

National Gallery of Art Archives: World War II Research Resources

Roberts Commission and Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Officers

The American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe (referred to as the “Roberts Commission” after its chairman, Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts) was established by President Roosevelt on June 23, 1943. Its purpose was to promote the preservation of cultural properties in war-ravaged areas with the stipulation that this mission should not interfere with military operations. The Roberts Commission provided information concerning the nature and location of cultural treasures to military units with the goal that they should be protected whenever possible. After the war, the Commission assisted the U.S. Army in its mission to restore to their rightful owners works of art that had been confiscated by the Nazis. The Commission also promoted public awareness of the fate of cultural treasures. The Commission was active until June 30, 1946, when the State Department took over its remaining functions.

The Roberts Commission was headquartered at the National Gallery of Art. Director David Finley served as the group’s vice-chairman, and Huntington Cairns as its secretary-treasurer. In addition to chairman Owen Roberts, other commission members were William Bell Dinsmoor, Herbert H. Lehman, Archibald MacLeish, Paul Sachs, Archbishop F.J. Spellman, Francis Henry Taylor, Charles H. Sawyer, Sumner Crosby, and Alfred E. Smith. John Walker was a special advisor.

The Commission proposed the establishment of a Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) program within the U.S. military to assist in protecting and restituting cultural property. Many MFAA officers had museum experience or were art historians. With the support of the Roberts Commission, they carried out a variety of rescue missions, from shoring up walls and covering frescoes in cathedrals to retrieving art confiscated by the Nazis. During the post-war military occupation of Germany, monuments officers worked at collecting points where art and other objects were inventoried and protected before restitution to their nations of origin.

Research Resources

Records in the archives reflect the involvement of National Gallery employees and others in the Roberts Commission and the MFAA.

One box of John Walker’s records as chief curator contains files regarding the Roberts Commission. These include a copy of the initial proposal for the establishment of the Commission (1943), recommendations on personnel and policy, correspondence between Walker and other Commission members, and memoranda dating from June 1943 to January 1953. The correspondence dated after the Commission was disbanded pertains to inquiries about the work of the Commission and policies concerning the future protection of art and monuments in the event of another war. Press releases and reports are filed with the correspondence.

Also included is information gathered from various sources (1944-1946) about emergency procedures for art packing, handling, and removal. Included are pamphlets, British Parliamentary debates concerning bombing policies and the preservation of historical and artistic treasures, a 1944 issue of Time magazine with a cartoon about the allied military's concern for the preservation of cultural treasures, and a report by Francis H. Taylor on the fate of arts and monuments in Europe. Applications for positions with the Commission and a Commission report for 1946 are also included.

Some records of the Secretary-General Counsel's office concern Huntington Cairns' work for the Roberts Commission. These include correspondence with Commission members, especially John H. (Harry) Scarff and Archibald MacLeish (who wrote about problems with the nomination of Ernst Posner for a position with the Commission). These files also include correspondence with Commission members, MFAA members, and Lincoln Kirstein concerning problems with his appointment to the MFAA (three letters from Kirstein are typed on confiscated Nazi letterhead). These records also include cables to Cairns from U.S. State Department officials.

A folder in the Secretary-General Counsel's records contains a photographic compilation of Kunst dem Volk (Art of the People), a catalogue of paintings that were intended for Hitler's proposed art museum in Linz, Austria, labeled "Copied for Committee for Restoration of Art in Europe." The images were made by National Gallery photographer Henry Beville on February 19, 1944.

The donated papers of David Finley contain several letters from MFAA officers, including Charles Parkhurst and John Skilton. Theodore Rousseau described conditions in occupied France and touched on the movement of some great art collections including the Rothschilds'. Finley's appointment as vice-chairman of the Commission and a copy of the letter requesting that he serve in that position, both signed by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, are also among Finley's papers.

The donated papers of John Walker include Commission reports and journals of his European trips as well as lectures on looted art, the Roberts Commission, art and the war, and recommendations for postwar relief efforts in Italy.

Some oral histories in the archives relate to Roberts Commission and MFAA activities. Charles Parkhurst discussed his experiences as a Monuments officer in Europe. John Walker recalled a variety of wartime activities, especially his work for the Roberts Commission. Craig Hugh Smyth described his activities in the MFAA. Edith Standen and Agnes Mongan discussed the work of the MFAA and its officers.

Papers of Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Officers

The archives also holds collections of personal papers from several individuals who were Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) officers and involved in art restitution in Europe after the war. Detailed [finding aids](#) are available for each of these collections.

