

ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

A Guide to the Irwin F. Cortelyou Papers on the Works of Ezra Ames, 1919-1987

Summary Information

Repository

Albany Institute of History & Art Library

Creator

Irwin F. Cortelyou

Title

Irwin F. Cortelyou Papers on the Works of Ezra Ames, 1919-1987

Identifier

MG 86

Date

1919-1987

Physical Description

11 boxes; 5.5 linear feet

Physical Location

The materials are located onsite in the Museum.

Language of the Material

English

Abstract

Irwin F. Cortelyou (1897-1997) was a writer and art historian who lived most of her life in Rumson, New Jersey. In 1949, she began to research the works of the painter, Ezra Ames, initially as a favor for a friend. Her research led her to Ames' account book at the Albany Institute of History & Art. Cortelyou's research and writings on Ames were later expanded and published in 1956 as *Ezra Ames of Albany*, a catalogue of over five hundred of his paintings.

This collection contains correspondence, photographs, research materials, and card files.

Preferred Citation

Preferred citation for this material is as follows:

Irwin F. Cortelyou Papers on the Works of Ezra Ames, 1919-1987, MG 86. Albany Institute of History & Art Library, Albany, New York.

Conditions Governing Access and Use

Restrictions on Access

None

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Accession: #M 1990.020

Accession Source/Date: Irwin F. Cortelyou, 1990

Processing Information

Processed by J. Chodikov, 1999. Finding aid updated by H. Cox, September 2020.

Biographical/Historical

Irwin F. Cortelyou (1897-1997) was a writer and art historian who lived most of her life in Rumson, New Jersey. She was raised in Riverdale, New York, until she finished school around 1916. She then moved to New York City where she worked as a nurse at Presbyterian Hospital. In 1922, she married George Bruce Cortelyou, Jr., son of the former U.S. Treasury Secretary from Theodore Roosevelt's administration. The couple moved to Rumson in the 1930s.

In 1949, she began to research the works of the painter Ezra Ames, at first as a favor for a friend, as she attempted to locate a companion portrait for two Ames portraits that he owned. As she was doing this, she was encouraged to research further and to undertake the task of compiling the first catalogue of Ames' works. Her research led her to Theodore Bolton, an art historian and writer for the New-York Historical Society. Bolton directed her to the Albany Institute of History and Art, which owned Ames' account book, a document that became one of her most valuable research tools in collecting and verifying information about Ames and his works. Later in 1949, Bolton joined her as a collaborator though Cortelyou still conducted most of the research.

From 1951 to 1952, the two wrote three articles about Ames' life and works for the *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*. In 1956, these articles were revised and expanded and, along with the addition of a bibliography and a catalogue of over five hundred of Ames' paintings, were published by the New-York Historical Society in a single work titled *Ezra Ames of Albany*. In 1957, a supplement to the catalogue was published. Cortelyou continued to compile research on Ames through the 1960s and 1970s, possibly for another catalogue supplement that was never published. Well into the 1980s she was sought out by people who believed they owned portraits by Ames and looked to her for verification.

Scope and Contents

The Cortelyou Papers spans the period from 1919-1987, and primarily contains documents relating to the research Cortelyou compiled for the articles, catalogue, and book that she and Bolton wrote on the life and works of Ezra Ames. It is divided into four series: Correspondence, Photographs, Research Materials, and Card Files.

Correspondence, 1949-1987, contains both the letters Cortelyou received and carbon copies of letters she sent in reply during the years she was compiling research for the articles, book, and catalogue, as well as the later supplement to the catalogue. The folders are arranged in alphabetical order. Correspondence within folders that are labeled with either a person's or an organization's name, are arranged chronologically. In the folders labeled (letter) general, the correspondence is arranged alphabetically, then chronologically if there are multiple letters. Also arranged alphabetically is the Dutchess County folder. In many of the letters there are references made to people in whose letters are in other folders. These references were the leads Cortelyou used to track down the true owners of paintings, as well as to find the correct genealogical information and personal history of the sitters in Ames' portraits.

Most of the permission slips mentioned in the correspondence are in the Research Materials. Many others were attached to their corresponding letters and are included in the folders that bear their name as well as in the Frick Art Reference Library folder. In the folder titled Miscellaneous, are newspaper clippings and some blank questionnaires, which Cortelyou would send to portrait owners, for them to mail back when completed. Other notable inclusions in this series are postcards, slides, genealogical and biographical

information about the sitters of Ames' portraits, photographs, sketches, notecards, invitations, signed questionnaires about specific portraits, rough drafts of letters and telegrams that Cortelyou did not send, descriptions of specific portraits from their owners, and some personal correspondence between Cortelyou and Bolton, and Cortelyou and Livingston Houston

Photographs, undated, is made up predominately of 8 x 10 black and white photographs of the portraits and miniatures by Ezra Ames as well as his other works, taken by various photographers. Some of these photographs have duplicates, but also contained in this series are color photographs, small snapshots, photostats, and magazine cutouts of Ames' works. The negatives to many of the photographs are included in their corresponding folders as well. Any other negatives are filed in the Other Negatives folder.

Folders are arranged in alphabetical order, with most of the photographs in groups by the sitter's first letter of their last name and then by the sitter's first name, if more than one person from a family was painted. If more than one painting was made of the same person over time, those photographs are then arranged in chronological order. Photographs that have tabs attached correspond to the page and illustration number in the Cortelyou and Bolton book. However, every illustration in the book does not have a tabbed photograph in this series.

