



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the James J. Rorimer Papers, 1921-1982, bulk 1943-1950, in the Archives of American Art

Rihoko Ueno

Funding for the processing of this collection was provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

April 24, 2012

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Collection Overview

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|--------------------|---|
| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | James J. Rorimer papers |
| Date: | 1921-1982 (bulk 1943-1950) |
| Identifier: | AAA.rorijame |
| Creator: | Rorimer, James J. (James Joseph), 1905-1966 |
| Extent: | 2.3 Linear feet |
| Language: | The collection is in English, French and German. |
| Summary: | The papers of curator and museum director James J. Rorimer measure 2.3 linear feet and date from 1921 to 1982, with the bulk from 1943-1950. The papers include documentation of James J. Rorimer's World War II service in the Monuments, Fine Art and Archives Section of the U.S. Army and his activities protecting historic and cultural sites from bombing, and locating and recovering art work and cultural icons stolen by the Nazis. Found within the papers are scattered biographical materials and correspondence, writings include draft versions of Rorimer's book <i>Safe-Keeping or Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War</i> , financial records, photographic materials including a photo album containing photographs of European art work and cultural sites where Rorimer worked, newsclippings and additional printed materials, and one scrapbook of clippings dating from World War II. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The James J. Rorimer papers were donated to the Archives of American Art by his wife, Katherine Serrell Rorimer, in 2 installments in 1983.

Related Archival Materials

Among the holdings of the Archives of American is an oral history interview with Anne Rorimer, James' daughter, conducted in 2010 by the Archives of American Art. The Archives also holds the papers of several members of the World War II Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Section of the U.S. Army, including S. Lane Faison, Walker Hancock, Walter Horn, Thomas Carr Howe, George Stout, and Otto Wittman. as well as oral history interviews with some of them.

The official government records for James Rorimer's service during World War II in the MFAA Section of the U.S. Army are maintained by the National Archives and Records Administration.

James J. Rorimer Papers, 1927-1966, are also located at Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 2800-2802 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 2800-2802 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

This collection was partially microfilmed upon receipt, reels 2800-2802; these reels are no longer in circulation. This collection was processed by Rihoko Ueno in April 2012.

Preferred Citation

James J. Rorimer papers, 1923-1982, bulk 1943-1950. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

James J. Rorimer (1905-1966) was a museum director and curator of medieval art working in New York City. Rorimer was the primary force and first director of The Cloisters at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. During World War II, Rorimer served in the U.S. Army Monuments, Fine Art and Archives Section protecting cultural sites and recovering stolen art work.

James J. Rorimer was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1905 and attended the University School there until he left in 1921 in order to study abroad in Europe. He studied at the Ecole Gory in Paris for two years, then returned to the United States to finish his studies at the University School in Cleveland. In 1927, Rorimer graduated from Harvard University with a B.A. Soon after, he began working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City where he worked his way up from a position as an assistant to Head Curator of Medieval Art, a position he filled from 1934 to 1955, director of The Cloisters, and eventually director and trustee of the museum.

Rorimer was heavily involved with the planning and development of The Cloisters, working closely with the architect Charles Collins. When The Cloisters opened in 1938, Rorimer worked there as a curator and later became the first director in 1949. During this time, Rorimer developed a professional relationship with John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who donated to New York City a large tract of land, a portion of which was given to the Metropolitan Museum as a location to build The Cloisters. The Cloisters' collections evolved into a world renown collection of medieval art under Rorimer's curatorship and directorship.

As the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1955-1966, Rorimer nearly doubled membership and attendance, raised a substantial amount of endowment funding, renovated almost half of the galleries, and increased the exhibition space.

Rorimer married Katherine Newton in 1942. They had two children, Anne and Louis.

During World War II, from 1943 to 1946, Rorimer served in the U.S. Army's Monuments, Fine Art and Archives (MFAA) Section. The "Monuments Men" of the U.S. Army were charged with locating and protecting historical sites, monuments, artwork, and buildings from Allied bombing. Towards the end of the war, the section led recovery efforts to locate and retrieve Nazi stolen art works and other cultural heritage items. Rorimer served as a MFAA officer in Normandy and Paris, and, while in Germany, was promoted to chief of the MFAA Section of the 7th Army Western Military District.

