



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

Guide to the Boston Art Commission records

Finding aid prepared by Kristen Swett
This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Repository: | City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division |
| Title: | Boston Art Commission records |
| Collection No.: | 0272.100 |
| Dates: | 1890-1959 |
| Quantity: | 3.25 Cubic feet (28 volumes and 1 portfolio) |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Historical note](#)

[Scope and Contents note](#)

[Related Material](#)

[Existence and Location of Copies note](#)

SERIES LIST

[Series I: Proceedings](#)

[Series II: Annual reports](#)

[Series III: Memorials](#)

[Series IV: Plans](#)

[Series V: Reference works](#)

Historical note

The Boston Art Commission, originally established in 1890, is the oldest municipal art commission in the United States. Chapter 122 of the Acts of 1890 established an 5 member Art Commission consisting of the Mayor, President of the Trustees of the Public Library, President of the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, President of the Boston Society of Architects and President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Chapter 122 of the Acts of 1890 was repealed by Chapter 410 of the Acts of 1898 which established the Art Department in charge of a Board of Commissioners appointed by the Mayor without confirmation. The Mayor selected the five members from lists of three each submitted by the Museum of Fine Arts, Trustees of the Boston Public Library, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston Art Club and the Boston Society of Architects. No work of art could become the property of the city without the approval of the Art

Department and all contracts or orders for the execution of any painting, monument, statue, bust, bas-relief or other sculpture were to be made by the Board. Chapter 87 of the Acts of 1919 placed under exclusive control of the Art Commission all works of art owned by the City of Boston.

The Art Department ceased to exist by the passage of Chapter 8 of the Ordinances of 1953 which created an Art Commission as a board in the Administrative Services Department. The Art Commission retained all the power and duties conferred or imposed by law on the Board of Art Commissioners in existence prior to the taking effect of Chapter 8 of the Ordinances of 1953. The Art Commission was not subject to supervision of the Administrative Services Board.

In 1982, the Art Commission was brought together with five other commissions to form the Environment Department (Chapter 624 of the Acts of 1982). This act's purpose was to coordinate the related concerns of all six commissions and streamline the use of each body's staff resources. Under the Environment Department, the Art Commission (as well as the other five) retained its independence to carry out its statutory obligations. In 1986, the Art Commission was reorganized as a board within the Office of Arts and Humanities (Section 2 of Chapter 4 of the Ordinances of 1986). The Mayor appoints the Art Commission; it consists of five Boston residents, each representing a Boston cultural institution. The Boston Art Commission exercises legal authority to approve and site new public art on property owned by the City of Boston. In addition, the Art Commission preserves and protects all monuments, paintings, statues, fountains and memorials on City property.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Contents note

This collection includes records of the Boston Art Commission from 1890-1959. It also includes several published reference volumes on art. The Art Commission records have been organized into 5 series: Series I: Proceedings, Series II: Annual reports, Series III: Memorials, Series IV: Plans and Series V: Reference works.

Series I includes 6 volumes of the minutes of the meetings of the Art Commission from its establishment in 1890 through January of 1959. The minutes are not indexed. The minutes from 1959 to the present remain in the custody of the Art Commission.

Series II includes three bound volumes of published annual reports of the Art Department from 1899-1945. Inventories of art owned by the City of Boston can be found in several annual reports. The annual reports can also be found in the Boston City Documents.

Series III includes memorials published for the dedication of various monuments and statues in the City of Boston.

Series IV includes plans drawn up in 1953 for a proposed "New Copley Square". The Art Commission was informed by the Traffic Commission that a new traffic layout was planned for the square and they requested plans to give the resulting new square a setting worthy of its surroundings.

Series V includes publications kept in the Art Commission library for reference purposes.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Related Material

Minutes, 1959 to the present, and all monument files remain in the custody of the Art Commission.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Existence and Location of Copies note

Microfilm copies of [Boston Art Commission records](#) are available through the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Series I: Proceedings, 1890 May 8-1959 January 15 (6 volumes)

Volume

| | |
|-----|---------------------------------|
| I-1 | 1890 May 8-1909 May 11 |
| I-2 | 1909 October 4-1914 January 17 |
| I-3 | 1914 January 23-1917 November 5 |
| I-4 | 1917 November 8-1921 June 21 |
| I-5 | 1921 July 21-1930 March 30 |
| I-6 | 1930 April 18-1959 January 15 |

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series II: Annual reports, 1899-1945 (3 volumes)

Volume

| | |
|------|--|
| II-1 | Annual Report of the Art Department, 1899-1910 |
| II-2 | Annual Report of the Art Department, 1911-1915 |
| II-3 | Annual Report of the Art Department, 1916-1945 |

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series III: Memorials, 1858-1909 (13 volumes)

Volume

| | |
|-------|---|
| III-1 | Memorial of the Inauguration of the Statue of Franklin, 1858 |
| III-2 | A Memorial of Edward Everett from the City of Boston, 1865 |
| III-3 | A Memorial of Charles Sumner from the City of Boston, 1874 |
| III-4 | Celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of the Evacuation of Boston by the British Army, March 17, 1776, 1875 |
| III-5 | Dedication of the Monument on Boston Common, Erected to the Memory of the Men of Boston Who Died in the Civil War, 1877 |

- III-6 Statue of Josiah Quincy, Dedication Ceremonies, October 11, 1879, 1879
- III-7 Celebration of the Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of Boston, September 17, 1880, 1880
- III-8 Proceedings on the Occasion of Laying the Corner-stone of the New Library Building of the City of Boston, November 28, 1888, 1889
- III-9 A Memorial of the American Patriots who fell at the Battle of Bunker Hill. June 17, 1775. With an Account of the Dedication of the Memorial Tablets on Winthrop Square, Charlestown, June 17, 1889, 1890
- III-10 The Monument to Robert Gould Shaw, 1897
- III-11 Monument to Joseph Warren, Its Origin, History and Dedication 1894-1904, 1905
- III-12 A Record of the Dedication of the Statue of Rear Admiral John Ancrum Winslow, May 8, 1909, 1909
Printed by order of the Governor and Council
- III-13 A Memorial to Patrick Collins, History of Its Inception, Establishment and Dedication, 1909
Published by the Collins Memorial Committee

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series IV: Plans, 1953 (1 portfolio)

Oversize

- IV-1 Proposed New Copley Square plans, 1953 September (20 drawings and plans)

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series V: Reference works, 1913-1973 (6 volumes)

Volume

- V-1 "Pen Drawing: an Illustrated Treatise" by Charles D. Maggins, 1913
- V-2 "Manual for Small Museums" by Laurence Vail Coleman, 1927
- V-3 "Illustrated Catalogue of a Special Loan Exhibition of Art Treasures from Japan" Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1936
- V-4 "Text to Monuments of Art, Showing its Development and Progress from the Earliest Artistic Attempts to the Present Period" by William Lubke and Ch. Fr. A. v. Lutzow, 1956
- V-5 "History of Ornament, Ancient and Medieval" by A. D. F. Hamlin, 1973
- V-6 "History of Ornament, Renaissance and Modern" by A. D. F. Hamlin

[Return to the Series List](#)