

Virginia White Papers MS.19

Finding aid prepared by Anna J. Clarkson

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art

June 27, 2012

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Summary Information

Repository	Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art
Title	Virginia White Papers
Date [bulk]	Bulk, 1912-1938
Date [inclusive]	1889-1951
Extent	0.5 Linear feet (2 boxes)
Language	English
Abstract	<p><i>The Virginia White Papers</i> reflect primarily the professional activities of renown antique and decorative arts expert, Virginia Purviance Bonsal White (1870-1955) a native of Baltimore. The papers consist of correspondence, a diary, a scrapbook, ephemera, and a publication proof. The materials cover a period of 1889-1951 with the bulk of material from 1912-1938. The collection is arranged into four series: 1) Art Collection. 2) Correspondence. 3) Ephemera. 4) Publication.</p>

Preferred Citation

Virginia White Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

Biographical Information

Virginia Purviance Bonsal White (1869-1955) great-niece of Johns Hopkins, founder of the namesake university and hospital, was a prominent Maryland social leader and authority on antiques.

White was actively involved with Harwood House Museum (subsequently Hammond-Harwood Association, Inc. since 1940) a colonial era Annapolis, MD residence and museum. At Harwood, White first learned about American decorative Arts from Richard T. Haines Halsey (1865-1943), Curator for the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who taught one of the first scholarly courses in American Decorative Arts in the nation at St. John's College from 1928-1932. Later, White served as a board member and private donor where she actively helped Harwood acquire extensive period furnishings during the 1940s and 50s. It was said that if she saw an item she wanted that she bought it, "counting on finding the money later. Such was her faith in her judgment that she never failed to find a sponsor."

In 1933 White bequeathed her extensive and valuable collection of early Maryland silver to The Baltimore Museum of Art. Works totaled over 150 items by Maryland silversmiths such as: George Aiken, William Ball, Barry Standish, Boehme Charles Louis, Joseph and Thomas Brass, Lewis Buichle, John Chalmers, Michael De Young, George Christopher Dowig, John Erwin, William Faris, Sr., George Franciscus, Sr., Littleton Holland, William Hollingshead, Hosea Wilson & Co., Christopher Hughes, Nicolas Hutchins, Joseph L. Jackson, Samuel Kirk, Peter Kirkwood, Samuel John Lea, Suel T. Leonard, Peter Leret, John Lynch, John Monteith, Frederick Nusz, Andrew Osthoff, John Patterson, Joseph Philippe, Lewis Joseph Poncet, William Richardson, Riggs & Griffith, George W. Riggs, Richard Rutter, Caleb Shields, Samuel Soumaien, T. & A.E. Warner, Joseph Toy, John Walrave, Andrew Ellicott Warner, Thomas H. Warner, Simon Wedge, R., William Whetcroft, Christopher Wynn, and several unknown makers.

Her knowledge of antiques was so renowned that U.S. customs officials often asked White to appraise rare items brought into the country. White was an original member of the Colony Club of New York City and a member of the Baltimore Assembly, a yearly gathering of the city's social leaders. She married banker and philanthropist Miles White, Jr. and had two sons, Francis M. White and Stephen Bonsal White.

Scope and Contents

The Virginia White Papers reflect primarily the professional activities of renown antique and decorative arts expert, Virginia Purviance Bonsal White (1870-1955) a native of Baltimore. The papers consist of correspondence, a diary, a scrapbook, ephemera, and a publication proof. The materials cover a period of

1889-1951 with the bulk of material from 1912-1938. The collection is arranged into four series: 1) Art Collection. 2) Correspondence. 3) Ephemera. 4) Publication.

Series 1, *Art Collection*, contains a large scrapbook, a small diary, and loose papers related to White's numerous antique purchases and collection. The large scrapbook measures 11 1/2 x 9 x 2 inches and contains over 139 pages of pasted black and white photographs of items purchased (and in some cases sold) with notations of place of origin, description, size, price etc. The small diary measures 7 x 5 x 1 inches and is dated "December 3, 1919. The diary seems to detail transactions of items purchased after 1919 and notes collection/inventory number, place of origin, description, size, price, and whether it was donated as a "museum gift" at a later date. The collection also contains loose papers related to Virginia White's art collection as a whole including drafts of correspondence relating to her large gift to the Baltimore Museum of Art of Maryland silver in the 1930s, a *List of Articles Sent by Mrs. Miles White, Jr.* to the American Art Association, New York, as well as miscellaneous papers about the history of objects.

