



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Jervis McEntee Papers,
1796, 1848-1905, in the Archives of American Art

Ellen Loll

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Jervis McEntee papers
Date:	1796 1848-1905
Identifier:	AAA.mcenjerv
Creator:	McEntee, Jervis, 1828-1891
Extent:	1.6 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of Hudson River School painter Jervis McEntee measure 1.6 linear feet and date from 1796 and 1848 to 1905. Letters from close friends and family members to McEntee include many from his mentor Frederic Edwin Church, and fellow artists Samuel Putnam Avery, George Henry Boughton, Sanford Gifford, Richard Henry, Eastman Johnson, Elizabeth B. Stoddard, John Ferguson Weir, Worthington Whittredge, and others. Papers relating to the McEntee family include obituaries, a family genealogy, and letters from and regarding family members. There are also papers relating to the Vaux family (McEntee's brother-in-law's family) and American architect and landscape artist Calvert Vaux, who designed a studio for McEntee. Of special significance are five volumes of diaries dating from 1872 through 1890 which provide a detailed depiction of the American art world in the 1870s and 1880s.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Adirondack Museum lent one diary for microfilming in 1964. The rest of the collection was acquired from several donors between 1959 and 1997. The noted collector Charles E. Feinberg donated letters in 1959 and, Mrs. Helen S. McEntee, who married the nephew of Jervis McEntee, donated the five volumes of diaries in 1964. William Gaffken, director of the insurance company that acquired the McEntee family insurance business, donated the remaining papers in 1997.

Separated Material

The Archives of American Art also holds material lent for microfilming (reel D9) including a diary dated June 12, 1851-August 17, 1851. This material was returned to the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, New York and is not described in the collection container inventory.

Alternative Forms Available

Letters, family papers, and five volumes of diaries of Jervis McEntee in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2007, 2017, and 2018, and are available on the Archives' website. Transcripts of the entries are available at <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collection-features/jervis-mcentee-diaries>.

Material lent for microfilming is available on 35mm microfilm reel D9 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

The Jervis McEntee papers were reprocessed in 2004 and a finding aid prepared. At that time all earlier accessions were merged. All of the papers, except for the five diaries, were digitized in 2007 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. In 2017, the five volumes of diaries were professionally conserved. In 2017 and 2018, the diaries were digitized. Funding for the conservation and digitization of the diaries was provided by the Smithsonian Institution Collection Care Preservation Fund and Collections Care Initiative.

Preferred Citation

Jervis McEntee papers, 1796, 1848-1905. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C., Research Center.

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Biographical Note

Jervis McEntee was born in Rondout, New York, July 14, 1828. He had early literary and artistic aspirations and studied under Frederic E. Church, who had himself studied under the Hudson River School master, Thomas Cole. McEntee was to maintain a close relationship with Church for the rest of his life. After an unsuccessful stint as a businessman, McEntee settled in New York in 1857 as one of the charter residents of Richard Morris Hunt's Tenth Street Studio Building. Since many of the other occupants were either bachelors or commuters, and since Mrs. McEntee was a lively, sympathetic hostess, the couple became the center of a spontaneous salon frequented by some of the best-known artists, writers, and actors of the time. After his wife died in 1878, McEntee stayed on, an increasingly neglected widower until his death in 1891.

McEntee was identified with the Hudson River School and an accomplished and sensitive painter of autumnal landscapes. He wrote in 1874, "Perhaps what would mark my work among that of my brother artists is a preference for the soberer phases Nature, the gray days of November and its leafless trees." McEntee stood at the center of the interlocking directorate formed by the National Academy of Design, the Century Club, and the Tenth Street Studio Building. In the latter part of the 19th century, these formed a supreme art establishment whose membership was composed of the old guard American artists, such as McEntee's close friends Eastman Johnson, Sanford Gifford, John Ferguson Weir, Worthington Whittredge, and Church, who were fighting an ultimately futile battle against the encroachment of European influences among both artists and collectors.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Hudson River School painter Jervis McEntee measure 1.6 linear feet and date from 1796 and 1850 to 1905. Letters from close friends and family members to McEntee include many from his mentor Frederic Edwin

Church, and fellow artists Samuel Putnam Avery, George Henry Boughton, Sanford Gifford, Richard Henry, Eastman Johnson, Elizabeth B. Stoddard, John Ferguson Weir, Worthington Whittredge, and others. Papers relating to the McEntee family include obituaries, a family genealogy, and letters from and regarding family members. There are also papers relating to the Vaux family (McEntee's brother-in-law's family) and American architect and landscape artist Calvert Vaux, who designed a studio for McEntee. Of special significance are five volumes of diaries dating from 1872 through 1890 which provide a detailed depiction of the American art world in the 1870s and 1880s.

