

George Biddle Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the
Library of Congress

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Revised and expanded by Nan Thompson
Ernst



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2009

Contact information: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mss/address.html>

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Congress Manuscript Division, 2009

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Collection Summary

Title: George Biddle Papers

Span Dates: 1863-1973

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1916-1973)

ID No.: MSS12674

Creator: Biddle, George, 1885-1973

Extent: 3,500 items; 31 containers plus 1 oversize; 12 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English with French, Italian, Portugese, and Spanish

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Artist and public official. Correspondence; diaries; drafts and printed copies of speeches, articles, and a memoir; sketchbooks; scrapbooks; announcements; book reviews; and other papers relating chiefly to Biddle's role in American art, his work for the federal support of art, and the Federal Art Project, including also material relating to his involvement with the United States War Department Art Advisory Committee, World War II, and the Nuremberg War Crime Trials.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Personal Names

Aiken, Conrad, 1889-1973--Correspondence.
Benton, Thomas Hart, 1889-1975--Correspondence.
Berenson, Bernard, 1865-1959--Correspondence.
Biddle, Francis, 1886-1968--Correspondence.
Biddle, George, 1885-1973.
Brooks, Van Wyck, 1886-1963--Correspondence.
Bullitt, William C. (William Christian), 1891-1967--Correspondence.
Cassatt, Mary, 1844-1926--Correspondence.
Chapin, Katherine Garrison, 1890-1977--Correspondence.
Cheever, John--Correspondence.
Dehn, Adolf, 1895-1968--Correspondence.
Diederich, William Hunt, 1884-1953--Correspondence.
Douglas, William O. (William Orville), 1898-1980--Correspondence.
Grosz, George, 1893-1959--Correspondence.
Huxley, Aldous, 1894-1963--Correspondence.
James, William, 1842-1910--Correspondence.
Kuniyoshi, Yasuo, 1889-1953--Correspondence.
Lippmann, Walter, 1889-1974--Correspondence.
Mailer, Norman--Correspondence.
Mann, Thomas, 1875-1955--Correspondence.
Mumford, Lewis, 1895-1990--Correspondence.
Noguchi, Isamu, 1904-1988--Correspondence.
Orozco, José Clemente, 1883-1949--Correspondence.
Poor, Henry Varnum, 1887-1970--Correspondence.
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972--Correspondence.
Rockefeller, Nelson A. (Nelson Aldrich), 1908-1979--Correspondence.
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962--Correspondence.
Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882-1945--Correspondence.
Saint-John Perse, 1887-1975--Correspondence.
Santayana, George, 1863-1952--Correspondence.
Shahn, Ben, 1898-1969--Correspondence.

Steinbeck, John, 1902-1968--Correspondence.
Tate, Allen, 1899-1979--Correspondence.
Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972--Correspondence.
Wheelock, John Hall, 1886-1978--Correspondence.
Wilson, Edmund, 1895-1972--Correspondence.
Wister, Owen, 1860-1938--Correspondence.
Wood, Grant, 1891-1942--Correspondence.
Wright, Frank Lloyd, 1867-1959--Correspondence.
Wyeth, Andrew, 1917-2009--Correspondence.
Zorach, Marguerite, 1887-1968--Correspondence.
Zorach, William, 1887-1966--Correspondence.

Organizations

Federal Art Project.
United States. War Dept.

Subjects

Art, American.
Courthouses--Mexico.
Federal aid to the arts--United States.
Mural painting and decoration, American--Mexico.
War crime trials--Germany--Nuremberg.
World War, 1939-1945--Africa, North.
World War, 1939-1945--Art and the war.
World War, 1939-1945--Italy.
World War, 1939-1945--Journalists.

Related Names

Sardeau, Hélène, 1899-1969. Hélène Sardeau papers.

Occupations

Artists.
Public officials.

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of George Biddle, artist and public official, were given to the Library of Congress by George Biddle, 1960-1970. Additions to the papers were given by Yale University Library in 1979 and by Biddle's son, Michael Biddle, in 1992.

