A Finding Aid to the William Henry Holmes Artists' Files, 1879-1955, in the Archives of American Art

Rihoko Ueno

Funding for the digitization of this collection was provided by The Walton Family Foundation and Terra Foundation for American Art.

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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives of American Art
Title: William Henry Holmes artists' files
Identifier: AAA.holmwill
Date: 1879-1955
Extent: 0.2 Linear feet
Creator: Holmes, William Henry, 1846-1933
Language: Collection is in English.
Summary: The artists' files of William Henry Holmes, curator and director of the Smithsonian's National Collection of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum) in Washington, D.C., measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1879 to 1955. The artists' files consist mostly of correspondence, but also include a few photographs, artwork in the form of sketches, and printed material. There is also one file relating to Holmes' affiliation with the Washington Water Color Club.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
These files were transferred from the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art Library (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum) to the Archives of American Art in two installments in 1981 and 1992.

Related Materials
Collections about William Henry Holmes are also located at other Smithsonian Institution archival units, including the National Anthropological Archives and Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Available Formats
This collection was digitized in 2017 and is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Processing Information
 Portions of the collection were microfilmed onto reels 2227 and 5438 after receipt. The collection was processed and prepared for digitization by Rihoko Ueno in 2017 with funding provided by The Walton Family Foundation and the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation
Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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Biographical / Historical

William Henry Holmes (1846-1933) was a curator, museum director, artist, scientific illustrator, archaeologist, geologist, and anthropologist. He served in various positions in the Smithsonian Institution, and finally as director of the Smithsonian's National Gallery of Art (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum) from 1920-1932.

Holmes was born in Harrison County, Ohio in 1846. In 1870, he graduated from McNeely Normal School in Ohio and, after a short time of teaching at that school, moved to Washington, D.C. in 1871 to study art under Theodore Kaufmann. Thanks to his artistic skills, he was soon hired by Smithsonian paleontologist Francis B. Meek to do scientific drawings. In 1872, Holmes joined the geological survey of Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden, as an artist and topographer of the survey of Yellowstone National Park and surrounding area, and other regions in the west. In 1879, Holmes went to work for the newly founded U.S. Geological Survey. There he worked as a geologist and chief of scientific illustration. In addition to art and geology, his interests and expertise expanded into archaeology and anthropology.

Holmes worked as chief curator at the Field Columbian Museum (now the Field Museum of Natural History) in Chicago before returning to the Smithsonian in 1897, where he served as curator of anthropology and chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology. In 1910, he became chairman of the Division of Anthropology. In 1920, Holmes became director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Gallery of Art (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum), a position he held until 1932. William Henry Holmes died one year later.

Scope and Contents

The artists' files of William Henry Holmes, curator and director of the Smithsonian's National Collection of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum) in Washington, D.C., measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1879 to 1955. The artists' files consist mostly of correspondence, but also include a few photographs, artwork in the form of sketches, and printed material. There is also one file relating to Holmes' affiliation with the Washington Water Color Club.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged as 1 series.

- Series 1: Artists’ Files, 1879-1955 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:
- Art, American
- Artists -- United States

Types of Materials:
- Photographs
- Sketches

Names:
- Brooke, Richard Norris, 1847-1920
- Closson, William Baxter Palmer, 1848-1926
- Fraser, James Earle, 1876-1953
- Johnston, Reuben Le Grand, 1850-1914
- La Farge, John, 1835-1910
- Melchers, Gari, 1860-1932
- Messer, Edmund Clarence, 1842-1919
- Moran, Thomas, 1837-1926
- Moser, James Henry, 1854-1913
- Nichols, Hobart, 1869-1962
- Oakley, Violet, 1874-1961
- Pennell, Joseph, 1857-1926
- Ream, Vinnie, 1847-1914
- Sharp, Joseph Henry, 1859-1953
- Smithsonian American Art Museum
- Walcott, Mary Vaux, 1860-1940
- Washington Water Color Club (Washington, D.C.)
- Weller, Carl F., 1853-1920
- Weyl, Max, 1837-1914
- Wiles, Irving Ramsay, 1861-1948
- Zolnay, George Julian, 1862 or 1863-1949

Occupations:
- Curators -- Washington (D.C.)

