

Albany Institute of History & Art
Library

AQ 185

ERASTUS DOW PALMER COLLECTION

1846-1955

1.1 lin. ft., 3 boxes

- Series I. Correspondence (1848-1923)
- Series II. Personal Papers (1846-1955)
- Series III. Photographs (1858-1890)

April 1999

Biographical Note

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

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 American 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 Content Note

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.

The subseries Outgoing Correspondence contains a number of letters written by E.D. Palmer to various friends regarding both his personal life and professional career. However, the underlying nature of this subseries is unusual in that we do not know whether these letters represent first drafts of correspondences, a body of work never sent, or letters that have in some way made their way back to E.D. Palmer and/or his descendants.

The subseries Incoming Correspondence is a body of writings from various family and friends spanning over seventy years. Of particular importance to this collection are the some eighty-two letters written to Palmer from artist Frederic Edwin Church. The correspondence between these two figures focuses on elements of their personal lives and professional careers. In addition, Church also describes the process of building his home, Olana, near Hudson, New

York. This subseries also includes a small group of letters from sculptor John Quincy Adams Ward that discuss different sculptures and projects the two acquaintances were working on, and in at least one case the recommendation of a competent casting in New York.

Continuing, the category of letters regarding E.D. Palmer Brochure *Philosophy of the Ideal* contains a body of writings, or rather thank you notes, from a number of people to whom Palmer sent a copy of *Philosophy of the Ideal*, a publication in which he discussed his theories and thoughts on art. In addition to thanking Palmer, the writers also provide valuable feedback.

The category Letters regarding E.D. Palmer's Livingston Statue provides an interesting look at the process of creation and the efforts allocated to the completion and presentation of a work of art. Within this category are letters discussing how and where the Livingston statue should be presented. The files also contain the original invoice for the casting of the statue, further documenting the economic factors involved in the creation of such a commission.

The category General Correspondence is a large body of letters that provide an intimate look into the life and career of E.D. Palmer. One of the largest bodies within this collection, general correspondence covers a wide spectrum of people and the greater part of Palmer's career. In some instances we are also able to trace the development of relationships over a number of years. One such example comes from the letters written to Palmer by Rufus M. Peckman (see Box 1, folder 45) whose correspondence with Palmer stretches from 1860 to 1895.

The subseries Walter Launt Palmer Letters includes a number of letters to and from W.L. Palmer, son of E.D. Palmer. These writings have little to do with the life and or works of E.D. Palmer and provide little insight into this collection. However, these letters are important in understanding W. L. Palmer and can and should be used in connection with the materials located in the Institute's Walter Launt Palmer Collection (BV 448).

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.

The subseries Biographical Material contains a quantity of items devoted to the life history of Erastus Dow Palmer. Included within this subseries are two published biographical articles written about Palmer, one from the *Buffalo Courier* and the second in a 1930 edition *American Illustrated*. The other materials in this subseries appear to be preliminary biographical/autobiographical manuscripts whose publication places and dates are unknown.

Erastus Dow Palmer's studio book provides a remarkable and valuable look into the inner workings and day-to-day activities of an artist's studio. This book contains the names of a number of visiting family and friends in addition to other contemporary artists. In addition, the second half of this book appears to record the distribution, if not the actual sales of his work. However, while this article records the date, title and name of owner, it does not include a list of sale prices.

The subseries Miscellaneous contains a group of items relating to E.D. Palmer's personal and, to some extent, professional life. For example, it holds a book of Japanese wood cuts, presumably purchased and presented to E.D. Palmer by his son W.L. Palmer. It is known that W.L. Palmer traveled extensively in the Far East and spent some time in Japan (a record of these journeys was kept in the form of a scrapbook by his second wife Zoe and is now in the library's Palmer/Gavit Collection MG 12). This small book of woodcuts would have made an appropriate souvenir. This subseries also contains items such as a calling card of E.D. Palmer and an invitation to the National Arts Club Exhibition of American Landscape Paintings.

Series III. PHOTOGRAPHS spans the years 1858-1890, and occupies seven folders. The

series has been further arranged in two subseries: Photograph's of Palmer's Work; and Family and Personal Photographs.

