Digital Archival Representation: Approaches & Challenges

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Introduction

• Archival representation
  – Context and content organized as an organic whole and represented in one hierarchical structure

• Digitization movement
  – Archival materials turned into digital objects with more granular multi-faceted item-level metadata
Archival Approach
John White Alexander papers, 1775-1968, bulk 1870-1915

Collection Summary

Alexander, John White, b. 1836 d. 1915

Folder: Portrait painter

York, N.Y.

The papers of John White Alexander in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2009. The bulk of the papers have been scanned total 5,992 images.

Series 1: Biographical Information

Series 2: Correspondence

Series 3: Assurances and Membership

Series 4: Legal and Financial Records

Series 1: Biographical Information, circa 1875-1908 (Box 1, OV 1/3; 0.1 linear feet)

This series contains notes, writings, and printed materials that describe the life of John White Alexander, as well as ephemera and personal documents related to specific life events.

Notes and narratives include biographical essays about Alexander and his guardian, Colonel Edward Ay Aiken. Biographies of Alexander's parents, and notes made by Elizabeth Alexander in preparation of these entries. Personal documents and ephemera include a wedding invitation, an identity card issued for the Paris International Exposition of 1900, a calling card, a circular about an artist named Jepes Alexander, examples of Alexander's signature, and a French visa. Also found are drafts of essays by Elizabeth Alexander about her husband and others in their circle, and an oral history interview of Elizabeth Alexander in three parts taken by DeWitt M. Lockman, a later president of the National Academy of Design.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box	Folder
1	1
2	Personal Documents and Ephemera, circa 1875-1908 ( Oversized items housed in OV 1/23)
5	5
6	6
7	7

Box	OV8

Oversized Personal Documents and Ephemera, circa 1875-1908 (items scanned with Box 1, 5.5)

Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1870-1942 (Boxes 1, 6.7 linear feet)

This series contains personal and business correspondence of John White Alexander and his wife, Elizabeth Alexander. Correspondence from the 1870s and 1880s contain primarily of Alexander's letters home to his guardian, Colonel Edward Ay Aiken, the Allen family, and his friend E.E. Phipps, all in Philadelphia, written from New York and Europe. After his death the family visited the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Many of these letters are found with typed transcripts which contain scattered annotations which appear to be in Elizabeth Alexander's handwriting. A couple of cases, transcripts exist for letters which are no longer found in the collection.

The remaining of correspondence consists of letters to Alexander from fellow artists, patrons, museums, arts organizations, and friends. Significant correspondents include Charles Dana Gibson, F.E. Lurie, Frederick Brackenor, Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry James...
Archival Approach

• Archival context
  • Provenance and original order
  • Hierarchical structure

• Accessibility & interoperability
  • Browsing
  • Keyword search
Document Group Approach
Document Group Approach

• Archival context
  • Functional group
  • Documentary relationship

• Accessibility & interoperability
  • Document group specific metadata schema
  • Multiple collection search
    • Comment field metadata
    • Keyword search
Metadata Approach

About This Collection

The Robert Lincoln O'Connell papers document the service of an Irish-American soldier, born in Massachusetts, but raised in Connecticut, who served as a combat engineer in the First Division of the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) in the First World War, 1917-1919. The papers include correspondence (33 letters, 19 postcards, 1 telegram) he wrote home, primarily to his mother, Mary, and sisters Ellen and Sarah, from his training in Washington, D.C. and Virginia through active duty service in France and Germany. Also included are military odds and ends, such as numerous pay slips and orders, in addition to several publications and photographs as well as dozens of postcards, associated with his time in the U.S. Army. There are also some items gathered recently by his family members and/or Archivist staff, such as copies of federal census forms and his obituary, to supplement the collection. The postcards have a special circumstance in that Robert tended to divide them into two parts. There were very basic ones, usually with little or no illustration, that he used for correspondence purposes. The other type were the photographs and color prints that he apparently considered as collectibles, either sending them home with his letters, or bringing home himself after the war. There are also some memorable items such as button pins, French cases, and an army battle opener.
Metadata Approach

- Archival context
  - Collection overview
  - External link to finding aids
- Accessibility & interoperability
  - Standard metadata schema
  - Multiple access points
    - Name / Subject / Date / Place / Title

Challenges of Digital Archival Representation

- Archival context
  - Archival approach
  - Document group approach
  - Metadata approach
- Accessibility & interoperability
  - Metadata approach
  - Document group approach
  - Archival approach