

Charles H. Stephens Papers

1081

Finding aid prepared by Lawrence Rosen.

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University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

3/18/2015

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Stephens, Charles H., 1864-1940
Title	Charles H. Stephens Papers
Call number	1081
Date [bulk]	1891-1916
Date [inclusive]	1876-1964
Extent	2.8 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Charles Hallowell Stephens (1855-1931), followed several careers; illustrator, art teacher, collector of American Indian artifacts, and amateur anthropologist. Born and raised in Philadelphia he attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts studying under the tutelage of Thomas Eakins. The importance of Stephens for the Penn Museum resides in his extensive collection of Native American artifacts that was estimated to have about 2000 items, about 1700 of which were acquired by the Penn Museum in 1945. The collection is divided into eight series: Correspondence, Blackfoot, Sioux, Collection Materials, Correspondence on Data, Visual Material, American Pageant Association, and Photographs.</p>

Biography/History

Charles Hallowell Stephens (1855-1931), followed several careers; illustrator, art teacher, collector of American Indian artifacts, and amateur anthropologist. Born and raised in Philadelphia he attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts studying under the tutelage of Thomas Eakins. Considered to be a protégé of Eakins, the relationship lasted for about ten years until an acrimonious breakup related to Eakins' problems with the Academy and the Philadelphia Sketch Club. In addition to instruction in painting and drawing, Stephens gained valuable experience in the newly emerging field of photography by working with Eakins, who was using photography to assist his painting. Stephens made extensive use of these skills in 1891 to take several hundred photos of the Piegan I Indians (a major portion of which are in his collection at The Penn Museum). Immediately after completing his tenure as student at the Academy he taught painting and drawing there from 1881 to 1891.

It was also during his student days at the Academy that he met his future wife Alice Barber who went on to become a preeminent painter and illustrator at a time when very few women were professional artists. For their entire marriage of forty years they both remained professionally active not only in their own careers, but also in the Philadelphia art community. (Stephens was an active member of the Philadelphia Sketch Club from 1874 to the time of his death, and served as its President from 1913 to 1917.)

The importance of Stephens for the Penn Museum resides in his extensive collection of Native American artifacts that was estimated to have about 2000 items, about 1700 of which were acquired by the Penn Museum in 1945. He began collecting in earnest in 1888 with the acquisition of Apache and Sioux objects. Much of the collection centers on the Plain Indians and heavily oriented to clothing. Especially notable is the detailed documentation of the collection, providing not only the source and price of each object, but aided by bibliographic and Museum research their place and function in the culture of the tribes as well. Such attention to documentation provided a tool for provenance issues and assessing the cultural context of the objects. Also notable was his sketches for the vast majority of the items. In the latter part of his life he began the construction of a systematic card catalog, that was completed for about one third of the collection by the time of his death.

Stephens interest in Native Americans extended well beyond simply building a collection. Although not trained as a historian or anthropologist he demonstrated a strong desire to understand Indian cultures on their own terms, very much in the same spirit that contemporary Cultural Anthropology evidences. His readings and bibliographic research, as much as can be deciphered from his unorganized notes, reflect a serious scholarly approach. But it is his observations from the time he spent on the Blackfeet Reservation with the Piegan Indians in the Summer of 1891 that is most telling. The straight forward and non-judgmental descriptions of his observations recorded in his note book are those of a neutral and objective observer.

Another strong avocation for Stephens was Pageantry, a popular entertainment in the early twentieth century. that involved shows and parades of individuals wearing costumes from various cultures and historical periods. Stephens was active for several years in that movement as a participant and organizer. He provided the clothing (sometimes repaired and altered by him) from his collection, which certainly contributed to the authenticity of Indian garb being exhibited in these shows. His reputation in Pageantry was noted by being listed in the 1914 Who's Who in Pageantry published by the American Pageant Association. For a more complete biography see Pammela H. Jardine Cultural Cahange in the Early Years of the Blackfoot Reservation: The Fieldwork of Charles H. Stephens in 1891., unpupublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

Scope and Contents

The Charles H. Stephens Papers spans the period from 1891 to 1964 and primarily contains items relating to his personal and professional life. The collection is divided into seven series:

Series I. Stephens Correspondence: Letters from publishers concerning his illustrations; correspondence with dealers and collectors, and extensive correspondence concerning the removal of Indian Agent George Steele from his position. There are very few letters in the General folder. It seems he did not have a habit of saving correspondence. The evidence suggests that he often used them as scrap paper to make notes, sketches, etc.

Series II. Blackfoot: The 1891 notebook of Stephens visit and observation of the Blackfoot Indian reservation and transcripts and photo reproductions of same, miscellaneous notes of the tribe, list of photographs taken by Stephens in 1891 and newspaper clippings collected by Stephens concerning the Blackfoot. The original single note book from 1891 had a been both photocopied and transcribed. On both of these sequential numbers have been placed on the upper right hand corner to correspond to the sequencing of pages in the note book. No page numbers appear in the notebook, and no sequential numbers on the copies have been assigned to the blank pages that appear in the notebook. The newspaper clippings were those collected by Stephens.

Series III. Sioux: Text of observation of a dance ceremony, and a letter found at Wounded Knee a few days after the battle.

Series IV. Collection Material: Handwritten draft of the catalog of the collection, final card catalog (with museum object numbers added), classification notes, names of dealers and collectors in Indian artifacts, acquisition receipts (often including name from whom received and cost) for objects (written primarily on scraps of paper), several note and sketch books, object tags, drawings and sketches of artifacts that may be a mix of objects in the collection or museums and images found in published material, a series of notes on objects, language, natural materials, and the processing of materials, and finally notes from library research that dealt with some historical issues and possible research background for some of his objects. Stephens recorded his acquisitions on various sized slips of paper, and were found to be unorganized. In subsequent years museum object numbers were placed on some of these receipts, and these were placed in a separate folder and when ever possible sequenced by the museum numbers. The remainder slips were placed in a second folder without organization.