Edward E. Adams

Edward Adams' papers encompass publications and articles on the works of art stolen by the Germans during World War II, including one written by Adams on the restitution of works of art stored at Schloss Neuschwanstein and Kloster Buxheim in Bavaria, where he supervised the evacuation of stored art. Adams' notes describing the significance of the materials are also included. His original negatives taken of restitution operations at these sites are in the collection; photographs, contact sheets, and digital scans have been made from the negatives and are available for reference use.

S. Lane Faison

Lane Faison's collection includes copies of three Consolidated Interrogation Reports written by Faison and his colleagues in the Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU) of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) stationed at Alt Aussee, Austria: Activity of the Einsatzstab Rosenberg in France by J.S. Plaut; The Goering Collection by Theodore Rousseau; and Linz: Hitler's Museum and Library by S. Lane Faison. The collection also contains copies of thirteen Detailed Interrogation Reports on German individuals connected with art looting during the war, and lecture notes by Faison on his role in investigating art looting and photographs of the ALIU and of other restitution officers. Digital scans have been made of a few of the photographs in the collection.

Walter I. Farmer

Walter Farmer's papers consist of subject files, inventory lists, correspondence, exhibition catalogues, news clippings, and publications. His papers also include photographs of works of art processed through the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point and research files from his posthumous publication, *The Safekeepers: A Memoir of the Arts at the End of World War II*. The collection also includes audio interviews with Farmer, Kenneth Lindsay, and Edith Standen conducted in 1993-1994.

Frederick Hartt

Frederick Hartt's collection includes photographs, letters, reports, pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, and periodical and newspaper articles, concerning Hartt's work as an officer in the MFAA section of the Allied Military Government in Italy after World War II. Included are aerial photographs of Italian cities and extensive photographs of war-damaged monuments.

E. Parker Lesley

The papers of Parker Lesley include a journal, reports, memoranda, letters, photographs, and exhibition catalogues concerning Lesley's work as an officer in the MFAA section of the Allied Military Government in Germany after the war.

Charles Parkhurst

The papers of Charles Parkhurst include letters, reports, photographs, memoranda, pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, and periodical articles concerning Parkhurst's work as an officer in the MFAA section of the U.S. Military Government in Germany after World War II and on the general subject of works of art stolen by the Germans during the war.

James Rorimer

The papers of James Rorimer consist of reports, journals, and photographs he created as an MFAA officer in France and Germany. Research files compiled for his book *Survival: the Salvage and Protection of Art in War* and catalogues, military, government, and Nazi publications collected by Rorimer comprise other records about his MFAA work. Of special interest are materials about the return of stained-glass windows looted from the Strasbourg Cathedral and materials about the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR).

Craig Hugh Smyth

Craig Hugh Smyth's papers contain photographs, activity logs, reports, diaries, and art shipment receipts and lists created while he served as director of the Munich Central Collecting Point. Additional materials include exhibition catalogues, publications, and newspaper clippings as well as research files from his lecture and later publication about the work done at the Munich Collecting Point.

Edith Standen

The Edith Standen collection includes daily journals, correspondence, photographs, periodical and newspaper articles, pamphlets, exhibition and auction catalogues, and other publications concerning her work in the MFAA section in Germany and as officer-in-charge at the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point and on the general subject of works of art stolen by the Germans during the war. Of special interest are personal records and photographs documenting her training as an officer in the Women's Army Corp (WAC).

Department of Image Collections: Munich Central Collecting Point Archive

Following the war, repositories for art and cultural objects recovered by the allies were established at several locations in Germany, including the Central Collecting Point in Munich. Works of art that passed through the Munich Central Collecting Point had come originally from museums and private collections, especially from France and The Netherlands. Property cards were prepared for the objects that passed through the collecting point, and many of the objects were photographed.

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) became the repository of the property cards and the photographic negatives from the Munich Central Collecting Point; these materials are part of the "Ardelia Hall Collection," after the State Department official who took custody of the materials after the war.

The images remained at NARA until it was agreed that the National Gallery of Art could borrow and print the negatives, retaining a set of photographs for study use in the department of image collections. This extensive project, spanning twenty-five years and involving the printing of thousands of negatives, was completed by the National Gallery in 2006.

NARA now retains the property card file of all the works of art and other objects processed through Munich, existing negatives of the works, and a full set of photographs printed from the negatives.

The National Gallery of Art Library's department of image collections holds a microfilm copy of the front faces of the inventory cards and the second set of photographs printed from the Munich negatives. The Munich Central Collecting Point Archive is available for research use by appointment in the Image Collections. For more information or to make an appointment, please visit the department's web page.