

Preston Remington records, 1925-1970

Finding aid prepared by Celia Hartmann

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Table of Contents

<u>Summary Information</u>	3
<u>Biographical note</u>	4
<u>Scope and Contents note</u>	4
<u>Arrangement note</u>	5
<u>Administrative Information</u>	5
<u>Related Materials</u>	5
<u>Controlled Access Headings</u>	6
<u>Collection Inventory</u>	7
<u>Series I. General Files</u>	7
<u>Series II. Gifts and Bequests</u>	9
<u>Series III. Committee on Architectural Rearrangement</u>	10

Summary Information

Repository	The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives
Title	Preston Remington records, 1925-1970
Dates	1925-1970 (bulk 1932-1956)
Extent	2.0 Linear feet (4 full-size document cases, 2 half-size document cases)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Preston Remington served in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Department of Decorative Arts and its successor departments from 1923 to 1958. From 1941-1943 he chaired the Museum's Committee on Architectural Rearrangement, which comprised Museum curators and administrators tasked with surveying individual departments' existing storage, display, and conservation spaces to assist in future planning for Museum expansion. From 1949 to 1955 he was the Museum's vice director, combining major administrative responsibilities with his curatorial duties. The records include memos received and some correspondence sent by Remington on a variety of Museum topics; documentation of gifts and bequests to the Department of Decorative Arts; and records related to the Committee on Architectural Rearrangement and plans for the Museum's renovation.</p>

Preferred Citation note

[Title of item], [date of item], Box [number], Folder [number], Preston Remington records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Biographical note

After graduating from Harvard University, Preston Remington (1897-1958) joined The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Department of Decorative Arts in 1923 as an assistant. He served for the remainder of his career as assistant curator (1924-1928), associate curator (1929-1933), curator in the newly formed Department of Renaissance and Modern Art (1934-1950) and its successor Department of Renaissance Art (1950-1957), and research curator there from 1957-1958. He chaired the Museum's Committee on Architectural Rearrangement from 1941 to 1943. Composed of Museum curators and administrators, the Committee was tasked with surveying individual departments' existing storage, display, and conservation spaces to assist in future planning for Museum expansion. Named vice director of the Museum in 1949, which combined major administrative responsibilities with a curatorial role, he retired from that position due to ill health in 1955. He continued to work on a catalogue of the Museum's French silver, which had been bequeathed in large part by Catherine Wentworth during his tenure as curator. After Remington's death on April 7, 1958, Director James J. Rorimer noted that "The major accomplishment during his later years of service to the Museum was the installation of the collections of post-renaissance [sic] decorative arts in the new galleries," including the reconstruction of period rooms that opened in November 1954.

Works Consulted

"Remington, Preston." Dictionary of Art Historians (website).
www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/remingtonp.htm, accessed April 20, 2013.

Rorimer, James J. "Preston Remington." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series Vol. 16, No. 9 (May 1958).

Scope and Contents note

The Preston Remington records contain unique documentation of substantial gifts and bequests, including personal correspondence with major donors, to the Department of Decorative Arts (later named Department of Renaissance and Modern Art, and Department of Renaissance Art), including Jules Bache, Susan Dwight Bliss, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Harkness, and Catherine D. Wentworth. The records related to the Committee on Architectural Rearrangement (1941-1943) include plans for the Museum's renovation, reports to the director on architectural studies and proposed budgets, as well as correspondence with Director Francis Henry Taylor and others. Remington's copies of Museum memos on a variety of subjects, and some outgoing correspondence, provide

general information on departmental and overall Museum operations from the 1930s to 1950s.

Some materials in the records postdate Remington's tenure at the Museum, but continue correspondence or other records that he initiated.

Arrangement note

The Preston Remington records are arranged in three series: I. General Files; II. Gifts and Bequests; III. Committee on Architectural Rearrangement.

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access note

Collection is open for research. Collection contains photographs that should be handled with gloves.