Geographic Names:
- Museum directors -- Washington (D.C.)
## Container Listing

### Series 1: Artists' Files, 1879-1955

*0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)*

Artists' files mostly consist of correspondence, along with some photographs, printed material, and limited artwork. Items of note include 3 photographs of R. N. Brooke: one a portrait annotated by Holmes, another of Brooke with his Corcoran School of Art class (accompanied by a key identifying a few students); and one of Brooke, E.H. Miller, Max Weyl, and E.C. Messer, autographed by each. Glued to the back of the latter is a typescript of an exchange of letters between Holmes and the donor of the photo, Emma North Messer. The Henry Moser file contains a letter from Moser to Holmes encouraging him in painting and exhibiting, two photographs of Moser, and correspondence with Moser's widow concerning the purchase of Moser's "Evening in the Berkshires" painting by the Cosmos Club. The Hobart Nichols file consists of 4 letters from Nichols to Holmes regarding information on his work and other artists and paintings. The Joseph Pennell file includes a sketch of Pennell. Carl Weller's file contains a watercolor sketch of the French countryside and a brief biography on Weller. The Max Weyl file includes a photo of Weyl, and a photo of a painting of Weyl by Holmes.

This series is arranged alphabetically by artist name. One folder of correspondence with members of the Washington Water Color Club is filed at the end.

This series has been digitized in its entirety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 1</th>
<th>Brooke, R. N., circa 1900-1932</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image(s): Brooke, R. N.: circa 1900-1932</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 2</td>
<td>Closson, William B. P., 1888-1928</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Image(s): Closson, William B. P.: 1888-1928</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 3</td>
<td>Fraser, James Earle, 1921</td>
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<td>Image(s): Fraser, James Earle: 1921</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 4</td>
<td>Hoxie, Vinnie Ream, 1879</td>
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<td>Image(s): Hoxie, Vinnie Ream: 1879</td>
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<td>Johnston, Reuben Le Grand, 1932</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image(s): Johnston, Reuben Le Grand: 1932</td>
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<td>LaFarge, John, 1909</td>
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<td>Image(s): LaFarge, John: 1909</td>
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<td>Melchers, Gari, 1929</td>
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<td>Image(s): Melchers, Gari: 1929</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 8</td>
<td>Moran, Thomas, 1883-1926</td>
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Image(s): Moran, Thomas: 1883-1926

Box 1, Folder 9  Moser, James Henry, circa 1900-1921
Image(s): Moser, James Henry: circa 1900-1921

Box 1, Folder 10  Nichols, Hobart, circa 1932
Image(s): Nichols, Hobart: circa 1932

Box 1, Folder 11  Oakley, Violet, 1921
Image(s): Oakley, Violet: 1921

Box 1, Folder 12  Pennell, Joseph, 1881-1923
Image(s): Pennell, Joseph: 1881-1923

Box 1, Folder 13  Sharp, Joseph Henry, 1910-1914
Image(s): Sharp, Joseph Henry: 1910-1914

Box 1, Folder 14  Walcott, Mary Vaux, 1932
Image(s): Walcott, Mary Vaux: 1932

Box 1, Folder 15  Weller, Carl F., circa 1915
Image(s): Weller, Carl F.: circa 1915

Box 1, Folder 16  Weyl, Max, 1880-1908
Image(s): Weyl, Max: 1880-1908

Box 1, Folder 17  Wiles, Irving R., 1925
Image(s): Wiles, Irving R.: 1925

Box 1, Folder 18  Zolnay, George Julian, 1914-1917
Image(s): Zolnay, George Julian: 1914-1917

Box 1, Folder 19  Washington Water Color Club, 1910-1955
Image(s): Washington Water Color Club: 1910-1955

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