The subseries Photographs of Palmer's Work is relatively small in comparison to the actual volume and extent of his career. This subseries contains images of one of Palmer's most famous sculptures, *The White Captive*. While the photographs of Palmer's works are limited in this collection, it is important to note that there is a much more extensive body of works located with the library's Walter Launt Palmer Collection (BV 448). In that archive photographs of the works by Erastus Palmer are almost all dated; these two collections provide a substantial chronology of the sculptor's career.

The subseries Family and Personal Photographs concentrates primarily on Palmer's immediate family and his family home, Appledore, south of Albany. There are eighteen stereoviews of the house and surrounding landscape as well as the photographs of daily activities at the home. Also featured in this subseries are a number of photographs of Walter Palmer and his sister Fanny (Mrs. Joseph Gavit). Again, this subseries should be augmented by the Walter Launt Palmer Collection (BV 448) which holds photographs of the family. Also contained within this subseries photographs of Walter's two grandmothers, Laurinda Ball (mother of Erastus Dow), and Mrs. Seaman (mother of Mary Jane Seaman), as well as two of his sisters, Isabelle Palmer Fassett and Madeiline Palmer Jaffrey. 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).

The Erastus Dow Palmer Papers were processed by SUNY student intern Jennifer B. Bott in April 1999.

Box Folder

Series I. Correspondence

Arranged in four subseries: Outgoing Correspondence; Incoming Correspondence; Miscellaneous; and Walter Launt Palmer Letters.

OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE

1	1	Armsby, Dr. J.H. Boss, Lewis	1848-1854 1883 Apr 12
	2	Butler and Smith Crannell, Marion Dickman, John Dudley (Albany Art Gallery)	1864 Jul 14 1880 Feb 25 1865 Feb 10 1885 May 19
	3	Fish, Hamilton Frothingham, Worthington	1852, 1855 1873 Nov 16
	4	Peckman, Rufus W. Pruyn, H.L. Treadwell, Mr. Unknown	(1874) 1883 Feb 7 1865 Jan 09 n.d.

INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE

Church, Fredric Edwin

5-25	Twenty-one folders, eighty-two items, Letters to Mrs Palmer (2) Partial letter to E.D. Palmer	1867-1895 n.d. n.d.
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Ward, John Quincy Adams

26	Seven items	1868-1890
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Philosophy of the Ideal

[1]	27	Buchman, Caroline Burthick, J.W. Doave Engel Gibson, Caroline H.	1895 Apr 01 1895 Apr 09 1895 Mar 30 1896 Mar 02 1903 May 04
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Box Folder

Series I. Correspondence, continued

INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE, continued

Philosophy of the Ideal, continued

[1]	28	Hartley, Jonathan S.	1895 Apr 06
		Hastings, Hugh	1899 Jan 25
		Hawkins, Rush C.	1895 Apr 04
		Kipp	1896 Apr 05
	29	Lansing, Abraham	1895 Apr 01
		Lauroroux, Wendell	1895 Apr 05
		Marshell, Henry Ryan	1895 May 15
	30	Perkins, Amy J.	1897 Jun 06
		Pruyn, Anna Parker	1895 Mar 30
		Purdy, T.M.	1895 May 15
		Rice, Maud M.	1895 Apr 01
	31	Smirely, T.	1896 Apr 14
		Strachauer, Clarence	1897 Apr 01
		Winter, William (2)	1895 Jun 26
		Unknown	1895 Apr 05

Robert Livingston Statue

	32	Typescript correspondence regarding the statue	n.d.
		Invoice for the casting (French)	n.d.
		Dorsheimer to E.D. Palmer	1879
		Unknown	1880 May 26
	33	Hastings, Hugh to E.D. Palmer	1899 Jan 31
		Hill, Governor from E.D. Palmer (never sent)	1885 Apr 15
		Peckman, R.W. to E.D. Palmer	1885 Jun 12
		Seymour, Walter to E.D. Palmer	1885 Apr 15
	34	Attie, grandson of E.D. Palmer	1898 Oct 25
		Ball, Thomas	1863 Jun 24
		Bartholomew, E.S.	1854
		Bellows, A.F.	1862 Dec 24

