



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Thomas B. Clarke Letters From or About Homer Dodge Martin, 1893-1897, 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

November 2008

Archives of American Art  
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Biographical Note.....	2
Scope and Content Note.....	3
Arrangement.....	3
Names and Subjects .....	3
Container Listing .....	4
Series 1: Thomas B. Clarke Letters From or About Homer Dodge Martin, 1893-1897.....	4

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Thomas B. Clarke letters from or about Homer Dodge Martin
<b>Date:</b>	1893-1897
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.clartbhm
<b>Creator:</b>	Clarke, Thomas B. (Thomas Benedict), 1848-1931
<b>Extent:</b>	0.2 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The Thomas B. Clarke letters from or about Homer Dodge Martin measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1893-1897. Twenty-two letters from Martin to art collector and patron Thomas B. Clarke, document Martin's work, his financial struggles, and his physical and mental condition in the last 5 years of his life. Additional letters to and from others further illuminate Martin's relationship with Clarke and provide insight into his financial affairs and the increasingly favorable market for the painter's work just prior to and following his death in 1897.

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## Administrative Information

### Provenance

Most of the letters were donated by Charles Feinberg in 1957. Four additional letters were given to the Archives by Irving Burton in 1967.

### Related Material

The James Stillman letters relating to Homer Dodge Martin have also been digitized and are available online via the Archives of American Art's website. Additional material relating to Homer Dodge Martin, including correspondence with Thomas B. Clarke and Elizabeth Martin, can be found in the Macbeth Gallery records at AAA.

### Alternative Forms Available

The letters of **Thomas B. (Thomas Benedict) Clarke from or about Homer Dodge Martin** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2009, and total 65 images.

### Processing Information

The collection was received in 2 separate donations in 1957 and 1967 and microfilmed on reels D9 and 3482. The letters were merged in 2008 by Stephanie Ashley, and digitized in entirety in 2009, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

### Preferred Citation

Thomas B. Clarke letters from or about Homer Dodge Martin, 1893-1897. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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## Biographical Note

Thomas Benedict Clarke (1848-1931) was a New York prosperous merchant who began collecting American art in the 1870s. Over the course of the next 20 years he actively traded, loaned, and sold artwork through dealers in New York City, outlets in Worcester, Cincinnati and St. Louis, and with artists. He also shared his collection through public and private exhibitions in New York and elsewhere. He earned praise from the critics for being the foremost patron of American painters during the late 1800s and was praised by many painters for his attention to American artists at a time when they considered themselves neglected or ignored.

Hudson River School painter Homer Dodge Martin (1836-1897) was one of the artists for whom Clarke acted as patron. Martin studied briefly with James Hart and spent his summers during the 1860s sketching in the Adirondacks, the Catskills and the White Mountains and then painted landscapes from the sketches he made at his studio in New York City's Tenth Street Studio Building.

In 1876 he took his first trip to Europe and from 1882-1886 lived in Normandy, France. There he was influenced both by the Barbizon school of painting and the Impressionists and his painting took on darker, more melancholy tones.

By 1887 Martin had returned to New York and in 1893 moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. During the 1890s Martin was plagued by ill health and financial struggles. A dead optic nerve in one eye and a cataract in the other, left him close to blindness when he died in February 1897. At the time of his death two of his greatest paintings, *Westchester Hills* (circa 1887) and *Harp of the Winds* (1895), remained unsold and another, *Adirondack Scenery* (1895) had been bought by Clarke for circa \$400.

In 1890, Clarke had dissolved his dry-goods partnership, Clarke & King, and announced that he would no longer deal in American pictures except as an agent for George Inness. Clarke opened a showroom known as "Art House" in 1891 on Fifth Avenue in New York City, and began dealing primarily in Oriental porcelains and Greek antiquities. The Martin letters are one source of evidence that Clarke did, however, continue to deal in American art as a private agent through Macbeth Gallery and others. A letter written on Clarke's behalf to Martin dated April 17, 1896, stated that he had contacted Samuel P. Avery on Martin's behalf, and suggested that he consign his paintings to Avery, rather than having Clarke promote them himself.