An extensive set of sketches of objects, once more usually on scrapes of paper, and unorganized. Some of the sketches were based on images found in publications or seen in Museums. Others may have been of items in his collection, but there was no information attached to these drawings. preventing making that assessment. They were organized by their function, guided in part by Stephens own suggestions for classification.

Series V. Correspondence and Data Re: Collection: Folders in this series are for museum activity with the collection from 1931 and after starting with the loaning of artifacts from Stephens in 1931. Letters and documents for the purchase in 1945, activity concerning Seminole items, Beaver Bowl and trade rifle from Stephens collection. Francis Eyman's essay on Stephens and her bibliographic searches for books containing Stephens' illustrations, and the publications of his wife, Alice. The Museum's involvement in the collection was divided into two periods: prior to the purchase in 1945 and the time subsequent to the purchase.

Series VI. Visual Material: A series of art panels adapted from Wounded Face's autobiographical pictograph.

Series VII Pageant Associations: Newsletters and publications from The Historical Pageant Association of Philadelphia and the American Pageant Association, notes on specifications and alterations to costumes.

Series VIII Photographs: Two archival boxes of photographs located with the photography archives, North American Section.

Administrative Information

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Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

For a more complete biography see Pamela H. Jardine Cultural Exchange in the Early Years of the Blackfoot Reservation: The Fieldwork of Charles H. Stephens in 1891., unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Drawings (visual works)
- Photographs

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Eyman, Frances, 1921-1949
- Steele, George, Major, 1837-1916
- Stephens, Alice Barber, 1858-1932

- Stephens, Charles H., 1864-1940

SUBJECT(S)

- Anthropology
- Ethnology--Indigenous peoples
- Indians of North America
- Material culture
- North American Indians

Collection Inventory

CORRESPONDENCE.

	Box
General.	1
Collection 1876-1916.	1
Agent George Steele.	1

BLACKFOOT.

	Box
Original notebook 1891.	1
Transcript of Original notebook.	1
Photo reproduction of Original notebook.	1
List of Photographs 1891.	1
Notes.	1
Newspaper Clippings.	1

SIoux.

	Box
Omaha Dance of the Sioux.	1
Pine Ridge Wounded Knee letter 1890.	1

CORRESPONDENCE AND DATA RE: COLLECTION.

	Box
Collection loan period 1931-1942.	3
Purchase of collection 1945.	3
Seminole items 1957-1959.	3
Beaver Bowl correspondence 1958-1964.	3
Flintlock Northwest trade gun.	3
Frances Eyman's essay on C. Stephens.	3
Frances Eyman's Biblio. search: books illustrated by C. Stephens.	3
Frances Eyman's Biblio. search: Alice Stephens.	3

VISUAL MATERIALS.

	Box
Art work.	3

AMERICAN PAGEANT ASSOCIATION.

	Box
Miscellaneous.	3

PHOTOGRAPHS.

	Box
Blackfeet-Stephens trip 1891 (1 of 4).	PA 68
Blackfeet-Stephens trip 1981 (2 of 4).	PA 68
Blackfeet-Stephens trip 1891 (3 of 4).	PA 68
Blackfeet-Stephens trip 1981 (4 of 4).	PA 68
Tintypes.	PA 68
Civil War Portraits, etc. (1 of 2).	PA 68
Civil War Portraits, etc. (2 of 2).	PA 68
Apache.	PA 69
Southern Arapaho.	PA 69

Piegan Arapaho.	PA 69
Southern Cheyenne.	PA 69
Chippewa.	PA 69
Comanche.	PA 69
Crow.	PA 69
Eskimo.	PA 69
Flathead Reservation-Variou tribes 1906.	PA 69
Hidatsa.	PA 69
Iroquios.	PA 69
Kaw.	PA 69
Kiowa.	PA 69
Maricopa, Pima.	PA 69
Mohave.	PA 69
Navajo.	PA 69
Omaha.	PA 69
Piute.	PA 69
Pawnee.	PA 69
Ponca.	PA 69
Pueblo.	PA 69

Sioux.	PA 69
Supai, Arizona.	PA 69
Suquamish/Duwamish.	PA 69
Ute.	PA 69
Walapai.	PA 69
Winnebago.	PA 69
Yuma.	PA 69
Shoshone.	PA 69
Mexico.	PA 69
Cowboys.	PA 69
Miscellaneous and Unidentified.	PA 69

COLLECTION MATERIAL.

	Box
Early catalogue.	1
Classification notes.	1
Dealers and Collectors.	1
Acquisition receipts with object numbers (1 of 2).	1

Acquisition receipts with object numbers (2 of 2).	1
Acquisition receipts without object numbers (1 of 2).	1
Acquisition receipts without object numbers (2 of 2).	1
Notes and sketch books (1 of 3).	1
Notes and sketch books (2 of 3).	2
Notes and sketch books (3 of 3).	2
Tags.	2
Adornments.	2
Bags.	2
Bands.	2
Clothes.	2
Musical Instruments.	2
Pottery and basketry.	2
Smoking.	2
Utensils and tools.	2
Weapons.	2
Mixed objects.	2
Misc. notes on objects.	2
	Box

Notes on flora and fauna.	2
Linguistic notes.	2
Notes on processing materials.	2
Bibliographic notes.	2
Extracts from Cours Larptentoir, Henry, and others.	2
Misc. notes.	3