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1910-1923

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1881-1924

Finding Aid for the American Art Association Records, 1877-1924

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Repository

The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives
10 East 71st Street
New York, NY, 10021
archives@frick.org
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Creator

Kirby, Thomas E. (Thomas Ellis), 1846-1924

Creator

American Art Association.

Title

American Art Association Records

ID

MS.15

Date

1877-1924

Extent

4.0 Linear feet (8 boxes)

Abstract

The American Art Association, a New York art gallery and auction house, was founded in 1883 by James F. Sutton, R. Austin Robertson, and Thomas E. Kirby. The records date from 1877-1924, but the bulk of the material documents a selection of auction sales run by the gallery from 1910 through 1923. The collection contains correspondence, approximately 1,000 photographs, handwritten and typed notes, fragments of a typed manuscript on the American Art Association, and printed material.

Preferred Citation

American Art Association Records. The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives.

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HISTORICAL NOTE

The American Art Association, a New York art gallery and auction house, was founded by James F. Sutton, R. Austin Robertson, and Thomas E. Kirby in 1883. Exhibitions of American art, as well as some Asian decorative arts, were on display in the sales galleries at 6 East 23rd Street. Thomas Kirby acted as auctioneer for the firm.

Sutton and Robertson had previously established the American Art Gallery in 1879, which closed in 1882. Thomas Kirby had begun his career as an auctioneer in the early 1870s, working with a variety of firms, including George A. Leavitt and Company, and had conducted sales throughout the country. He had his own auction company, Thomas E. Kirby and Company, when he joined with Sutton and Roberts in 1883.

R. Austin Robertson died in 1892. Kirby's son Gustavus joined the firm in 1912 and became half owner in 1915, upon the death of James Sutton. The galleries moved to 30 East 57th Street in 1922. In 1923, Kirby retired and sold the American Art Association to Cortlandt Field Bishop (1870-1935), who contracted Hiram Parke and Otto Bernet to run the auction house. In 1929 it merged with the Anderson Auction Company to form the American Art Association-Anderson Galleries, Inc. In 1938, the firm was taken over by Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., which had been formed a year earlier.

Bolas, Gerald D. *The Early Years of the American Art Association, 1879-1900*. PhD diss., City University of New York, 1998.

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SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The American Art Association records document a selection of auction sales run by the gallery, as well as Thomas Kirby's relationship with those who sold their works through the American Art Association. Records date from 1877-1924, with the bulk dating from 1910-1924. The collection includes correspondence, approximately 1,000 photographs, handwritten and typed notes, fragments of a typed manuscript on the American Art Association, pages from auction sales catalogues, newspaper and periodical clippings, and several sales catalogues.

The bulk of the collection concerns specific auction sales conducted by the American Art Association. Files contain inventories of the works, often with prices and names of buyers; black and white photographs of the works and several of the exhibition installations; correspondence; sections of a typed manuscript on the American Art Association; handwritten notes regarding the sales; pages from sales catalogues; and clippings. Documentation of 70 sales ranges from a single typescript sentence to multiple folders of correspondence, inventories and hundreds of photographs of the items for sale. An additional 150 auction sales are represented in the files only by cursory handwritten notes. Some of the most heavily documented sales include *57 Paintings Belonging to Ichabod T. Williams* of February 3-4, 1915; *Charles of London, Italian, French & English Furniture, Tapestries, Rugs, Paintings, Porcelains, etc.* of November 15-20, 1920; and *Palatial Mansion & Contents Collected by William J. Saloman*, April 4-7, 1923.

Also of note in the records is correspondence between Thomas Kirby and Arthur B. Emmons regarding several auctions in which works he owned were sold; 16 letters to Charles De Kay from correspondents other than Thomas Kirby; handwritten notes on George Inness; biographical comments on Thomas Kirby; a privately printed catalogue, *Pictures in the Collection of F.A.G. Hood, Esq.*; and several letters concerning the controversy over the authenticity of the painting *Blue Boy* at the William H. Fuller Sale of February 25, 1898, including a letter from Francis Davis Millet. A few clippings and letters document Kirby's career prior to his affiliation with the American Art Association.

