A Finding Aid to the William Trost Richards Papers, 1848-1920, in the Archives of American Art

Erin Corley

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

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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives of American Art
Title: William Trost Richards papers
Identifier: AAA.richwill
Date: 1848-1920
Extent: 1.8 Linear feet
Creator: Richards, William Trost, 1833-1905
Language: The records are in English.
Summary: The William Trost Richards papers measure 1.8 linear feet and date from 1848-1920. The collection documents Richards' personal life and his career as a landscape and seascape painter. The collection consists of correspondence, writings, business files, printed material, photographs, and other miscellaneous materials.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
The bulk of the collection was donated in 1980 by Mrs. James B. Conant, Richards's granddaughter. The Archives microfilmed this portion of the collection on reels 2296-2299 upon receipt. The inventory of paintings by others was donated by Victor Spark in 1954 and filmed on reel 3470.

Related Archival Materials
Also available on microfilm at the Archives are the George Whitney papers relating to William Trost Richards, 1875-1885, which includes 112 watercolors and an oil painting by William Trost Richards. These items were lent anonymously in 1979 and returned to the lender after they were filmed. They are available on reels 1497.

Available Formats
This site provides access to the papers of William Trost Richards in the Archives of American Art that were digitized in 2010, and total 1,295 images.

Processing Information
The entire collection was fully processed, arranged, and described by Erin Corley in 2005 and scanned in 2010 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation
Biographical Note

William Trost Richards was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1833. From 1850 to 1858 he worked as a designer and illustrator of ornamental metalwork, and briefly studied draughtsmanship and painting with the German artist Paul Weber. Richards was also an active member of the Forensic and Literary Circle of Philadelphia during the early 1850s. In 1852 he had his first exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and a year later was elected a full Academician. He had great interest in landscapes and geological subjects, and spent summers sketching in the Catskills and Adirondacks. From 1855 to 1856 Richards toured Europe with William Stanley Haseltine and Alexander Lawrie, and was influenced by the Dusseldorf school of landscape painters.

Richards married aspiring poetess Anna Matlack in 1856, and they settled in Germantown, Pennsylvania, where they had eight children, five of which survived to adulthood. In 1858 he attended an exhibition of British art in Philadelphia, and was greatly influenced by the works of Pre-Raphaelite painters. He began painting outdoors, executing precise, naturalistic, yet atmospheric, landscapes. In 1862 he joined the National Academy of Design, and in 1863 joined the Society for the Advancement of Truth in Art, an American Pre-Raphaelite organization. From 1868 to 1874, Richards spent summers on the East Coast and began focusing on marine subjects painted in watercolor, exhibiting often with the American Watercolor Society. Richards also traveled to Europe several times, and lived there from 1879-1880 while trying to find a new direction for his artwork. In 1881 he built a summer house for his family in Newport, Rhode Island and moved there permanently in 1890. His wife Anna died in 1900, and he continued to paint landscapes and seascapes until his death in 1905.

Scope and Contents

The William Trost Richards papers measure 1.8 linear feet and date from 1848-1920. The collection documents Richards' personal life and his career as a landscape and seascape painter. The collection consists of correspondence, writings, business files, printed material, photographs, and other miscellaneous materials.

Correspondence files date from 1851 to 1917 and include family correspondence between Richards and his wife Anna as well as with their children. Of note are letters written by William Trost Richards to his wife while he was in Europe, which include many illustrations of his travels. Also found is general correspondence of a personal and professional nature between Richards and friends, artists, art dealers, and collectors, many of whom played a prominent role in Philadelphia society. Writings include essays written by Richards, homemade magazines written and illustrated by the Richards family, and writings
by his wife Anna and others. Business files contain financial, legal, and real estate records, and printed material contains an exhibition catalog from 1976, news clippings, and event programs. Miscellany found in this collection include artwork by others, and inventory of paintings by others, compiled by Richards, and an interview transcript with Miriam Thayer Richards. Photographs include images of Richards, his wife Anna, and their home in Newport, Rhode Island.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 6 series:

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1851-1917, undated (Box 1-2; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 2: Writings, 1849-1905, undated (Box 2-4; 0.8 linear feet)
- Series 3: Business Files, 1865-1920, undated (Box 4; 3 folders)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1850-1906, 1976, undated (Box 4-5; 5 folders)
- Series 5: Miscellany, 1848-1876, undated (Box 5; 5 folders)
- Series 6: Photographs, circa 1850-1900 (Box 5; 7 folders)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:
- Landscape painters -- Pennsylvania -- Germantown
- Landscape painting -- 19th century -- Pennsylvania -- Germantown
- Marine painters -- Rhode Island -- Newport
- Marine painting -- 19th century -- Rhode Island -- Newport

Types of Materials:
- Daguerreotypes
- Photographs

Names:
- Avery, Samuel Putnam, 1822-1904
- Coates, Edward Hornor, 1846-1921
- Eakins, Thomas, 1844-1916
- Lambdin, George Cochran, 1830-1896
- Lanman, Charles, 1819-1895
- Whitney, George, d. 1885
- Wilcox, William H.
Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1851-1917, undated

0.7 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

This series contains Richards' incoming and outgoing correspondence with family, friends, artists, dealers, and collectors, and is divided into family and general correspondence. Files arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically within each folder.