There are also folders containing photographs of certain owners and organizations private collections. Photographs of sitters from some families and individuals that were numerous enough to separate from the larger groups, are also contained in their own folders, such as the Ames family, the Clinton family, Alexander Hamilton, and Ames' own self-portraits, among others. Other folders contain some of Cortelyou's early research into Ezra Ames and the Ames family, and some have photographs of portraits that are not attributed to Ames, and portraits that were not unidentified as to the name of the sitter. Photographs of Ames' other works, and various other pictures are in the Miscellaneous folder.

Research Materials, 1919-1972, contains the materials that Cortelyou accumulated while researching Ames' work, as well as copies of the *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* in which the original articles were published. The series holds exhibition catalogues, brochures from events and historical sites, newsletters and other works published by organizations, biographical information on the sitters in portraits that appeared in other published works, newspaper and magazine articles (both original and photocopied) containing biographical information on the subjects of paintings, and lists of photographs of Ames' work that organizations possessed. There are also small sketchbooks containing drawings by Cortelyou of portraits she had seen personally. These books were found within the card files but were moved to Research Materials during processing. In addition, at the beginning of the series, is a folder of signed slips that Cortelyou and Bolton issued to owners of Ames works to obtain their permission to reproduce photographs in the book and catalogue. The slips are arranged in chronological order, with any undated slips filed after in alphabetical order. The rest of the folders in this series are arranged in alphabetical order.

Card Files, undated, consists almost entirely of index cards and pieces of paper cut to that size. It has four subseries within: Catalogue for Printer, Bibliography, Historical Information, and Miscellaneous. The information on the cards is Cortelyou's notes on Ames' paintings (including his miniatures and other works) and the reference materials that were used in the writing of the book, as well as historical and biographical information Cortelyou collected on Ames, his family, and the sitters in Ames' works. The cards are not separated into folders but are housed together in boxes. They retain Cortelyou's original tabbed dividers and remain in the arrangement she created.

The Catalogue for Printer sub-series starts with the cards Cortelyou accumulated after the first supplement to the catalogue was printed, followed by the cards containing the information that went into the original catalogue. In this subseries, there is only information about Ames' portraits, and not his miniatures and other works, but the cards contain information about unlocated portraits as well as the located ones. On each card there is the name of the sitter, the size of the portrait, the owner of the portrait, or if the portrait was unlocated, where a photo reproduction can be obtained, and as much descriptive and biographical information about each portrait that Cortelyou was able to accumulate. The cards are arranged in alphabetical order by the name of the sitter in each portrait.

The Bibliography subseries collects Cortelyou's notes on all the reference material she searched through including material for the book itself, the catalogue, and the works she chose not to use. There are two main sections to this subseries. The first, Hyphenated Words, is a short reference list of words that shows the correct way of writing words that could potentially be confused as whether to write them as one word, two words, or with a hyphen between them. The next one, Bibliography, is divided into three smaller sections called Essay, Catalogue, and References Not Cited, which are each separated into manuscripts, books, magazines, and newspapers, in that order. The only exception being within the Catalogue section, where books is called published sources, and is filed after newspapers. The final newspaper section is then followed by four smaller sections, called Personal and Miscellaneous, Manuscript Duplicates, Duplicate Cards, and To Be Read, which contains citations of works that if Cortelyou ever had read, it is unknown.

The third subseries, Historical Information, contains the biographical, genealogical, and historical notes Cortelyou collected on Ames, his estate and family, and the sitters in Ames' portraits, as well as historical information on Albany, the surrounding area, and other towns Ames lived and visited during his life. Also included are notes about interviews Cortelyou held with people early in her research of Ames, including one with Theodore Bolton.

In addition, within this subseries, are sections containing Cortelyou's notes on Museum and Private Collections of Ames' works, and the expenses she accrued in conducting her research, including money she paid for materials and receipts she received in paying for prints of photographs. Following this are two sections called Field Work and Photography. Field Work contains notes on trips Cortelyou planned to make to view

portraits, and a file of addresses of people with whom she corresponded. The last section, Photographs, lists negatives given to the Frick Art Reference Library by Cortelyou.

The last subseries, Miscellaneous, begins with Cortelyou's notes on Ames' miniatures, landscapes, drawings and other works, and engravings made from Ames' portraits. Following are her notes on works not by Ames and works that are attributed to Ames but are questionable. After this is a large section called Addenda. This section contains note cards on miniatures and prints that were not meant to be catalogued, works where permission to reproduce was denied, and acknowledgements. This is followed by another large section called Not for Catalogue, which contains notes about portraits not by Ames, and are not to be put in the catalogue. This section is followed by cards about unexamined works, Ames Exhibitions, research work on Ames by William Sawitzky, Albany's Bicentennial, portraits that were previously anonymous but were subsequently attributed to Ames by Cortelyou, AIHA prints located at the Frick Art Reference Library, Costumes, and notes written to Cortelyou.

Next is another large section called Extracts Account Books, containing excerpts taken directly out of Ames' account books, and is separated into three smaller sections: Miscellaneous Totals; Signs; and Extracts Miscellaneous Work. This is followed by another large section called Patron File. This is a listing of the sitters and buyers of Ames' works and how much was paid or owed. This section is separated into identified, questionable, and unidentified sitters for first his portraits, and again for his miniatures. This section ends with a small section called Discard and Duplicate.

Finally, there are sections of cards devoted to the works of Julius Ames, Ezra Ames' son, Cortelyou's notes for the first supplement to the catalogue, notes on miscellaneous paintings, the James family of Albany, and lastly, two sections of research into P.T. Barnum's American Museum, which do not seem to be related to the work on Ezra Ames, but might possibly have been meant for a separate work on Barnum. Also included with these cards is a road map from 1951, which must have been used by Cortelyou on her travels to see and evaluate portraits at the homes of the various owners, which were spread throughout New York. These visits are well documented throughout Cortelyou's correspondence with the portrait owners.

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