Processing History:

The papers of George Biddle were arranged and described in 1982. The collection was expanded and revised in 1996. The finding aid was revised in 2009.

Additional Guides:

A description of the 1992 addition to the George Biddle Papers appeared in *Library of Congress Acquisitions: Manuscript Division*, 1992, pp. 44-45.

Other Repositories:

The Archives of American Art has a microfilm copy of about 800 items in this collection photographed in 1954 when the Biddle Papers were in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Copyright Status:

Copyright in the unpublished writings of George Biddle in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions:

The papers of George Biddle are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, George Biddle Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1885, Jan. 24	Born, Philadelphia, Pa.
1898-1904	Attended Groton School, Groton, Mass.
1908	Spent six months working as a cowhand in Texas and Mexico
1908-1911	A.B. and LL.B., Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
1912-1916	Attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.; studied printmaking in Munich, Germany; spent summers painting in France with Frederick Frieseke
1917	Married Anne ("Nancy") Coleman (divorced) Enlisted in the United States Army; commissioned a first lieutenant
1917-1919	Served on the general staff, First Army Corps, in battles at Marne, St. Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne, France
1920	Lived in Tautira, Tahiti, with periodic trips to New York
1924	Moved to Paris, France
1925	Married Jane Belo (divorced)
1927	Settled in Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.
1928	Accompanied Diego Rivera on a sketching trip through Mexico
1930	Published <i>Green Island</i> . New York, N.Y.: Coward-McCann
1931	Married Hélène Sardeau (died 1969); spent most of the next two years in Rome, Italy
1933	Advocated the establishment of a mural program for public buildings as part of the Federal Art Project

1939	Published <i>An American Artist's Story</i> . Boston: Little, Brown
1942-1945	Chairman, War Department Art Advisory Committee
1942	Created murals and sculpture with H�el�ene Sardeau for the Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1944	Sketched and wrote <i>George Biddle's War Drawings</i> . New York: Hyperion Press Published <i>Artist At War</i> . New York: Viking Press
1944-1945	Designed and executed a mural with H�el�ene Sardeau for the supreme court building, Mexico City, Mexico
1945	Reporter and artist, Nuremberg War Crime Trials, Nuremberg, Germany
1950-1954	Served on the United States Commission of Fine Arts
1957	Published <i>The Yes and No of Contemporary Art</i> . Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press
1968	Published <i>Tahitian Journal</i> . Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press
1973, Nov. 6	Died, Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of George Biddle (1885-1973) include material dated between 1863 and 1973, with the greater part dated after 1916. Included in the collection are diaries, general and family correspondence, drafts and printed copies of speeches, articles and a memoir, sketchbooks, and scrapbooks of personal clippings, announcements of exhibits, and reviews of Biddle's books. The family correspondence contains a number of letters received by Biddle's wife, the sculptor H el ene Sardeau Biddle. Material relating to H el ene Sardeau can also be found in the [Subject File](#) and [Scrapbook](#) series. An [Addition](#) to the collection contains diaries, correspondence, and a sketchbook which supplement material in the original series. The papers are organized in nine series: [Diaries](#), [Family Correspondence](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Writings](#), [Subject File](#), [Sketches and Sketchbooks](#), [Scrapbooks](#), [Addition](#), and [Oversize](#).

The principal topic documented by the collection is George Biddle's career as a painter and as a spokesman for a more prominent role by the federal government in support of art. Biddle's association with the Federal Art Project, including his commission to paint murals for the Department of Justice building in 1935, is documented in the [Diaries](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Subject File](#), and [Scrapbooks](#) series. In 1942, he and his wife, H el ene Sardeau, were commissioned by the government of Brazil to create murals and sculpture for the national library in Rio de Janeiro. In 1943-1944, he and Sardeau designed and painted the murals for the Mexican supreme court building. These projects are documented in the [Diaries](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Subject File](#), [Scrapbooks](#), and [Addition](#) series.