While in Paris, Rorimer worked closely with Rose Valland, an employee of the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris who spied on the Nazis and recorded in detail the movements of artwork stolen by members of the Nazi party, including Hermann Wilhelm Goering and Joseph Goebbels. With Valland's assistance, Rorimer discovered a large cache of stolen and confiscated artwork at the Neuschwanstein Castle in the Bavarian Alps. He and his team also recovered other artwork, European antiquities, and cultural icons that were stored in nearby salt mines. Rorimer and the other Monuments Men arranged the recovery and removal of the cache of stolen goods.

Rorimer received numerous awards for his work during World War II including, the French Cross of War in 1945, Chevalier in 1947, and officer of the French Legion of Honor in 1957. Rorimer wrote about his work as a Monuments Man in his book *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War*, published by Abelard Press in 1950. James J. Rorimer died in 1966.

Scope and Contents

The papers of curator and museum director James J. Rorimer measure 2.3 linear feet and date from 1921 to 1982, with the bulk from 1943-1950. The papers include documentation of James J. Rorimer's World War II service in the Monuments, Fine Art and Archives Section of the U.S. Army and his activities protecting historic and cultural sites from bombing, and locating and recovering art work and cultural icons stolen by the Nazis. Found within the papers are scattered biographical materials and correspondence, writings include draft versions of Rorimer's book *Safe-Keeping* or *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War*, financial records, photographic materials including a photo album containing photographs of European art work and cultural sites where Rorimer worked, newsclippings and additional printed materials, and one scrapbook of clippings dating from World War II.

Scattered biographical materials include a college transcript and various certificates. Much of the correspondence is comprised of army directives but also includes some personal letters from Rorimer's wife Katherine.

Writings by Rorimer include several handwritten manuscripts and drafts of his book *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War*, which was originally titled *Safe-Keeping*. There is one folder of miscellaneous financial records, mostly dating from Rorimer's time in the army. There is also one folder of minutes of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Board of Trustees meetings.

Photographic materials include black and white photographs, negatives, contact prints, postcards, and one photo album. The photograph album was given to Rorimer from the headquarters of the Office of Military Government in Baden-Wurttemberg and is titled *War Damage in Wurtemmberg: A Selection of Photographs*. Many of the photographs document bomb damage to European cultural monuments and historic sites. There are photographs of Nazi stolen art repositories discovered by Rorimer and fellow Monuments Men at Buxheim monastery and Neuschwanstein castle, art recovery and transportation, and restitution work at Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point. Photographs of people, such as Edith Standen, Rose Valland, and Rorimer, are scattered throughout the series.

Printed materials include newspaper and magazine clippings, mostly related to The Cloisters or the activities and achievements of the Monuments Men. Printed materials also includes bulletins, brochures, and press releases. There is also a war-time scrapbook and two handbooks of maps showing historic monuments and sites in France and Germany.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1942-1946 (Box 1, 4; 8 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1927-1982 (Box 1; 0.1 linear feet)
- Series 3: Writings, circa 1946-1950 (Box 1; 0.8 linear feet)
- Series 4: Financial Records, 1943-1946 (Box 1; 1 folder)
- Series 5: Administrative Files, 1940 (Box 1; 1 folder)
- Series 6: Photographic Materials, 1921-1966 (Box 1-2, 4; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 7: Printed Materials, 1923-1966 (Box 3-4, OV 5-6; 0.7 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art thefts -- Germany -- History -- 20th century
Art treasures in war -- France
Art treasures in war -- Germany
Cultural property -- Protection -- Europe -- History -- 20th century
Curators -- New York (State) -- New York
Museum directors -- New York (State) -- New York
World War, 1939-1945 -- Art and the war

Types of Materials:

Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names:

Allied Forces. Supreme Headquarters. Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section
Cloisters (Museum)
Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.). Board of Trustees
Rorimer, Katherine S.
Valland, Rose

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1942-1946

8 Folders (Box 1,4)

Scope and Contents: This series contains forms and certificates dating from Rorimer's time in the U.S. Army, including a certificate of honorable discharge and certificate of service. A Harvard transcript and Alumni Bulletin are also included.

