



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Thomas Eakins Letters, 1866-1934, in the Archives of American Art

Erin Corley

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:	Thomas Eakins letters
Identifier:	AAA.eakithom
Date:	1866-1934
Creator:	Eakins, Thomas, 1844-1916
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The letters of Thomas Eakins measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1866 to 1934. They primarily document the period between 1866 and 1869 that he spent studying art in Paris, as well as his career as a portrait artist.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Letters from Eakins to his family were donated by Dr. Caroline Crowell, daughter of Frances Eakins Crowell, and niece of Thomas Eakins. Other letters were donated in 1962 and 1963 by Irving Levitt and Lawrence Fleischman. Both accessions were microfilmed upon receipt.

Alternative Forms Available

The letters of **Thomas Eakins** were digitized in 2006 by the Archives of American Art. The letters have been scanned in their entirety, and total 143 images.

Processing Information

The collection received some preliminary processing and was microfilmed upon receipt on reels 640 and 2803. The collection was fully re-processed, arranged and described by Erin Corley in 2005 and the bulk of it was scanned, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Thomas Eakins letters, 1866-1934. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The bulk of the collection has been digitized and is available online via AAA's website. Use of material not digitized requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Realist painter Thomas Eakins was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1844. He was encouraged by his parents to develop his talent in art, and in 1862 he entered the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Also during this period Eakins developed an interest in anatomy, revealed later in the realistically detailed *Gross Clinic*, painted in 1875. In 1866 he moved to Paris, where he studied painting with Jean-Léon Gérôme at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts for three years, and briefly with sculptor Augustin-Alexandre Dumont and painter Léon Bonnat. He toured Spain for six months in 1870 and then returned to Philadelphia to become a portrait artist. Eakins began teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and became its director of instruction in 1882. During this period he also met fellow artist Susan MacDowell and they were married in 1884. While at the Academy, he promoted a curriculum based on the study of the human figure, and began using photography as a method of study for his paintings. A dispute over the use of nude models forced Eakins to resign from the Academy in 1886, but he continued painting and exhibiting until his death in 1916.

Scope and Content Note

The letters of Thomas Eakins measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1866 to 1934. They primarily document the period between 1866 and 1869 that he spent studying art in Paris, as well as his career as a portrait artist.

Arrangement

Due to the small size of this collection, items are categorized into one series consisting of five folders. Items are arranged chronologically.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Painters -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia
- Painting, American
- Portrait painting -- 19th century -- United States
- Portrait painting, American

Names:

- Couture, Thomas, 1815-1879
- Crowell, Frances Eakins, b. 1848
- Crowell, William J.
- Fussell, Charles Lewis, 1840-1909
- Gérôme, Jean Léon, 1824-1904
- Hallowell, William R.
- Richards, Frederick de Bourg, 1822-1903
- Sartain, William, 1843-1924
- Wallace, J. Laurie (John Laurie)

Occupations:

Portrait painters -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia

Places:

Paris (France) -- description and travel

Container Listing

Series 1: Thomas Eakins Letters, 1866-1934

(Box 1; 5 folders)

Scope and Contents: Letters to his family include letters to his mother, father, future brother-in-law William ("Bill") Crowell, youngest sister Caroline ("Caddy"), and numerous letters to his younger sister Frances ("Fanny") Eakins Crowell. In the letters Eakins discusses his life in Paris, European political events such as the attempt to assassinate Emperor Alexander of Russia and rioting in Paris, working in Jean-Léon Gérôme's studio, and his opinions on Gérôme's artwork, including in a letter a sketch of the painting *Dante* (April 1, 1869). He also discusses Frederick DeBourg Richards and Thomas Couture, as well as his friendship with artist William ("Bill") Sartain who was also living in Paris at the time, and Fanny's friendship with Emily Sartain, also an artist. Also found is a photographic copy of a November 8, 1866 illustrated letter to his mother. Most of the letters are fragments with pages missing, and almost all include transcripts.

Miscellaneous letters include photographic copies of a fragment of an illustrated letter from artist Charles Lewis Fussell to Eakins, three letters from Eakins to former student John Laurie Wallace, and one letter, dated 1934, to Mr. Wallace from Susan Eakins, all transcribed. Also found are photocopies of three letters from Eakins to William ("Bill") Hallowell, a friend and portrait subject.

Box 1, Folder 1	Letters to Family, 1866-1867
Box 1, Folder 2	Letters to Family, 1868
Box 1, Folder 3	Letters to Family, 1869
Box 1, Folder 4	Letters to Family, circa 1866-1869
Box 1, Folder 5	Letters, Miscellaneous, 1866-1934

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