

# COLLECTION M020

## Booth Tarkington Art Collecting Papers, 1932-1981

Archives, Indianapolis Museum of Art at  
Newfields

By Catherine Walsh, August 2018

### Overview

**Title:** Booth Tarkington Art Collecting Papers

**Reference Code:** M020

**Date(s) of Creation/Record-Keeping Activity:** 1932-1981, bulk 1935-1945

**Creators:** Tarkington, Booth (1869-1946) and Trotter, Elizabeth Stanley (Betty)

**Extent:** 1.8 cubic feet | 2.2 linear feet | 5 document boxes

#### Forms of Material:

Letters,

Telegrams,

Newspaper and magazine clippings,

Photographs,

Papers (retyped excerpts from bibliographic sources),

Exhibition catalogs,

Book jackets,

Receipts

**Languages and Scripts:** English

**System of Arrangement:** The collection is divided into 2 series as listed below.

Series 1: **Seawood Collection Scrapbooks, 1932-1945**

Series 2: **Miscellaneous Papers, 1939-1981**

**Processing Information:** Three boxes contained 18 binders, assembled by Tarkington and Trotter, and there was no consistent pattern linking the various binders in alphabetical or chronological arrangements. The binders were not numbered (save by the processor for convenience of identification), and they seem to have been included in boxes as they fit and in no particular order. However, each binder was carefully curated and ordered, with clippings, correspondence, etc., inserted in (crumbling) plastic sleeves or pasted to pages. The original order within the binders was maintained, but materials were rehoused in folders with imposed titles. Materials in plastic sleeves were housed together in folded archival paper to indicate the originator's groupings, and photographs showcasing the paintings in situ in Seawood or art galleries were preserved in photographic sleeves. Evidence of previous intervention or preservation efforts, presumably by museum staff, includes copied correspondence. Copies were three-hole punched and the original brittle letters were retained and housed in glassine sleeves, often stapled to the copy. Additionally, one of the three boxes contained several folders obviously assembled later than the binders (circa 1961-1981). These relate to the posthumous distribution of the art collection and contain auction information, sales receipts, information about donation, and transcripts from a 1981 commemoration of Booth Tarkington's birthday.

## Scope and Content

This collection consists of 18 scrapbooks, originally assembled by Booth Tarkington and his secretary, Elizabeth Trotter. While there are no precise dates for the creation of these works, included clippings indicate that they were largely assembled during the 1930s and 1940s, during the final years of Tarkington's life; he spent much of this time at Seawood in Kennebunkport, Maine, but clippings and exhibition programs provide evidence of travel between Indianapolis and Seawood.

In content, the materials center around the paintings Tarkington owned, including a great deal of quoted research material and biographical information about the artists and portrait subjects. Typically, each original binder contained materials related to one or more paintings, and several binders included title sheets/tags

indicating that they referenced works from a particular room in Seawood (e.g., dining room). Materials include photographs of the works, often in situ on exhibit or in Tarkington's home; newspaper and magazine clippings about artists or exhibitions; exhibition brochures and catalogs; gallery materials related to purchase and display of the works; correspondence related to acquisition, research, loans, and discussion of Tarkington's portraits; book jackets and manuscripts or texts written by Tarkington about art; book reviews and critical reception; and many retyped, excerpted or quoted texts relating to the paintings derived from other authors, experts in the field, or historical/primary sources. Correspondence and reviews indicate interaction with prominent historical figures, including: the art historian Erwin Panofsky; art critic Royal Cortissoz; art gallery representatives Daniel H. Farr, Robert C. Vose, Bert Newhouse, Sophia Ruskin, and John Levy; and art museum curators and directors, including Wilbur D. Peat of the John Herron Art Institute (now Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields).

## Biographical History

Booth Tarkington (1869-1946) was a novelist and playwright born in Indianapolis, Indiana, where he lived most of his life. Known as "The Gentleman from Indiana" after the title of his first published work, Tarkington wrote primarily regional literature about Indiana life, people, and politics; he won two Pulitzer Prizes for his novels. Tarkington's work sold well enough that he accumulated wealth, even in the midst of the Great Depression, and he was greatly interested in the arts and the artistic community. He began collecting art as early as his first trip to Europe in 1903, and he worked diligently to develop a collection primarily composed of portraits, many purchased during the depression when an unprecedented number of paintings hit the art market at relatively low costs. He bought works by Reynolds, Gainsborough, Lawrence, Lely, Gilbert Stuart, Romney, Raeburn, Titian, Velazquez, and Goya. This interest in art infiltrated his writing, resulting in *Some Old Portraits* of 1939, a collection of essays on his paintings, as well as a number of short stories on art collecting assembled in *Rumbin Galleries* in 1934. He loaned his paintings repeatedly for public exhibition, and ultimately donated many of them to various institutions, including the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, then known as the John Herron Art Museum. When not on public display, Tarkington's art was primarily housed in either his home in Indianapolis, or in his summer retreat in Kennebunkport, Maine, known as "Seawood." Interestingly, during much of the period that saw the most active exhibition and involvement with his art collection, including assembly of these scrapbooks, Tarkington was struggling with vision problems. In the late 1920s, he