Arrangement: These records are arranged chronologically.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | Army Certificates and Forms, 1942-1946 Notes: Oversized certificate housed in Box 4, folder 1. |
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|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Harvard Transcript, 1943 |
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| Box 1, Folder 3 | Army Physical Examination Report, 1943 |
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|-----------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Boston University Civil Affairs Training School, circa 1943 |
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| Box 1, Folder 5 | Certificate of Honorable Discharge, 1943 |
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|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Box 1, Folder 6 | Certificate of Service, 1946 |
|-----------------|------------------------------|

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|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Box 1, Folder 7 | List of Honors, circa 1946 |
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|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Harvard Alumni Bulletin, circa 1946 |
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| Box 4, Folder 1 | Oversized Building Inspection Certificate from Box 1, Folder 1, 1942 |
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Series 2: Correspondence, 1927-1982

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence mostly relates to Rorimer's army service during World War II from 1943-1946, such as letters about placement and assignments in the army, army directives, and announcements of awards. There are a few personal letters from Rorimer's wife Katherine or Kay. There are also letters about publishing the book *Survival* and congratulatory notes upon publication. The more prominent names among the correspondents include Paul Sachs, associate director of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard; John D. Rockefeller, Jr., philanthropist; Robert Lehman, banker and donor to the Metropolitan Museum; Francis Henry Taylor, director of the Metropolitan Museum; and Captain Edith A. Standen, one of the Monuments Men.

Arrangement: This series is arranged chronologically.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Correspondence, 1927-1941 |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Correspondence, 1943 |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Correspondence, 1944 |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | Correspondence, 1945 |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | Correspondence, 1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 14 | Correspondence, 1962-1966 |
| Box 1, Folder 15 | Correspondence, 1975-1982 |
| Box 1, Folder 16 | Miscellaneous Undated Correspondence, circa 1943-1966 |

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Series 3: Writings, circa 1946-1950

0.8 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: There are three drafts of Rorimer's book *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War*, which was originally titled and referred to in these versions as *Safe-Keeping*. The earliest draft is mostly handwritten, the later draft is a mixture of typed and handwritten pages, the third draft is a typescript of the manuscript. There is also one folder of revisions for the earliest draft.

Arrangement: Writings are grouped together according to the manuscript draft with the handwritten draft first, then the second draft, and the typescript draft at the end.

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|---------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 17 | Manuscript Early Draft, circa 1946-1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 18-26 | Manuscript Early Draft, circa 1946-1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 27 | Manuscript Revisions, circa 1946-1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 28-30 | Manuscript Later Draft, circa 1946-1950 3 Folders |
| Box 1, Folder 31-34 | Manuscript Typescript Draft, circa 1946-1950 4 Folders |

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Series 4: Financial Records, 1943-1946

1 Folder (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Financial records consists of one folder containing various forms and receipts from Rorimer's time serving in the U.S. army.

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| Box 1, Folder 35 | Forms and Receipts, 1943-1946 |
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Series 5: Administrative Files, 1940

1 Folder (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: There is one folder of Metropolitan Museum of Art Board of Trustees minutes for one meeting.

Box 1, Folder 36

Metropolitan Museum of Art Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1943-1946

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Series 6: Photographic Materials, 1921-1966

0.7 Linear feet (Box 1-2, 4)

Scope and Contents: Photographic materials include black and white photographs, negatives, and contact prints. Aside from a few travel photographs, the bulk of the series is dedicated to Rorimer's work in the Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives section during the war. There is one photograph album given to Rorimer from the headquarters of the Office of Military Government in Baden-Wurttemberg titled *War Damage in Wurtemmberg: A Selection of Photographs*. The rest of the photographs depict MFAA activities such as recovery and transportation of cultural artifacts from stolen art repositories such as Buxheim monastery and Neuschwanstein castle, documentation of bomb damage in Germany and other countries, the protection of historic sites in France, and restitution and exhibitions at the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point. Many of the photographs have annotations written on the verso. Photographs of people, including Rorimer, Stanislaw Lorentz, Edith A. Standen, and Rose Valland, are scattered throughout the series, and indicated with notes at the folder level.

