



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Weir Family Papers, 1809-circa
1961, bulk 1830-1920, 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.

2019/07/11

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Weir family papers
Date:	1809-circa 1961 (bulk 1830-1920)
Identifier:	AAA.weirweir
Creator:	Weir family
Extent:	0.8 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	<p>The papers of the prominent New York and Connecticut Weir family of artists measure 0.8 linear feet and date from 1809-circa 1961, with the bulk of the material dating from 1830-1920. The papers are a collection of correspondence and photographs that constitute a small but vivid record of the influence and relationships of this family of Hudson River School, landscape, and miniature painters. Correspondence consists primarily of letters to painter John Ferguson Weir when he was director of the Yale School of Fine Arts, with scattered letters to his daughter Edith Weir (Perry), and a small amount of correspondence of Robert Weir, his daughter Carrie M. Mansfield, son-in-law Lewis William Mansfield, and Julia Bayard. Letters to John F. Weir are from many late-19th century artists, as well as actors, poets, lawyers, scholars, and clergymen, often concerning arrangements for visiting lectures at the school. Photographs are of Robert Walter Weir, Susan Bayard Weir, Julian Alden Weir, and artwork.</p>

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Photographs were given to the Archives of American Art in 2019 by Mary and John McGuigan, Jr. Letters to John Ferguson Weir were donated by Harold O. Love in 1961. Material on reels 529-531, 533, 565, 936 and 949 was lent for microfilming 1973-1975 by Rev. DeWolf Perry, grandson of John F. Weir. He also donated two photographs in 1975. The donor and date of acquisition of the manuscript draft of Julian Alden Weir's biography are unknown. The draft was transferred from the Julian Alden Weir papers in 2019 as it was assumed that it was donated by a relative of the family since Dorothy Weir Young was the author of Weir's biography.

Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of material lent for microfilming by Reverend DeWolf Perry. Included on reels 529-531 are correspondence of John Ferguson Weir, much of it with his brother Julian Alden Weir, with his future wife which he wrote while serving in the Civil War, and with artists; 77 letters, 1823-1881, of Robert W. Weir with members of the Congress and War Dept. regarding commissions, and with artists and others, including Horatio Greenough, William Page, Thomas Cole,

William Cullen Bryant, and George P. Morris; a pocket diary of John F. Weir, 1860, with occasional poems and sketches; 2 sketchbooks, and 71 drawings, watercolors, and oils by John F. Weir; 3 sketchbooks and 165 original drawings, lithographs, watercolors and oils by Robert Weir; 4 portraits of John F. by others; sheet music with words and lithograph on the cover by Robert; 81 photographs of John and Robert, family, and work; exhibition material of Robert; a list of John F. Weir's paintings with prices; drafts of *Robert W. Weir, Artist* by Irene Weir (1947); and a typescript of a biography of John F. Weir by his daughter, Edith Weir (Perry); genealogical material; and clippings. Reel 533 includes a typescript of "The Story of My Life: The Inner Life of a Human Soul," by Mary French Weir, ca. 1920 (94 p.), and a typescript of a biography of her mother, Clara Miller-French, ca. 1920 (28 p.). Reel 565 contains family correspondence, 1866-1927, of Mary French Weir; an excerpt from the French family genealogy; and an obituary of Mary French Weir written by her daughter Edith Weir Perry. Reel 936 contains a sketchbook, 1826, by Robert Weir, of figures, statues, and buildings in Rome done while a student. The drawings are in pencil, ink wash, and pen and ink. (111 p.); reel 949 contains three sketchbooks, 1869-1902, by John F. Weir, done in watercolor, pencil and ink wash. (69 p.), of landscapes, figures, and heads of individuals in Italy, Switzerland, Dordrecht, Holland, and France.

Loaned materials were returned to the donor and are not described in the collection container inventory.

Related Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds the microfilm (Reels 70-71, 125-126, 577) for the Julian Alden Weir papers, 1869-1966, including correspondence (mostly typed transcripts); scrapbooks; photographs; sketches; notebooks and scrapbooks and clippings compiled by Dorothy Weir Young in preparation for her book, *The Life and Letters of J. Alden Weir* (1960, Yale University Press).