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ARRANGEMENT

The records are organized in three series:

Series I: Auction Sales, 1910-1923

Series II: Correspondence and Notes, 1877-1924

Series III: Clippings, 1881-1924

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Access Restrictions

These records are open for research under the conditions of The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives access policy. Contact the Archives Department for further information at archives@frick.org.

Provenance

Gift of Mrs. Thomas Waller (Wilhelmina), granddaughter of Thomas E. Kirby, 1956.

Processing Information

Arranged and described by Susan Chore, 2001.

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RELATED MATERIALS

Related Materials

Twelve linear feet of scrapbooks containing newspaper clippings on auction sales require conservation attention and are not available for research due to their fragile condition.

American Art Association Records, 1853-1924. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. (This collection contains the bulk of the American Art Association's records, an additional 50 linear feet)

Separated Materials

Books and sales catalogues were removed and integrated into the Library's collection.

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CONTROLLED ACCESS HEADINGS

Corporate Name(s)

- American Art Association.

Genre(s)

- Photographs.
- Correspondence.
- Clippings, newspaper.

Personal Name(s)

- Kirby, Thomas E. (Thomas Ellis), 1846-1924
- De Kay, Charles, 1848-1935
- Emmons, Arthur B.
- Hood, G.F.W.
- Lorenz, Rose H., d. 1934, Clippings.

Subject(s)

- Art galleries, Commercial--New York (State)--New York.
- Art auctions--New York (State)--New York.
- Painting--Prices.
- Art dealers--New York (State)--New York.

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COLLECTION INVENTORY

Series I: Auction Sales, 1910-1923

Arranged chronologically.

Documents selected auction sales conducted by the American Art Association. Contains file folder covers with handwritten notes, sections of a typed manuscript on the American Art Association that pertains to individual sales and sellers, inventories, price lists, correspondence, newspaper clippings, sales

catalogues, and photographs of the works, including some installations. Also included are two files of biographical comments on Thomas Kirby from the American Art Association manuscript, which were numbered and originally interfiled with the Auction Sales records. Auction sales that are represented in the files with only cursory handwritten listings on the file folder cover are listed below as "Auction Sales" with a date range; the number in parentheses indicates the number of sales listed in the folder. Numbers following the folder title are those written on original folders.

Box	Folder		Date
1	1	Auction Sales (2), #368-369	1910 Dec. 5-6
1	2	Private Collection of Paintings, John H. Converse, #370 Ten photographs, letter from John G. Johnson to Thomas Kirby, and inventory.	1911 Jan. 6
1	3	Old Chinese Porcelain, Jades, etc., Yamanaka & Co., #371	1911 Jan. 5-7
1	4	Comments, #371-A Typed biographical comments (four pages), primarily about Thomas Kirby and book sales.	undated
1	5	Dr. Leslie D. Ward, Valuable Paintings, #372 21 photos.	1911 Jan. 13
1	6	Paintings & Objects of Art Collected by Wm. M. Laffan, #373 Letter from William Laffan to Thomas Kirby (May 24, 1903) containing comments about Mr. Morgan's visit to Aix-les-Bains, France during which he purchased no art.	1911 Jan. 20-21
1	7	Valuable Modern Paintings, sold by the dealer Jules Oehme, #374	1911 Jan. 27
1	8	Modern Paintings sold by order of Felix Isman, #375	1911 Jan. 3
1	9	Comments, #376-A Typed biographical comments (two pages) on Mr. Kirby as the "premier auctioneer."	undated
1	10	Auction Sales (2), #377-378	1911 Mar. 6-7
1	11	Modern Paintings & Water Colors, collected by late Peter A. Schemm, #379 40 photographs.	1911 Mar. 15-17
1	12	Auction Sales (3), #432-434	1913 Nov. 5-10
1	13	Artistic Property, Tapestries, Cottier & Company, #435	1913 Nov. 19
1	14	Valuable Stock of Old English Furniture, Cooper & Griffith, #436 Letter from C.H. Griffith to the American Art Association (December 10, 1913) regarding his satisfaction with the outcome of the sale.	1913 Dec. 3-6
1	15	Stock of Rugs & Textiles, John T. Keresey & Co., #437	1913 Dec. 8-10
1	16	Auction Sales (2), #439-440	1914 Jan. 15-16

