

# ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

## A Guide to the Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, 1846-1955

### Summary Information

#### Repository

Albany Institute of History & Art Library

#### Creator

Erastus Dow Palmer

#### Title

Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, 1846-1955

#### Identifier

AQ 185

#### Date

1846-1955

#### Physical Description

1.1 linear feet; 3 boxes

#### Physical Location

The materials are located onsite in the Museum.

#### Language of the Material

English

#### Abstract

Erastus Dow Palmer (1817-1904) was an American sculptor. Born in Pompey, New York, he and his family moved to Albany, New York, in 1849 when Palmer began working on large-scale sculptures. His sculpture, *Angel at the Sepulchre* (1865), remains in Albany. Palmer son's Walter Launt Palmer (1854-1932), also became an artist, best known for his winter scenes. Following his death in 1904, Erastus Palmer was buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery.

This collection contains correspondence, personal papers, and photographs.

## **Preferred Citation**

Preferred citation for this material is as follows:

Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, 1846-1955, AQ 185. Albany Institute of History & Art Library, Albany, New York.

## **Conditions Governing Access and Use**

### **Restrictions on Access**

None

### **Copyright**

The researcher assumes full responsibility for conforming with the laws of copyright. Whenever possible, the Albany Institute of History & Art Library will provide information about copyright owners and other restrictions, but the legal determination ultimately rests with the researcher. Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be discussed with the Archivist/Librarian.

## **Immediate Source of Acquisition**

Donated by Joseph Gavit, 1966.

## **Processing Information**

Processed by J.B. Bott, April 1999. Finding aid updated by H. Cox June 2020.

## **Biographical/Historical**

Erastus Dow Palmer was born April 2, 1817, in Pompey, Onondaga County, New York. As a youth, he moved with his family to Utica, New York, where his father, a carpenter, taught him the basics of woodworking. In 1834, Palmer moved to Dunkirk, New York, to start a career in woodcarving and joining. While in Dunkirk, he was married to Malinda Alton. By 1840 Palmer had returned to Utica, having lost his wife and their baby to complications of childbirth. Within three years Palmer again married, to Mary Jane Seaman.

1846 marked a turning point in Palmer's life and ultimately in his career. The story has been related that a neighbor showed him a cameo portrait imported from Europe. Palmer, impressed by the delicacy of the carving, was determined to try his hand at the medium. His first

undertaking was a portrait of his wife Mary Jane. When it was finished Palmer showed it to a friend, who in turn showed it to a local lawyer, Thomas R. Walker. The cameo was praised by Walker and, in gratitude, Palmer executed a portrait of Walker, thus beginning his career as a sculptor.

The late 1840s art scene in America and Europe was dominated by neoclassicism, a style whose influence became clearly evident in Palmer's work. His first idealized subject was Virginia, a shell cameo whose subject was taken from a popular novel. The following year Palmer carved his first full-length sculpture, *The Mariner's Wife*. Palmer's work often blends classical tradition with inspiration from his personal life. This idea is clearly evident in works such as *Infant Ceres*, where his daughter served as a model; that bust was carved in a realistic fashion and then given an allegorical title.

In 1849 Palmer and his wife moved to Albany, New York, presumably in search of patronage in both public and private spheres. In the 1850's Palmer opened a studio near the State Capitol building, and it soon became a center of artistic activity. Palmer's success in Albany allowed him to take on a number of assistants, including sculptors Richard Henry Parks and Charles Calverley, which in turn granted him the freedom to acquire more commissions and, ultimately, to reach a wider audience.

However, while Palmer reached artistic maturity during the 1850s, his career would be stunted by the onset of the Civil War. While the conflict itself inspired one of Palmer's most celebrated works, *Peace in Bondage*, Palmer's overall patronage declined markedly during and after the war. Furthermore, he created only two works between 1867 and 1872, one of which, *Angel of the Sepulchre*, was commissioned by Robert Lenox Banks for his family lot in Albany Rural Cemetery.

In 1873, Palmer was commissioned by New York State to execute a full-length statue of statesman Robert R. Livingston. In preparation for the Livingston commission Palmer made a trip to Europe, which was, in fact, his first trip abroad. The excursion also included two young painters: his son Walter Launt Palmer and Walter's childhood friend Will Hicok Low. After touring, Palmer rented a studio in Paris where he modeled the figure of Livingston. The piece was cast in bronze later the following year by the Barbedienne foundry and eventually shipped to America. Palmer had two other copies cast in bronze. One was presented to at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., while the other remained in Albany at the State Court of Appeals. A plaster version of the statue is also located at the Albany Institute of History and Art.