Additional Weir family records are held by the Yale University Archives. The records form part of the material previously lent to the Archives of American Art for microfilming by Reverend DeWolf Perry, and described above as separated materials.

Other Finding Aids

Microfilm reel D129: Partial inventory, including some typescripts, available at Archives of American Art offices.

Available Formats

The collection was digitized in 2019 and is available on the Archives of American Art website.

Material lent for microfilming on reels 529-531, 533, 565, 936 and 949 is available at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

The photographs donated by Mary and John McGuigan were merged with letters to John Ferguson Weir, the manuscript draft of J. Alden Weir's biography (transferred from the Julian Alden Weir papers, 1869-1966), and Robert W. Weir letters transferred from the Mary K. McGuigan and John F. McGuigan, Jr. artists' letters collection. All accessions were fully processed and a finding aid written by Stephanie Ashley in 2019. The collection was digitized in 2019 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Weir family papers, 1809-circa 1961. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

This collection is open for research. Access to original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center.

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Biographical / Historical

The New York and Connecticut Weir family of artists included painter and West Point professor Robert Walter Weir (1803-1889), his sons John Ferguson Weir (1841-1926) and Julian Alden Weir (1852-1919), and granddaughter Edith Weir (Perry) (1875-1955).

Julian Alden Weir was a renowned American Impressionist painter and a founding member of "The Ten," a loosely allied group of American artists dissatisfied with some of the established professional art organizations of the time who exhibited their work as a unified group. He also taught at the Women's Art School of the Cooper Union in New York.

John Ferguson Weir became acquainted with many of the rising young artists of his day when he took a room in the Tenth Street Studio in his early twenties and developed proficiency in landscape and still life painting. Like his brother, he then studied art abroad and returned to become director and later dean of the School of Fine Arts at Yale University from 1869-1913.

John Ferguson Weir married Mary Hannah French in 1866. Their daughter, Edith Weir Perry, was a noted miniature painter who studied under Lucy Fairchild Fuller.

Scope and Contents

The papers of the prominent New York and Connecticut Weir family of artists measure 0.8 linear feet and date from 1809-circa 1961, with the bulk of the material dating from 1830-1920. The papers are a collection of correspondence and photographs that constitute a small but vivid record of the influence and relationships of this family of Hudson River School, landscape, and miniature painters. Correspondence consists primarily of letters to painter John Ferguson Weir when he was director of the Yale School of Fine Arts, with scattered letters to his daughter Edith Weir (Perry), and a small amount of correspondence of Robert Weir, his daughter Carrie M. Mansfield, son-in-law Lewis William Mansfield, and Julia Bayard. Letters to John F. Weir are from many late-19th century artists, as well as actors, poets, lawyers, scholars, and clergymen, often concerning arrangements for visiting lectures at the school. Photographs are of Robert Walter Weir, Susan Bayard Weir, Julian Alden Weir, and artwork.

There are approximately 275 letters to John Ferguson Weir, some of which enclose sketches, photographs, and printed writings. The letters of Hudson River School artists including Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Cole, Sanford Robinson Gifford, Jervis McEntee, and Worthington Whittredge, capture a sense of the intense ties those artists felt to the landscape and to each other. Often the correspondents mention their fellow artists in their letters in personal as well as professional terms, writing of family, friendships, visits to each other's homes, practical arrangements for delivering, retrieving, and exhibiting artwork, and their shared artistic aspirations, successes, and disappointments.

Many of the letters are responses from lawyers, scholars, clergymen, writers, and educators in reply to Weir's requests to speak at the Yale School of Fine Arts. Taken together the letters, which often go beyond routine matters to extend to more personal affairs, reveal the warm esteem in which Weir was held, not only in his capacity as director of the school but as an artist and a friend. The letters, such as those from Laura Hills, Lucia Fairchild Fuller, Adele Herter, and Candace and Dora Wheeler, also document the Weir family's friendships with and encouragement

of women artists, at a time of limited support for women in the arts. Also of note are letters from actors Edwin Booth and Joseph Jefferson, who were both friends of John F. Weir.

Letters of Robert Weir and extended Bayard and Mansfield family members relate primarily to family affairs. Photographs of Julian Alden Weir, Robert W. Weir, and Susan Bayard Weir include professional portraits and candid family shots, as well as photographs of two sketches of Julian Alden Weir and two miscellaneous photos of artwork.

