



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the William Couper Papers, 1872-1971, bulk 1872-1908, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	William Couper papers
Identifier:	AAA.coupwill
Date:	1872-1971 (bulk 1872-1908)
Creator:	Couper, William, 1853-1942
Extent:	0.9 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of William Couper date from 1872 through 1971 with the bulk of the material dated 1872 through 1908. The collection consists of 0.9 linear feet of letters, photographs, and printed material that document William Couper's career as a sculptor and his family life. Letters are from Couper and his wife to his parents, and to his brother John, discussing family matters, his art training, his travels, and his work in New York. There are also several letters from his father-in-law, sculptor Thomas Ball.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The William Couper papers were donated by the artist's nephew Monroe Couper to the Archives of American Art in 1992.

Alternative Forms Available

Portions of the collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reel 5883 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

Processing of the William Couper papers was completed by Jean Fitzgerald in 2004.

Preferred Citation

William Couper Papers, 1872-1971, bulk 1872-1908. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Patrons must use microfilm copy.

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Biographical Note

William Couper was born September 20, 1853 in Norfolk, Virginia, son of John Diedrich Couper and Euphania Monroe Couling Couper. He acquired an interest in sculpture from time spent at his father's company, Couper Marble Works.

After studying at the Cooper Institute in New York, Couper won a scholarship to the Royal Academy at Munich in 1875. Disliking the atmosphere in Munich, he took a place in the studio of Thomas Ball in Florence, Italy in the same year. Couper married Mr. Ball's daughter, Eliza Chickering Ball in 1878, and remained in Florence for over two decades, returning to New York to open a studio in 1897.

In 1901, Couper received a bronze medal at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. His notable works include a series of thirteen heroic busts of scientists for the American Museum of Natural History, a relief sculpture for the Sailors' Memorial in Annapolis, a statue of Capt. John Smith at Jamestown, and a portrait bust of John D. Rockefeller.

Couper retired in 1913 and died later in 1942 in Easton, Maryland.

Scope and Content Note

The William Couper papers span the years 1872 to 1971 with the bulk of the material dated 1872 to 1942, and measure 0.9 linear feet. They consist of letters, photographs, and printed material that document William Couper's career as a sculptor. Letters are from Couper and his wife to his parents, and to his brother John, discussing family matters, his art training, his travels, and his work in New York. There are also several letters from his father-in-law, sculptor Thomas Ball. An index of the letters and transcripts of approximately 70 of the letters were prepared by Couper's nephew Monroe Couper and are filed within the collection.

Also found within the papers are 0.4 linear feet of photographs of Couper and family members, his home in Florence, Italy, and a photograph album and unbound photographs of his art work. There are also clippings and 3 theater programs for productions in which William Couper performed.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 3 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Letters, 1874-1908 (Box 1; 0.4 linear feet; reel 5883)
 - Series 2: Photographs, 1886-1887 (Box 2-3; 0.4 linear feet; reel 5883)
 - Series 3: Printed Material, 1872-1971 (Box 2; 4 folders; reel 5883)
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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:

Sculptors

Sculpture, American
Sculpture, Modern -- 19th century -- Italy
Sculpture, Modern -- 19th century -- Study and teaching
Sculpture, Modern -- 19th century -- United States

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

Ball, Thomas, 1819-1911

Container Listing

Series 1: Letters, 1874-1908

(Box 1; 0.4 linear feet; reel 5883)

Scope and Contents: Letters are from Couper and his wife to his parents and to his brother John. There are also several letters from his father-in-law, sculptor Thomas Ball. An index of the letters, and transcripts of approximately 70 of the letters prepared by Monroe Couper are also filed within the series.

Box 1, Folder 1	Index to Letters (that date from 1874-1908), n.d.
Box 1, Folder 2	Transcripts of Letters (that date from 1874-1898), n.d.
Box 1, Folder 3	Letters, July-August 1874
Box 1, Folder 4	Letters, September-October, 1874
Box 1, Folder 5	Letters, November-December, 1874
Box 1, Folder 6	Letters, January-June, 1875
Box 1, Folder 7	Letters, July-August, 1875
Box 1, Folder 8	Letters, September-October, 1875
Box 1, Folder 9	Letters, February-June, 1876
Box 1, Folder 10	Letters, July-August, 1876
Box 1, Folder 11	Letters, October, 1876
Box 1, Folder 12	Letters, November, 1876
Box 1, Folder 13	Letters, December, 1876
Box 1, Folder 14	Letters, February-June, 1877
Box 1, Folder 15	Letters, July, 1877
Box 1, Folder 16	Letters, August-December, 1877
Box 1, Folder 17	Letters, 1878
Box 1, Folder 18	Letters, 1879
Box 1, Folder 19	Letters, 1880

Box 1, Folder 20	Letters, 1881
Box 1, Folder 21	Letters, 1882
Box 1, Folder 22	Letters, 1883
Box 1, Folder 23	Letters, 1884
Box 1, Folder 24	Letters, 1885
Box 1, Folder 25	Letters, 1886
Box 1, Folder 26	Letters, 1887
Box 1, Folder 27	Letters, 1888
Box 1, Folder 28	Letters, 1890-1894
Box 1, Folder 29	Letters, 1895
Box 1, Folder 30	Letters, 1896
Box 1, Folder 31	Letters, January-June, 1897
Box 1, Folder 32	Letters, July-December, 1897
Box 1, Folder 33	Letters, January-May, 1898
Box 1, Folder 34	Letters, July-September, 1898
Box 1, Folder 35	Letters, October-December, 1898
Box 1, Folder 36	Letters, 1899
Box 1, Folder 37	Letters, 1900
Box 1, Folder 38	Letters, 1901-1902
Box 1, Folder 39	Letters, 1903-1908

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Series 2: Photographs, 1886-1887

(Box 2-3; 0.4 linear feet; reel 5883)

Scope and Contents: Photographs are of Couper and family members, and of his home in Florence, Italy. There are also unbound photographs and a photograph album of his art work.

Box 2, Folder 1-2 Couper and Family Members, 1886-1887, n.d.

Box 2, Folder 3 Interiors of Couper's Home in Florence, Italy, n.d.

Box 2, Folder 4-9 Art Works, n.d.

Box 2, Folder 10 Photograph Album of Art Works , n.d.
Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 3

Box 3, Folder 1 Oversized Photograph Album of Art Works from Box 2, Folder 10, n.d.

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Series 3: Printed Material, 1872-1971

(Box 2; 4 folders; reel 5883)

Scope and Contents: Printed material consists of clippings and theater programs for productions in which William Couper performed.

Box 2, Folder 11-13 Clippings, 1872-1971

Box 2, Folder 14 Theater Programs, 1876-1877

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