The Correspondence series is arranged into 2 subseries:

- 1.1: Family Correspondence, 1878-1905, undated
- 1.2: General Correspondence, 1851-1917

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

1.1: Family Correspondence, 1878-1905, undated

Family Correspondence includes letters from William Trost Richards or his wife, Anna M. Richards, to family members. The bulk of this subseries are intimate and detailed letters to their daughter Eleanor (Nelly) Richards Price concerning things such as the family, travels throughout Europe, raising children, clothing, and societal issues. Also found are letters to their son-in-law, William Price, one letter to their son Herbert, letters to their son Theodore and his wife, Miriam Thayer Richards, and letters to Anna's brother, Charles Matlack. Also of note are letters written by William Trost Richards to his wife while he was in Europe, which include many illustrations of his travels. Researchers should note that much of the correspondence was originally undated and was dated much later based on the content of the letter.

Box 1, Folder 1
William T. Richards to wife Anna, circa 1878-1885
Image(s)

Box 1, Folder 2
Charles Matlack, 1896-1905, 1878-1879, undated
Image(s)

Box 1, Folder 3-20
Eleanor Richards Price, circa 1880-1905, undated
Image(s)
1.2: General Correspondence, 1851-1917

General Correspondence is with friends, fellow artists, collectors, and others and includes letters to and from William Trost Richards. Correspondence is with artists Fidelia Bridges, George Cochran Lambdin, and William H. Willcox, art dealer Samuel Putnam Avery, and Edward H. Coates, President of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Also found are numerous letters to and from his major patron and collector, George Whitney, and from his friend and patron, Elias Lyman Magoon. Items of note in the miscellaneous correspondence include, an 1877 letter from Thomas Eakins, an 1881 letter from Alexander Lawrie, and an 1883 letter from Charles Lanman.

Box 1, Folder 27
Charlotte Augusta Astor, undated

Box 1, Folder 28
Samuel P. Avery, 1869-1904, undated

Box 1, Folder 29
Fidelia Bridges, undated

Box 1, Folder 30
Edward H. Coates, 1886-1905

Box 1, Folder 31
George Cochran Lambdin, 1885-1887

Box 1, Folder 32
Elias Lyman Magoon, 1871-1884
Box 2, Folder 1-2  James T. Mitchell, 1851-1853
   2 Folders
   Image(s)
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 3  Harrison S. Morris, 1898-1905
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 4  Daniel Neall, 1876, undated, undated
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 5  A. E. Outerbridge, 1887, undated
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 6  George W. Outerbridge, 1894-1902
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 7  John R. Sheridan, 1892-1893
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 8  George F. Shrady, 1900-1905
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 9  Hannah W. Smith, 1866
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 10-22  George Whitney, circa 1860-1885
   13 Folders
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)
   Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 23  William H. Wilcox, 1854, 1879, 1885, undated
Box 2, Folder 24-28  Miscellaneous, 1853, 1864-1917, undated
5 Folders
Image(s)
Image(s)
Image(s)
Image(s)
Image(s)
Series 2: Writings, 1849-1905, undated

0.8 Linear feet (Box 2-4)

Writings include essays written by Richards in the early 1950s including "Flowers" and "The Spirit of Toil," as well as several essays for the Forensic and Literary Circle of Philadelphia. Also found are unpublished, homemade magazines, created by Richards, Anna, and their children. "London Days: A Homemade Magazine of Literature, Art, Science and Fun" was created while the family lived in London from 1879 to 1880, and upon their return the series was called "Our Own Monthly." Anna home schooled all of their children and these were made as part of their education. All of the magazines are illustrated by William and Anna.

Writings also include works by Anna, such as an edited manuscript of her poem "Chemistry" and annotated editions of her published work, Dramatic Sonnets. Also found is Anna's "commonplace book" filled with quotations, literary excerpts, and her own thoughts. This series also includes writings by others, including an "In Memoriam" poem for Richards by Esther Morton Smith.

The bulk of this series has been scanned. Three volumes of "London Days" are fragile and have not been scanned.