By this time Palmer was nearly seventy years old and, in addition to aging, the AQ 185 3 neoclassical style for which he was so well known was falling out of fashion on both sides of the Atlantic. Classic idealization was replaced by a more active realism, marble (Palmer's medium of choice) was replaced increasingly by bronze, and Palmer and his contemporaries were superseded by a new generation of artists. However, it should not be thought that Palmer left no artistic legacy. During his lifetime, much was made of the point that, unlike other sculptors of his generation and those succeeding him, Palmer did not go to Europe to study and work. The result was that his style developed in a particularly America manner. At the time it was thought that staying at home left his art pure and uncorrupted by the influences of Europe.

Erastus Dow Palmer died in Albany on March 9, 1904; he was buried in Albany Rural Cemetery. Palmer was survived by his widow Mary Jane Seaman Palmer, his son Walter Launt Palmer, and his four daughters, Isabelle (Mrs. W.H. Fassette) of London, England, Fanny (Mrs. Joseph Gavit) of New York City, Rebecca (Mrs. Frank Burton) of New York City, and Madeleine (Mrs. Clive Jaffray) of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

## Scope and Contents

The Erastus Dow Palmer Collection spans the period from 1846-1959 and primarily contains documents relating to the sculptor's personal and family life. The collection is arranged in three series: Correspondence; Personal Papers; and Photographs. The majority of the items in this collection were donated to the Institute by Palmer's grandson Joseph Gavit in January 1966. Over the course of time other E.D. Palmer-related items have found their way into the collection. One such group was the 1977 purchase of some sixty-three letters to or from Palmer.

Series I. CORRESPONDENCE spans the years 1848-1923 and occupies fifty-five folders. The largest of the three series, it has been further divided into four subseries: Outgoing Correspondence; Incoming Correspondence; Miscellaneous; and Walter Launt Palmer Letters. The subseries Incoming Correspondence is arranged in five groups: letters from Frederic E. Church; letters from J.Q.A. Ward; letters regarding E.D. Palmer's Brochure Philosophy of the Ideal; letters regarding Palmer's Livingston Statue; and General Correspondence. Correspondence is filed alphabetically by sender within. Similarly, all other subseries are arranged alphabetically with the exception of Miscellaneous which has been arranged by typology and or content.

Series II. PERSONAL PAPERS spans the years 1846-1955, and holds seven folders. This series has been further divided into three subseries; Biographical Material; Studio Records; and Miscellaneous.

Series III. PHOTOGRAPHS spans the years 1858-1890, and occupies seven folders. The AQ 185 5 series has been further arranged in two subseries: Photograph's of Palmer's Work; and Family and Personal Photographs. In addition to this collection other images of E.D. Palmer and his family can be found in the Mary Palmer Calverley Byrne-Ivy Papers (C 500).

## Contents List

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
<b>Correspondence, 1848-1923</b>		
Outgoing Correspondence, 1848-1885		
Dr. J.H. Armsby, 1848-1854	1	1
Lewis Boss, 12 April 1883		
Butler and Smith, 14 July 1864	1	2
Marion Crannell, 25 February 1880		
John Dickman, 10 February 1865		
Dudley (Albany Art Gallery), 19 May 1885		

Hamilton Fish, 1852, 1855	1	3
Worthington Frothingham, 16 November 1873		
Rufus W. Peckman, 1874	1	4
H.L. Pruyn, 7 February 1883		
Mr. Treadwell, 09 January 1865		
Unidentified, undated		
Incoming Correspondence, 1850-1903		
Fredric Edwin Church		
82 items, 1867-1895		5-25
Letters to Mrs. Palmer (2), undated		
Partial letter to E.D. Palmer, undated		
John Quincy Adams Ward		
Seven items, 1868-1890		26
<i>Philosophy of the Ideal</i>		
Caroline Buchman, 1 April 1895		27
J.W. Burthick, 9 April 1895		
Doave, 30 March 1895		
Engel, 2 March 1896		
Caroline H. Gibson, 4 May 1903		
Jonathan S. Hartley, 6 April 1895		28
Hugh Hastings, 25 January 1899		
Rush C. Hawkins, 4 April 1895		
Kipp, 5 April 1896		
Abraham Lansing, 1 April 1895		29
Wendell Lauroroux, 5 April 1895		
Henry Ryan Marshell, 15 May 1895		
Amy J. Perkins, 6 June 1897		30
Anna Parker Pruyn, 30 March 1895		
T.M. Purdy, 15 May 1895		
Maud M. Rice, 1 April 1895		
T. Smirely, 14 April 1896		31
Clarence Strachauer, 1 April 1897		
William Winter, (2) 26 June 1895		
Unidentified, 5 April 1895		
Robert Livingston Statue		
Typescript correspondence regarding the statue, undated		32
Invoice for the casting (French), undated		
Dorsheimer to E.D. Palmer 1879		
Unidentified, 26 May 1880		
Hugh Hastings to E.D. Palmer, 31 January 1899		33
Governor Hill from E.D. Palmer (unsent), 15 April 1885		
R.W. Peckman to E.D. Palmer, 12 June 1885		
Walter Seymour to E.D. Palmer, 15 April 1885		
Attie, grandson of E.D. Palmer, 25 October 1898		34
Thomas Ball, 24 June 1863		
E.S. Bartholomew, 1854		
A.F. Bellows, 24 December 1862		
Booth, 1886		35