1	17	Valuable Paintings, Collection by the Late Clement & Griscom, #458 34 photographs	1914 Jan. 26-27
1	18	Paintings by Old Masters & Early English School, Leon Hirsch, #441; Old Chinese Bronzes, Porcelains, Brocades, Paintings on Glass, Rugs and Furniture, Yamanaka & Co., #442 Four hand-tinted photographs and one black and white photo of objects in the auction. Five photographs of the exhibition rooms. (5 photographs removed to Oversize box)	1914 Jan. 29-31
1	19	Auction Sale (1), #433A	1914 Feb. 5-9
1	20	Old Oriental Weaves, Old Persian Faiences, Arm. Persian Looms and Other Oriental Treasures, O. Agopian & Son, #438	1914 Feb. 6-9
1	21	Auction Sales (3) #434A, #436A, #437A; Horace Townsend, Famous Hargreave Collection of Wedgewood, Medallions, etc., #434B	1914 Feb. 9-18
1	22	Great Collection of Blue and White Style Color Specimens, Peach Blooms, etc., S.S. Carvalho, #439A; Paintings & Drawings by the Late Francis Davis Millet, #442; Auction Sales (2), #440A-#441A File folder cover with notes on Millet re Academy of Rome and his death.	1914 Feb. 24-28; Mar. 6; Mar. 7-11
1	23	Valuable Paintings by Foreign and American Masters, #443	1914 Mar. 17-20
1	24	Auction Sales (6), #444-449	1914 Mar. 19- May 8
1	25	Book Sales (16), 1913-1914, #400, 407-408, 451-457, 460-462, 468	1913 Nov.- 1914 May
1	26	Auction Sale (1), #466; Artistic & Other Property, Residence of Late Mrs. Emilie de L. Havermeyer, #467 Essay "Monogram on the series 'Les fetes de Village' composed of three tapestries" (seven pages, typed), letter from John Getz to Kirby re Audran tapestries in sale (November 16, 1914), and three photographs of rooms in residence, two of tapestries. (2 photographs removed to Oversize box)	1914 Oct. 29 - Nov. 7; Nov. 16-23
1	27	Auction Sale (1), #468; Old Chinese Rugs Collected by Thomas B. Clarke, #469	1914 Dec. 3-7; 1915 Jan. 6-9
1	28-29	Auction Sale (1), #470; Early English Portraits Collected by F.A.G. Hood, #471 Nine letters from G.F.W. Hood to Thomas Kirby, four telegrams, and 13 photographs. Also contains privately printed catalogue <i>Pictures in the Collection of F.A.G. Hood, Esq.</i> Catalogue contains some annotations.	1915 Jan. 12-14; Jan. 21
2	1	Chinese & Japanese Bronzes Collected by Charles H. Cramps, #472; Auction sale (1), #473	1915 Jan. 21; Jan. 19
2	2	Tapestries, Old Laces, Snuff Boxes, Watches, Fans, Louis XV Furniture Collected by Duc d'Avaray, #474 (2 photographs removed to Oversize box)	1915 Jan. 22-23