Arrangement: The photographs album is at the beginning of the series. The rest of the photographs are grouped by subject, the arranged chronologically within each grouping.

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| Box 1, Folder 37 | Album War Damage in Wurttemberg: A Selection of Photographs, 1945 Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 4, Folder 2. |
| Box 1, Folder 38 | Personal Photographs of Travels in Europe, 1921-1926 |
| Box 1, Folder 39 | Alfred Rosenberg, 1942 |
| Box 1, Folder 40 | Buxheim Monastery, ERR Photograph and Restoration Lab, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 41 | Buxheim Monastery, Looted Antiques and Rothschild Furniture, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 42 | Buxheim Monastery, Transporting Recovered Art by Trucks and Trains, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1 | Neuschwanstein Castle |
| Box 1, Folder 43 | Views of the Castle Up Close and From a Distance, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 44 | Official Signal Corps Photographs of Art Recovery, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 45 | Storage Rooms and Transportation of Art, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 46 | Photographs Signed and Annotated by Rose Valland, 1945 |
| Box 1, Folder 47 | Monuments Men at Berchtesgaden Looted Art Repository, circa 1945-1946 Notes: Includes blurry photographs of James Rorimer, Captain Anderson, Captain Hathaway, and P.F.C. Miller. |
| Box 1, Folder 48 | Art Recovery at Gufflaum and Neuenstein, Germany, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 49 | Art Recovery of Famous Paintings at Unidentified Location, circa 1945-1946 |

Notes: Mostly photographs of specific paintings with some photographs of the soldiers holding the frames, probably in the midst of transporting the art.

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| Box 1, Folder 50 | Rooms in Unidentified Looted Art Repository, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 51 | Unidentified Looted Art, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 1, Folder 52 | Hungarian Train, circa 1945-1946 Notes: Two photographs labeled "Hungarian Train" on the verso, possibly photographs of the Hungarian Gold Train. |
| Box 2 | Protecting Cultural Monuments and Historic Sites in France |
| Box 2, Folder 1 | Camouflage Netting Over Sculptures in Versailles Gardens, Paris, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 2 | Special Services Tent at the Grand Trianon in Versailles, Paris, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 3 | James Rorimer with Soldiers and Civilians at the Louvre, Paris, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 4 | Christ in Majesty Tympanum at the Chartres Cathedral, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2 | Bomb Damage to Buildings in Germany |
| Box 2, Folder 5 | St. George's Church, Nordlingen, and a "Nearby" Church, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 6 | Cathedral, Rathaus, and Other Buildings in Ulm, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | Palace, Museum, and Theater in Darmstadt, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 8 | Fulda Cathedral and St. Michael's Church IN Fulda, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | Rothenburg Town Hall, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 10 | St. Andreas Church and Museum in Worms, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 11 | National Theater and Residences at Max Joseph Platz, Munich, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 12 | Unidentified Building in Kurhessen, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 13 | Bomb Damage to Innsbruck Cathedral in Austria, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 14 | Bomb Damage to Monuments at Unidentified Locations, circa 1945-1946 |

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|------------------|---|
| Box 2, Folder 15 | U.S. Jeeps and Soldiers at Unidentified Locations, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 16 | Unidentified Cultural Monuments, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 17 | Unidentified Cultural Monuments, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 18 | View of Heidelberg, Germany, Across the Neckar River, 1945 |
| Box 2, Folder 19 | Room inside "Buxhein ERR Textiles" in Memmingen, Germany, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2 | Wiesbaden Collecting Point |
| Box 2, Folder 20 | Exterior Views of Building, 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 21 | Storage Rooms with Racks of Paintings and Crates of Recovered Art, 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 22 | Exhibitions of Recovered Art, 1946 Notes: Includes one photograph of Edith Standen. |
| Box 2, Folder 23 | Restitution Shipments to France, 1946 Notes: Includes several photographs of Edith Standen and Rose Valland, and one image with Joe Kelleher. There are also a few photographs of Aristide Maillol sculptures being prepared for shipment. |
| Box 2, Folder 24 | Edith Standen Conducting Tour of U.S. Guards, 1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 25 | Edith Standen and Two Others Inspect "Berlin Sculptures", 1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 26 | Negatives of Cultural Monuments, circa 1945-1946 |
| Box 2, Folder 27 | Contact Prints of Cultural Monuments, circa 1945-1946 Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 4, Folder 3. |
| Box 2, Folder 28 | Small Album of Rooms in Hohenschwangau Castle, 1946-1950 |
| Box 2, Folder 29 | Rorimer Awarded Legion of Honor in France, circa 1947 |
| Box 2, Folder 30 | Stanislaw Lorentz and Wilanow Palace in Warsaw, circa 1950-1966 |
| Box 2, Folder 31 | Heilbronn Reunion, 1956 |
| Box 2, Folder 32 | Miscellaneous Notes and Photographs Captions, 1945-1963 |
| Box 4, Folder 2 | Oversized Photograph Album from Box 1, Folder 37, 1945 |