Arrangement

The Jervis McEntee papers have been arranged into five series, based on material type.

- Series 1: Letters, 1850-1905, undated (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
 - Series 2: Vaux Family Letters and Correspondence, 1850-1890, undated (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
 - Series 3: Third Party Letters, 1861-1873, undated (Box 2; 0.1 linear feet)
 - Series 4: Miscellany, 1796, 1848-1895, undated (Box 2; 0.1 linear feet)
 - Series 5: Diaries, 1872-1890 (Box 3-4; 0.6 linear feet)
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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, Modern -- 19th century -- New York (State) -- New York
Artists -- New York (State) -- New York
Artists' studios
Bull Run (Va.), 1st Battle, 1861
Hudson River school of landscape painting
Landscape painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Diaries
Sketches

Names:

Anthony, A. V. S. (Andrew Varick Stout), 1835-1906
Baker, George Augustus, 1821-1880
Bellows, Henry W. (Henry Whitney), 1814-1882
Boardman, Andrew
Booth, Edwin, 1833-1893
Boughton, George Henry, 1834-1905
Butler, Benjamin F., 1830-1884
Casilear, John William, 1811-1893
Century Association (New York, N.Y.)
Chapin, E. H. (Edwin Hubbell), 1814-1880
Church, Frederic Edwin, 1826-1900
Church, Isabel
Cropsey, Jasper Francis, 1823-1900
DeForest, H. G.

Derrenbacher, John
Donoho, J. R., Mrs
Gifford, Sanford Robinson, 1823-1880
Gray, Henry Peters, 1819-1877
Hart, William McDougal, 1823-1894
Hicks, Thomas, 1823-1890
Hubbard, Richard William, 1816-1888
Huntington, Daniel, 1816-1906
Husted, James W.
Inness, George, 1825-1894
Johnson, Eastman, 1824-1906
Jourmans, E. L., Mrs
Kensett, John Frederick, 1816-1872
Lang, Louis, 1814-1893
McEntee, James S.
Meeks, Louisa B.
National Academy of Design (U.S.)
Palmer, Erastus Dow, 1817-1904
Sawyer, C. M.
Shumway, Henry Colton, 1807-1884
Stoddard, Richard Henry, 1825-1903
Stone, William O. (William Oliver), 1830-1875
Stribling, C. K.
Sykes, Charles W.
Thompson, Launt, 1833-1894
Vaux, Calvert, 1824-1895
Von Glumer, Francisca
Ward, John Quincy Adams, 1830-1910
Weir, John F. (John Ferguson), 1841-1926
Whittredge, Worthington, 1820-1910
Wickes, E. T.
Youmans, Kate
Zarnnhus, E. L.

Places:

Adirondack Mountains (N.Y.)
Lake Champlain (N.Y.) -- Pictorial works
Lake George (N.Y.) -- Pictorial works

Container Listing

Series 1: Letters, 1850-1905, undated

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Letters in this series are from McEntee's close friends and family members, including his mentor Frederic E. Church, fellow artists Samuel Putnam Avery, Andrew Boardman, Sanford Gifford, Daniel Huntington, George Inness, Eastman Johnson, John Ferguson Weir, Worthington Whittredge, and numerous others.