Box Folder

Series I. Correspondence, continued

INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE, continued

Robert Livingston Statue, continued

35	Booth	1886	
	Boss, Louis	1883 Apr 12	
	Boughton, George H.	1874 Aug 27	
	Brow, H.K.	1850 Dec 05	
36	Callicot, T.C.	1875 Dec 25	
	Carley, J.E.	1874 Jun	
	Casella, Louis P.	1889	
37	Colman, Samuel JR.	1858, May 19	
	Colyn, Vincent	1866 Nov 09	
	Cozzeno, Frederick S.	1868 Aug 23	
	Cropsey, J.F.	1858 Feb 25	
	Crossbey, Isabel	1895 Feb 02	
38	Darley	1856 Nov 04	
	Dix, John A.	1873 Mar 13	
	Doave, J.K.	1879, 1881	
39	Elliott, Charles Loring	1860, 1867	
	Fay, Edvard	1864 Feb 08	
	Feilds, J.T.	1868 Mar 10	
	French, Daniel Chester	1894 Mar 02	
1	40	Gardner, James	1880 Dec 04
		Greenwood, Grace	1873 Mar 27
		Hall, B.H.	1886 Mar 30
		Hart, James M.	1852-1895
	41	Hart, W.	1859 Mar 09
		Hornsby, J.H.	[1848], 1854
		Hubbard, R.W.	1862 Dec 31
		Huntington, Daniel	1863, 1873

Box Folder

Series I. Correspondence, continued

INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE, continued

Robert Livingston Statue, continued

42	Hurt, F.M. Johnson, Eastman Johnson, John Taylor Jones, Thomas D.	n.d. 1864, 1869 n.d. 1866 Jan 25	
43	Kensett, J.H. Kunver, Miss L., H.W. Lambdin, George C. Lang, Louis	1856, 1858 1848 Jul 11 1860 1864 Sep 27 (1863 or 64)	
44	Lansing, Abraham Lauroroux, Wendell Locke Messy, W.J. SR. Moore, Charles H.	1886 Apr 03 1877 Dec 29 1901 Dec 08 1894 May 26 1862 Feb 27	
45	Peckman, Rufus, M.	1860-1895	
2	46	Philips, Wendell Potter, H.C. Powers, Hiram Pruyn, R. Quincy, J. Jr.	n.d. Feb 06 1881 May 06 1868 Mar 04 1864 Apr 16 1862 Apr 21
47	Richards, T. Addison Risely, H. Rogers, John Rogers, Mrs.	1873 Mar 29 1886 1866, 1880 1884 Mar 10	
48	Sawyer, Walter Sturgis, Russell Taft, Leonardo Ten Eyck, J.C. Tifford, S.R.	1903 Apr 11 1877 Apr 09 1902 1881 Oct 03 1862 Dec 11	

Box Folder

Series I. Correspondence, continued

INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE, continued

Robert Livingston Statue, continued

49	Thatcher, John Boyd	1886 Jun 01
	Thompson, Launt	1866 Jan 02
	Tower, C.	1890 Jun 11
	Tray, Henry Peters	1862 Jun 23
	Tuckeman, H.T.	1860, 1866
50	Waltman, Alfred	1866
	Whittredge, Worthington	(1863 or 64) Jun 19
	Willison, Miss	1893 Feb 16
	Winter, William	1882 Apr 12
	Unknown	1897 Mar 20
51	Letter to Palmer prior to 1873 departure to Europe regarding a dinner held for him, and signed by 45 people	1873 Mar 28
	Letter to Palmer requesting that he exhibit in Boston, signed by 17 people	1856 Nov 25
	Three letters in one: E.D. Palmer to J.Q.A. Ward to Thomas Hicks to E.D. Palmer	1876 Apr 11-19

MISCELLANEOUS

52	Psalm, unknown	[1868]
	Note from Palmer with cameo	1879 Apr 10
	E.D. Palmer and William Winter	1883 Mar 23
	Unknown note	1884 Apr 26
	Eulogy for B.S. Hurt dictated by E.D. Palmer and transcribed by Madeleine Palmer	1888 Nov 18
	E.D. Palmer note	1891 Dec 17
53	Poem by Alfred B. Street <i>Army Relief Bazaar</i>	1864
	Poem by W.H. Fassett	1889
	Poem by E.D. Palmer's nephew	1899 Sep 10
	Poem by R.S. Chilton, <i>The Little Peasant</i>	n.d.
	Poem unknown	n.d.