Conditions Governing Use note

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

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Building (1940). Committee on Architectural Rearrangement, Office of the Secretary Records, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

O'Connor and Embury files, Wings D and K, Multiple Wings, Architectural Plans Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Remington, Preston, 1919-, Office of the Secretary Records, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Francis Henry Taylor records, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Indexing Terms

Subjects - Corporate Bodies

- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.). Department of Decorative Arts. -- History
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.). Department of Renaissance and Modern Art . -- History
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.). -- Officials and employees

Genres and Forms of Materials

- Administrative records
- Correspondence
- Reports

Subjects - People

- Taylor, Francis Henry, 1903-1957 -- Correspondence

Subjects - Topics

- Art--Collectors and collecting--United States

Series I. General Files

Collection Inventory

Series I. General Files 1932-1959, 1962, 1967

Scope and Contents note

The series contains copies of Museum memos on a variety of subjects received by Remington and a small amount of outgoing correspondence, providing a snapshot of general Museum operations during the 1930s to 1950s. The memos received by Remington related to World War II provide information on the Museum's policies and procedures necessitated in wartime, including personnel, preparedness, and safety issues, but do not document Remington's own directives or particular measures undertaken by the Department of Renaissance and Modern Art.

Arrangement note

The series is arranged alphabetically by subject, preceded by a 1951 memo from the Department of Decorative Arts explaining the arrangement, location, and management of some curators' correspondence and records at that time.

Box	Folder	
1	1	Correspondence files memo, Margaret C. Bissell. May 24, 1951
1	2	Building. Construction and maintenance. 1947-1949
1	3	Building. Laboratories and conservation. 1934-1945
1	4	Building. Lighting. 1951, 1953
1	5	Building. Office and gallery reconstruction. 1949-1952 <i>Note:</i> Oversized material from this folder has been removed to flat file 18, drawer 1, folder 10.
Flat-file 18/ drawer 1	10	Building. Office and gallery reconstruction. Floor plan. [1949-1952] <i>Note:</i> Oversized material removed from box 1, folder 5.
Box		
1	6	Building. Restaurant. 1936, 1948, 1949
1	7	Building. Vitrines. 1950, 1951, 1954
1	8	Building. Vitrines. Correspondence with fabricators Rangoni, Basilio & Figlio (Florence, Italy). 1949-1953, 1980
1	9	Costume exhibitions. 1939, 1941-1945
1	10	Finances. 1933-1949
1	11	Hours and closings. 1936-1959
1	12	Inventories. 1942, 1946
1	13	Loans. Policies. 1935, 1940, 1948
1	14	Loans. To institutions A-M. 1936-1968
1	15	Loans. To institutions N-Z. 1933-1962

Series I. General Files

1	16	Loans. To Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1937-1942
1	17	Loans. From individuals. 1932-1967
1	18	Loans. Gibbons, Mrs. John Henry. 1933-1953
1	19	Memos. Art handling. 1945, 1948
1	20	Memos. Art purchases. 1933, 1934, 1937
1	21	Memos. Building operation. 1933, 1948, 1953
1	22	Memos. Director's office. 1932-1947
1	23	Memos. Education activities. 1934, 1936, 1940
1	24	Memos. Gifts and valuations. 1932, 1936, 1945
1	25	Memos. Hours, closings, holidays. 1932-1949
1	26	Memos. Inquiries. 1943
1	27	Memos. Loans. 1932-1956
1	28	Memos. Mail. 1936-1950
1	29	Memos. Opinions on art. 1932-1937
1	30	Memos. Printing. 1936, 1941, 1942
1	31	Memos. Publications. 1936, 1938, 1944, 1949
2	1	Memos. Receptions, special events. 1941, 1946, 1949
2	2	Memos. Recordkeeping. 1934, 1935
2	3	Memos. Supplies. 1935, 1939, 1942, 1949
2	4	Memos. Telephone use and service. 1932, 1949
2	5	Memos. Television. 1941, 1953, 1954
2	6	Personnel. Contributions. 1935-1952, undated
2	7	Personnel. Department of Guardianship and Protection. 1942-1945
2	8	Personnel. Employee records. 1944-1948
2	9	Personnel. Job descriptions and qualifications. 1941, 1942, 1946, 1956
2	10	Personnel. Memos and advisories. 1934-1948
2	11	Personnel. New York University Institute of Fine Arts classes. 1936-1961
2	12	Personnel. Retirement. 1934-1948
		<i>Access note:</i> Redacted copies of documents with salary information replace originals in this folder. Restricted documents may be accessed on or after June 2029, at the discretion of Archives staff.
2	13	Personnel. Salaries. 1925-1949
		<i>Access Note:</i> Documents with salary information have been removed from this folder. Restricted documents may be accessed on or after February 2028, at the discretion of Archives staff.
2	14	Personnel. Vacation policy. 1946, 1947
2	15	Regulations. Department of Renaissance and Modern Art, Department of Service and Supply. 1942, 1951
2	16	Department of Renaissance and Modern Art. Activity. 1948
2	17	Department of Renaissance and Modern Art. "A report on the strengths and weaknesses of the collections" (two copies). March 1949