2	3	Auction Sales (2), #475-476	1915 Jan. 25
2	4-7	<p>57 Paintings Belonging to Ichabod T. Williams, #477</p> <p>File folder cover with descriptive notes; two-page typed summary of sale with some buyers and prices listed; typed list of paintings with artist, number, buyer and price; and 123 photographs, with duplicates.</p> <p>(One file folder cover and 42 images removed to Oversize box)</p>	1915 Feb. 3-4
2	8	<p>Chinese Porcelains Collected by the late William Churchill Oestler, #479; Rare & Beautiful Art Treasures from China, Yamanaka, #480</p>	1915 Feb. 5-6; Feb. 16-17
2	9	<p>Auction Sale (1), #481</p>	1915 Feb. 25-27
2	10	<p>Valuable Oriental and Other Art Property, Arthur I. Hoe Collection, #482</p>	1915 Mar. 5-6
2	11	<p>Continuation Paintings Sale, various sellers, #483</p>	1915 Mar. 5
2	12	<p>Auction Sales (5), #484, 484A, 485-487</p>	1915 Mar.
2	13	<p>Art and Literary Collections of the Late General Brayton Ives, #488</p> <p>Correspondence (1910-1913) to General Brayton Ives from Edgar Gorer and Dreicer & Co., regarding the sale/purchase of his vases and other porcelains. Includes invoices with prices.</p>	1915 Apr. 6-14
2	14	<p>The Blakeslee Galleries of Paintings, #489</p> <p>Letter to the American Art Association from Prinz Brothers denying any business dealings with Blakeslee, and copy of a confidential letter from John G. Johnson to Dr. Paul Mersch re strategy for selling the Blakeslee collection.</p> <p>(three photographs removed to Oversize box)</p>	1915 Apr. 21-22
2	15	<p>15 Fine Paintings by the Great Masters, Duveen Brothers, "Fire Sale," #490</p> <p>File folder cover with notes about damage done to the paintings by a ship fire.</p>	1915 Apr. 29
2	16	<p>Chinese Porcelains, Jade, etc. belonging to Loo & Cie, #491; Auction Sale, #492</p>	1915 May 5-6; May 13
2	17	<p>Costly Church Treasures Belonging to the Dominican Order of the Catholic Church of Cuba, #493</p>	1915 Apr. 24-May 1
2	18	<p>Book Sales, 1914-1915, #494-504</p>	1914 Jul.-1915 May
2	19	<p>Costly Art Property & Antiquities Belonging to the House of Karl Freund, #526</p>	1916 Mar. 20-23
2	20	<p>Auction Sales (2), #563-564</p>	1916 Nov.
2	21	<p>Old & Modern Paintings belonging to Several Estates, #593</p>	1917 Apr. 16-17

		Letter to Kirby regarding sales of pictures from Gustav Reichard Estate, and one photo.	
3	1	Auction Sales (20), #594-612	1917 Nov. - May
3	2	Auction Sales (2), #686-687	1919 Mar.
3	3	Textiles & Embroideries, V. Benguiat, #688	1919 Apr. 7- 12
3	4	Auction Sale (1), #689	1919 Apr. 15-16
3	5	Old & Modern Masters, various sellers, #690	1919 Apr. 24-25
3	6	Art Treasures collected by the late Charles Stewart Smith, #691	1919 Apr. 25-26
3	7	Italian Renaissance Furniture, Bronzes, Ceramics, etc., Tolentino Galleries, #692	1919 May 1- 2
3	8	Auction Sales (2), #693-694	1919 May
3	9	Auction Sale (1): Books, #695; Sumptuous "Attic" Library of the late Alfred J. Cox, Master Binder, #696	1918 Nov. 18-21; 1918 Dec. 9- 10
3	10	Auction Sales (8), (Book Sales) #697-704	1918 Dec. - 1919 Apr.
3	11	Auction Sales (4), #706-709; Auction Sale: Residence of Arthur B. Emmons SEE ALSO: Correspondence and Notes - Emmons, Arthur B.	1919 Aug.- Nov.; 1919 Aug. 28
3	12	Auction Sales (2), #710-711	1919 Nov.
3	13	Furnishings & Embellishments, Residence of Captain J.R. De Lamar, #712 (Eight photographs of residence interior removed to Oversize box)	1919 Nov. 20-22
3	14	Auction Sale (1), #713; Old & Modern Rugs & Carpets, #714	1919 Nov.; 1919 Nov. 25
3	15	Emil Pares, Spanish & Italian Furniture, Flemish & French Tapestries, etc., #715	1919 Dec. 18-23
3	16	Auction Sale (1), #716; Oriental Porcelain, Snuff Bottles, Vases, etc, Fred William Hunter, #717	1919 Dec.; 1920 Jan. 7- 14
3	17-18	Old and Modern Paintings, Arthur B. Emmons., Thatcher B. Adams, Joseph F. Flanagan, Henry Sayles, Harris B. Dick, #718	1920 Jan. 14-15

43 photographs, and cuts from the catalogue marked with prices, size, number and seller.

