



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the George Catlin Papers, 1821-1904, 1946, in the Archives of American Art

Patricia K. Craig and Barbara D. Aikens

Funding for the digitization of the microfilm of this collection
was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	George Catlin papers
Date:	undated 1821-1904
Identifier:	AAA.catlgeor
Creator:	Catlin, George, 1796-1872
Extent:	2.3 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	<p>The collection comprises 2.3 feet of papers concerning George Catlin's creation and promotion of his famed "Indian Gallery" of paintings, drawings, and artifacts of North American Indians. Dating from 1821 through 1904, with one item dated 1946, the papers include letters, notebooks and journals, receipt books and loose receipts, printed materials, and other documentation. The bulk of the collection focuses on Catlin's efforts to promote the sale of his gallery to the United States government through tours, including London and Paris, and petitions to various governments to purchase the Gallery. Among the rare printed catalogs and petitions in the collection are exhibition catalogs for the U.S., London, and Paris tours, the earliest dating from 1837. Letters and other documents include letters dating from the 1830s from Henry Clay, Thomas Sully, and William Henry Seward commending Catlin's work, as well as Catlin family correspondence and papers dating from 1821 through the 1870s.</p>

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The papers of George Catlin were transferred to the Archives of American Art by the Library of the Smithsonian's National Collection of Fine Arts, now the Smithsonian's American Art Museum. Accession records indicate that the papers were once maintained by the Smithsonian's Bureau of Ethnology and were probably part of the original 1879 acquisition of Catlin's Indian Gallery by the Smithsonian. Businessman Joseph Harrison rescued the "Indian Gallery" from Catlin's creditors in the 1850s and stored the collection in a Philadelphia warehouse, where it suffered damage from at least two fires before Harrison's widow donated the collection to the Smithsonian.

Related Archival Materials

The Archives holds several related collections of differing provenances related to George Catlin, including a small collection of manuscripts and drawings microfilmed on reel 1191 related to Catlin's work in marine art and documentation. A microfilmed loan of circa 500 items is also available on reel 3277 of letters between Catlin and Sir Thomas Phillipps, 1840-1860, writings by Catlin and material on Catlin's Indian Gallery, including clippings, catalogs, handbills, invitations, drawings and portrait sketches of

native Americans, and printed material; a watercolor sketchbook; a list of paintings; and miscellany. Also found within the Archives is one undated letter microfilmed on reel D8 from Catlin, and a collection of art historian William Truettner's research papers on George Catlin.

Available Formats

The papers of **George Catlin** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2005 from 2 reels of microfilm, and total 2,360 images.

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Patricia K. Craig in 2001. The microfilm was digitized in 2005 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

George Catlin papers, 1821-1946. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

A digitized version of the microfilm of this collection is available online via the Archives of American Art website.

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Biographical Note

George Catlin was born in 1796 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Although trained as a lawyer, Catlin quit his law practice and moved to Philadelphia in 1823 to begin a career as a portrait painter. He gained membership in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1824, but his career in formal portraiture met with little success. In 1830, Catlin embarked upon his lifetime achievement of documenting the lives, customs, and culture of the declining native American population of the Plains. He spent the next six years traveling, drawing, painting, and writing about the Plains Indians. By 1837, he had amassed enough documentation to hold a major exhibition in New York of *Catlin's Indian Gallery of Portraits, Landscapes, Manners and Customs, Costumes, etc.* The same exhibition, with an added live show, traveled to London in 1842 and Paris in 1845, where it was met with rave reviews.

Catlin spent the remainder of his life gathering support for the sale of the Indian Gallery to the U.S. Congress. Between 1841 and 1842, at his own expense, Catlin wrote and published his two volume set *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*. He also wrote numerous petitions and "memorials" to Congress, often including statements from national and international reputable supporters, such as Daniel Webster, General Lewis Cass, the Joint Committee on the Library (of Congress), and the American Ambassador to France. The Smithsonian Institution's first Secretary Joseph Henry strongly supported congressional acquisition of Catlin's work and even provided Catlin with a small studio in the Castle building. All of the appeals to the government for the purchase of the collection were, in the end, unsuccessful and Catlin died almost penniless in 1872.

Scope and Contents

The collection comprises 2.3 feet of papers concerning George Catlin's creation and promotion of his famed "Indian Gallery" of paintings, drawings, and artifacts of North American Indians. Dating from 1821 through 1904, with one item dated 1946, the papers include letters, notebooks and journals, receipt books and loose receipts, printed materials, and other documentation. The bulk of the collection focuses on Catlin's efforts to promote the sale of his gallery to the United States government through tours, including London and Paris, and petitions to various governments to purchase the Gallery. Among the rare printed catalogs and petitions in the collection are exhibition catalogs for the U.S., London, and Paris tours, the earliest dating from 1837. Letters and other documents include letters dating from the 1830s from Henry Clay, Thomas Sully, and William Henry Seward commending Catlin's work, as well as Catlin family correspondence and papers dating from 1821 through the 1870s.

