



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the Sanford Robinson  
Gifford Papers, 1840s - 1900, circa  
1960s-1970s, 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

June 2007

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/>

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Biographical Note.....	2
Scope and Content Note.....	3
Arrangement.....	4
Names and Subjects .....	4
Container Listing .....	5
Series 1: Letters, 1855-1874.....	5
Series 2: Printed Material, circa 1850s-1881.....	6
Series 3: Artwork, circa 1840s-circa 1870s.....	7
Series 4: Photographs and Copy Prints, circa 1856-1900, circa 1960s-1970s.....	8

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Sanford Robinson Gifford papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.giffsanf
<b>Date:</b>	1840s-1900 circa 1960s-1970s
<b>Extent:</b>	0.9 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	Gifford, Sanford Robinson, 1823-1880
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	<p>The papers of landscape painter Sanford Robinson Gifford, date from the 1840s through 1900, and circa 1960s-1970s. The bulk of the papers fall between 1855-1881; material from the circa 1960s-1970s consists of photographic copy prints for which the Archives does not have the originals. The small collection measures 0.9 linear feet of scattered documentation of Gifford's life, primarily extensive biographical accounts of his travels in the mid 1850s and late 1860s in the form of bound letters to his father. These serve as detailed journals of his impressions of Europe and the Middle East, the development of his painting, and his relationships with other artists such as Albert Bierstadt and Worthington Whittredge. The collection also contains sketches by Gifford, printed material including catalogs of Gifford's paintings, and photographs of Gifford and others.</p>

---

## Administrative Information

### Provenance

Edith Wilkinson first donated the Sanford Robinson Gifford papers in 1955 and 1957. James C. Gifford donated copy prints of photographs in 1964. Five sketchbooks were lent for microfilming by the Vassar College Art Library in 1966 and George and Frances Gifford Cummings donated additional material in 1973. In 1974, sixteen sketchbooks, photographs, and other materials were lent for microfilming by Dr. Sanford Gifford, Gifford's great-nephew.

### Separated Material

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of material lent for microfilming (reels D254 and 688) including twenty-one sketchbooks, photographs, passports and certificates, an 1888 European travel diary of Mary Louise Willard, wife of Gifford's nephew, Harold, and a 1966 letter. Loaned materials were returned to the lender and are not described in the collection container inventory.

## Related Material

Five sketchbooks were loaned by Vassar College in 1966 and the originals were returned to the donor after microfilming on reel D254.

## Alternative Forms Available

The papers of **Sanford Robinson Gifford** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2007, and total 849 images.

Material lent for microfilming are available on 35mm microfilm reels D254 and 688 at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

## Processing Information

All donated accessions were microfilmed at some point after receipt on reels D10, D21, D33, 672 and 4994. The various accessions were merged and processed as one collection by Stephanie Ashley in 2007 and digitized in 2007 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

## Preferred Citation

Sanford Robinson Gifford papers, 1840s-1900, circa 1960s-1970s. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions on Access

The collection has been digitized and is available online via AAA's website.

## Terms of Use

The Archives of American Art makes its archival collections available for non-commercial, educational and personal use unless restricted by copyright and/or donor restrictions, including but not limited to access and publication restrictions. AAA makes no representations concerning such rights and restrictions and it is the user's responsibility to determine whether rights or restrictions exist and to obtain any necessary permission to access, use, reproduce and publish the collections. Please refer to the [Smithsonian's Terms of Use](#) for additional information.

---

## Biographical Note

Sanford Robinson Gifford was born in Greenfield, New York, in 1823. He attended Brown University from 1842-1844 and moved to New York City in 1845 where he studied drawing, perspective and anatomy under the direction of the British watercolorist and drawing-master, John R. Smith. He also studied the human figure in anatomy classes at the Crosby Street Medical college and took drawing classes at the National Academy of Design. In 1846 he visited the Berkshire Hills and the Catskill Mountains, sketching from nature. "These studies," he wrote to O. B. Frothingham in 1874, "together with the great admiration I felt for the works of Cole developed a strong interest in landscape art, and opened my eyes to a keener perception and more intelligent enjoyment of nature. Having once enjoyed the absolute freedom of the landscape painters life I was unable to return to portrait painting."

The American Art Union bought and showed some of Gifford's first pictures in 1847. In 1851 he was elected an associate, and in 1854 an academician, of the National Academy of Design.