In January 1899 Clarke announced that he would dispose of his American pictures at auction following a week long exhibition at the American Art Association. In February 1899, 7 of the 10 Homer Martin paintings in Clarke's possession were sold at that auction, including *Adirondack Scenery* for \$5500. Within two years of his death, Martin's *Harp of the Winds* was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In addition to the Metropolitan Museum, Martin's work can be found in other important American museums including the Addison Gallery of American Art, the Albany Institute of History and Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He became a member of the National Academy of Design in 1874 and was one of the founders of the Society of American Artists.

## Scope and Content Note

This collection measures 0.2 linear feet, including 22 letters from Homer Martin to art patron Thomas Clarke, and dates from 1893-1897. Since Martin kept no diaries or sales ledgers himself, the letters are invaluable in understanding his painting, financial struggles, and his physical and mental condition in the last 5 years of his life. Additional letters from Martin's son, Ralph, his wife, Elizabeth, and gallery owner William Macbeth, and a letter from Martin to his friend Montgomery Schuyler, further illuminate Clarke's activities as a dealer and patron of Martin's work, and provide insight into Martin's financial affairs and the increasingly favorable market for the painter's work just prior to and following his death in 1897.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 1 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Thomas B. Clarke Letters From or About Homer Dodge Martin, 1893-1897 (Box 1; 9 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 -- Economic aspects  
Art dealers -- New York (State) -- New York  
Art patrons -- New York (State) -- New York  
Collectors and collecting -- New York (State) -- New York

Names:

Macbeth, William, 1851-1917  
Martin, Homer Dodge, 1836-1897

Occupations:

Painters

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Thomas B. Clarke Letters From or About Homer Dodge Martin, 1893-1897

#### 9 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Written entirely from St. Paul where he had moved in 1893, the 22 letters from Martin to Thomas Clarke indicate the painter's homesickness for the New York art scene, his physical suffering and his anguish over his financial situation. In a December 1895 letter to Clarke he writes of the "deadly loneliness I live in" and states that "aside from my anxiety over the commercial side of my affairs I look for letters as an alligator watches for flies." His letters also document his work, tracing from 1894, for example, his progress on one of his most important paintings, *Adirondack Scenery*, and indicating his increasing reliance on memory, rather than direct observation of nature, for his work.

In an April 1895 letter to Montgomery Schuyler, whom Martin called "Robo" (an old friend with whom he travelled to Lake Ontario in 1874), Martin mentions 2 pictures he intends to ship to Clarke that he hopes will be "more important than anything I have done." Martin's relationship with Clarke is further illuminated by two 1896 letters from Martin's son, Ralph, written on his behalf, in which Ralph states his father's hope that the market for his work "should begin to rise, as some of the newspaper notices seem to presage" and his desire for an arrangement with Clarke in which Clarke handles all his paintings under a mutually profitable contract. Martin's prime objective in this endeavour was "a definite income," with which to rent a studio with good light as he was "badly handicapped" and working "with the greatest difficulty." A response to Ralph's request, written in an unidentified hand on behalf of Clarke to Martin, suggests that an "active picture concern such as Avery's would be the best for the results that you and your family hope for" as Clarke has ceased to show such work at his Art House.

Two letters from Elizabeth Martin and one from William Macbeth to Clarke touch on the fact that Clarke continued to deal in Martin's paintings through Macbeth at the end of Martin's life and after his death, despite his assertion in 1890 that he would no longer handle any other American paintings except those by George Inness.

Two notes written in an unidentified hand contain excerpts from 3 Martin letters and list 3 dates respectively.

Box 1, Folder 1	<a href="#">Letters from Martin to Thomas Clarke, 1893</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	<a href="#">Letters from Martin to Thomas Clarke, 1894</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	<a href="#">Letters from Martin to Thomas Clarke, 1895</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	<a href="#">Letters from Martin to Thomas Clarke, 1896</a>
Box 1, Folder 5	<a href="#">Letter from Martin to "Robo" (Montgomery Schuyler), 1895</a>
Box 1, Folder 6	<a href="#">Letters from Ralph Martin to Thomas Clarke, 1896</a>
Box 1, Folder 7	<a href="#">Letters from Elizabeth Martin and William Macbeth to Thomas Clarke, 1897</a>

Box 1, Folder 8

[Letter to Martin for Clarke by Unknown, 1896](#)

Box 1, Folder 9

[Notes on Letters in Unidentified Hand, circa 1896](#)

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*