



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the John Singer Sargent Letters, 1887-1922, 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.

November 17, 2006

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	John Singer Sargent letters
<b>Date:</b>	1887-1922
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.sargjohn
<b>Creator:</b>	Sargent, John Singer, 1856-1925
<b>Extent:</b>	0.2 Linear feet ((104 letters))
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The John Singer Sargent letters consist of 104 letters dating from 1887 to 1922. The letters provide limited insight into his later career through letters to commissioned patrons, sitters, and friends and colleagues. Topics covered include works in progress, replies to social invitations, and other general social news. Many of the letters are written to Mrs. Charles Hunter, an English friend and patron who sat for several portraits. Also found are letters from Sargent to friend Edith Blaney, whose husband was landscape artist Dwight Blaney. Additional scattered letters were written to Henry Mills Alden, Lawrence Barrett, Mrs. Baxter, a Mr. Griffith, Sir George Hunter, Mrs. Jackson, Louisa P. Loring, Henry Gurdon Marquand, Mrs. Pick, Mr. Spizer, and unidentified/illegible recipients. There are two photographs of Sargent.

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## Administrative Information

### Provenance

42 of the letters were given to the Archives by Charles E. Feinberg in 1956 and purchased from King V. Hostick, an autograph dealer, in 1957. A few additional letters in the possession of Charles E. Feinberg were sold at auction and purchased by the Archives of American Art in 1968. Circa 60 letters from Sargent to Mrs. Charles Hunter were donated by Elizabeth Williamson, daughter of Mrs. Charles Hunter, in 1964. All accessions were microfilmed shortly after receipt.

### Related Material

Related collections available at the Archives of American Art include the F. W. Sargent papers (John Singer Sargent's father), which include correspondence with his son, available on reel D317. Also found is the R. L. Ormond material relating to John Singer Sargent, available on microfilm reels 1407 and 1820, and "Recollections of John Singer Sargent," a typescript and recording of an interview of Sargent's model Anton Kamp, available on microfilm reel 5002. Other collections were loaned to the Archives of American Art for microfilming and returned to the owner, including the Charles Jackson Paine letters from John Singer Sargent, available on reel 2542, and the John Singer Sargent letter to Mrs. Henry White, available on reel 647.

## Alternative Forms Available

The papers of painter **John Singer Sargent** were digitized in 2006 by the Archives of American Art, and total 286 images.

## Processing Information

The John Singer Sargent letters received minimal processing shortly after accessioning and were microfilmed in multiple accessions on reels D10 and 3471. The collection was fully processed, arranged and described by Erin Corley, and scanned in 2006, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

## Preferred Citation

John Singer Sargent letters, 1887-1922. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions on Access

The collection has been digitized and is available online via AAA's website.

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## Biographical Note

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) was born in Florence, Italy to American Parents, Dr. Fitzwilliam Sargent and Mary Newbold Singer Sargent of Philadelphia. During his childhood the family traveled Europe extensively, often spending summers in Switzerland and winters in Italy. Sargent began drawing and painting at an early age, helping in the studio of Carl Welsch in 1868, attending the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence in 1873, studying at Carolus-Duran's atelier and the studio of James Carroll Beckwith and finally attending the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1875. Sargent quickly gained recognition for his paintings, receiving honors for his works at the Salon and the Society of American Artists. During this period he visited the studios of many prominent artists working in Europe, including John Everett Millais, Frederic Leighton, and Claude Monet and also became friends with Henry James.

Influenced by Frans Hals and Velazquez, Sargent became a very successful portrait painter, acquiring many French patrons and later even more American clients. His most famous work, *Mme Gautreau*, known as 'Madame X', was denounced by the Salon in 1884 for its provocative modernism. After this scandal he moved from Paris to London, and in 1887 visited the United States, where he was treated as a celebrity. He visited again in 1890 and established studios in New York and Boston, in addition to his studio in London. He also accepted a commission to do a series of murals in the Boston Public Library which wasn't completed and installed until 1916. In 1891 he traveled to Egypt, Greece, and Turkey - travels that inspired his later paintings. By 1900 Sargent was the leading society portrait painter on an international level and was known for using modern styles of lighting, poses, and settings. In addition to many other honors he became a full member of the Royal Academy in London and the National Academy of Design in New York.

