



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

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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Archives of American Art  
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	William Henry Holmes artists' files
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.holmwill
<b>Date:</b>	1879-1955
<b>Extent:</b>	0.2 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	Holmes, William Henry, 1846-1933
<b>Language:</b>	English  Collection is in English.
<b>Summary:</b>	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.

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## 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

William Henry Holmes artists' files, 1879-1955. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## 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.

## Conditions Governing Use

The William Henry Holmes artists' files are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

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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.

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## 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.

Notable artists represented in the files include R.N. Brooke, William B. P. Closson, James Earle Fraser, Vinnie Ream Hoxie, Reuben Le Grand Johnston, John LaFarge, Gari Melchers, Thomas Moran, Henry

Moser, Hobart Nichols, Violet Oakley, Joseph Pennell, Joseph Henry Sharp, Mary Vaux Walcott, Carl F. Weller, Max Weyl, Irving R. Wiles and George Julian Zolnay.

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## Arrangement

This collection is arranged as 1 series.

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

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## 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.

Box 1, Folder 1	Brooke, R. N., circa 1900-1932 <a href="#">Image(s): Brooke, R. N.: circa 1900-1932</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	Closson, William B. P., 1888-1928 <a href="#">Image(s): Closson, William B. P.: 1888-1928</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	Fraser, James Earle, 1921 <a href="#">Image(s): Fraser, James Earle: 1921</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	Hoxie, Vinnie Ream, 1879 <a href="#">Image(s): Hoxie, Vinnie Ream: 1879</a>
Box 1, Folder 5	Johnston, Reuben Le Grand, 1932 <a href="#">Image(s): Johnston, Reuben Le Grand: 1932</a>
Box 1, Folder 6	LaFarge, John, 1909 <a href="#">Image(s): LaFarge, John: 1909</a>
Box 1, Folder 7	Melchers, Gari, 1929 <a href="#">Image(s): Melchers, Gari: 1929</a>
Box 1, Folder 8	Moran, Thomas, 1883-1926

	<a href="#">Image(s): Moran, Thomas: 1883-1926</a>
Box 1, Folder 9	Moser, James Henry, circa 1900-1921 <a href="#">Image(s): Moser, James Henry: circa 1900-1921</a>
Box 1, Folder 10	Nichols, Hobart, circa 1932 <a href="#">Image(s): Nichols, Hobart: circa 1932</a>
Box 1, Folder 11	Oakley, Violet, 1921 <a href="#">Image(s): Oakley, Violet: 1921</a>
Box 1, Folder 12	Pennell, Joseph, 1881-1923 <a href="#">Image(s): Pennell, Joseph: 1881-1923</a>
Box 1, Folder 13	Sharp, Joseph Henry, 1910-1914 <a href="#">Image(s): Sharp, Joseph Henry: 1910-1914</a>
Box 1, Folder 14	Walcott, Mary Vaux, 1932 <a href="#">Image(s): Walcott, Mary Vaux: 1932</a>
Box 1, Folder 15	Weller, Carl F., circa 1915 <a href="#">Image(s): Weller, Carl F.: circa 1915</a>
Box 1, Folder 16	Weyl, Max, 1880-1908 <a href="#">Image(s): Weyl, Max: 1880-1908</a>
Box 1, Folder 17	Wiles, Irving R., 1925 <a href="#">Image(s): Wiles, Irving R.: 1925</a>
Box 1, Folder 18	Zolnay, George Julian, 1914-1917 <a href="#">Image(s): Zolnay, George Julian: 1914-1917</a>
Box 1, Folder 19	Washington Water Color Club, 1910-1955 <a href="#">Image(s): Washington Water Color Club: 1910-1955</a>

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