



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Charles Henry Caffin
Papers, circa 1883-1973, bulk circa
1883-1918 , in the Archives of American Art

Catherine S. Gaines

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
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Charles Henry Caffin papers
Identifier:	AAA.caffchar
Date:	circa 1883-1973 (bulk 1883-1918)
Extent:	1.2 Linear feet
Creator:	Caffin, Charles Henry, 1854-1918
Language:	English
Summary:	The scattered papers of art critic and writer Charles Henry Caffin measure 1.2 linear feet and date from circa 1883-1973, bulk circa 1883-1918. Found within the papers are an interview transcript, two letters, printed materials, one scrapbook, and family photographs dating from circa 1883 to circa 1911, many by noted photographers Arnold Genthe, Frances Benjamin Johnston, Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, and Alfred Stieglitz. The scrapbook contains Caffin's columns for the <i>New York American</i> , 1913-1915.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Donna Caffin Layton, daughter of Charles Caffin, donated most of the papers in 1974. Stephen D. Rockstroh, Caffin's son-in-law, donated additional material in 1985.

Alternative Forms Available

The papers of **Charles Henry Caffin** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2009, and total 167 images.

Materials not scanned include duplicates, negatives, and some printed and published works that are not annotated.

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Catherine S. Gaines in 2003, merging the two accessions. The collection was digitized in 2009, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Charles Henry Caffin papers, circa 1883-1973, bulk circa 1883-1918. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

Ownership and Literary Rights

The Charles Henry Caffin papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Charles Henry Caffin was born in 1854 in England. After graduating from Oxford University, Caffin served as stage manager for outdoor productions with Ben Greet and His Shakespearean Players. During this time, he met actress Caroline Scurfield, whom he later married and had two daughters, Freda and Donna. Caffin moved to United States in 1892 where he began to write about art, drama, and dance. He was an early supporter of the Photo-Secessionists and American modern art.

Initially, Caffin worked for several years executing murals from designs prepared by other artists for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the new Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Shortly thereafter, however, he began writing for Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Notes* and later *Camera Work*. He moved to the New York City area and worked as a critic for the *New York Evening Post*, *New York Sun*, and later for the *New York American*. Caffin wrote many books about art, drama, and dance, including *Photography as Fine Art* (1901), *American Masters of Painting* (1902), *How to Study Pictures* (1905), and *Art for Life's Sake* (1913).

Charles Caffin died in 1918.

Scope and Content Note

The scattered papers of art critic and writer Charles Henry Caffin measure 1.2 linear feet and date from circa 1883-1973. Found within the papers are an interview transcript, two letters, printed materials, one scrapbook, and family photographs dating from circa 1883 to circa 1911, many by noted photographers Arnold Genthe, Frances Benjamin Johnston, Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, and Alfred Stieglitz. The scrapbook contains Caffin's columns for the *New York American*, 1913-1915.

Biographical information includes an autograph book, and a transcript and written summary of a 1973 interview with Caffin's daughter, Donna Layton, conducted by Wanda Corn and Deborah Loft concerning Charles Henry Caffin. The two letters found within the papers are written to Caroline Caffin. Printed material consists of play announcements, a play written by Charles Rann Kennedy, and excerpts from a 1974 published book on photography mentioning Caffin.

Photographs are of the Caffin family, including Charles Henry, Caroline, Donna, Freda and Charles's mother Harlet. Also found are photographs of Ben Greet. Notable photographers include Arnold Genthe, Frances Benjamin Johnston, Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, and Alfred Stieglitz. There is one scrapbook containing Charles Henry Caffin's articles written for the *New York American* magazine from 1913-1915.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 5 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Information, 1915, 1973 (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1920 (Box 1; 1 folder)
- Series 3: Printed Material, 1908, circa 1920, 1973 (Box 1; 3 folders)
- Series 4: Photographs, circa 1883-circa 1910s (Box 1, 3-4; 0.6 linear feet)
- Series 5: Scrapbooks, 1913-1915 (Box 2; 0.4 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art critics -- New York (State) -- New York
Art, Modern -- 20th century
Photographers
Photography, Artistic
Theater -- History -- 20th century