Biddle helped organize the War Department Art Committee in 1943 and traveled as artist-correspondent at the battle fronts in North Africa and Italy. That same year he began planning the reorganization of postwar federal art projects. In 1945 he covered the Nuremberg War Crime Trials as reporter and artist. His wartime activities are documented in the [Diaries](#), [General Correspondence](#), [Subject File](#), [Scrapbooks](#), and [Addition](#) series.

George Biddle was a writer as well as a painter. He published books and articles about his own development as an artist, most of which recount his travels throughout the world. Only his 1939 memoir, *An American Artist's Story*, is represented in the [Writings](#) series, along with a number of articles and speeches about art. Biddle's [diaries](#), beginning in 1901, cover most of his life except for the years 1910-1917 and 1924-1932. For the remaining years, Biddle created a detailed record of his activities, encounters, reading, thoughts, conversations, and impressions. He recorded the routine matters of daily life but also described artists and writers of his wide acquaintance, and the social and political leaders he knew from boyhood and from his association with the Roosevelt and Truman administrations.

Edited extracts from Biddle's [diaries](#) appear in his books *An American Artist's Story* (1939), *Artist at War* (1944), and *Tahitian Journal* (1968), but most of the diaries were never published. Of particular interest are the entries describing the Nuremberg trials. As a brother of Francis Biddle, Franklin D. Roosevelt's attorney general, George Biddle was a close associate of the American team of prosecutors. His conversations with them and descriptions of the area devastated by war are recorded in diaries in the [Addition](#) series.

The [Addition](#) series also includes family and general correspondence and a sketchbook. The material is organized in accordance with the arrangement of the preceding series.

Posters from the Japanese exhibition can be found in the [Oversize](#) series.

Correspondents in the collection include Conrad Aiken, Bernard Berenson, Thomas Hart Benton, Francis and Katherine Biddle, Van Wyck Brooks, William C. Bullitt, Mary Cassatt, John Cheever, Adolf Dehn, Wilhelm Hunt Diederich, William O. Douglas, George Grosz, Aldous Huxley, William James, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Alexis Léger (Saint-John Perse), Walter Lippmann, Thomas Mann, Norman Mailer, Lewis Mumford, Isamu Noguchi, José Clemente Orozco, Henry Varnum Poor, Ezra Pound, Nelson A. Rockefeller, Eleanor Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, George Santayana, Ben Shahn, John Steinbeck, Allen Tate, Harry S. Truman, John Hall Wheelock, Edmund Wilson, Owen Wister, Grant Wood, Frank Lloyd Wright, Andrew Wyeth, and William and Marguerite Zorach. Some of the correspondence is in French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in nine series:

- [Diaries, 1901-1963](#)
- [Family Correspondence, 1863-1967](#)
- [General Correspondence, 1904-1969](#)
- [Writings, 1929-1963](#)
- [Subject File, 1899-1958](#)
- [Sketches and Sketchbooks, 1930-1959](#)
- [Scrapbooks, 1916-1965](#)
- [Addition, 1908-1973](#)
- [Oversize, 1958](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
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BOX 7-10	<u>Family Correspondence, 1863-1967</u> Correspondence received and sent by family members. Arranged alphabetically by name of family member.
BOX 11-16	<u>General Correspondence, 1904-1969</u> Letters sent and received. Organized as letters sent and received, and thereunder alphabetically by name of correspondent.
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BOX 19	<u>Subject File, 1899-1958</u> Biographical sketches, photographs, journals, poems, passports, legal documents, correspondence, memoranda, reports, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by name of person and therein by subject or type of material.
BOX 20-21	<u>Sketches and Sketchbooks, 1930-1959</u> Sketches and sketchbooks. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 22-26	<u>Scrapbooks, 1916-1965</u> Scrapbooks containing clippings, announcements of exhibits, and reviews of Biddle's books. Arranged alphabetically by name of person and therein chronologically.
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BOX OV 1	<u>Oversize, 1958</u> Posters from Japanese exhibition. Organized and described according to the series, box, and folder from which they were removed.

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Family Correspondence, 1863-1967

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General Correspondence, 1904-1969

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General Correspondence, 1904-1969

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BOX OV 1	Posters, Japanese exhibition, 1958 (Container 19)