Gifford traveled widely to sketch landscapes for future paintings, recording his experiences in letters to his father which he intended would "serve the double purpose of letter and journal, and be an economy of time." He requested that his father number the letters sequentially and keep them together.

In the summer of 1855 Gifford visited England, Scotland and Paris, where he spent the winter of 1855 transforming his English and Scottish sketches into paintings. In the fall of 1856 he rented a studio in Rome and, over the course of the winter, painted pictures that reportedly pleased him "pretty well," including *Lake Nemi*. During the spring of 1857, Gifford spent time with fellow artists Worthington Whittredge, William H. Beard and Albert Bierstadt before leaving Rome in May with Bierstadt for a walking tour of southern Italy, where they planned to reconnect with Whittredge and Beard. Gifford ended his European tour with a visits to Innsbruck, Munich, Vienna, Prague, Dresden, Berlin and Paris, before returning to the United States at the end of the summer.

On his return Gifford rented studio Number 19 in the Tenth Street Studio Building in New York City, which he retained until his death. Over the next few years he also made frequent summer trips to various northeastern locales including the Catskills, the Adirondacks, the Green Mountains in Vermont, the White Mountains in New Hampshire, Maine and Nova Scotia.

Gifford served in New York's Seventh Regiment when it marched to the defense of Washington in April 1861, and again in 1862 and 1863. Several paintings resulted from this experience, including *Sunday Morning at Camp Cameron* (1861), *Bivouac of the Seventh Regiment at Arlington Heights, Virginia* (1861) and *Camp of the Seventh Regiment, near Frederick, Maryland, in July 1863* (1864).

In 1868 Gifford returned to Europe, again visiting London and Paris, where he met with friends Jervis McEntee and his wife. He then spent the summer visiting the Alps and Sicily before wintering in Rome. In 1869 he traveled to Egypt where he and a small party hired a boat to take them on a two-month voyage from Cairo down the Nile River. Subsequently, Gifford traveled to the Middle East with Alfred Craven via the Suez Canal, where his itinerary included Syria, Jerusalem, Samaria, Damascus, Greece and Turkey. Gifford arrived in Venice in June 1869 and sailed for the United States at the beginning of September.

In 1870 Gifford visited Colorado with Worthington Whittredge and John Frederick Kensett, and accompanied a United States Geological party under Dr. Hayden in the exploration of Wyoming, Utah, and the Colorado Territories. In the summer of 1873 he visited California, Oregon, British Columbia and Alaska.

Gifford married in 1877 but in 1880 became ill and died of malarial fever and pneumonia at the age of 58. That same year he was honored with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's first monographic retrospective and a memorial catalogue of his known pictures.

---

## Scope and Content Note

The collection dates from the 1840s through 1900, and circa 1960s-1970s with the bulk of the material falling between 1855-1881. Material from circa 1960s-1970s consists of photographic copy prints of original photographs from the mid to late 1800s for which the Archives does not own the originals. The papers measure 0.9 linear feet and provide detailed documentation of the life of Hudson River School landscape painter, Sanford Robinson Gifford, during the mid 1850s and late 1860s. The papers contain extensive accounts of Gifford's travels in 3 bound volumes of typewritten letters from Gifford to his father. These letters serve as travel journals and provide extensive and vivid descriptions of Gifford's work and experiences in Europe and the Middle East, and document his relationships with a variety of other artists, including Alfred Bierstadt and Worthington Whittredge, during this period.

Additional records provide scattered documentation of other periods of Gifford's life. Letters refer to his travels in the American west and his Civil War service and its effect on his painting. Printed material

includes clippings and exhibition catalogs, and includes a catalogue of his paintings published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1881. Artwork by Gifford includes sketches by the artist and prints, engravings and paintings by various others. Original photographs date from 1856-1900 and include images of Gifford during the Civil War. Copyprints for which the Archives does not own the originals date from the circa 1960s-1970s and include two images of a family home in Hudson, New York, where Gifford had a studio in the mid 1860s, a portrait photograph of Gifford, and an image of Gifford on the Hayden expedition.