Of particular interest in the collection are letters to and from Catlin, including two written by Catlin during his early travels to the west in the 1830s. Other letters include ones from Henry Clay, John Adams Dix, Ralph Randolph Gurley, James Hall, William Henry Seward, Thomas Sully (illustrated), and Baron Friederich von Humbolt, among others. Most wish Catlin well and offer support in his endeavors to sell his collection.

Also found within the collection are several notebooks and notes describing Native American ceremonies, name translations, customs, and other information pertinent to Catlin's catalog, two volume book, and exhibitions of the "Indian Gallery." There are also numerous loose receipts and account and receipt books documenting the 1840s London and Paris venues of the "Indian Gallery" exhibition. The collection also houses printed catalogs for the exhibitions, including a rare 1837 catalog for the first show in New York.

Additional materials include certificates of authenticity testifying to the authenticity of Catlin's paintings from life of Native American sitters, announcements relating to exhibition openings, printed memorials and petitions to Congress, printed letters of support, envelopes and name cards, and handwritten tickets to Catlin lectures. Also found are a handwritten journal of Theodore B. Catlin, photogravures of Catlin, obituaries for Catlin, and printed reviews of the exhibitions.

Arrangement

The George Catlin papers are arranged into five series based primarily on document type. Within each series, materials are arranged in chronological order.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1821-1885 (Boxes 1, 6; Reel 5824; 12 folders)
 - Series 2: Writings, 1825-circa 1872 (Boxes 1, 6; Reel 5824; 9 folders)
 - Series 3: Financial Records, 1826-1848 (Boxes 2, 6; Reels 5824-5825; 13 folders, 3 bound volumes)
 - Series 4: Catalogs, 1837-1871 (Boxes 3-5; Reel 5825; 1 linear foot)
 - Series 5: Ephemera and Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1832-1904, 1946 (Boxes 5-6, OV 7; Reel 5825; 14 folders)
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Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art and race
Ethnological illustrators
Indians of North America -- Portraits

Miniature painters

Types of Materials:

Photogravures

Names:

Clay, Henry, 1777-1852

Seward, William Henry, 1801-1872

Sully, Thomas, 1783-1872

Occupations:

Ethnological painters

Illustrators

Painters

Portrait painters

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1821-1885

12 Folders (Boxes 1, 6; Reel 5824)

Scope and Contents: Letters to and from Catlin, including two written while traveling in the west in the 1830s. Also found are family letters and several letters of support from Henry Clay, John Adams Dix, Ralph Randolph Gurley, James Hall, William Henry Seward, Thomas Sully (illustrated), and Baron Friederich von Humbolt, among others. Most wish Catlin well and offer support in his endeavors to promote and sell his collection. Folder headings include all oversize material.

Reel 5824, Frame 17-29 [Correspondence, 1821, undated](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 30-50 [Correspondence, 1834-1839](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 51-73 [Correspondence, 1839](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 74-96 [Correspondence, 1840-1842](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 97-129 [Correspondence, circa 1840s](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 130-146 [Correspondence, 1843-1844](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 147-160 [Correspondence, 1845-1849](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 161-176 [Correspondence, 1850-1855](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 177-179 [Correspondence, 1861](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 180-187 [Correspondence, 1870, undated](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 188-208 [Correspondence, 1885](#)

Reel unfiled

Transcripts of Correspondence Concerning Catlin, undated

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Series 2: Writings, 1825-circa 1872

9 Folders (Boxes 1, 6; Reel 5824)

Scope and Contents: This series includes several handwritten notebooks by Catlin, as well as printed memorials and petitions written by Catlin. Also found is a handwritten French translation of Catlin's 1845 exhibition catalog and a partial handwritten manuscript "Travels in Europe." The subscription notebook was originally created circa 1825 to record subscription sales for a printed version of a portrait of the Hon. Tapping Reeve, a Connecticut judge painted by Catlin. The printing was never actually undertaken, however, and the book was later used in 1841 as a memo book during Catlin's stay in London. Of particular interest are the Notebooks numbered 6 and 7. Both contain notes about Catlin's paintings and exhibitions, as well as cultural information about the Indian tribes, such as name translations. One notebook describes a Mandan battle in gruesome detail.