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names:

Andreyev, Leonid, 1871-1919. Sorrows of Belgium
Corn, Wanda M.
Genthe, Arnold, 1869-1942
Greet, Ben, Sir, 1857-1936
Johnston, Frances Benjamin, 1864-1952
Kennedy, Charles Rann, 1871- Servant in the house
Käsebier, Gertrude, 1852-1934
Layton, Donna Caffin
Steichen, Edward, 1879-1973
Stieglitz, Alfred, 1864-1946

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Information, 1915, 1973

2 Folders (Box 1)

This series consists of an oral history transcript and summary conducted in 1973 with Donna Layton by Wanda Corn and Deborah Loft concerning Charles Henry Caffin. Also found is an autograph book given to Caffin as thanks for a speaking engagement, written on a copy of Leonid Andreyev's *The Sorrows of Belgium*.

Pages that do not have autographs, drawings, notes, and poems have not been scanned.

Box 1, Folder 1 Autograph Book on Leonid Andreyev's *The Sorrows of Belgium*, 1915
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 2 Interview Transcript with Donna Layton, 1973 February 27
[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 2: Letters, 1920

1 Folder (Box 1)

This series consists two letters written to Mrs. Caroline Scurfield Caffin in 1920 from one her daughters and Gilbert Cannan. The letters were found folded inside Leonid Andreyev's *The Sorrows of Belgium*.

Box 1, Folder 3

Letters, 1920

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 3: Printed Material, 1908, circa 1920s, 1972

3 Folders (Box 1)

Found here is an announcement of a Ben Greet performance in the United States, and a copy of the play *Servant in the House* by Charles Rann Kennedy given to Freda Caffin with signatures of cast members. Also found are photocopied excerpts taken from Beaumont Newhall's *History of Photography* that discuss Charles Henry Caffin.

Only pages with signatures have been scanned from the Rann play.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Ben Greet Play Announcement, circa 1920s
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Excerpts from <i>History of Photography</i> by Beaumont Newhall, 1972 June 19
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | <i>Servant in the House</i> by Charles Rann Kennedy, 1908
Image(s) |

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Series 4: Photographs, circa 1883-circa 1910s

0.6 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 3-4)

Photographs are of the Caffin family including Charles Henry, Caroline, Donna, Freda and Charles's mother Harlet. Also found are photographs of Ben Greet and of Greet with Caroline Caffin during a performance of *As You Like It* circa 1883. Notable photographers include Arnold Genthe, Frances Benjamin Johnston, Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, and Alfred Stieglitz.

Folders include copy prints and negatives of the photographs. The originals have been conserved and are housed in Box 3 and OV 4.

Only original photographs have been scanned.

Box 1, Folder 7	Caroline Caffin, 1901, circa 1905 Image(s) Oversized original housed in Box 3
Box 1, Folder 8	Caroline, Donna, and Freda Caffin, 1905 Image(s) Oversized original housed in Box 3
Box 1, Folder 9	Charles Henry Caffin, 1905, circa 1900 Image(s) Oversized originals housed in Box 3 and OV 4
Box 1, Folder 10	Donna and Freda Caffin, 1901, 1905 Image(s) Oversized originals housed in Box 3
Box 1, Folder 11	Harlet C. Caffin, circa 1900s Image(s) Oversized originals housed in Box 3
Box 1, Folder 12	Ben Greet, circa 1910s Image(s) Oversized originals housed in Box 3
Box 1, Folder 13	Ben Greet and Caroline Scurfield Caffin, circa 1883 Image(s) Oversized originals housed in Box 3
Box 3	Conserved Photographs, circa 1883-1905 Oversized originals digitized with Box 1, Folders 7-13.
Box OV 4	Oversized Conserved Photograph of Charles Henry Caffin, circa 1883 Oversized originals digitized with Box 1, Folder 9

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Series 5: Scrapbooks, 1913-1915

0.4 Linear feet (Box 2)

This series consists of one scrapbook containing Charles Henry Caffin's articles written for the *New York American* magazine from 1913-1915.

This scrapbook has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 2, Folder 1 Scrapbook, 1913-1915
[Image\(s\)](#)

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