In 1907 Sargent decided to give up his portrait studios and focus on murals and landscape studies. In 1918 he became a war artist for the Ministry of Information and in 1924 had his first retrospective exhibition at Grand Central Art Galleries in New York. Sargent remained unmarried and died in his sleep in 1925 at the age of 69.

## Scope and Content Note

The John Singer Sargent letters consist of 104 letters dating from 1887 to 1922. The letters provide limited insight into his later career through letters to commissioned patrons, sitters, and friends and colleagues. Topics covered include works in progress, replies to social invitations, and other general social news. Many of the letters are written to Mrs. Charles Hunter, an English friend and patron who sat for several portraits. Also found are letters from Sargent to friend Edith Blaney, whose husband was landscape artist Dwight Blaney. Additional scattered letters were written to Henry Mills Alden, Lawrence Barrett, Mrs. Baxter, a Mr. Griffith, Sir George Hunter, Mrs. Jackson, Louisa P. Loring, Henry Gurdon Marquand, Mrs. Pick, Mr. Spizer, and unidentified/illegible recipients. There are two photographs of Sargent.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 1 series:

- Series 1: John Singer Sargent Letters, 1887-1922 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)

Due to the small size of this collection, the letters are arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent into one series of 18 folders. Items within each folder are arranged chronologically .

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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 -- Commissioning  
Art patronage  
Portrait painters -- England -- London

Names:

Blaney, Edith H.  
Hunter, Charles, Mrs.

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: John Singer Sargent Letters, 1887-1922

#### 0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Scattered documentation of Sargent's later career are found in these letters to portrait commission patrons, many of whom were also personal and social friends. Topics discussed in the letter include current works in progress, replies to invitations, and other general social news. Many of the letters were written to Mrs. Charles Hunter, an English friend and patron, who sat for several portraits by Sargent. Also found are letters from Sargent to friend Edith Blaney, whose husband was landscape artist Dwight Blaney. Other notable letters include a brief one to Henry Mills Alden, an editor at *Harper's Magazine* concerning a photograph of Sargent for an article by Henry James, three letters to Henry Marquand regarding Sargent's work on portraits of him and his father, and a letter to Lawrence Barrett requesting to show a portrait in an exhibition. There are also several letters written by Sargent to people whose names are illegible and have not been identified. Also found is a photograph mounted on a postcard of Sargent later in life depicting him painting outdoors and a photograph of his self portrait.

Box 1, Folder 1	<a href="#">Alden, Mr. [Henry Mills], 1887</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	<a href="#">Barrett, Mr. [Lawrence], undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	<a href="#">Baxter, Mrs., undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	<a href="#">Blaney, Mrs. Dwight [Edith], 1916-1917, undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 5	<a href="#">Griffith, Mr., 1913</a>
Box 1, Folder 6	<a href="#">Henschel, Sir George, undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 7	<a href="#">Hunter, Mrs. Charles, 1906-1915</a>
Box 1, Folder 8	<a href="#">Hunter, Mrs. Charles, 1916-1917</a>
Box 1, Folder 9	<a href="#">Hunter, Mrs. Charles, 1918-1919</a>
Box 1, Folder 10	<a href="#">Hunter, Mrs. Charles, 1920-1921, undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 11	<a href="#">Jackson, Mrs., undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 12	<a href="#">Loring, Louisa P., 1915-1922, undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 13	<a href="#">Marquand, Henry Gurdon, undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 14	<a href="#">Pick, Mrs., undated</a>

Box 1, Folder 15	<a href="#">Spizer, Mr., circa 1898, 1904</a>
Box 1, Folder 16	<a href="#">Unidentified letters, 1919, undated</a>
Box 1, Folder 17	<a href="#">Photograph on postcard of John Singer Sargent, circa 1920</a>
Box 1, Folder 18	<a href="#">Photograph of John Singer Sargent Self-portrait, undated</a>

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