Reel 5824, Frame 209-227	George Catlin's Subscription and Expense Notebook, 1825, undated
Reel 5824, Frame 228-252	George Catlin's Notebook #6, circa 1830s
Reel 5824, Frame 253-273	George Catlin's Notebook #7, circa 1830s
Reel 5824, Frame 274-292	George Catlin's Notebook with Notations about Paintings, circa 1840s
Reel 5824, Frame 293-317	Handwritten Catalog Raisonne, French Translation, author unknown (1 of 4), circa 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 318-342	Handwritten Catalog Raisonne, French Translation, author unknown (2 of 4), circa 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 343-367	Handwritten Catalog Raisonne, French Translation, author unknown (3 of 4), circa 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 368-387	Handwritten Catalog Raisonne, French Translation, author unknown (4 of 4), circa 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 388-395	Printed, "Memorial" by George Catlin to Congress, 1868
Reel 5824, Frame 396-402	Miscellaneous Notes and Reminiscences by George Catlin, 1869
Reel 5824, Frame 403-408	Printed, Petition to Congress and Leaflet, circa 1872
Reel 5824, Frame 409-417	Printed, "Synopsis of the Travels of George Catlin in Gathering His Sketches for His Indian Collection", circa 1872

Reel 5824, Frame 418-442 [Handwritten Partial Book Manuscript, "Travels In Europe" \(1 of 3\), undated](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 443-467 [Handwritten Partial Book Manuscript, "Travels In Europe" \(2 of 3\), undated](#)

Reel 5824, Frame 468-484 [Handwritten Partial Book Manuscript, "Travels In Europe" \(3 of 3\), undated](#)

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Series 3: Financial Records, 1826-1848

13 Folders (3 bound volumes)

Scope and Contents: This series includes bound and loose accounts, receipts, and invoices, primarily those of George Catlin for his travels in Europe associated with the exhibitions, as well as receipts for advertising and space rental for the exhibitions. One account book is marked on the cover "Clara B. Catlin Account Book", which actually documents book sales. Also found is one very small bound green daybook decorated with metal tabs and a cover label engraved, "Souvenir." It is unclear who is the author of the entries. Inside is a handwritten inscription dated 1827 on the title page, along with an illegible name. The book includes notes, addresses, account entries, and "doodles." Folder headings include all oversize material.

Reel 5824, Frame 485-509	Bound, Miscellaneous Account and Receipt Book (1 of 4), 1826-1838
Reel 5824, Frame 510-534	Bound, Miscellaneous Account and Receipt Book (2 of 4), 1826-1838
Reel 5824, Frame 535-559	Bound, Miscellaneous Account and Receipt Book (3 of 4), 1826-1838
Reel 5824, Frame 560-585	Bound, Miscellaneous Account and Receipt Book (4 of 4), 1826-1838
Reel 5824, Frame 586-606	Bound Daybook, "Souvenir", Unknown Author, 1827-1830
Reel 5824, Frame 607-613	Bound Account Book, Book Sales, undated
Reel 5824, Frame 614-643	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (1 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 644-673	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (2 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 674-703	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (3 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 704-733	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (4 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 734-763	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (5 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 764-793	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (6 of 10), 1841

Reel 5824, Frame 794-823	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (7 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 824-853	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (8 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 854-883	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (9 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 884-902	Bound "Memorandum" and Receipt Notebook (10 of 10), 1841
Reel 5824, Frame 903-932	Bound Paris Hall Receipts (1 of 4), 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 933-962	Bound Paris Hall Receipts (2 of 4), 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 963-992	Bound Paris Hall Receipts (3 of 4), 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 993-1106	Bound Paris Hall Receipts (4 of 4), 1845
Reel 5824, Frame 1107-1127	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts, 1833-1839
Reel 5824, Frame 1128-1143	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (1 of 4), 1840 2 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 12-41	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (2 of 4), 1840 2 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 42-71	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (3 of 4), 1840 2 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 72-97	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (4 of 4), 1840 2 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 98-108	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts, 1841
Reel 5825, Frame 109-110	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts, 1842
Reel 5825, Frame 111-140	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (1 of 2), 1843

Reel 5825, Frame 141-163	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (2 of 2), 1843
Reel 5825, Frame 164-165	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts, 1844
Reel 5825, Frame 166-190	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (1 of 2), 1845
Reel 5825, Frame 191-205	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts (2 of 2), 1845
Reel 5825, Frame 206-207	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts, 1848
Reel 5825, Frame 208-223	Miscellaneous Loose Invoices and Receipts, undated
Reel 5825, Frame 224-229	Miscellaneous Financial Material, 1841-1845

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Series 4: Catalogs, 1837-1871

1 Linear foot (Boxes 3-5; Reel 5825)

Scope and Contents: Printed catalogs and duplicates for the Indian Gallery exhibitions in the United States and Europe. The series is arranged chronologically by publication date. Duplicate copies are grouped together in folders. Folder headings include all oversize material.