Series II. Gifts and Bequests

2	18	Department of Renaissance and Modern Art. Ten most important objects in the collection. 1934, 1944, undated
2	19	Department of Renaissance and Modern Art. History, summary of holdings. 1932, undated
2	20	Reports. "Where is The Metropolitan Museum Going?" 1943
2	21	Storage. 1942, 1951
2	22	Work Projects Administration. 1937-1947 <i>Note:</i> Includes monthly reports of WPA activities at the Museum from April 1941 to January 1942.
2	23	World War II. Air raids and building control. 1941, 1942
2	24	World War II. Building maintenance. 1941, 1942, 1944
2	25	World War II. Exhibits. 1943
2	26	World War II. General. 1941, 1942, 1945
2	27	World War II. Loans for exhibits. 1941, 1942
2	28	World War II. Office of War Information article. June-July 1943
2	29	World War II. Personnel. 1941-1944, 1952
2	30	World War II. Storage. 1940-1944, 1946
2	31	World's Fair. "Masterpieces of Art" exhibition. 1940

Series II. Gifts and Bequests 1925-1970

Scope and Contents note

The series contains both correspondence and administrative materials pertaining to gifts and bequests to the Department of Decorative Arts during Preston Remington's tenure as curator, and some postdating it that continue correspondence initiated during that time. Individual folders contain correspondence regarding specific major donors to the department. The files document Remington's long and often cordial relationships with major donors to the department. Several visits made by Remington and his staff to the homes of collectors, including Jules Bache, Susan Dwight Bliss, and George D. Pratt in the New York City area, are documented by annotated inventories of artwork.

Arrangement note

The series is arranged alphabetically by last name of donor, preceded by a general report on gifts and bequests to the department in the years 1919 to 1947.

Box	Folder	
3	1	Report on gifts and bequests, 1919-1947. October 24, 1947
3	2	B. 1936-1941
3	3	Bache, Jules S. 1943-1945
3	4	Beattie, W. Gedney. 1937, 1941
3	5	Bliss, Susan Dwight. 1944-1953
3	6	C. 1925-1935
3	7	F, G. 1917, 1937

Series III. Committee on Architectural Rearrangement

3	8	Garvan, Francis P. 1919-1954, 1967
3	9	Gary, Emma T., bequest. 1928-1950
3	10	H. 1938, 1939, 1960
3	11	Harkness, Edward S. 1938, 1950
3	12	Harkness, Edward S. (Mrs.). 1919-1951
3	13	Hyde, James Hazen. 1948-1960
3	14	K. 1924, 1955-1956
3	15	Katz, Sigmund J. 1951-1953
3	16	L, M. 1935-1968
3	17	Lehman, Robert. 1943-1960
3	18	Martin, Mary. 1936-1946
3	19	Morgan, J.P., estate. 1943-1954
3	20	Mortimer, Stanley. 1949-1961
3	21	N, O, P. 1933-1954
3	22	Pratt, George D. 1926, 1935-1942
3	23	R. 1927-1956
4	1	Robertson, Ralph K. (Mrs. Ann Payne Blumenthal). 1958-1970
4	2	S-Z. 1936-1969
4	3	Schiff, John. Collection of majolica. 1946
4	4	Shattuck, Mary Strong (Mrs. Albert R.). 1929-1935, 1946, 1948
4	5	Wentworth, Catherine D. (Mrs.). 1935-1949
4	6	Whitney, Payne (Mrs. Helen Hay). 1942-1944

Series III. Committee on Architectural Rearrangement 1940-1947

Historical note

Preston Remington chaired the Committee on Architectural Rearrangement (1941-1943), which was tasked with surveying individual departments' existing storage, display, and conservation spaces. This information was provided to the Museum's architects to assist in their designs for future Museum expansion, which were to include Director Francis Henry Taylor's vision of the Metropolitan Museum as five separate museums, and a planned merger with the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1940, Robert B. O'Connor, partner of Museum trustee and Building Committee Chair Benjamin Wistar Morris in the firm of Morris and O'Connor, surveyed the Museum and presented Director Francis Henry Taylor with suggestions for Museum-wide changes. As part of a cost-sharing arrangement with New York City on planned architectural changes, Parks Commissioner Robert Moses recommended that the Museum employ his agency's consulting architect, Aymar Embury II. In 1942, O'Connor and Embury created Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury, Associate Architects, to work on the Museum's expansion. According to Morrison H. Heckscher's *Bulletin* "The Metropolitan Museum of Art: An architectural history," the proposed expansion would only be realized, in much revised form, in the 1950s for a variety of reasons, including delays occasioned by wartime, the need for extensive postwar fundraising, cancellation of the planned merger with the Whitney, and disagreements over some of the architects' design suggestions, which included significant changes to the Museum's iconic Fifth Avenue exterior and Great Hall.