SEE ALSO: Correspondence and Notes - Emmons, Arthur B. for extensive

3	19	Mrs. Rowland Lincoln and other Private Collections, #719	1920 Jan. 22
3	20	Mrs. Eben Sutton, Early American & English Furniture, Rare Glass, etc., #720	1920 Jan. 22-24
3	21	Furnishings & Embellishments, Mrs. James Brown, Mrs. Stephen Brown, Mrs. Lloyd Bryce, #721	1920 Jan. 29-30
3	22	Paintings collected by Capt. J.R. De Lamar, #722 29 photographs.	1920 Jan. 29
3	23	Household Furniture, Tapestries, Clocks, etc. Thatcher M. Adams Estate, #723	1920 Jan. 31
3	24	Collection of Japanese Color Prints & Paintings, Arthur Davison Ficke, #724	1920 Feb. 10-11
3	25	Kouchakji Frères, Rare Persian Pottery, etc., #725	1920 Feb. 13-14
3	26	Ernest A. Bischoff Collection, Chinese Porcelain, etc., #726	1920 Feb. 24-28
3	27	Ralph H. White, Modern Paintings, #727	1920 Feb. 25-26
3	28	Paintings, Watercolors, Pastels, Drawings, Etchings, and Studio Effects of the late Hendrik William Mesdag, #728	1920 Mar. 8- 10
3	29	Auction Sales (7), #729-735	1920 Mar.
3	30	Auction Sale (1), #736; The Celebrated E. Eymonau Collection and Vitall Benguiat Collection of Remarkable Rugs, Tapestries, & Textiles, #737	1920 Mar. 29-30; 1920 Apr. 8- 10
3	31-32	R. Hall McCormick, Portraits & Landscapes by British Masters, #738 80 photographs.	1920 Apr. 10
4	1-3	Early American & British Portraits, Landscapes & Historical Pictures, Frank Bulkeley Smith, #739 99 photographs.	1920 Apr. 22-23
4	4	Italian Furniture, Tapestries, Bronzes, etc. collected by Raoul Tolentino, #740	1920 Apr. 21-27
4	5	Auction Sales (8), #741-748	1919 Oct.- 1920 May
4	6	Auction Sale (1), #749; Late S.S. Rosenstamm, Masterpieces of Etchings, Notable Prints by Rembrandt & Durer, #750	1920 Jan.; 1920 Jan. 27

4	7	Auction Sale (1), #751; William Lanier Washington Relics & Memorabilia of George Washington, #752	1920 Feb. ; 1920 Feb. 7- 9
4	8	Auction Sales (6), #753-758	1920 Feb.- Mar.
4	9	Auction Sales (9), #759-777	1920 Mar.- May
4	10-13	Charles of London, Italian, French & English Furniture, Tapestries, Rugs, Paintings, Porcelains, etc., #779 182 photographs.	1920 Nov. 15-20
5	1	Auction Sale (1), #778; Antique French & Italian Furniture, Tapestries, Clocks, Laces & Velvets, Madame Lefortier, #780	1920 Nov. ; 1920 Dec. 2- 4
5	2	Auction Sale (1), #781; Beautiful English Lustre, Robert Gilchrist, #782	1920 Dec. ; 1920 Dec. 6- 7
5	3	Auction Sales (3), #782 (duplicate number), #784	1920 Dec.
Palatial Mansion & Contents Collected by William J. Saloman, #950			
Box	Folder		Date
5	4	Correspondence, sale summaries and notes File folder cover; "Notes for Sir Joseph;" letters from Edwin S. Stuart, Jacques Seligmann and others; copies of letters from Joseph Duveen regarding the provenance of the works, his advice on the quality of the photographs, and suggestions that the paintings need to be cleaned (1912-1923); summaries listing some buyers, descriptions of the items in the sale, and prices; a note to Miss Lorenz; and, "A Short Summary of Some of the Outstanding Features Forming the Art Collection of Mr. William Saloman, Deceased" (five pages).	1912- 1933
5	5	Inventories and Appraisals	1922- 1933
5	6	Newspaper clippings (One clipping removed to Oversize box)	1923
5	7-8	Saloman Sales Catalogue tear sheets	1923
5	9	Sales Catalogue tear sheets Marked-up tear sheets of items sold by Duveen Brothers and other dealers to Mr. Saloman.	
5	10-11	Photographs - Furniture, Rugs, Tapestries 91 photographs.	
6	1	Photographs - Paintings 32 photographs	
6	2-4	Photographs - Sculpture & Decorative Objects 117 photographs.	

