

# **Luigi Palma di Cesnola collection, 1861-1950s (bulk, 1861-1904)**

**Finding aid prepared by Celia Hartmann**

**Processing of this collection was funded by a  
generous grant from the Leon Levy Foundation**

---

This finding aid was generated using Archivists' Toolkit on  
May 18, 2015

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives  
1000 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY, 10028-0198  
212-570-3937  
[archives@metmuseum.org](mailto:archives@metmuseum.org)

---

## Table of Contents

---

<u>Summary Information</u> .....	3
<u>Biographical note</u> .....	4
<u>Scope and Contents note</u> .....	5
<u>Arrangement note</u> .....	5
<u>Administrative Information</u> .....	6
<u>Related Materials</u> .....	6
<u>Controlled Access Headings</u> .....	7
<u>Collection Inventory</u> .....	8
<u>Series I. Museum Administration</u> .....	8
<u>Series II. Personal Correspondence and Writings</u> .....	9
<u>Series III. Memorabilia and Collected Materials</u> .....	9

---

## Summary Information

---

<b>Repository</b>	The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives
<b>Title</b>	Luigi Palma di Cesnola collection, 1861-1950s (bulk, 1861-1904)
<b>Dates</b>	1861-1950s (bulk 1861-1904)
<b>Extent</b>	5.39 Linear feet (two full-size document cases, one half-size document case, three oversize boxes)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Emanuele Pietro Paolo Maria Luigi Palma di Cesnola (1832-1904) was born in Italy, emigrated to the United States and served in the Union army during the Civil War, and in 1865 was named U.S. Consul to Cyprus, where he acquired an enormous collection of antiquities through both excavation and purchase, in addition to pursuing his diplomatic duties. By 1876 he had sold to the Metropolitan Museum some ten thousand items. He was named a trustee of the Museum and elected Secretary in 1877, and appointed as the Museum's first Director in 1879. Under his directorship, the Museum increased its membership, raised much-needed funds, increased its visibility as a cultural center, added significantly to its holdings, and expanded its Fifth Avenue building. The records are comprised of material produced by Cesnola in the course of his Museum work and personal life, as well as items about him created by others, including correspondence, reports, and visual materials.</p>

### Preferred Citation note

[Title of item], [date], Box [number], Folder [number], Luigi Palma di Cesnola collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

---

## Biographical note

---

Emanuele Pietro Paolo Maria Luigi Palma di Cesnola (1832-1904) was born in Rivarolo Canavese, Italy, to a family of distant Piedmontese nobility and was educated at the Royal Military School of Turin. He served as an officer for the Army of Sardinia in the war against Austria and for the British in the Crimean War. Around 1858 he emigrated to the United States, where he married Mary Isabel Reid, daughter of Commodore Samuel Chester Reid. During the American Civil War Cesnola rose from major of the Eleventh New York Cavalry to brigadier general, and was named colonel of the Fourth New York Cavalry. He was captured by Confederate forces in June 1863 while leading a charge at Aldie, Virginia, and spent ten months in Libby Prison.

In 1865 Cesnola was appointed United States consul at Cyprus, then under Ottoman occupation, where he served until 1876 and acquired an enormous collection of antiquities through both excavation and purchase, in addition to pursuing his diplomatic duties. Cesnola's negotiations to sell his collection to Emperor Napoleon III for display at the Palais du Louvre, and then with Russian officials for possible transfer to the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, were unsuccessful. After returning to the United States, Cesnola sold 275 crates of antiquities to the Metropolitan Museum in 1873, supervising their installation at the Museum's west 14th street location before they were put on public view. A second collection acquired in 1876 brought the total Cesnola collection at the Museum to some ten thousand items. He was named an ex-officio trustee of the Museum and elected Secretary in 1877, and appointed as the Museum's first Director in 1879.

Under his directorship, the Metropolitan Museum moved from 14th street to its current Central Park location in 1880, where his Cypriot collections occupied much of the first floor. The collection established the Museum's reputation as a repository of classical antiquities, and confirmed Cypriot items as important foci of collecting. Under his directorship, the Museum instituted annual levels of membership that both raised funds and increased its visibility as a cultural center. Additions to the collection during Cesnola's tenure included donations and bequests of paintings and decorative arts from such collectors as Henry Marquand, Junius S. Morgan, John Jacob Astor, and Catherine Lorillard Wolfe, as well as a large and eclectic musical instruments collection donated by Mrs. John Crosby Brown. The Museum's Fifth Avenue location expanded through the addition of south and north wings in 1888 and 1894, as well as the 1902 Great Hall and façade designed by Richard Morris Hunt.

