape painter Albert Bierstadt between 1860 and 1900. The majority of the letters were penned in the last two decades of his life.

Bierstadt writes specifically of his work in several of the letters and refers to two paintings, *Laramie Peak* and *The Jungfrau*. In one letter he writes of the inspiration he finds in nature through his love of the mountains. Bierstadt invites friends to his studio in New York City, mentions a trip to Yosemite in the 1870s and writes letters of introduction on behalf of friends. Two of the letters concern commissions and discuss financial matters.

Arrangement

Due to the small size of this collection, items are arranged as one chronological series.

- Series 1: Albert Bierstadt Letters, 1860-1900 (Box 1; 13 items)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Art -- Economic aspects
Artists' studios -- New York (State) -- New York
Hudson River school of landscape painting
Landscape painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Geographic Names:

Yosemite National Park (Calif.)

Container Listing

Series 1: Albert Bierstadt Letters, 1860-1900

1 Folder (Box 1)

In these 13 unrelated letters written by renowned Hudson River School landscape painter Albert Bierstadt between 1860 and 1900, Bierstadt writes specifically of his work in several of the letters and refers to two paintings, *Laramie Peak* and *The Jungfrau*. He writes of the inspiration he finds in nature through his love of the mountains. Bierstadt invites friends to his studio in New York City, mentions a trip to Yosemite in the 1870s and writes letters of introduction on behalf of friends. Two of the letters concern commissions and discuss financial matters.

Letters are arranged chronologically.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | Letter To Mrs. Parsons, 1860, January 20
Image(s)
Concerns purchasing color and beginning to paint <i>Laramie Peak</i> . |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Letter To Professor Whitney, 1873, June 12
Image(s)
Concerns Whitney's being replaced on an irrigation committee by Mr. King. Bierstadt mentions that he is going to Yosemite and invites Whitney to join him. |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Letter to Unidentified Person, circa 1880s
Image(s)
Bierstadt sends an invitation to a meeting at his Tenth Street studio. |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Letter To Mr. Coffin, circa 1880s, June 14
Image(s)
Inquiry written on behalf of a "quite destitute" artist, John Irving, and his family, asking Coffin if he knows of a furnished apartment available for the family. |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Letter To Mr. Rives, 1880, June 16
<i>(includes transcript)</i>
Image(s)
Bierstadt writes from New York City, describing the opportunities available to art students in the city. |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | Letter To Bierstadt's Sister, 1884, December 1
Image(s)
Concerns a commission. |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Letter To Mrs. Ely, 1887, April 8
Image(s)
Bierstadt invites her brother, and any of her friends, to visit him at his studio. |

- Box 1, Folder 8 Letter To Mr. Stedman, 1887, November 20
(includes transcript)
[Image\(s\)](#)
Letter conveys the the gift of a fragment salvaged when breaking up a piece of quartz that suggested to Bierstadt "a scarf pin for some good fellow." Bierstadt writes to Stedman of the "glorious old mountains which have given me so much happiness" from which such a fragment came.
- Box 1, Folder 9 Letter To Mr. Jules Lévida, 1887, December 23
[Image\(s\)](#)
Bierstadt introduces David Wallace.
- Box 1, Folder 10 Letter to Unidentified Person, 1888, June 28
(handwritten copy)
[Image\(s\)](#)
Discusses commissions that may result from the fact that Bierstadt has "spent much time and money on the matters referred to in your letter."
- Box 1, Folder 11 Letter To Mr. Adams, 1892, October 6
[Image\(s\)](#)
Bierstadt states that he is happy to show Mr. Adams's friend "the new motor."
- Box 1, Folder 12 Letter To Mr. Cooke, 1893, March 7
[Image\(s\)](#)
Discusses financial matters.
- Box 1, Folder 13 Letter To General Miles, 1900, January 6
(photocopy)
[Image\(s\)](#)
Bierstadt informs General Miles that he is sending a small painting of a Swiss landscape, *The Jungfrau*, as a gift for the General's daughter on the occasion of her marriage.

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