Arrangement

Due to the small size of the collection, the Weir family papers are arranged as one series.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Hudson River school of landscape painting
Women painters

Types of Materials:

Drawings

Names:

McGuigan, John F., Jr. (John Fuller)
McGuigan, Mary K.
Perry, Edith Weir, 1875-
Weir, John F. (John Ferguson), 1841-1926
Weir, Julian Alden, 1852-1919
Weir, Robert Walter, 1803-1889

Occupations:

Landscape painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Miniature painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Weir Family Papers, 1809-circa 1961 (bulk 1830-1920)

0.8 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2, OVs 3-4)

Scope and Contents: Letters to John F. Weir form the bulk of the series. Of particular note are letters which provide insight into the minds of some of the most important landscape and impressionist artists of the late-19th century and evoke a sense of the waning years of the Hudson River School and the efforts of those artists to capture the undeveloped wildness of the American landscape before it passed into history. Five letters and a sketch from Jervis McEntee are deeply personal as the artist expresses despair about his inability to find subjects in the landscape of Roundout, New York, that had previously so inspired him. He writes of how "The country has changed and lost its quiet," and his desperate need for the companionship of other artists that he had enjoyed with Sanford Gifford and Worthington Whittredge, concluding that "Now when I go away alone to these isolated mountain vallies [sic] I nearly die from loneliness..." Ironically later letters from Frederic Edwin Church refer to the death of Jervis McEntee, and Church's desire to seek seclusion and paint alone in his house.

There is an 1834 letter from Thomas Cole and draft of an agreement relating to his renting a room from John Trumbull at the American Academy of Fine Arts for the exhibition of a picture *The Angel Announcing the Birth of Our Savior*.

Several letters from renowned actor Edwin Booth, mention contributions of sketches to his wife's album from Sanford Robinson Gifford, Jervis McEntee, and Weir himself. There are 4 letters and 3 sketches from Sanford Robinson Gifford enclosing a photo of Gifford. In one letter he describes re-working the sky of his painting *Ruins of the Parthenon* against the strong recommendation of Frederic Edwin Church, and declares the work a success.

Additional details regarding individual correspondents are provided in the container listing.

In addition to photographs of Julian Alden Weir, Robert Weir, and others, there is a photograph of Robert Fulton's drawing, *Love's First Interview*, inscribed to John F. Weir, and a photograph of a war monument by an unknown sculptor.

Arrangement: The series is arranged by type of material. Letters to John F. Weir are arranged alphabetically. Correspondents represented with 5 or more items are housed in named files.

Box 1, Folder 1 [Letters, Julia Bayard to Carrie M. Mansfield, 1846-1868](#)

Box 1, Folder 2 [Letters, Carrie M. Mansfield and Lewis William Mansfield, circa 1847-1852](#)

Box 1, Folder 3 [Letters to John F. Weir, A, circa 1844-circa 1902](#)

Notes: Includes 3 letters from Edwin Austin Abbey including Abbey's impressions of England and an invitation to Weir from the Royal Academy of Arts.

Box 1, Folder 4 [Letters to John F. Weir, Ba-Be, 1809-1906](#)

Box 1, Folder 5 [Letters to John F. Weir, Bi-Br, circa 1870-circa 1899](#)

Notes: Includes letter from Albert Bierstadt regarding transmittal of pictures for an exhibition; 2 letters from John Bigelow; a sketch to Edith Weir

by Poultney Bigelow; and 2 letters and a sketch from Henry Kirke Brown.