Louis Boss, 12 April 1883		
George H. Boughton, 27 August 1874		
H.K. Brow, 5 December 1850		
T.C. Callicot, 25 December 1875		36
J.E. Carley, June 1874		
Louis P. Casella, 1889		
Samuel Colman, JR., 19 May 1858		37
Vincent Colyn, 0 November 1866		
Frederick S. Cozzeno, 23 August 1868		
J.F. Cropsey, 25 February 1858		
Isabel Crossbey, 2 February 1895		
Darley, 4 November 1856		38
John A. Dix, 13 March 1873		
J.K. Doave, 1879, 1881		
Charles Loring Elliott, 1860, 1867		39
Edvard Fay, 8 February 1864		
J.T. Feilds, 10 March 1868		
Daniel Chester French, 2 March 1894		
James Gardner, 4 December 1880		40
Grace Greenwood, 27 March 1873		
B.H. Hall, 30 March 1886		
James M. Hart, 1852-1895		
W. Hart, 9 March 1859		41
J.H. Hornsby, [1848], 1854		
R.W. Hubbard, 31 December 1862		
Daniel Huntington, 1863, 1873		
F.M. Hurtt, undated		42
Eastman Johnson, 1864, 1869		
John Taylor Johnson, undated		
Thomas D. Jones, 25 January 1866		
J.H. Kensett, 1856, 1858		43
Miss Kunver, 11 July 1848		
H.W.L., 1860		
George C. Lambdin, 27 September 1864		
Louis Lang, 1863 or 1864		
Abraham Lansing, 3 April 1886		44
Wendell Lauroroux, 29 December 1877		
Locke, 8 December 1901		
W.J. Messy, SR., 26 May 1894		
Charles H. Moore, 27 February 1862		
Rufus, M. Peckman, 1860-1895		45
Wendell Philips, 6 February [no year given]	2	1
H.C. Potter, 6 May 1881		
Hiram Powers, 4 March 1868		
R. Pruyn, 16 April 1864		
J. Quincy, Jr., 21 April 1862		
T. Addison Richards, 29 March 1873		2
H. Risely, 1886		