In 1880 French art dealer Gaston Feuardent accused Cesnola of having reconstructed some of his excavated pieces from fragments and presented them falsely as complete works. Cesnola was vindicated in a court trial that concluded in early 1884. A committee of experts formed by the Museum also reached conclusions supporting Cesnola, who had denied all charges.

During Cesnola's tenure, a Museum trustee committee investigation of whether he had diverted funds for his own use reached negative conclusions, but did reveal his office's rudimentary and inadequate accounting procedures. His imperious treatment of both trustees and fellow staff members from 1890 on led to an 1895 split in the Board between those supportive of his methods and those demanding, unsuccessfully, his resignation.

Cesnola died in 1904 and was succeeded as director by Sir Caspar Purdon Clark, previously of the South Kensington Museum, the precursor of London's Victoria & Albert/Science Museum/Natural History Museum complex.

In the 1920s, the Museum sold duplicates from the Cesnola collection. Today the collection's approximately six thousand pieces document the art of Cyprus from ca. 3000 BCE through ca. 300 CE in all major media: terracotta, vases, bronzes, gems, glass, silver and gold plate, jewelry, and stone sculpture.

---

## Scope and Contents note

---

The Luigi Palma di Cesnola collection comprises material produced by Cesnola in the course of his Museum work and personal life, as well as items about him created by others, making it a hybrid of official records, personal papers, and related documents and ephemera. Documents related to his Metropolitan Museum directorship include correspondence, materials from the suit brought by Gaston Feuardent, and those related to the investigation of Cesnola's accounts, as well as Director's Reports to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees.

His personal correspondence and writings include letters he wrote to his wife while imprisoned during the Civil War and others about his travels and antiquities discoveries, and an 1887 pamphlet "An address on the practical value of the American museum."

Memorabilia and items about Cesnola include those donated by his granddaughter: a gold watch, photographs and other images, a watercolor of Cesnola at the Battle of Aldie, and a certificate from the Medal of Honor Legion. Also included is a collection of posthumous tributes, as well as bibliographic information on Cesnola from various sources.

---

## Arrangement note

---

The collection is arranged in three series: Series I. Museum Administration, Series II. Personal Correspondence and Writings, Series III. Memorabilia and Collected Materials

---

## **Administrative Information**

---

### **Conditions Governing Access note**

Collection is open for research. Records pertaining to The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Board of Trustees, legal proceedings, donor and object information, and specific employee information are restricted, according to Museum policy.

### **Conditions Governing Use note**

Copyright restrictions may apply. Consult Archives staff regarding permission to quote or reproduce.

### **Immediate Source of Acquisition note**

The Luigi Palma de Cesnola collection includes documents transferred from the Office of the Secretary records at various times, as well as materials donated by Carl Sandler Berkowitz, Cesnola's granddaughter Mrs. J. Bradley Cook (Violet Baker), Philippe de Montebello, and Mrs. Marhanka.

---

## **Related Materials**

---

### **Related Archival Materials note**

Luigi Palma di Cesnola Files, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives

Cesnola Collection Files, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives

Mrs. J. Bradley Cook (Violet Baker) Files, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives

Digitized material can be searched for in the Museum's Digital Collections: <http://www.metmuseum.org/research/digital-collections>

## Indexing Terms

---

### Genres and Forms of Materials

- Administrative records
- Clippings (Books, newspapers etc.)
- Correspondence
- Keys (hardware)
- Photocopies
- Photographs
- Pocket watch
- watercolors (paintings)

### Subjects - Places

- Cyprus - Antiquities
- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865

### Occupation(s)

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

### Subjects - People

- De Forest, Robert W., (Robert Weeks), 1848-1931 -- Correspondence
- Marquand, Henry Gurdon, 1819-1902 -- Correspondence

### Subjects - Topics

- Libby Prison.
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Administration.
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Officials and employees.
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.). Board of Trustees

## Series I. Museum Administration

## Collection Inventory

### Series I. Museum Administration 1870-1933 (bulk, 1880-1904)

#### Scope and Contents note

The series includes mostly incoming correspondence with some copies of outgoing letters pertaining to external matters, documentation of the Feuardent lawsuit, investigations into the Director's accounts, and posthumous tributes as well as Cesnola's will. Some folders include index cards listing correspondents mentioned in the folder, which were made at a later date.

Note that the official correspondence and related records of those who served as Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art prior to the tenure of Francis Henry Taylor (1940-1955) are interfiled in the Office of the Secretary Records, also held by Museum Archives. Consult Museum Archives staff for further information.