Box 1, Folder 6	Letters to John F. Weir, Booth, Edwin, circa 1880-circa 1886
Box 1, Folder 7	Letters to John F. Weir, C, 1834-1913
Box 1, Folder 8	Letters to John F. Weir, D, 1828-1906
Box 1, Folder 9	Letters to John F. Weir, E, 1873, 1912
Box 1, Folder 10	Letters to John F. Weir, F, circa 1852-circa 1907
Box 1, Folder 11	Letters to John F. Weir, G, 1870-1907
Box 1, Folder 12	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, H, 1855-1908 Notes: Includes 2 letters, 3 notes, and a sketch from Hubert von Herkomer; 2 letters from Adele Herter, one congratulating Edith Weir on having work accepted at the Paris Salon; 2 letters from Laura Hills advising Edith Weir on painting miniatures; 1 note from Winslow Homer regarding exchange of a picture; 4 letters from Richard W. Hubbard in which he complains about having to paint "slick-surface pictures for the atrocious Academy light"; 1 letter from William Morris Hunt; and a sketch and a letter from Daniel Huntington.</p>
Box 1, Folder 13	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, I-L, 1836-circa 1896 Notes: Includes 4 letters from Eastman Johnson; and 2 letters from John La Farge.</p>
Box 1, Folder 14	Letters to John F. Weir, Jefferson, Joseph, circa 1883-circa 1903
Box 1, Folder 15	Letters to John F. Weir, M, 1827-1891
Box 1, Folder 16	Letters to John F. Weir, McEntee, Jervis, 1874-1886
Box 1, Folder 17	Letters to John F. Weir, N, circa 1878-circa 1901
Box 1, Folder 18	Letters to John F. Weir, O-P, circa 1860-1910
Box 1, Folder 19	Letters to John F. Weir, Phelps, Edward John, circa 1885-circa 1896
Box 1, Folder 20	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, R, circa 1869-1913 Notes: Includes 1 letter from Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., wishing the Weir's well on travels and sharing his impressions of locations in Europe.</p>
Box 1, Folder 21	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, S, circa 1831-circa 1899 Notes: Includes 1 letter from John Singer Sargent; 1 detailed and entertaining letter from John Sartain relating to someone wanting to write an article about him for <i>Harper's Magazine</i>; 4 warm and</p>

personal letters from poet Edmund Clarence Stedman; and 2 letters from William Wetmore Story.

Box 1, Folder 22	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, Saint -Gaudens, Augustus, circa 1905</p> <p>Notes: Some language in these manuscripts may be offensive to viewers. It is presented as it exists in the original documents for the benefit of research. This material in no way reflects the views of the Archives of American Art or the Smithsonian Institution.</p>
Box 1, Folder 23	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, T, 1834-1892</p> <p>Notes: Includes 2 letters from John Henry Twachtman relating to arrangements for sending pictures.</p>
Box 1, Folder 24	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, Thompson, Launt, 1869-1893</p>
Box 1, Folder 25	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, V, 1878-1903</p>
Box 1, Folder 26	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, W, 1844-1903</p> <p>Notes: Includes 2 small signed pencil sketches from Frank Waller; 3 letters from architect and author William Robert Ware, discussing a bust he wants; and a small pen sketch signed "Julian" of Edith Weir as a child.</p>
Box 1, Folder 27	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, Wheeler, Candace and Dora, circa 1880s-1912</p> <p>Notes: Includes a sketch by Dora Wheeler.</p>
Box 1, Folder 28	<p>Letters to John F. Weir, Names Illegible, 1882, undated</p>
Box 1, Folder 29	<p>List of Senders (incomplete), circa 1961</p>
Box 1, Folder 30	<p>Letters of Robert W. Weir., 1854, 1884</p>
Box 2, Folder 1	<p>Manuscript Fragments, Draft of Julian Alden Weir Biography, circa 1940s</p>
Box 2, Folder 2	<p>Photographs of J. Alden Weir, circa 1880s-1912</p> <p>Notes: Oversized photographs housed in OV 3</p>
Box 2, Folder 3	<p>Photographs of J. Alden Weir, circa 1908-circa 1910</p> <p>Notes: Oversized photographs housed in OV 3</p>
Box 2, Folder 4	<p>Photographs of J. Alden Weir, circa 1910-circa 1918</p> <p>Notes: Oversized photographs housed in OV 3</p>
Box 2, Folder 5	<p>Photographs of Robert W. Weir and Susan Bayard Weir, circa 1860, 1872-1886</p> <p>Notes: Oversized photographs housed in OV 4</p>
Box 2, Folder 6	<p>Photograph of Unidentified Man, circa 1910</p>
Box 2, Folder 7	<p>Photographs of Artwork, undated</p>

Notes: Oversized photographs housed in OV 4

Oversize 3

Oversized Photographs of J. Alden Weir digitized with Box 2, Folders 2-4

Oversize 4

Oversized Photographs of Robert W. Weir and Photographs of Artwork digitized with Box 2, Folders 5 and 7

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