Box 1, Folder 1	First Name Only, 1861, 1878
Box 1, Folder 2	Anthony, Andrew Varick Stout, 1870
Box 1, Folder 3	Avery, Samuel Putnam, 1873
Box 1, Folder 4	Baker, George A., 1873
Box 1, Folder 5	Bellows, Henry W., 1878
Box 1, Folder 6	Boardman, Andrew, 1878
Box 1, Folder 7	Boughton, George Henry, 1871, 1890
Box 1, Folder 8	Butler, Benjamin Franklin, 1878
Box 1, Folder 9	Chapin, E.H. (Edwin Hubbell), 1867
Box 1, Folder 10	Church, Frederic Edwin, 1873, 1878, 1890
Box 1, Folder 11	Church, Isabel, n.d.
Box 1, Folder 12	Cook, Martha Walker, 1873
Box 1, Folder 13	Darley, Jenny G., 1888
Box 1, Folder 14	De Forest, H.G., 1878
Box 1, Folder 15	Derrenbacher, John, 1861
Box 1, Folder 16	Donoho, Mrs. J.R., 1878
Box 1, Folder 17	Fitch, John, 1873, n.d.
Box 1, Folder 18	Gifford, Sanford Robinson, 1860, 1862-1863, 1870-1879, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 19	Hicks, Thomas, 1878
Box 1, Folder 20	Hubbard, Richard William, 1861
Box 1, Folder 21	Huntington, Daniel, 1878
Box 1, Folder 22	Husted, James W., n.d.
Box 1, Folder 23	Inness, George, n.d.
Box 1, Folder 24	Johnson, Eastman, 1862, 1865-1884, 1889-1890, n.d.
Box 1, Folder 25	Jones, Alfred, 1873
Box 1, Folder 26	Long, Louis, 1873
Box 1, Folder 27	McEntee, Gertrude (Mrs.-wife), 1861, 1868
Box 1, Folder 28	McEntee, Girard L. Jr., 1905
Box 1, Folder 29	McEntee, James S., 1861
Box 1, Folder 30	McEntee, Jervis (letters from Jervis to sister Mary Vaux), 1868, 1880-1881
Box 1, Folder 31	McEntee, Maurice, 1861, 1873
Box 1, Folder 32	McEntee, Mrs. (Jervis's Mother), n.d.
Box 1, Folder 33	Meeks, Louisa, 1878
Box 1, Folder 34	Osgood, J.R., 1873
Box 1, Folder 35	Richards, T. Addison (Thomas Addison), 1878
Box 1, Folder 36	Stedmen, Edmund and Laura, 1878
Box 1, Folder 37	Stoddard, Elizabeth B., n.d.
Box 1, Folder 38	Stoddard, Richard Henry, 1870
Box 1, Folder 39	Stribling, C.K., 1850
Box 1, Folder 40	Sykes, Charles W., 1878
Box 1, Folder 41	Taylor, Marie, 1879
Box 1, Folder 42	Thompson, Launt, 1861, 1865, 1873, 1878, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 43	Von Glumer, Francisca, ca. 1890
Box 1, Folder 44	Ward, John Quincy Adams, n.d.
Box 1, Folder 45	Weir, John F. (John Ferguson), 1866-1867, 1873, 1878, 1889-1890
Box 1, Folder 46	Whipple, M.J., 1873
Box 1, Folder 47	Whittredge, Worthington, 1865-1891
Box 1, Folder 48	Wickes, E.T., 1878
Box 1, Folder 49	Youmans, Kate, 1867-1868
Box 1, Folder 50	Zarnnhus, E. L., 1899
Box 1, Folder 51	Unidentified, n.d.

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Series 2: Vaux Family Letters and Correspondence, 1850-1890, undated

Scope and Contents: Series Two includes letters from McEntee's sister Mary Vaux's family and her husband, American architect and landscape artist Calvert Vaux. This series relates largely to family matters, including letters from Vaux's mother, wife, brother Alfred, sisters Emily and Catharine, and children.

Box 1, Folder 52	First Name Only, 1867-1868, 1871, n.d.
Box 1, Folder 53	Blood, Alfred J., 1859
Box 1, Folder 54	Brickwood, J.D., 1867
Box 1, Folder 55	Browne, Lillian G., n.d.
Box 1, Folder 56	Gifford, Mary, n.d.
Box 1, Folder 57	Olmstead, Mary C., 1864
Box 1, Folder 58	Stryker, Helen B., 1881
Box 1, Folder 59	Taylor, John N., 1868
Box 1, Folder 60	Vaux, Alfred, 1850, 1851
Box 1, Folder 61	Vaux, Calvert, circa 1854-1855, 1866, n.d. Image(s): Vaux
Box 1, Folder 62	Vaux, Calvert Bowyer, 1866 Image(s): Vaux
Box 1, Folder 63	Vaux, Downing, 1868-circa 1880
Box 1, Folder 64	Vaux, Emily Brickwood, 1855-1871
Box 1, Folder 65	Vaux, Marion, 1881
Box 1, Folder 66	Vaux, Mary McEntee, 1854, 1868, 1878
Box 1, Folder 67	Williams, Emily, 1856
Box 1, Folder 68	Withers, Catherine, 1868, n.d. Image(s): Withers
Box 1, Folder 69	Unidentified, 1860, 1881-1890, n.d.

