

J. F. G. Umlauff

1157

Finding aid prepared by Ian Lachow.

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University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

6/20/2013

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Umlauff, J.F.G
Title	J. F. G. Umlauff
Call number	1157
Date [inclusive]	1912-1933
Extent	1.5 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>J.F.G. Umlauff of Germany sold this collection to Gordon of the Penn Museum in the 1910s and 1920s. Gordon expressed interest in this collection as he sought African and Oceanian specimens for the Penn Museum, artifacts from a location they previously possessed very few. J.F.G. Umlauff lived from 1833-1889 and owned a German ethnographic and artifact firm that was established in 1868 and flourished for more than a century, closing not until 1974. The firm was managed by J.F.G. Umlauff until his death, at which time the firm was taken over by his son Johannes Umlauff. The firm was still operated by J.F.G. Umlauff when he sold several African and Oceanian specimens to Gordon. The collection can still be found in the Penn Museum and is now organized into 3 separate series – correspondence, catalogues, and albums. The correspondence section consists of letters between Umlauff and Gordon, the catalogues section is comprised of many lists of the specimens Umlauff sold to Gordon and, finally, the album section consists of many photos of the artifacts sold. Overall, this collection remains important since it marks the first time the Penn Museum truly expressed interest and</p>

acquired many “primitive” African and Oceanian artifacts.

Biography/History

Objects from Africa and Oceania were at first overlooked by the Penn Museum. Africa, for example, was not in the minds of prominent Philadelphians who met in 1887 and contributed funds to establish the institution that would one day become The University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. This changed, however, with the arrival of new museum director George Byron Gordon in 1910. Gordon quickly displayed interest in so-called “primitive” artifacts from Oldman, who shipped many Oceanian specimens, and J.F.G. Umlauff, a German with his own firm in Hamburg, Umlauff’s firm promoted its stock by sending museums its catalogues and photographs, which often showed its rooms absolutely crammed with African and Oceanian art. The firm was established by the patriarch of the Umlauff family, Johann Friedrich Gustav Umlauff (1833-89), and it was managed by his sons after his death (Thode-Arora 1992). The firm was officially founded in 1868 and it flourished for more than a century, closing shop only in 1974. The founder, Johann Gustav Umlauff, was originally a ship’s carpenter but in 1859 he purchased a bathhouse in Hamburg near the harbor, selling curios from overseas on the side. Later, Umlauff married a sister of the wild-animal dealer Carl Hagenbeck. Umlauff purchased a number of collections from Hagenbeck and from other prominent German collectors and dealers. Umlauff essentially profited from the substantial ethnographical “leftovers” as Hagenbeck branched out in the mid-1870s to what he named anthropological-zoological exhibitions, shows of exotic performers with their animals from overseas. J.F.G. Umlauff of Hamburg ultimately became Germany’s foremost dealer in natural history specimens and cultural objects. The Umlauffs not only bought various ethnographic objects and naturalia but also sold their possessions to many museums. The Penn Museum today still has some of these early African and Oceanian artifacts from the Umlauff firm in Hamburg.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of three series – correspondence, catalogues, and albums – which involve the exchange of African and Oceanian artifacts from J.F.G. Umlauff in Germany to George B. Gordon of the Penn Museum. This transfer occurred during the years 1912-1943, with most of the activity happening between 1912 and 1932. This deal between Gordon and Umlauff was significant because it marked one of the first times the Penn Museum showed interest and acquired “primitive” artifacts from Africa and Oceania. Overall, this collection is compiled to reflect this historic meeting between Gordon and Umlauff. The first aspect of the collection is the correspondence section, which is comprised of many letters and notes that track the exchange between Gordon and Umlauff. The next section of the collection is the catalogues, which consists of many lists containing item inventory that is being interchanged. Lastly, the final section is albums, which consists of the very photos and albums which were sold from the Umlauff

firm in Germany to Gordon's Penn Museum. These three sections – the correspondence, catalogues, and albums – comprise this collection and reveal the history of Umlauff and Gordon's exchange. The first section in the collection is correspondence, which consists of a series of letters written between Gordon and Umlauff discussing their future sale. The dates of the letters are between 1912 and 1943, with the majority being between 1912 and 1933 and many concentrated in 1912 alone. The letters in the collection are all from J.F.G. Umlauff writing to Gordon; the letters written from Gordon to Umlauff are in another collection. Most of the letters express Umlauff's desire for Gordon to pay for the items he has bought; he requests invoices and various other methods to get Gordon to begin to purchase the items he has bought. There are also many telegrams and some withdrawal sheets with similar purposes. Overall, this section is mainly concerned with letters written from Umlauff to Gordon with the interest of facilitating their transactions. The second series in this collection is catalogues, which consists of numerous lists of the artifact inventory that Umlauff sold to Gordon. There are essentially two separate lists which comprise the catalogue section: numbered lists and non-numbered lists which are instead labeled by various island groups. The numbered group list runs from 1-40; however, not all lists are present. These lists also have titles, which are locations from various places in Africa and Oceania. Likewise, the non-numbered lists are labeled by location names. Lastly, the final series in the collection is albums. This section is comprised of various albums of the actual artifacts – primarily photos – that Umlauff sold to Gordon. These photos are separated by region in separate albums. As in the lists, the albums are separated primarily into regions and islands in Africa and Oceania, respectively.

Administrative Information

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Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Solomon Islands

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Gordon, G. B. (George Byron), 1870-1927
- Hall, Henry Usher, b. 1876-d. 1944
- Jayne, Horace Howard Furness, 1898-1975
- Umlauff, J.F.G
- Umlauff, Johannes , 1874-1951

SUBJECT(S)

- Anthropology
- Antiquities
- Ethnology
- Maasai (African people)

Collection Inventory

CORRESPONDENCE, 1912-1943.

	Box
1912, 1912.	1
1913-1943, 1913-1943 (Bulk, 1913-1931) .	1

CATALOGUES.

	Box
Herero Sammlung.	1
New Guinea.	1
New Britain, New Ireland, Matty Islands, New Zealand.	1
Solomon Islands, New Caledonien.	1
List 1: Afrika Allgemein.	1
List 2: OST-Afrika.	1
List 4: Admiralitaets Inseln.	1
List 7: Karolinen Inseln.	1

List 15: Massai.	1
List 19: Marquesas.	1
List 23: Viti Inseln.	1
List 32: Togo Fetische.	1
List 38: Nubien Sudan.	1
List 39: Franz Inseln.	1
List 40: Schilluk.	1

ALBUMS.

	Box
Tahiti and Hervey Islands. Katalog No. 300.	1
Pacific Islands. Katalog No. 301.	1
Kamerun Sammlung 1914 Katalog No. 222.	2
Kamerun-Sammlung 1914 Katalog No. 223.	2
Carolinen Sammlung.	3
New Zealand Sammlung.	3
Baininng & Sulka Sammlung.	3
New Guinea.	3

Kamerun Sammlung.	3
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Massai.	3
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Herero Sammlung. Katalog No. 163.	3
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