developed cataracts and a detached retina, rendering him blind; although an operation gave him some sight back, he continued to dictate his writing and make heavy use of his personal secretary, Elizabeth (Betty) Trotter, who likely typed and prepared the scrapbooks in this collection at his direction. Trotter can be viewed as a co-creator of the archival material.

Tarkington was a prominent citizen in the city of Indianapolis, having served a term as a state representative in 1903, and he developed strong ties to the John Herron Art Museum, beginning by loaning some of his art collection to the museum at the behest of then-director Wilbur Peat for a highly attended 1937 exhibition, *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*. In 1940, Tarkington joined the Art Association's board and accepted appointment as the chairman of the Fine Arts Committee.

### **Sources:**

Robinson, Anne P. and S. L. Berry. *Every Way Possible: 125 Years of the Indianapolis Museum of Art*. Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2008.

Woodress, James. "Tarkington, Booth (1869-1946)." *American National Biography*, 2000, <https://doi-org.proxy.ulib.uits.iu.edu/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1601607>. Accessed July 26, 2018).

"Tarkington, Booth." *World Authors 1900-1950* (January 1, 1996): *Biography Reference Bank* (H. W. Wilson), EBSCOhost. Accessed July 26, 2018.

## **Further Research**

### **Related Archival Materials:**

Booth Tarkington Papers, 1900-1945 (Accession #7416-t), Clifton Waller Barrett Library, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.  
<http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu04063.xml>

Booth Tarkington Collection (#4653). Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

Booth Tarkington Letters, 1894-1962 (bulk 1938-1945). Indiana Historical Society, Smith Memorial Library, Indianapolis, IN.

Papers. 1919-1937. Tarkington, Booth, 1869-1946. Dartmouth College, Rauner Special Collections Library, Hanover, NH.

**Notes:**

This archival collection includes many unique, original materials, such as correspondence and photographs of paintings in situ, which would be particularly valuable to scholars. The materials provide context about the collecting, display, and exhibition practices and theories of a past museum donor, board member, and cultural figure. There are letters and reviews written by prominent art historians and critics, such as Erwin Panofsky and Royal Cortissoz. A number of sources address the design and use of Tarkington's home, Seawood, as well as the location of various objet d'art therein, of interest to historians of design, architecture, and artistic display. Literary historians might find value in the links between Tarkington's writings and his art collecting practices. However, the greatest strength of the collection resides not necessarily in unique materials, but in the evidence it presents of unique arrangement and thinking about what it means to own paintings. The scrapbooks represent Tarkington's thoughts about his collection and can be seen as a carefully composed and curated presentation of information about treasured objects. It is evident that he valued some sources more than others. For instance, a review of his *Some Old Portraits* written by Cortissoz is included in nearly every binder, duplication that is left intact because it highlights emphasis. The artworks are placed at the center of a nexus of personal reminiscence, scholarly research and historical documents, economic considerations, and social and institutional ties.

**Subject/Index Terms:**

Art—Collectors and Collecting,

Art—Exhibitions,

Authors—Indiana,

E. and A. Silberman Galleries,

John Herron Art Institute,

Newhouse Galleries,

Portraits, American,

Portraits, European,

Robert C. Vose Galleries,

Seawood (residence)—Kennebunkport, Maine,  
Archives, IMA at Newfields

M020

Tarkington, Booth, 1869-1946,

Trotter, Elizabeth Stanley

## Administrative Information

**Repository:** Archives, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. 4000 Michigan Road Indianapolis, IN 46208. (317) 923-1331 X276. archives@discovernewfields.org

**Immediate Source of Acquisition:** Gift, ca.1945.

**Custodial History:** acquisition of the papers pre-dates the 2010 formal establishment of the Archives. Presumably, Tarkington or his representative donated the bulk of the material to the John Herron Art Institute in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century following or during his board activity. Additions were likely made by museum staff, circa 1961-1981.

**Citation:** [Item title], [DD Month YYYY], [Container information]. Booth Tarkington Art Collecting Papers (M020). Archives, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. Indianapolis, IN.