Series 2, *Correspondence*, contains correspondence between Virginia White and other individual persons, dealers and scholars relating to her antique and decorative arts transactions. The correspondence primarily includes bills of sale and background history on items purchased by White.

Series 3, *Ephemera*, contains 1 photograph of a young man, 1 illustration of stitching types, 1 monogrammed handkerchief, and 4 undated Christmas cards.

Series 4, *Publication*, contains a proof of the publication *Maryland Silversmiths: 1715-1830* by J. Hall Pleasants and Howard Sill dated 1930.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into four series: 1. Art Collection. 2. Correspondence. 3. Photographs. 4. Publication. Each series is arranged alphabetically by subject while the contents are arranged in chronological order when possible. The collection was received in no particular order. Intellectual control was established by the Archivist.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art June 27, 2012

Restrictions and Use

The Virginia White Papers are the physical property of the Manuscripts Collections, Baltimore Museum of Art. Copyright, except in cases where material has passed into the public domain, belongs to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult a Library staff member.

Provenance

Transferred from Decorative Arts Department to the Archives in August of 2005.

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Anna J. Clarkson in June of 2012.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Baltimore Museum of Art
- Metropolitan Museum of Art. (New York, N.Y.)
- National Gallery of Art. (U.S.)
- Pennsylvania Museum of Art.
- Tiffany and Company.

Genre(s)

- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Financial records
- Scrapbooks

Personal Name(s)

- Du Pont, Henry Francis, 1880-1969

Subject(s)

- Furniture
- Silverware
- Women art collectors -- United States

Physical Characteristics

As a whole, the collection is in fair condition. Ink in the small diary is extremely faded and hard to read. The spine of the large scrapbook is almost removed from the book and should be handled with extreme care. In addition, the scrapbook is missing eight photographs. Also, there is an extremely brittle document that has had a preservation copy made in the Correspondence Series.

Art Collection

Collection Inventory

Art Collection 1919-1933 3.0 folders		
	Box	Folder
Large Scrapbook undated	1	1
Small Diary 1919	1	2
	Book	Folder
Papers 1933	1	3
Correspondence 1889, 1898, 1912-1916, 1918-1922, 1924-1929, 1931-1933, 1938, 1942, 1948, 1951, undated 1.0 folders	Box	Folder
Baltimore Museum of Art 1924, 1933, 1942	1	4
Blair, Gist 1925		
Brent, Alice 1920		
Canter, Sally undated		
Carey, T.V. 1914-1915		
C.F. Meislahn 1938		

Correspondence

Clarkson, Dr. Joseph A. 1914

Davis, Caroline E. 1898

DuPont, Henry Francis 1931

Emmanuel Church Parish House 1923

Forman, E.M. 1928

Harding, H. Wareham 1915-1916, 1919, 1922

Harrison, Mrs. M. S. 1913

Hayward, Grace A. 1926

Hill, Lockwood & Redfield 1925

Jacobs, Mary Frick undated

J.W. Berry & Son 1914

Metropolitan Museum of Art 1924

Null, Dr. Francis T. 1913, 1922

Parr, Ral 1929

Correspondence

Paud, Mary 1921

Paul, A.G. 1889

Paul, J.E. 1933

Pennington, Josias 1920

Pennsylvania Museum of Art 1914-1916

Perry, Shaw and Hepburn 1932

Pitt, Faris C. 1920-1921

Pleasants, Dr. J. Hall 1931

Princeton University 1948

Robinson, James undated

Schwarz, John 1951

Sellers, Horace Wells 1927

Sherman, Frederic Fairchild 1929

Smithsonian Institution, National Gallery of Art 1925

Ephemera

Thomas, J. Rochelle 1926

Tiffany & Co. 1914

University Club undated

Vernay, Arthur 1912, 1915, 1918

White, Miles Jr. undated

Winterthur 1929

Ephemera undated	1.0 folders	Box	Folder
		1	5
Publication 1930	1.0 folders	Box	Folder
		2	1