Box 4, Folder 3

Oversize Contact Prints from Box 2, Folder 27, circa 1945-1946

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Series 7: Printed Materials, 1923-1966

0.7 Linear feet (Box 3-4, OV 5-6)

Scope and Contents: Printed materials consist of a scrapbook, news clippings, press releases, bulletins, several magazines, booklets, and manuals of maps. Most are related to The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, activities and discoveries of the Monuments Men, and profiles of art collectors and directors. There is also a large scrapbook which contains some personal materials, such as letters and Harvard Alumni bulletins about Rorimer, but the majority of the content consists of news clippings, some of which are duplicated in other folders.

Arrangement: The scrapbook is at the beginning of the series and the remainder of the material are grouped together by type, such as clippings, periodicals, postcards, and then chronologically within each grouping.

Box 3, Folder 1 Scrapbook, 1923-1950
Notes: Oversized material housed in OV 5.

Box 3, Folder 2 News Clippings, 1943-1944

Box 3, Folder 3 News Clippings, 1945

Box 3, Folder 4 News Clippings, circa 1945
Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 4, Folder 4.

Box 3, Folder 5 News Clippings, 1946

Box 3, Folder 6 News Clippings, 1947-1958

Box 3, Folder 7 News Clippings, 1962-1966
Notes: Oversized materials housed in Box 4, folder 5.

Box 3, Folder 8 Paris, France: Seine Section, 1945, circa 1945

Box 3, Folder 9 Art News, 1946

Box 3, Folder 10 Abelard Press Publications Catalog, 1950

Box 3, Folder 11 Emporium, 1955

Box 3, Folder 12 sele arte, 1955

Box 3, Folder 13 Kunstchronik, 1955

Box 3, Folder 14 Cultura Peruana, 1955
Notes: Oversized materials housed in Box 4, folder 6.

Box 3, Folder 15 Die Kunst, circa 1955

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| Box 3, Folder 16 | Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletins, 1938-1958 |
| Box 3, Folder 17 | The Cloisters Brochures, circa 1941 |
| Box 3, Folder 18 | The Miracle of Theophilus, circa 1942 |
| Box 3, Folder 19 | Chart and Survey of German Education System, circa 1943 |
| Box 3, Folder 20 | Postcards, circa 1943-1946 |
| Box 3, Folder 21 | Civil Affairs Handbook: France, 1944 Notes: Oversized material housed in OV 6. |
| Box 3, Folder 22 | Civil Affairs Handbook: Germany, 1944 Notes: Oversized material housed in OV 6. |
| Box 3, Folder 23 | Press Releases, circa 1945 |
| Box 3, Folder 24 | Walter W.S. Cook Essays and Memorial Tributes, 1955-1962 |
| Box 4, Folder 4 | Oversized Clippings from Box 3, Folder 4, circa 1945 |
| Box 4, Folder 5 | Oversized Clippings from Box 3, Folder 7, 1963 |
| Box 4, Folder 6 | Oversized Cultura Peruana Magazine from Box 3, Folder 14, 1963 |
| Box OV 5 | Oversized Scrapbook from Box 3, Folder 1, 1923-1950 |
| Box OV 6 | Oversized Civil Affairs Handbook: France from Box 3, Folder 21, 1944 |
| Box OV 6 | Oversized Civil Affairs Handbook: Germany from Box 3, Folder 22, 1944 |

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