

M010

Reifel, J. Ottis Adams Research Collection, 1872-1972 | Indianapolis Museum of Art Archives

By Rebecca Denne

Collection Overview

Title: Reifel, J. Ottis Adams Research Collection, 1872-1972

Primary Creator: Adams, J. Ottis (John Ottis) (1851-1927)

Extent: 1.71 linear feet

Arrangement: The collection is arranged in two series:

Series I: Primary Source Material

Series II: Research Files

Languages: English, French, German

Scope and Contents of the Materials

The Reifel, J. Ottis Adams Research Collection contains primary source documents and research files about the life and times of Indiana artist J. Ottis Adams, collected by Dorothy Reifel. The archival collection came to the Indianapolis Museum of Art from the Dorothy Reifel estate. The collection has been divided into two series which are described below.

Series I: Primary Source Material, 1972-1944, n.d. contains photographs of Brookville, The Hermitage, and J. Ottis Adams' family. Also included are letters addressed to J. Ottis Adams and his wife Winifred Ottis Adams. Amongst these are messages of sympathy and condolence following the artist's death in 1927, a letter from Mrs. T.C. Steele, and letters from architect Edwin Fulwider. The series also includes a detailed family tree of J. Ottis Adams created in 1937. Passports in addition to a consignment note, a souvenir, and a hand-drawn map of Munich document the time Adams spent studying in Germany in the late nineteenth century. The series is arranged primarily by date.

Series 2: Research Files, 1898-1972, n.d. contains the research files of Dorothy Reifel. Her research is comprised of newspaper clippings about J. Ottis Adams and other Hoosier artists, ephemera about the John Herron Art Institute, letters addressed to Ms. Reifel, and transcripts of several of Ms. Reifel's interviews with Mrs. J. Ottis Adams and others. Also included are newspaper clippings on the developments in Indiana art more generally from 1902 to 1972.

Biographical Note

Dorothy Reifel (1895-1990)

Dorothy Reifel was a lifelong resident of Franklin County, Indiana. For many years, she worked as a public school teacher there in the town of Brookville. At the time, J. Ottis Adams and his wife, Winifred, were also residing in that area and became acquainted with Ms. Reifel. Following the artist's death, Ms. Reifel, with help from his widow, put together a collection of primary source documents and related research files with the notion of one day publishing a monograph on J. Ottis Adams. Regrettably, Ms. Reifel's publication was never finished. The papers of Ms. Reifel, which contain both primary material and her own notes, were donated to the Indianapolis Museum of Art by her estate in 2005.

J. Ottis Adams (1851-1927)

The landscape painter John Ottis Adams was born in 1851 in Amity, Indiana, a small town south of Indianapolis. He attended Wabash College in 1871, but left a year later for the South Kensington Art School in London to study under John Parker. Adams returned to Indiana in 1876, eventually settling in Muncie.

In 1880 Adams returned to Europe, traveling to the Royal Academy in Munich to study with Gyula Benczúr. In Munich, Adams met two other painters from Indiana, Theodore Clement (T. C.) Steele and William Forsyth. After seven years in Munich, Adams returned to Muncie and opened an art school there with Forsyth. Adams also taught classes in Union City and Fort Wayne, Indiana.

In 1895 Adams, Forsyth and Steele were invited to exhibit at the Athenaeum Building in Chicago with two other Indiana painters, Otto Stark and Richard B. Gruelle. The exhibition, sponsored by the Central Art Association of Chicago, was named "The Hoosier Group," and the term was associated with the five artists throughout their artistic careers. Also in Chicago that year, Adams, Forsyth and Steele joined with other regional artists to form the Society of Western Artists. The mission of the Society was to promote Midwestern art and exhibitions of work by Society members and other artists circulated through the region annually. Adams was president of the Society of Western Artists from 1908-1910.

Adams and Steele purchased an estate together in Brookville, Indiana in 1897, which was later named "The Hermitage." The Hermitage hosted visiting artists and held summer art classes for the public. A decade later Adams became the sole owner of the property and The Hermitage became one of the Adams' family residences.

A year after acquiring the Hermitage, Adams married a still-life painter from Muncie, Winifred Brady. Winifred was the sister of Elizabeth Brady, who married Frank C. Ball, co-founder of the Ball Brothers Glass Manufacturing Business (now Ball Corporation) and one of the founders of Ball State University. Winifred met Adams in 1889 when she was a student at the Muncie art school he founded.

Adams was instrumental in establishing the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis in 1902 and taught drawing and painting there until 1906. During this time, the Adams family began summering

in Leland, Michigan. By 1910 Adams was in poor health and began spending the winters in Florida. He moved back to Indiana permanently in 1926 and passed away a year later. Adams is buried in Muncie.

Source:

J. Ottis Adams Papers (M001) finding aid.

Martin Krouse, Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs at the Indianapolis Museum of Art

Subject/Index Terms

Adams, Wayman, 1883-1959

Adams, Winifred Brady

Art, American -- Indiana

Art--Indiana--Indianapolis--Exhibitions

Art Association of Indianapolis, Indiana

Artists--Indiana--Biography

Ball, Frank Clayton, 1857-1943

Brookville (Ind.)