---

## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 4 series:

- Series 1: Letters, 1855-1874 (Box 1; 3 volumes, 1 folder)
- Series 2: Printed Material, circa 1850s-1881 (Box 2; 4 folders)
- Series 3: Artwork, circa 1840s-circa 1870s (Box 2, OV 3; 4 folders)
- Series 4: Photographs and Copy Prints, 1856-circa 1900, circa 1960s-1970s (Box 2, 5, OV 4; 11 folders)

---

## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Hudson River school of landscape painting  
Landscape painters -- New York (State)  
Landscape painting -- 19th century -- New York (State)  
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865  
Works of art

Types of Materials:

Diaries  
Photographs  
Sketchbooks

Names:

Bierstadt, Albert, 1830-1902  
Whittredge, Worthington, 1820-1910

Geographic Names:

Egypt -- description and travel  
Europe -- description and travel

---

## Container Listing

### Series 1: Letters, 1855-1874

(Box 1; 3 volumes, 1 folder)

Letters include three bound volumes, entitled "European Letters," of 63 typed letters written by Gifford to his father during his travels in Europe and the Middle East in 1855-1857 and 1868-1869. The letters, which provide rich, vivid, and detailed descriptions of Gifford's travels, were numbered sequentially, probably by Gifford's father at his son's request. Some are interspersed with small sketches and handwritten corrections.

Letters in Volume I describe Gifford's Atlantic crossing in the summer of 1855 and his travels to England, Scotland and Paris. The letters record his impressions of many of the principal collections of art in the United Kingdom, both public and private, and document his visits to Parisian museums, as well as excursions he took in the vicinity of the French capital.

Volume II documents spring, 1856, in Paris, Gifford's subsequent travels to the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, and the fall and winter spent in Rome. He writes of time spent with Worthington Whittredge, William H. Beard and Albert Bierstadt, and his spring, 1857, tour of southern Italy with Bierstadt. Also documented are his visits to Innsbruck, Munich, Vienna, Prague, Dresden, Berlin, and Paris.

Volume III records another Atlantic voyage and Gifford's return to London and Paris in June 1868, his meeting with Jervis McEntee and his wife, trips to Italy, Mont Blanc and the Alps, and his winter in Rome. It also describes his travels in Egypt in 1869, his trip down the Nile and to the Middle East, and a visit to Venice.

Volume III concludes with a typed extract of a letter written by Gifford to Richard Butler describing his travels, that was apparently published in the *New York Evening Post*.

Loose letters include two from Gifford to his sister, Molly, written from Europe in July 1856 and February 1869. A letter to friends in Rome, dated July 1869, describes his visit to Cairo and his cruise down the Nile. In a November 1874 letter to O. B. Frothingham, "in answer to your inquiries," Gifford discusses his family history, his education, his art training, and his extensive travels in Europe including touring Italy with Albert Bierstadt, visiting the American west with Worthington Whittredge, and traveling in Egypt. The letter also mentions his service during the Civil War and the paintings it inspired.

Box 1, Folder 1	European Letters, Volume I, May 1855-February 1856 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	European Letters, Volume II, March 1856-August 1857 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	European Letters, Volume III, June 1868-August 1869 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	Loose Letters, 1856, 1869, 1879 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Series 2: Printed Material, circa 1850s-1881

(Box 2; 4 folders)

Printed material consists of catalogs of Gifford's work compiled after his death, and news clippings related to Gifford's career. A catalog of the "Gifford Memorial Meeting of The Century," held in the Century Rooms, New York on November 19, 1880, contains a list of Gifford's pictures and the transcripts of addresses by J. F. Weir, Worthington Whittredge and Jervis McEntee. A catalog for an exhibition of the *Loan Collection of Paintings* of the Gifford memorial collection held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 1880-March 1881, and a *Catalogue of Paintings of Sanford R. Gifford, N. A.*, compiled and published under the auspices of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1881, can also be found here, in addition to Parts I and II of the 1881 catalogs of auctioneers, Thos. E. Kirby & Co., entitled *Sanford R. Gifford Collection* and *Catalogue of Valuable Oil Paintings, Works of the Famous Artist Sanford R. Gifford, N.A.*

Box 2, Folder 1	Catalogs, 1880-1881 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 2	Catalogs, 1881 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 3	News Clippings, circa 1850s-circa 1880s <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 4	News Clippings, 1858-1881 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



## Series 3: Artwork, circa 1840s-circa 1870s

(Box 2, OV 3; 4 folders)

This series includes artwork, primarily sketches in pencil, ink, watercolor, pastel and white chalk, that appear to be by Gifford, although the majority are not signed. In addition to sketches there is an oversized print of an engraving signed by Gifford.