Box 2, Folder 29  "Flowers," 1850
Image(s)

Box 2, Folder 30  Forensic Literary Circle, 1850-1851
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 1  Humbly Dedicated to Marie by Her Friend Will,"  undated
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 2  "London Days," Vol. 1, Part I, 1879
Not scanned

Box 3, Folder 3  "London Days," Vol. 1, Part II, 1880
Not scanned

Box 3, Folder 4  "London Days," Vol. 1, Part III, 1880
Not scanned

Box 3, Folder 5  "London Days,"  undated
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 6  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 2, No. 18, March 5, 1881
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 7  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 2, No. 19, April 2, 1881
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 8  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 2, No. 20, May 7, 1881
Box 3, Folder 9  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 2, No. 23, January 7, 1882
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 10  "Our Own Monthly," No. 25, circa 1882
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 11  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 26, April 1, 1882
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 12  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 27, December 9, 1882
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 13  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 28, January 7, 1883
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 14  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 29, February 3, 1883
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 15  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 30, March 3, 1883
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 16  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 31, April 7, 1883
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 17  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 32, May 1883
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 18  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 33, November 3, 1883
Image(s)

Box 3, Folder 19  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 34, December 1, 1883
Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 1  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 35, January 5, 1884
Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 2  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 36, February 2, 1884
Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 3  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 3, No. 38, April 5, 1884
Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 4  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 39, January 3, 1885
Box 4, Folder 5  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 40, February 7, 1885 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 6  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 41, April 4, 1885 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 7  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 42, November 7, 1885 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 8  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 43, December 5, 1885 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 9  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 44, January 2, 1886 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 10  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 46, March 6, 1886 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 11  "Our Own Monthly," Vol. 4, No. 47, April 3, 1886 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 12  "Our Own Monthly," undated Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 13  "The Spirit of Toil," 1852 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 14  "Sunlight," 1851 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 15  Miscellaneous writings by Richards, 1852, undated Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 16  Anna M. Richards, "Chemistry," undated Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 17  Anna M. Richards, Commonplace Book, Vol. 4, undated Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 18  Anna M. Richards, Dramatic Sonnets, 1881 Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 19  Writings by Others, 1849-1860, undated, undated
Image(s)

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Series 3: Business Files, 1865-1920, undated

3 Folders (Box 4)

Business files include various financial statements for the sale of artwork, purchase of materials, and shipping expenses. Also found are three copies of legal documents concerning Richards’ artwork while living in London, and various real estate documents for his property in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 4, Folder 20  Financial Statements, 1865-1920, undated
Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 21  Legal Documents, 1879
Image(s)

Box 4, Folder 22  Real Estate Documents, 1874-1890, undated
Image(s)
Series 4: Printed Material, 1850-1906, undated, undated

5 Folders (Box 4-5)

Printed material includes an exhibition catalog for a Richards exhibition at the Art Association of Newport and numerous clippings concerning Richards’ artwork, his death, and a major auction of his work in 1906. Also found are event programs for gatherings of the Forensic and Literary Circle.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 4, Folder 23  Catalog, *William Trost Richards*, 1976
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 1  Event Programs, Forensic and Literary Circle, 1850-1953
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 2-4  News Clippings, 1871-1906, undated
3 Folders
Image(s)
Image(s)
Image(s)
Series 5: Miscellany, 1848-1876, undated

5 Folders (Box 5)

This series contains artwork by others, including small paintings and prints, an award to Richards from the United State Centennial Commission, and a handwritten list of paintings by others, including painter, title, and dimensions of each work. Also found is a transcript of an interview with Mrs. Theodore (Miriam) Richards, primarily discussing her memories of Anna M. Richards.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 5, Folder 5   Artwork by Others, 1848, undated, undated
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 6   Award Certificate, 1876
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 7   Inventory of Paintings by Others, undated
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 8   Transcript, Mrs. Theodore Richards, undated
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 9   Unidentified Sketch, undated
Image(s)

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Series 6: Photographs, circa 1850-1900

7 Folders (Box 5)

Photographs include portraits of William Trost Richards as a young man, as well as later in his life. Two photographs of note are a daguerreotype of Richards from the 1850s, and a photograph of Richards painting in his studio. Also found are portraits of Anna Richards, two of Richards' children, possibly Theodore and Anna, a pendant with photographs of William and Anna, and photographs of the Richards family home on Conanicut Island.

This series has been scanned in its entirety except for negatives.

Box 5, Folder 10-11  
William Trost Richards, circa 1850-1900
2 Folders
Image(s)
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 12  
William Trost Richards, Daguerreotype, circa 1850
Image(s)
See Black Cabinet, Drawer 8: Cased Photographs

Box 5, Folder 13  
Anna Matlack Richards, circa 1880s
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 14  
Portrait Pendant of W. T. Richards and wife Anna, circa 1860
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 15  
Two Richards children, circa 1860s
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 16  
Conanicut House, circa 1885
Image(s)

Box 5, Folder 17  
Negatives, William Trost Richards, circa 1850-1900
Not scanned