## Access & Use

**Conditions Governing Access:** Collection is open for research.

**Physical Access:** Some photographs and clippings are heavily embrittled. Handle with care.

**Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:** 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.

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## Box and Folder Listing

### Series 1: Seawood Collection Scrapbooks, 1932-1945

#### Box 1

Folder 1: [Binder #1: Catena, Isenbrandt, De Heusch, Van der Neer]

Folder 2: [Binder #1: Catena, Isenbrandt]

Folder 3: [Binder #1: De Heusch, Mytens]

Folder 4: [Binder #2: Seawood Gallery-room, exhibitions incl. at Herron, 1941, Kneller's *Sarah Jennings*]

Folder 5: [Binder #2: John Riley's *Isaac Newton*]

- Folder 6: [Binder #3: Seawood Sunroom; Constable]
- Folder 7: [Binder #3: Seawood Sunroom; Rousseau, Dupre, Diaz, Inness, Blakelock]
- Folder 8: [Binder #4: Reynolds' *Arabella Reynolds*]
- Folder 9: [Binder #4: Thomas Lawrence's *Edward Morris*]
- Folder 10: [Binder #5: Seawood Dining Room; Hanneman, Wissing]
- Folder 11: [Binder #5: Seawood Dining Room; Highmore, Largilliere, Soest]

**Box 2**

- Folder 1: [Binder #6: Bibliography, Panofsky]
- Folder 2: [Binder #6: Excerpts on Lawrence, Copley]
- Folder 3: [Binder #6: Excerpts on Gainsborough, Reynolds]
- Folder 4: [Binder #7: Notes, clippings, Tarkington essay; Gilbert Stuart's *Robert Liston*]
- Folder 5: [Binder #7: Gilbert Stuart's *Augusta Montagu*]
- Folder 6: [Binder #7: Gilbert Stuart's *Barney Smith*]
- Folder 7: [Binder #8: Exhibition clippings, letters, photos]
- Folder 8: [Binder #8: Exhibition clippings, letters, photos]
- Folder 9: [Binder #8: Exhibition clippings, letters, photos]
- Folder 10: [Binder #9: Retyped notes/excerpts, various artists]
- Folder 11: [Binder #9: Retyped notes/excerpts, various artists]

**Box 3**

- Folder 1: [Binder #10: Thomas Lawrence, George IV]
- Folder 2: [Binder #10: Thomas Lawrence, George IV]
- Folder 3: [Binder #11: Newsclippings, exhibitions]
- Folder 4: [Binder #11: Correspondence with galleries, museums, admirers]
- Folder 5: [Binder #11: Clippings, exhibits]
- Folder 6: [Binder #11: Bibliography, insurance and donation lists]
- Folder 7: [Binder #12: Seawood Gallery Room; William Dobson's *Ben Jonson*]
- Folder 8: [Binder #12: Seawood Gallery Room; William Dobson's *Ben Jonson*]
- Folder 9: [Binder #12: Seawood Gallery Room; William Dobson's *Ben Jonson*]
- Folder 10: [Binder #13: Gallery; Peter Lely's *Ashburnham*]

**Box 4**

- Folder 1: [Binder #13: Gallery; Peter Lely's *Castlehaven*]
- Folder 2: [Binder #13: Gallery; Peter Lely's *Mary, Princess of Orange*]
- Folder 3: [Binder #13: Gallery; Peter Lely's *Nell Gwyn*]
- Folder 4: [Binder #14: Various works, artists; retyped excerpts]
- Folder 5: [Binder #14: Various works, artists; retyped excerpts]
- Folder 6: [Binder #15: J. S. Copley's *Mrs. Isaac Royall*]
- Folder 7: [Binder #15: J. S. Copley's *Mrs. Isaac Royall*]
- Folder 8: [Binder #16: Thomas Gainsborough's *William Blackstone*]
- Folder 9: [Binder #16: Thomas Gainsborough]
- Folder 10: [Binder #16: Thomas Gainsborough's *Samuel Foote*]

**Box 5**

- Folder 1: [Binder #17: William Dobson, Seawood photographs]

- Folder 2: [Binder #17: William Dobson's *John Milton*]
- Folder 3: [Binder #17: William Dobson's *John Milton, Nicholas Laniere*]
- Folder 4: [Binder #17: Various works, artists]
- Folder 5: [Binder #18: Ribot, Francisco Goya's *Maria Luisa*]
- Folder 6: [Binder #18: Francisco Goya's *Maria Luisa*]
- Folder 7: [Binder #18: Francisco Goya's *Maria Luisa*]

## **Series 2: Miscellaneous Papers, 1939-1981**

### **Box 5**

- Folder 8: [Unbound: Pontormo correspondence]
- Folder 9: [Tarkington's *Rumbin Galleries*, review]
- Folder 10: [Tarkington and the Indianapolis Art Association; address to Caroline Marmon Fesler; posthumous auction materials, receipts]
- Folder 11: [Tarkington memorials, chiefly 1981]
- Folder 12: [List of English artists and works, alphabetical with addresses, undated]