Artwork by others includes 10 prints of engravings by various artists, including 2 with sketches by Gifford on the verso. Oversized artwork by others is by various artists and includes a watercolor, 2 paintings on board, and 5 prints of engravings and a lithograph. Also included is a conserved charcoal and white chalk sketch of a skeleton by an unidentified artist, possibly Gifford.

Box 2, Folder 5	Artwork by Gifford, circa 1840s-circa 1870s <a href="#">Image(s)</a> Oversized material housed in Box 3
Box 2, Folder 6	Artwork by Gifford, circa 1840s-1870s <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 7	Artwork by Others, circa 1800s <a href="#">Image(s)</a> Oversized material housed in Box 3
Box 2, Folder 8	Artwork by Others, Engravings with Gifford Sketches on verso, circa 1800s <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box OV 3	Oversized Artwork By Gifford, circa 1840s-circa 1870s Oversized material scanned with Box 2, folders 5-6
Box OV 3	Oversized Artwork By Others, circa 1800s Oversized material scanned with Box 2, folder 7

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

## Series 4: Photographs and Copy Prints, circa 1856-1900, circa 1960s-1970s

(Box 2, 5, OV 4; 11 folders)

The bulk of the photographs date from the mid-1850s through the 1870s and 1900. Copy prints for which the Archives does not own the originals date from circa 1960s-1970s and were printed from original photographs dating from the 1860s and 1870s. Photographs of Gifford during the Civil War depict the artist in civil war uniform and with unidentified members of the Seventh New York Regiment. Pictures of the Gifford family and homes include copy prints of the exterior and interior home of Elihu and Eliza Starbuck Gifford in Hudson, New York, just after the Civil War, where Sanford Gifford had a studio. There is also a copy print of Arthur, Malcolm and Paul Gifford, sons of James Gifford and grandsons of Elihu and Eliza Starbuck Gifford.

Photographs of Ute and Shoshone Indians are displayed on photo cards from Denver and Salt Lake City studios. Two photographs of Mont Cervin include one with a pencil sketch of the mountain by Gifford on the back. There are also photographs of unidentified individuals taken abroad in Greece, the Middle East, and Jamaica.

Photographs of artwork include a copy print of a Gifford self-portrait executed in 1853, a photograph of an unidentified painting, and a photograph of an unidentified sculpture. Also included are 2 negatives and four copy prints of a "Skeleton Study" by an unidentified artist, possibly Gifford, found in Series 3: Artwork.

Oversized photographs picture San Giorgio (including a negative), two boats, the Washington monument, and an unidentified sculpture, respectively.

Box 2, Folder 9	Gifford During Civil War, circa 1861-circa 1863 <a href="#">Image(s)</a> Oversized material conserved and housed in Box 5
Box 2, Folder 10	Gifford During Civil War, Negative, circa 1861-circa 1863
Box 2, Folder 11	Gifford Family and Homes, circa 1960s-circa 1970s ( <i>copy prints</i> ) <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 12	Gifford on 1870 Hayden Expedition, circa 1960s-circa 1970s ( <i>copy prints</i> ) <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 13	Gifford Portrait, circa 1960s-circa 1970s ( <i>copy print</i> ) <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 14	Gifford Portrait, circa 1960s-circa 1970s ( <i>negative</i> )
Box 2, Folder 15	Indians, Ute and Shoshone, circa 1870s <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 16	Mont Cervin (Matterhorn), circa 1856-circa 1868

	<a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 17	Unidentified Individuals, circa 1850s-circa 1870s <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 18	Photographs and Negative, Miscellaneous, circa 1900 <a href="#">Image(s)</a> Oversized material housed in OV 4; Partially scanned
Box 2, Folder 19	Photographs of Artwork, circa 1860s-circa 1970s <a href="#">Image(s)</a> Contains copy prints; Oversized material housed in OV 4
Box OV 4	Oversized Photographs and Negatives, Miscellaneous, circa 1900 Oversized material scanned with Box 2, folder 18
Box OV 4	Oversized Photographs of Artwork, circa 1900 Oversized material scanned with Box 2, folder 19
Box 5	Gifford During Civil War, circa 1861-circa 1863 Oversized material scanned with Box 2, folder 9

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