Box Folder

Series I. Correspondence, continued

MISCELLANEOUS, continued

54	Letter to Walter Launt Palmer from F.S. Church Letter to Mrs. Gavit from F.S. Church	1914 Apr 20 1916 Jul 25
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WALTER LAUNT PALMER LETTERS

55	Boughton, G.H. to W.L. Palmer Braker from W.L. Palmer Callicot, T.C. from W.L. Palmer Ellenville, E.L. Henry from W.L. Palmer Lambourne, Alfred to W.L. Palmer Unknown to W. L. Palmer Unknown from W.L. Palmer Unknown from W.L. Palmer	1877 May 10 n.d. 1873 Jun 29 1898 Jul 01 1882 Apr 01 1881 Jul 16 1920 Sep 05 1923 Jun 20
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Box Folder

Series II. Personal Papers

Arranged into three subseries: Biographical Material; Studio Records;
and Miscellaneous.

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

[2]	56	Biography by E.H. Edwards in the <i>Buffalo Courier</i> Biography by Mrs. Walter Launt Palmer Biography, unknown author Biography taken from catalog transcription list	1893 Jun 11 n.d. n.d. n.d.
	57	Biography by Charles A. Ingraham in <i>American Illustrated</i> , vol. XXLV no.1	1930

STUDIO RECORDS

	58	Studio register of guests and record of works	1846-1852
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MISCELLANEOUS

	59	Baby book made by Lydia Gibson for Beatrice Palmer (granddaughter of E.D. Palmer) Japanese Book with woodcut prints Palmer bookplates	n.d. n.d. n.d.
	60	Invitation to National Arts Club exhibition of American Landscape Painting Note from H.L. Write regarding a quilt E.D. Palmer business card	1910 Feb 02 n.d. n.d.
	61	Photocopies of catalog of painting and sculpture, exhibition at Palmer's studio Tearsheet regarding, the U.S. Sanitary Commission Printed pamphlet regarding <i>The School-Mate</i> , signed Catalog of the Palmer Marbles (2 copies)	1864 Feb 22 n.d. n.d. n.d.

Box Folder

Series II. Personal Papers, continued

MISCELLANEOUS, continued

[2]	62	Contract for property in Albany, NY	1867 Jan 09
		Certificate of Credit from a London bank	1874 Mar 25
		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)	1955 Mar 15
		Inventory list of E.D. Palmer sculptures in the Palmer Room at the AIHA from 1918	n.d.
		Miscellaneous note	n.d.

Box Folder

Series III. Photographs

Arranged into two subseries: Photographs of Palmer's Work; and Family and Personal Photographs.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF PALMER'S WORK

3	63	Bust of <i>White Captive</i>	1858
		<i>Faith</i>	1860
		Study for <i>White Captive</i> signed by E.D. Palmer	1890
		Bas relief of <i>Thomas McCredie</i>	n.d.
		Sculpture and gave of Arthur	n.d.

FAMILY AND PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHS

67		E.D. Palmer	1873
		E.D. Palmer in studio window at Appledale	n.d. Jul 27
		E.D. Palmer (2)	n.d.
65		E.D. Palmer and wife at Appledale	1884 Sep 21
		E.D. Palmer and wife at Appledale	1884 Oct 02
		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. Pruyne	1890
66		W.L. Palmer with Mr. Mrs. W.H. Harris, Edith Harris, and Jim Hoyt, photographic plate	1883 Jul 06
		W.L. Palmer in Venice	1885
		W. L. Palmer (2)	n.d.
67		Fanny Palmer	1884 Jun 19
		Unknown Palmer	n.d.
		Charles A. Lesic	n.d.
		Ms. Samuel Osbourne, later Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson	n.d.
		Caroline Gardner Clarke	n.d.
68-69		18 Stereoviews of Appledale House of E.D. Palmer on LaFayette St.	1874 n.d.