



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the James Stillman Letters Relating to Homer Dodge Martin, 1882-1898, in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie Ashley

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:	James Stillman letters relating to Homer Dodge Martin
Date:	1882-1898
Identifier:	AAA.stiljame
Creator:	Stillman, James, 1850-1918
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The James Stillman letters relating to Homer Dodge Martin measures 0.2 linear feet and consists of 28 letters and 2 pencil sketches dating from 1882-1898. Primarily from late-19th century painter Homer Dodge Martin and his wife, Elizabeth, to art patron and banker, James Stillman, the letters discuss consignment, exhibition and sale of Martin's artwork, his experiences painting while living in France, his financial struggles, and his physical and mental condition. Two pencil sketches by Martin are accompanied by a note dated 1884. Also found are 2 letters from Martin to Mr. Van Loon discussing payment for paintings and 2 letters to Stillman from Bancel La Farge concerning Stillman's purchase of a La Farge watercolor.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Six letters from Homer Dodge Martin were donated to AAA by Chauncey Stillman, grandson of James Stillman, in 1955 and 1959. Additional letters to Stillman from Martin, Elizabeth Martin, and Bancel La Farge, and from Martin to Mr. Van Loon, were donated by Mrs. P. S. Paine, granddaughter of James Stillman, in 1978.

Related Material

The Archives of American Art also holds the Thomas B. Clarke letters from or about Homer Dodge Martin, 1893-1897. Additional material relating to Homer Dodge Martin, including correspondence with Thomas B. Clarke and Elizabeth Martin, can be found in the Macbeth Gallery records.

Alternative Forms Available

The **James Stillman** letters relating to Homer Dodge Martin in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2009. The papers have been scanned in their entirety and total 85 images.

Processing Information

The letters were donated in 3 installments and microfilmed at some point after receipt on reels D9, D22 and 3742. All items were merged and fully processed by Stephanie Ashley in 2008, and digitized in entirety in 2009, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

James Stillman letters relating to Homer Dodge Martin, 1882-1898. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of the original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Banker and art patron James Stillman, was committed to promoting the artwork of landscape artist Homer Dodge Martin and providing financial investment in and practical assistance with the logistics of handling Martin's artwork over a period of at least 16 years.

Homer Dodge Martin (1836-1897) was born in Albany, New York. He studied briefly with James Hart and spent his summers during the 1860s in the Adirondacks, the Catskills and the White Mountains, and painted landscapes from the sketches he made there in the style of the Hudson River school at his studio in New York City's Tenth Street Studio Building.

In 1876 he took his first trip to Europe and from 1882-1886 lived in Normandy, France in Honfleur and Villerville. There he was influenced both by the Barbizon school of painting and the Impressionists and his painting took on darker, more melancholy tones.

By 1897 Martin had returned to New York City and in 1893 Martin moved to St. Paul, Minnesota where, nearly blind, he painted one of his best-known works, *Adirondack Scenery* (1895) from memory.

Although never successful within his lifetime, within 2 years of his death *Adirondack Scenery* sold for \$5500 and *Harp of the Winds* (1895) was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Martin's paintings can be found in the collections of other important American museums including the Addison Gallery of American Art, the Albany Institute of History and Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Martin became a member of the National Academy of Design in 1874 and in 1877 was one of the founders of the Society of American Artists.

Scope and Content Note

The James Stillman letters relating to Homer Dodge Martin measures 0.2 linear feet and consists of 28 letters from Martin and his wife Elizabeth to banker and art patron James Stillman documenting Stillman's financial and practical assistance to the Martin's through consignment, exhibition and sale of Martin's artwork. The letters provide insight into Martin's experiences painting while living in Honfleur and Villerville, France, his financial struggles, and his physical and mental condition. They also reveal Elizabeth Martin's efforts as advocate for her husband's work and reputation, and her dismay at his physical and mental decline due in part to lack of financial success.

Also found are 2 1884 pencil sketches by Martin, of a view in Honfleur; 2 letters from Martin to Mr. Van Loon discussing payment for paintings; and 2 letters to Stillman from Bancel La Farge concerning Stillman's purchase of a La Farge watercolor.

The collection contains no letters from Stillman.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 1 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: James Stillman Letters Relating to Homer Dodge Martin, 1882-1898 (Box 1; 4 folders)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art -- Economic aspects
- Art patronage
- Art patrons
- Landscape painters -- New York (State)

Types of Materials:

- Sketches

Names:

- La Farge, Bancel, 1865-1938
- Martin, Elizabeth
- Martin, Homer Dodge, 1836-1897

Container Listing

Series 1: James Stillman Letters Relating to Homer Dodge Martin, 1882-1898

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Although the collection contains no letters from its creator, banker and art patron James Stillman, it documents Stillman's apparent commitment to promoting the artwork of Homer Dodge Martin, and how he provided financial investment in and practical assistance with the logistics of handling Martin's pictures over a period of at least 16 years. The letters reveal the gratitude Homer and Elizabeth Martin felt for Stillman's "many kindnesses," and discuss shipment, framing, consignment, sales, and exhibition of Martin's work. They also show how Martin looked to Stillman for his opinions on his painting, and provide insight into his struggles to reach a wider and more lucrative audience for his work.

Written from Honfleur and Villerville, France, Martin's letters from the 1880s reveal his fear of being forgotten and his dismay when receipt of his paintings or letters goes unacknowledged. He discusses the advantages of painting outdoors from nature and the difficulties that ensue when the weather does not cooperate. In November 1886 he writes about his lack of productivity during the autumn due to various "mental and physical" problems, including a "nervous state of unrest" and resulting insomnia, and states that he is looking forward to his imminent return to the United States.

Later letters document Martin's move to St. Paul, Minnesota in late 1893. The painter writes of being "demoralised" by his physical condition and of a hiatus of 2 years prior to the move when he did no work. Nevertheless he appears hopeful that his paintings are being increasingly well-received. In an August 1894 letter, however, he writes of "coming to his senses" after having been "set up by an amount of praise for my recent work which quite turned my head," and expresses the fear that he has dropped in Stillman's regard because of this.

Two pencil sketches by Martin, of a view of Honfleur pier and of the house from which he saw the view respectively, are found with the 1884 letters.

Elizabeth Martin's letters document her key role in making arrangements for the shipping, framing, exhibition and sale of her husband's paintings and his physical demise due to liver and eye trouble. She also writes of his reticence to engage Stillman's assistance with the promotion of his work more fully, due to his fear of "wearing out your patience and seeming to impose on your friendship." Her letters reveal how Martin's pictures were being well received in the 1890s by critics and fellow artists, but how commensurate financial success was not forthcoming, and his "many discouragements" because of this. Her 1895-1896 letters mention her urgent financial need, and her last letters seek Stillman's assistance in finding employment for her son, Ralph.

In addition to letters from Homer and Elizabeth Martin, the collection contains 2 1898 letters from Bancel La Farge, documenting transmittal and receipt of a watercolor study, "Smack at Sea," and 2 letters from Homer Martin to Mr. Van Loon regarding payment for paintings.

Box 1, Folder 1 [Letters from Homer Martin to James Stillman, 1883-1894](#)

Box 1, Folder 2 [Letters from Elizabeth Martin to James Stillman, 1884-1897](#)

Box 1, Folder 3 [Letters from Homer Martin to Mr. Van Loon, 1882, 1884](#)

Box 1, Folder 4

[Letters from Bancel La Farge to James Stillman, 1898](#)

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