Reel 5825, Frame 230-253	Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery of Portraits, Landscapes, Manners and Customs, Costumes, Etc. (New York, first edition), 1837 2 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 254-279	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery; Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representations of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (London edition, C. & J. Adlard Printers), circa 1840
Reel 5825, Frame 280-299	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery; Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representations of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (London edition, C. & J. Adlard Printers) (1 of 2), circa 1843 4 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 300-319	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery; Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representations of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (London edition, C & J Adlard Printers) (2 of 2), circa 1843 4 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 320-339	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery, Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representations of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (New York, first edition) (1 of 2), 1845 Notes: Includes insert, "Opinions of the English and United States Press on Catlin's North American Indian Museum."
Reel 5825, Frame 340-359	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery, Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representations of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (New York, first edition) (2 of 2), 1845 Notes: Includes insert, "Opinions of the English and United States Press on Catlin's North American Indian Museum."
Reel 5825, Frame 360-385	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery, Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representation of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (London edition, C. & J. Adlard), 1845 Notes: Includes insert, <i>Catalogue Raisonné de la Galerie Indienne de Mr. Catlin</i> (Paris edition, Imprimerie de Wittersheim)
Reel 5825, Frame 386-410	Catalogue Raisonné de La Galerie Indienne de Mr. Catlin (Paris edition, Imprimerie de Wittersheim) (1 of 2), 1845

Reel 5825, Frame 411-437	Catalogue Raisonné de La Galerie Indienne de Mr. Catlin (Paris edition, Imprimerie de Wittersheim) (2 of 2), 1845
Reel 5825, Frame 438-467	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Collection; Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representatives of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (notated London edition, self-published) (1 of 2), 1848 2 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 468-486	A Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Collection; Containing Portraits, Landscapes, Costumes, Etc., and Representatives of the Manners and Customs of the North American Indians (notated London edition, self-published) (2 of 2), 1848 2 Folders
Reel 5825, Frame 487-510	Catalogue Descriptive and Instructive of Catlin's Indian Cartoons: Portraits, Types and Customs and LaSalle's Discoveries (New York edition, Baker and Godwin, printers) (1 of 2), 1871
Reel 5825, Frame 511-537	Catalogue Descriptive and Instructive of Catlin's Indian Cartoons: Portraits, Types and Customs and LaSalle's Discoveries (New York edition, Baker and Godwin, printers) (2 of 2), 1871

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Series 5: Ephemera and Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1832-1904, undated

14 Folders (Boxes 5, 6, OV 7; Reel 5825)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of exhibition announcements, certifications of authenticity for Catlin's portraits and other paintings, miscellaneous broadsides, announcements, clippings, petitions in support of the proposed purchase of the Indian Gallery by Congress, obituaries for George Catlin, reviews of the exhibitions, photogravures of Catlin, and a handwritten journal belonging to Catlin's son, Theodore, and other miscellaneous handwritten documents and printed matter. Additional items of interest include a sheet music cover print used to advertise a music and dance performance by North American Indians who accompanied Catlin as part of his Indian Gallery exhibition in Paris and a handpainted mineral chart of previously unknown clay specimens gathered by Catlin during his travels among Indians in Minnesota, later named "Catlinite" in his honor. Folder headings include all oversize material.

Reel 5825, Frame 538-544	Certificates of Authenticity, 1832-1836, undated
Reel 5825, Frame 545-564	Reviews, circa 1837-1889
Reel 5825, Frame 565-568	Copyright Registration for Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians, 1841
Reel 5825, Frame 569-570	London Subscription Form for Purchasing Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians, circa 1840-1845
Reel 5825, Frame 571-595	Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Athenaeum (London) (1 of 3), 1840
Reel 5825, Frame 596-615	Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Athenaeum (London) (2 of 3), 1840
Reel 5825, Frame 616-635	Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Athenaeum (London) (3 of 3), 1840
Reel 5825, Frame 636-638	Handwritten Tickets to Catlin Lecture by George Catlin, undated
Reel 5825, Frame 639-660	Petitions to U. S. Congress to Authorize Purchase of Catlin's Indian Collection, circa 1840s-1875
Reel 5825, Frame 661-673	Miscellaneous Announcements, Broadside, and Clippings, 1840-1850, 1904, 1946
Reel 5825, Frame 674-693	Miscellaneous Printed Matter (1 of 2), circa 1845-1889

Reel 5825, Frame 694-714	Miscellaneous Printed Matter (2 of 2), circa 1845-1889
Reel 5825, Frame 715-723	Envelopes, Name Cards, and Miscellaneous Collected Items, 1849-1861, undated
Reel 5825, Frame 724-726	Photocopies of Title Pages for Letters by George Catlin Describing the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians (New York Commercial Advertisers), undated
Reel 5825, Frame 727-732	Obituaries for George Catlin, 1872
Reel 5825, Frame 733-753	Theodore B. Catlin's Miscellaneous Journal (London), 1845
Reel 5825, Frame 754-760	Photographs and Photogravure of George Catlin, 1868, undated
Reel unfiled	Handpainted Mineral Chart, circa 1830s

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