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Series 3: Third Party Letters, 1861-1873, undated

Scope and Contents: Series Three houses third-party correspondence, largely letters addressed to Mrs. McEntee, Jervis' wife. Some writers include Girard McEntee, Maurice McEntee, and Alice Sawyer.

Box 2, Folder 1	Gray, T., 1873
Box 2, Folder 2	Holland, J. G., 1873
Box 2, Folder 3	McEntee, Girard L., ca. 1861
Box 2, Folder 4	McEntee, Maurice, 1862
Box 2, Folder 5	Sawyer, Alice, 1873
Box 2, Folder 6	Smith, M., 1862
Box 2, Folder 7	Tompkins, Augusta McEntee, n.d.
Box 2, Folder 8	Tompkins, Laura, 1871
Box 2, Folder 9	Vanderlip, George M., 1873
Box 2, Folder 10	Unidentified, 1864-1865

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Series 4: Miscellany, 1796, 1848-1895, undated

Scope and Contents: The fourth series houses scattered printed materials, manuscripts and writings, and several pages from McEntee's sketchbook. Family obituaries and genealogical material are also found in this series.

Box 2, Folder 11 [Calvert Vaux's "Villages and Cottages," 1850, 1870, 1889](#)

Box 2, Folder 12 [List, n.d.](#)

Box 2, Folder 13 [Manuscript "Sketch of John Vanderlyn's Life," 1796](#)

Box 2, Folder 14 [Material Concerning Calvert and Mrs. Vaux, 1848-1895](#)

Box 2, Folder 15 [McEntee Family Genealogies, n.d.](#)

Box 2, Folder 16 [Obituaries, 1891](#)

Box 2, Folder 17 [Pages from Jervis McEntee's Sketchbook, 1863](#)

Box 2, Folder 18 [Printed Material, 1877-1878, n.d.](#)

Box 2, Folder 19 [Unidentified Photographs, n.d.](#)

Box 2, Folder 20 [Vaux/Brickwood Genealogy, 1869](#)

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Series 5: Diaries, 1872-1890

Scope and Contents:

Series Five consists of the five volumes that compose the Jervis McEntee Diaries. The diaries provide a vivid, accurate impression of the life of a typical New York painter during and after the Gilded Age. There is much first-hand information on the inner workings of the National Academy and the Century Club, on the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, on efforts to revive the Art Union idea, on the vigorous growth of art societies and exhibitions throughout the country. The diaries reveal the economy of art during the period - prices, patterns of collecting and patronage, the artists' dependence on personal contacts through clubs, social gatherings, and influential friends. Descriptions of major events include the opening of the Metropolitan Museum and of the Brooklyn Bridge, the first major exhibition of French Impressionism in New York ("simply absurd, foolish and unlovely from any point of view"), and the Beecher-Tilton scandal.

McEntee's diaries offer researchers a valuable view of the everyday existence of a reputable American artist towards the close of the 19th century - how he painted, whom he associated with, how and to whom he sold his work, what he did when he was not working, what he thought of art, artists, and collectors. McEntee provides an account of the ultimately futile battle against the encroachment of European influences among both artists and collectors during this period. He writes in March 1877, "The Munich students work prevails, and the genuinely American productions are put aside to give prominence to the foreign looking art." According to McEntee, a certain painting by Whistler depicts "a woman dead or drunk by what is apparently the seashore, strewn with fragments of stale pound cake." The diaries also offer some clear insights into the character of several major artists who were McEntee's intimate friends: "Whittredge came to my room and sat until midnight and we talked, or rather he did for Whittredge generally does the talking." He is astonished to receive an invitation to join the Frederic E. Churches at the theatre because "I thought they only went to prayer meetings."

The five volumes of diaries are filled with McEntee's detailed thoughts, observations, activities, and encounters. Long passages describe his overwhelming anxieties over money and family difficulties. He is frequently lonely and depressed and always worried about his status as an artist.

Box BV 3, Folder 1	Diary, Volume I, 1872 May 10-1874 November 20
Box BV 4, Folder 1	Diary, Volume II, 1874 November 26-1878 December 8
Box BV 5, Folder 1	Diary, Volume III, 1878 December 15-1883 June 15
Box BV 6, Folder 1	Diary, Volume IV, 1883 June 16-1889 July 31
Box BV 7, Folder 1	Diary, Volume V, 1889 August 1-1880 November 1

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