Box	Folder	
1	1	Attempt to dismiss. Correspondence and memoranda. 1895
2	1	Committee to Investigate Charges Against the Director (1 of 2). 1890
2	2	Committee to Investigate Charges Against the Director (2 of 2). 1890
1	2	Correspondence (1 of 3). 1875-1885
1	3	Correspondence (2 of 3). 1886-1899
1	4	Correspondence (3 of 3). 1900-1901, 1904-1905
1	5	Death and posthumous. 1904-1928 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material has been removed to box 2, folder 3.
2	3	Death and posthumous. Oversize. 1904-1905 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material removed from box 1, folder 5.
2	4	Director's report (1 of 2). November 6, 1880
2	5	Director's reports (2 of 2). 1880, 1883-1886, 1889 <i>Note:</i> Includes a summary of the folder's contents, made at a later date.
2	6	Investigation of accounts. Bills, financial statements (1 of 2). 1872-1884
2	7	Investigation of accounts. Bills, financial statements (2 of 2). Undated
1	6	Investigation of accounts. Correspondence (1 of 4). 1881, 1883-1888 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material has been removed to box 2, folder 8.
2	8	Investigation of accounts. Correspondence (1 of 4). Oversize. 1881, 1883-1888 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material removed from box 1, folder 6.
1	7	Investigation of accounts. Correspondence (2 of 4). 1889
1	8	Investigation of accounts. Correspondence (3 of 4). January-March 1890
1	9	Investigation of accounts. Correspondence (4 of 4). April 1890-1891, undated
1	10	Investigation of accounts. Documents, accountants' memoranda. 1879-1885



**Series II. Personal Correspondence and Writings**

---

		<i>Note:</i> Oversize material has been removed to box 2, folder 9. .
2	9	Investigation of accounts. Documents, accountants' memoranda. Oversize. 1879-1884 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material removed from box 1, folder 10.
1	11	Investigation of accounts. Statements. 1885-1888, 1890 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material has been removed to box 4, folder 1.
4	1	Investigation of accounts. Statements. Oversize. <i>Note:</i> Oversize material removed from box 1, folder 11.
2	10	Lawsuit, Feuardent v. Cesnola. 1876-1880
1	12	Metropolitan Museum history and description. [1881] <i>Note:</i> Compiled by Cesnola for Appleton's American Encyclopedia.
1	13	"Salaminia (Cyprus): Its history, treasures, and antiquities." Prospectus, by Alexander Palma di Cesnola. December 7, 1881

---

**Series II. Personal Correspondence and Writings 1861-1902 (bulk, 1861-1881)****Scope and Contents note**

The series includes letters sent and received by Cesnola, most notably those addressed to his wife while he was in Libby Prison, his 1887 pamphlet "An address on the practical value of the American museum," and a book of recollections including extracts of some letters received.

Box	Folder	
1	14	"An address on the practical value of the American museum." 1887 <i>Note:</i> From a presentation made July 12, 1887, Round Lake, New York.
1	15	Book of reflections, extracts of letters received. 1879-1898 <i>Note:</i> Includes a later typed transcript of the letter extracts.
1	16	From Franz Sigid. 1865, 1902
1	17	To Mary Reid (later Cesnola). Photocopied typed transcript. April 1, 1861
1	18	To Mary Reid Cesnola. Sent from Libby Prison. September 1863-March 1864
1	19	To Mr. Hall. 1876, 1878
1	20	To United States Treasurer. March 23, 1881

---

**Series III. Memorabilia and Collected Materials 1860s-1950s (bulk, 1860s-1904)****Scope and Contents note**

## Series III. Memorabilia and Collected Materials

The series includes biographical sketches of Cesnola, a bibliography of sources about him, painted and photographic portraits, a watercolor of the Battle of Aldie, photocopied clippings, and personal items including a gold pocket watch and keys to his office at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Box	Folder	
1	21	Bibliography. 1929, 1932, undated <i>Note:</i> Various lists of sources of information on Cesnola.
1	22	Biographical sketches. 1897-1952 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material has been removed to box 2, folder 11.
2	11	Biographical sketches. Oversize. pre-1904 <i>Note:</i> Oversize material removed from box 1, folder 22.
4	2	Certificate. Medal of Honor Legion. April 9, 1898
2	12	Clippings. Photocopies (1 of 2). 1882-1883
1	23	Clippings. Photocopies (2 of 2). 1900-1902
3	1	Commemorative scrapbook. 1904
5	-	Office keys (three). Undated
5	-	Pocket watch. Undated <i>Note:</i> Made by Joseph Player, inscribed "Opressa Resurgit" with the Cesnola coat of arms.
6	-	Portrait. Black and white photograph, matted and framed.
3	2	Portraits. Family photograph, reproduced image of Cesnola in Libby Prison. [1860s], undated
5	3	Watercolor painting by A. Runge. General Cesnola at Battle of Aldie. [1864] <i>Note:</i> Reproduced in Thomas Hoving's online article "My Eye": <a href="http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/hoving/hoving4-24-4.asp">http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/hoving/hoving4-24-4.asp</a>