

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives
William Church Osborn Records, 1904-1953

Processed by John Buchanan, 1971
Finding aid revised by Jim Moske, 2009

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives
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Collection Summary

Title: William Church Osborn Records

Creator: Osborn, William Church, 1862-1951

Dates: 1904-1953

Extent: 1.5 linear feet (5 boxes)

Abstract: William Church Osborn was a longtime trustee of The Metropolitan Museum of Art who also served as the institution's Vice President, President and Honorary President. Records consist primarily of correspondence regarding all aspects of Museum operations including acquisitions, exhibitions, fundraising, buildings and trustee affairs.

Administrative Information

Provenance: Transfer to Museum Archives; date of transfer unknown.

Form of citation: [Title of item], [date of item], Box [number], Folder [number], William Church Osborn Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Restrictions

Access: Collection is open for research.

Selected files contained in Box 5 relating to confidential Museum business are available to Museum staff only.

Use restrictions: Consult Archives staff regarding permission to quote or reproduce.

Biographical Note

Lawyer and civic leader William Church Osborn (1862-1951) was a longtime trustee of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. He also served on the boards of a number of charitable and educational institutions, including the Children's Aid Society and his alma mater, Princeton University. Although he never ran for elective office, Osborn was active in the political arena as organizer and president of the Society to Prevent Corrupt Practices at Elections, as chairman of the New York State Democratic Committee, and as founder, president, and chairman of the Citizens Budget Commission. Osborn was first elected a trustee of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in May 1904. He later served as Vice President (1932-1941), President (1941-1947) and Honorary President (1947-1951). Significant events during the period of Osborn's leadership of the Metropolitan include the celebration of the Museum's 75th anniversary, the construction of several new building wings, and the appointment of Francis Henry Taylor as the institution's fifth Director. Osborn made several important gifts of artwork to the Museum, including such paintings as Edouard Manet's "The Spanish Singer" and Paul Gauguin's "Two Tahitian Women." Through his bequest he left to the Metropolitan works by Monet, Pissarro and William Blake.

Scope and Content

Records consist primarily of correspondence to and from William Church Osborn and relate to all aspects of Museum operations including acquisitions, exhibitions, educational programs, facilities, fundraising, relations with New York City, personnel and Trustee matters. Prominent correspondents include Bashford Dean, Roland Redmond, William M. Ivins, Lee Simonson, Herbert E. Winlock, James Rorimer, Robert Woods de Forest, Francis Henry Taylor and Robert Moses. There is substantial documentation regarding the planning and construction of The Cloisters, proposed expansion and renovation of the main Museum building, the search for a Museum Director following the 1931 death of Edward Robinson, the activities of the Museum's Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Committee, cooperation with other New York museums and relations with government agencies (particularly the New York City Parks Department under Robert Moses).

Arrangement

Records consist of two series:

Series 1. Subjects

Series 2. Chronological Correspondence

Related Materials

Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Francis Henry Taylor Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Osborn Family Osborn and Dodge Family Papers, 1726-1983, Princeton University.

Subject Headings

Corporate Names

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.).

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Administration.

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Board of Trustees.

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Management.

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Official and employees.

Personal Names

Bach, Richard F., 1888-1968

Dean, Bashford, 1867-1928

De Forest, Robert W. (Robert Weeks), 1848-1931

Ivins, William Mills, 1881-1961

Kent, Henry Watson, 1866-1948

Moses, Robert, 1888-1981

Rorimer James J. (James Joseph), 1905-1966

Redmond, Roland Livingston, 1892-1982

Saxe, John Godfrey, b. 1877

Simonson, Lee, 1888-1967

Taylor, Henry Francis, 1903-1957

Winlock, Herbert Eustis, 1884-1950

Container List

Series 1. Subjects

Box	Folder	Title
1	1	Administration, Museum, 1942
	2	American Handicraft Council, 1938-1939
	3	American Craftsmen's Cooperative Council, Inc., 1951-1952
	4-5	American Craftsmen's Educational Council, Inc., 1949-1953
	6	Art Objects, expert opinion on, 1932
	7	Bache Collection, 1943-1945
	8	Bahr Collection, 1941-1943
	9-10	Building, 1908, 1928-1935, 1941-1947
	11	By-laws, 1939
	12	Clearwater, Alphonso Trumbour, 1934-1935
	13-18	Cloisters, 1935-1936, 1942, 1944-1945
	19	Constitution, 1944, 1947
	20	Counsel, Museum, 1942-1944
	21	Costume Institute, 1943-1945
	22	Dale, Chester, 1932, 1941
	23	Dean, Bashford, 1926-1927
	24	Demonstration material, 1920, 1934-1940
2	1-2	Director, selection of, 1931, 1937, 1939, 1940
	3	Educational Work, 1943-1946
	4	Finances, 1929, 1941, 1943-1945
	5	French, Daniel Chester, 1926
	6-12	Fundraising, 1944-1946
	13	Gary, Emma T. - Estate, 1936-1938
	14	Gifts, disposal of, 1928
	15	Havemeyer, Louisine W., bequest of - Extracts from will, 1929
	16	History of the Museum, 1944-1946
	17	Ivins, William Mills, Jr., 1939, 1944-1946
	18	James, Arthur Curtiss - Estate, 1941-1942
	19	Ludlow, Mrs. Fulton, 1930-1932, 1945
	20	Mayor, A. Hyatt, 1943
	21	Modern American Art, 1927, 1938
3	22-24	Moses, Robert, 1943-1946
	1-8	Museum Estates, 1931, 1941-1945
	9	Museum of Modern Art, 1934-1935, 1944
	10	New York City - Budget, 1934, 1937, 1941
	11	New York City - Department of Parks, 1937-1938
	12	New York University - Institute of Fine Arts, 1943
	13	New Yorker article, 1939
	14	Paintings, Curator of, 1946
	15	Pieta, Palestrina, 1937
	16	Pieta, Rondanini, 1945
4	18	Reorganization, Museum, 1926
	1	Secretary, Museum, 1944
	2	Security, 1944
	3	Stokes, Isaac Newton Phelps, 1937-1938

4	4	Verplanck Room, 1939, 1947
	5	Wentworth Collection, 1937
	6-11	Whitney Museum of American Art, 1942-1943, 1945-1947
	12	Winlock, Herbert Eustis, 1937, 1939, 1944
5		Restricted files – Open to Museum staff only

Series 2. Chronological Correspondence

For a summary of the contents of significant letters included in this series refer to the 1971 finding aid by John Buchanan; consult Archives staff for access.

Box	Folder	Title
4	13	1930-1931, 1934-1939
	14	1941-1942
	15	January-March, 1943
	16	April-December, 1943
	17	January-May, 1944
	18	June-December, 1944
	19	January-May, 1945
	20	June-December, 1945
	21	1946-1947