Series II: Correspondence and Notes, 1877-1924

Arranged alphabetically by subject or correspondent.

Contains Thomas Kirby's correspondence regarding American Art Association auction sales, copies of letters pertaining to provenance, and miscellaneous notes and essays. Correspondents include Arthur B. Emmons, Francis Davis Millet, and William Fuller. Emmons correspondence concerns three American Art Association sales in which works he owned were sold. Also includes 16 letters sent to Charles de Kay from correspondents other than Thomas Kirby. Of note is an essay on the American Art Association's relationship with George Inness, and letters concerning the controversy over the sale of *Blue Boy*.

Box	Folder		Date
6	5	<i>Blue Boy</i>, William H. Fuller Sale (February 25, 1898)	[189?]
		Two letters from William Fuller, and one from Francis Davis Millet related to the sale of the painting <i>Blue Boy</i> .	
6	6	"A Business Change" Notice	1883 Feb. 17
		Notice re Thomas Kirby's sale of Thomas E. Kirby & Co. and his new association with James F. Sutton and R. Austin Robertson of The American Art Galleries and Art Association	
6	7	Correspondence, miscellaneous	1877- 1898
		Three letters and one telegram. H. Harper (sp?) with regrets that Kirby is leaving Leavitt & Co. and response to request to use him as a reference; J.C. Hoagland regarding increasing value of Barbizon pictures; and letter from Kirby to Mr. [Aitken] with list of paintings to be omitted from his sale.	
6	8	De Kay, Charles	1924
		Letters to Charles de Kay. Correspondents include Frank P. Crasto, Jr., P. Whitwell Wilson, Arthur Swann of the American Art Association, John S. Wood, Henry Rood, Eugenio Pirani, R.W. van Boskerck, and John De Kay regarding the U.S. preventing his entry into the country and complaints about Washington. Also a few letters criticizing book reviews he has written.	
6	9-10	Emmons, Arthur B.	1919- 1922
		Correspondence between Emmons and Kirby regarding public sale at Emmons' residence at 60 Park Avenue on August 28, 1919; sale of etchings on December 4-5, 1919; sale of Emmons' Renoirs and Monets January 14-15, 1920; and his subsequent repurchase of one of Monet's "poppy pictures" from Durand-Ruel.	
6	11	Inness, George – Essay	undated
		Handwritten essay about the American Art Association's relationship with George Inness.	
6	12-13	Notes, miscellaneous	1898, undated
		Descriptions of auction sales, private collections, and miscellaneous notes.	
6	14	Whistler Pictures, Correspondence as to the Sale of	1920
		Carbon copies of correspondence between Sir George Lewis and Joseph Pennell regarding the disposition of Whistler engravings and prints belonging to the estate of William Heinemann.	

Series III: Clippings, 1881-1924

Arranged alphabetically by subject.

The bulk of the newspaper articles concern auction sales of the American Art Association, the 1922 opening of the new galleries on 57th Street, and the sale of Rosa Bonheur's *Horse Fair* in 1887. Also

contains articles on the history of the American Art Association, Thomas Kirby, Gustavus Kirby, Rose Lorenz, auction sales of other galleries, private collections and an obituary of Charles Freer. Newspaper clippings were photocopied onto acid free paper.

Box	Folder		Date
7	1-2	American Art Association - Auction Sales	1885-1895; 1921-1923
		Folder 1 contains photocopies of the newspaper clippings; Folder 2 contains the originals (some originals removed to oversize).	
7	3	American Art Association - History	1896, 1922
7	4-6	American Art Association - New Galleries, 30 East 57th Street	1922
		Re opening and Fifth Avenue Association Prize.	
		[3 folders, 2 of originals]	
7	7	Bonheur, Rosa	1887
		Regarding purchase of <i>Horse Fair</i> at A.T. Stewart sale of March 23, 1887-March 31, 1887 by Cornelius Vanderbilt and his subsequent donation of the painting to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.	
7	8	Freer, Charles L.	1919
		Obituary	
7	9	Kirby, Gustavus	1922-1923
7	10	Kirby, Thomas	1896-1922, undated
7	11	Lorenz, Rose	1916, 1923
7	12-13	Miscellaneous	1881-1924
		Articles about auction sales, private collections, and works of art.	