



Smithsonian
*Freer Gallery of Art and
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*

William Bryan Robertson Postcard
and Photograph Collection

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives
Title:	William Bryan Robertson Postcard and Photograph Collection
Date:	1929-1932
Identifier:	FSA.A2019.02
Creator:	Robertson, William Bryan, 1893-1943
Extent:	0.07 Cubic feet (130 postcards and photographs)
Language:	English .
Container:	Box 1

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Valerie Bernat, 2019.

Preferred Citation

William Bryan Robertson Postcard and Photograph Collection, FSA.A2019.02. National Museum of Asian Art Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of Valerie Bernat.

Biographical / Historical

Major William Bryan Robertson was born in 1893 and joined the Aviation Section of the U.S. Signal Corps (then part of the Army and a predecessor of the U.S. Air Force) in 1917. By 1918, he was commissioned to serve as second lieutenant in World War I, but the war ended before he deployed. Soon after the war, Robertson started an aviation business in St. Louis with his brother: they provided entertainment, transport, and education on aeronautics to the public. In 1926, after almost a decade of government airmail service, the Postmaster General began contracting private companies to deliver airmail—the second of which was the Robertson Aircraft Corporation. They were tasked with delivering mail from St. Louis to Chicago. The first pilot they hired for this journey was Charles Lindbergh, who would later be known for his flight across the Atlantic, which Robertson helped fund.

In early 1929, Robertson was called to China to organize and develop the air mail services. He planned routes from Nanjing to Beijing, Shanghai to Wuhan (formerly known as Hankou), and Wuhan to Guangzhou (then Canton). As president of Aviation Exploration Incorporated, Robertson signed a contract with China Airways for operation of the routes he charted; the airway was later merged into China National Aviation Corporation. He did the same in Turkey, flying from Istanbul to survey potential routes across the country in early 1932. The first public air transportation in Turkey occurred in 1933 in Ankara. Another airport was founded in Adana, a city Robertson surveyed, also in 1933.

In November 1929, the town of Anglum, Missouri, close to the St. Louis flying field (now the site of St. Louis Lambert International Airport), was renamed Robertson in his honor. The town was later absorbed by the city of Hazelwood. Robertson was killed in a crash of a demonstration glider in 1943, on his home flying field in St. Louis.

Content Description

The collection consists of 130 items: 32 photographic prints and 98 postcards. The postcards are largely unaddressed; however, some were sent to Robertson's wife and others include labels and descriptions of the site depicted. One apparently unsent postcard bears the address of Evangeline Lodge Land Lindbergh, mother of Charles Lindbergh.

Arrangement

The William Bryan Robertson Collection is organized into two series based on medium: Series I: Photographic Prints and Series II: Postcards.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Architecture
- Bridges
- Buddhist temples
- Cable cars
- Japanese women
- Mosques -- Turkey
- Mount Fuji
- Shinto
- Statue of Buddha

Places:

- Algiers (Algeria)
- China
- Guangzhou (China)
- Japan
- Konya (Turkey)
- Kyoto (Japan)
- Mount Hiei (Japan)
- Paris (France)
- Shanghai (China)
- Turkey
- Yangtze River (China)

Container Listing

Series 1: Photographs, circa 1929-1932

Arrangement: The items are arranged as received.

Scope and Contents: Some photographs are labeled with their country of origin, but most are unlabeled. It is unknown if Robertson took the photographs himself or if they were purchased.

The size of the photographs are varied. Those from the originally unlabeled section are approximately 4.75 in by 2.75 in, with two miniature photographs (1.75 in by 2.5 in) and one larger photograph (6.75 in by 5 in). Those photographs taken from other original sections are 5.5 in by 3.5 in.

General: From the dates written and from knowledge of Robertson's overseas journeys, most of the collection can be dated from 1929 to 1932.

On his trip to China, the only identified location in photographs is Shanghai.

The photographs from Japan are of two statues, both from the same garden in Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture, around 30 miles from Tokyo and 210 miles from Kyoto.

One of the two photographs from Turkey is of Ankara, while the other is of an unknown location. It was seemingly paired with a postcard, as it is of the same location, shares a similar caption, and was next to the postcard in the donor's original organization.

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Series 2: Postcards, 1925-1932

- Arrangement: The series is organized by country of origin into four subseries. Series 2.1: China; Series 2.2: Japan; Series 2.3: Turkey; Series 2.4: Miscellaneous.
- Scope and Contents: The series contain postcards from Shanghai and Guangzhou; Kyoto; Adana and Konya, Turkey. Each contain postcards of architecture, with a special focus on bridges, places of iconic cultural influence, and scenes of daily life.

China, 1929

22 Postcards (black & white)

- Arrangement: Alphabetical by caption.
- Scope and Contents: Most postcards are identified by a short caption on the front of the card in English, while some are also captioned in Chinese. The majority are from locations in the city of Shanghai, with the modern buildings on Nanjing Road and the Majestic Hotel being of particular interest. There are three cards from Guangzhou: one of the Liurong Temple (Flower Pagoda), one of the Hualin Temple (Temple of the 500 Genu), and one of the memorial gate in front of the Yuewang (or, Yuefei) Temple. One is not captioned and is of an unknown location.
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Japan, 1925-1930

59 Postcards (color and black & white)

- Arrangement: The subseries is organized by thematic group, and then alphabetically within those groups.
- Scope and Contents: The postcards from Japan are overwhelmingly from Kyoto and the surrounding areas. The first thematic group is architecture, followed by bridges. The third group is cultural sites, such as temples. The fourth is of features on and around Mt. Hiei, slightly northeast of Kyoto. The Mt. Hiei cable car features heavily in this section. The last section is people, ranging from farmers at work to female performers.
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Turkey, 1932

17 Postcards (black & white)

- Arrangement: This subsection is organized by location, with the unknown locations placed at the end.
- Scope and Contents: The largest number of postcards is from the city of Adana, with eight postcards. The second largest is postcards from Konya, at four cards. There is one card captioned in Arabic script, three with illegible names, and one that makes no mention of a location. In this section, all postcards are of architecture and scenery.
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Miscellaneous

2 Postcards (color)

- Arrangement: Unarranged

Scope and Contents: The first is a postcard of the Hotel Scribe (L'hôtel Scribe) in Paris. The second is of two women walking down the Rue de la Mer-Rouge, Algiers. The latter is the only postcard in this collection addressed to Robertson, sent by a man named Ray.

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