John Rogers, 1866, 1880	
Mrs. Rogers, 10 March 1884	
Walter Sawyer, 11 April 1903	3
Russell Sturgis, 9 April 1877	
Leonardo Taft, 1902	
J.C. Ten Eyck, 3 October 1881	
S.R. Tifford, 11 December 1862	
John Boyd Thatcher, 1 June 1886	4
Launt Thompson, 2 January 1866	
C. Tower, 11 June 1890	
Henry Peters Tray, 23 June 1862	
H.T. Tuckeman, 1860, 1866	
Alfred Waltman, 1866	5
Worthington Whittredge, 19 June 1863 or 1864	
Miss Willison, 16 February 1893	
William Winter, 12 April 1882	
Unidentified, 20 March 1897	
Letter to Palmer prior to 1873 departure to Europe regarding a dinner held for him, and signed by 45 people, 28 March 1873	6
Letter to Palmer requesting that he exhibit in Boston, signed by 17 people, 25 November 1856	
Three letters in one: E.D. Palmer to J.Q.A. Ward to Thomas Hicks to E.D. Palmer, 11-19 April 1876	
Miscellaneous, 1864-1916	
Psalm, unidentified, 1868	7
Note from Palmer with cameo, 10 April 1879	
E.D. Palmer and William Winter, 23 March 1883	
Unidentified note, 26 April 1884	
Eulogy for B.S. Hurt dictated by E.D. Palmer and transcribed by Madeleine Palmer, 18 November 1888	
E.D. Palmer note, 17 December 1891	
Poem by Alfred B. Street Army Relief Bazaar, 1864	8
Poem by W.H. Fassett, 1889	
Poem by E.D. Palmer's nephew, 10 September 1899	
Poem by R.S. Chilton, <i>The Little Peasant</i> , undated	
Poem, unidentified, undated	
Letter to Walter Launt Palmer from F.S. Church, 20 April 1914	9
Letter to Mrs. Gavit from F.S. Church, 25 July 1916	
Walter Launt Palmer Letters, 1873-1923	
G.H. Boughton to W.L. Palmer, 10 May 1877	10
Braker from W.L. Palmer, undated	
T.C. Callicot from W.L. Palmer, 29 June 1873	
E.L. Henry Ellenville, from W.L. Palmer, 1 July 1898	
Alfred Lambourne to W.L. Palmer, 1 April 1882	
Unidentified to W. L. Palmer, 16 July 1881	
Unidentified from W.L. Palmer, 5 September 1920	
Unidentified from W.L. Palmer, 20 June 1923	
<b>Personal Papers, 1846-1955</b>	

Biographical Material, 1893-1930		
Biography by E.H. Edwards in the Buffalo Courier, 11 June 1893		11
Biography by Mrs. Walter Launt Palmer, undated		
Biography, unidentified author, undated		
Biography taken from catalog transcription list, undated		
Biography by Charles A. Ingraham in American Illustrated, volume XXLV, no. 1, 1930		12
Studio Records, 1846-1852		
Studio register of guests and record of works, 1846-1852		13
Miscellaneous, 1864-1955		
Baby book made by Lydia Gibson for Beatrice Palmer (granddaughter of E.D. Palmer), undated		14
Japanese Book with woodcut prints, undated		
Palmer bookplates, undated		
Invitation to National Arts Club exhibition of American Landscape Painting, 2 February 1910		15
Note from H.L. Write regarding a quilt, undated		
E.D. Palmer business card, undated		
Photocopies of catalog of painting and sculpture, exhibition at Palmer's studio, 22 February 1864		16
Tearsheet regarding, the U.S. Sanitary Commission, undated		
Printed pamphlet regarding The School-Mate, signed, undated		
Catalog of the Palmer Marbles (2 copies), undated		
Contract for property in Albany, NY, 9 January 1867		17
Certificate of Credit from a London bank, 25 March 1874		
Bibliography and list of notes for 1942 Oct. 10 exhibition, 1942		
Inventory list of E.D. Palmer sculptures in the Albany Rural Cemetery (3 copies), 15 March 1955		
Inventory list of E.D. Palmer sculptures in the Palmer Room at the AIHA from 1918, undated		
Miscellaneous note, undated		
<b>Photographs, 1858-1890, undated</b>		
Photographs of Palmer's Work, 1858-1890		
Bust of <i>White Captive</i> , 1858	3	1
<i>Faith</i> , 1860		
Study for <i>White Captive</i> signed by E.D. Palmer, 1890		
Bas relief of <i>Thomas McCredie</i> , undated		
Sculpture and grave of Arthur, undated		
Family and Personal Photographs, 1873-1890		
E.D. Palmer, 1873		2
E.D. Palmer in studio window at Appledale, Jul 27 [no year given]		
E.D. Palmer (2), undated		
E.D. Palmer and wife at Appledale, 21 September 1884		3
E.D. Palmer and wife at Appledale, 2 October 1884		
Stereoview of E.D. Palmer and W.L. Palmer, 1860		
Group view of E.D. Palmer, Mary Jane Seaman Palmer, Madeleine Palmer, Emma Farnsworth, H.L. Pruyn, 1890		



W.L. Palmer with Mr. Mrs. W.H. Harris, Edith Harris, and Jim Hoyt, photographic plate, 6 July 1883	4
W.L. Palmer in Venice, 1885	
W.L. Palmer (2), undated	
Fanny Palmer, 19 June 1884	5
Unidentified Palmer, undated	
Charles A. Lesic, undated	
Ms. Samuel Osbourne, later Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, undated	
Caroline Gardner Clarke, undated	
18 Stereoviews of Appledale, 1874	6-7
House of E.D. Palmer on LaFayette Street, undated	