Series III. Committee on Architectural Rearrangement

Work Consulted

Heckscher, Morrison H. "The Metropolitan Museum of Art: An architectural history." *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*. New Series, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Summer 1995).

Scope and Contents note

The series consists predominantly of reports from the Museum's various departments detailing their current exhibition and storage space needs, for consideration by the Committee in determining the Museum's planned renovation. Also included are correspondence and reports from the architects of the Museum's planned expansion, Robert O'Connor and Aymar Embury II, with suggestions and plans for extensive changes to the Museum's interior and exterior.

Arrangement note

The series is arranged alphabetically by name of individuals, including museum staff and architectural consultants, and of departments in the Museum.

Box	Folder	
4	7	American Wing. Undated
4	8	Architectural Rearrangement Committee. 1941, 1942, undated
4	9	Architectural Rearrangement Committee. Complete departmental reports. March-April 1941
4	10	Arms and Armor. 1941, 1943
4	11	Committees and sub-committees. February, September 1943
4	12	Conservation and Technical Research Laboratories. [1941-1943]
4	13	Development committee and sub-committee. 1943
4	14	Director's office. 1929, 1942, 1943
4	15	Education and Museum Extension. 1943 <i>Note:</i> Oversized material from this folder has been removed to flat file 18, drawer 1, folder 10.
Flat-file		
18/ drawer 1	10	Education and Museum Extension. Plan, Museum of Casts. June 9, 1941 <i>Note:</i> Oversized material removed from box 4, folder 15.
Box		
4	16	Educational Work. Elliott, Huger. February-March 1941
4	17	Egyptian Art. 1941, 1943 <i>Note:</i> Oversized material from this folder has been removed to flat file 18, drawer 1, folder 11.
Flat-file		
18/ drawer 1	11	Egyptian Art. Floor plans. April 1941, undated <i>Note:</i> Oversized material removed from box 4, folder 17.
Box		
4	18	Embury, Aymar II. January-June 1943

Series III. Committee on Architectural Rearrangement

Note: Oversized material from this folder has been removed to flat file 18, drawer 1, folder 11.

Flat-file

18/ drawer 1 11 Embury, Aymar II. Plan, clipping. 1942, 1943
Note: Oversized material removed from box 4, folder 18.

Box

4 19 Far Eastern Art. 1941
Note: Oversized material from this folder has been removed to flat file 18, drawer 1, folder 11.

Flat-file

18/ drawer 1 11 Far Eastern Art. Floor plans. May 1943, undated
Note: Oversized material removed from box 4, folder 19.

Box

4 20 Greek and Roman Art. 1941, 1943
 4 21 Harrison, Laurence S. April 22, 1943
 4 22 Ivins, William M., Jr. March 25, 1940
 4 23 Jayne, Horace F. 1942, 1943
 4 24 Library. April, May 1943
 4 25 Medieval Art. 1941, 1943
 4 26 Morris, Benjamin W. 1942-1944
 4 27 Near Eastern Art. October 9, 1940
Note: Oversized material from this folder has been removed to flat file 18, drawer 1, folder 11.

Flat-file

18/ drawer 1 11 Near Eastern Art. Second floor plan. 1940
Note: Oversized material removed from box 4, folder 27.

Box

4 28 O'Connor, Robert B. 1940-1947
 4 29 Paintings. May 19, 1943
 4 30 Photographs. [1941-1943]
 4 31 Prints. May 1943
 4 32 Remington, Preston. March, April 1943
 5 1 Renaissance and Modern Art (1 of 2). 1941
Note: Oversized material from this folder has been removed to flat file 18, drawer 1, folder 11.

Flat-file

18/ drawer 1 11 Renaissance and Modern Art (1 of 2). Oversized.
Note: Oversized material removed from box 5, folder 1.

Box

Series III. Committee on Architectural Rearrangement

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|---|---|--|
| 5 | 2 | Renaissance and Modern Art (2 of 2). 1943 |
| 5 | 3 | Stan, Anisoara. "A plan for an ethnographic museum of peasant art." 1942 |
| 5 | 4 | Taylor, Francis Henry. Director's reports. 1940-1944 |
| 5 | 5 | Wallace. Display materials. April, May 1943 |