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.

2017 March 21
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# Collection Overview

**Repository:** Archives of American Art  
**Title:** William Henry Holmes artists' files  
**Date:** 1879-1955  
**Identifier:** AAA.holmwill  
**Creator:** Holmes, William Henry, 1846-1933  
**Extent:** 0.2 Linear feet  
**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.
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.

Missing Title:
• 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.)

Places:
- Museum directors -- Washington (D.C.)
Container Listing

Series 1: Artists' Files, 1879-1955

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: 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.

Arrangement: 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.

Available Formats: This series has been digitized in its entirety.

<p>| Box 1, Folder 1 | Brooke, R. N., circa 1900-1932 |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Closson, William B. P., 1888-1928 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Fraser, James Earle, 1921 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Hoxie, Vinnie Ream, 1879 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Johnston, Reuben Le Grand, 1932 |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | LaFarge, John, 1909 |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Melchers, Gari, 1929 |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Moran, Thomas, 1883-1926 |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Moser, James Henry, circa 1900-1921 |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Nichols, Hobart, circa 1932 |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Oakley, Violet, 1921 |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | Pennell, Joseph, 1881-1923 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 13</th>
<th>Sharp, Joseph Henry, 1910-1914</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 14</td>
<td>Walcott, Mary Vaux, 1932</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 15</td>
<td>Weller, Carl F., circa 1915</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 16</td>
<td>Weyl, Max, 1880-1908</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 17</td>
<td>Wiles, Irving R., 1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 18</td>
<td>Zolnay, George Julian, 1914-1917</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 19</td>
<td>Washington Water Color Club, 1910-1955</td>
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