Franklin County (Ind.)

John Herron Art Institute

Society of Western Artists

Stark, Otto, 1859-1926

Steele, Brandt (Rembrandt Theodore), 1870-1965

Steele, Selma N. (Selma Neubacher), approximately 1870-1945

Steele, T. C. (Theodore Clement), 1847-1926

William J. Forsyth, (1854–1935)

Forms of Material:

brochures

clippings (information artifacts)

correspondence

interviews

membership cards

notes

pamphlets

passports

photographic prints

photographs

plats (maps)

sketches

Administrative Information

Repository: Indianapolis Museum of Art Archives

Alternate Extent Statement: 1 box, 1 OVA folder, 1 OVB box, 3 photo folders

Access Restrictions: Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions: Unpublished manuscripts are protected by copyright. Permission to publish, quote, or reproduce must be secured from the repository and the copyright holder. Please contact the Archivist for more information.

Acquisition Source: Dorothy Reifel estate

Preferred Citation: [Title of item], [date], [Container information], Reifel, J. Ottis Adams Research Collection (M010), IMA Archives, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN.

Box and Folder Listing

Series I: Primary Source Material, 1972-1944, n.d. contains photographs of Brookville, The Hermitage, and J. Ottis Adams' family. Also included are letters addressed to J. Ottis Adams and his wife Winifred Ottis Adams. Amongst these are messages of sympathy and condolence following the artist's death in 1927, a letter from Mrs. T.C. Steele, and letters from architect Edwin Fulwider. The series also includes a detailed family tree of J. Ottis Adams created in 1937. Passports in addition to a consignment note, a souvenir, and a hand-drawn map of Munich document the time Adams spent studying in Germany in the late nineteenth century. The series is arranged primarily by date.

Box 1

- Folder 1: German souvenir, 1885
- Folder 2: Miscellaneous letters to Mr. Adams, 1903-1927, n.d.
- Folder 3: Miscellaneous letters to Mrs. Adams, 1926-1951, n.d.
- Folder 4: Letters of condolence to Mrs. Adams, 1927
- Folder 5: Letters to Mrs. Adams about exhibitions, 1927, n.d.
- Folder 6: Letter to Mrs. Adams from Mrs. T. C. Steele, 1927
- Folder 7: Letters to Mrs. Adams from Edwin Fulwider
- Folder 8: Adams' drawing of map of Munich, Germany
- Folder 9: German customs declaration form, n.d.
- Folder 10: Sketch, n.d.

Photo Folder 1: Brookville photographs, 1903-1905, n.d.

Photo Folder 2: Adams home, "The Hermitage", 1906-1916, n.d.

Photo Folder 3: Family photographs, n.d.

OVA Folder 1: Photographs of Florida, n.d.

OVB Box 1

- Folder 1: Adams passport, 1872
- Folder 2: Adams passport, 1880
- Folder 3: Consignment note, 1880
- Folder 4: Family letter from Mr. Adams, 1920
- Folder 5: Adams family tree, 1937
- Folder 6: "A Plat of the Town of Amity" map drawing by Adams, n.d.

Series 2: Research, 1898-1972, n.d. contains the research files of Dorothy Reifel. Her research is comprised of newspaper clippings about J. Ottis Adams and other Hoosier artists, ephemera from the John Herron Art Institute, letters to Ms. Reifel, and transcripts of several Ms. Reifel's interviews with Mrs. J. Ottis Adams and others. Also included are newspaper clippings on developments in art more generally from 1902 to 1972.

Box 1

- Folder 11: Letters to Dorothy Reifel, 1940-1961
- Folder 12: Interview with Mrs. Adams, 1941
- Folder 13: Interview with Brandt Steele, 1943
- Folder 14: Interview with Mrs. Adams, 1952
- Folder 15: Interview with Adams' students, 1955
- Folder 16: Interview with Brandt Steele, 1955
- Folder 17: Interview with Susan Stark Taylor and notes, n.d.
- Folder 18: Notes on Brookville, n.d.
- Folder 19: "The American Artists' European Register", 1887
- Folder 20: John Herron Art Institute ephemera, 1902-1927
- Folder 21: Adams biography, James T. White & Co., 1929
- Folder 22: Legends of Franklin County by Portia S. Everett, 1958
- Folder 23: Franklin County ephemera, n.d.
- Folder 24: T.C. Steele ephemera, n.d.
- Folder 25: "The Lure of Technic", n.d.
- Folder 26: Catalog of Art, Ball Collection at Ball Teacher's College, n.d.

OVB Box 1

- Folder 7: Clippings about Franklin County, 1898-1953, n.d.
- Folder 8: Clippings about Adams, 1899-1933
- Folder 9: Clippings about Western Artists Group exhibitions
- Folder 10: Miscellaneous art clippings, 1902-1972
- Folder 11: Clippings about T.C. Steele, 1941, n.d.