

Birge Harrison photograph

MS.066

Finding Aid prepared by Hoang Tran



PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY
OF THE FINE ARTS

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
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215-972-2066

Hoang Tran, June 2016

Summary Information

Repository	The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Dorothy and Kenneth Woodcock Archives
Creator	Lovell Birge Harrison (1854-1929)
Title	Lovell Birge Harrison photograph
Date [bulk]	
Date [inclusive]	1908
Extent	1 oversized item stored in a flat file
Location note	
Language	
Language of Materials note	
Abstract	The collection consists of one item: a photograph of Harrison teaching, by Jessie Tarbox Beals, signed and dated 1908. The mount carries the following inscription on the verso: "'Uncle' Birge Harrison teaching at Woodstock, NY."

Preferred Citation note

[identification of item], Title of Collection, Collection ID#, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Historical note

Lovell Birge Harrison (October 28, 1854, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – 1929) was an American genre and landscape painter, teacher, and writer. He was a prominent practitioner and advocate of Tonalism.

Born in Philadelphia, Birge Harrison was the brother of artist T. Alexander Harrison. He studied first at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1874, and later credited Thomas Eakins as a positive influence on his own teaching style. He then went to Paris on the advice of John Singer Sargent to study with Carolus-Duran and at the École des Beaux-Arts under Cabanel. In 1881 Harrison exhibited at the Paris Salon, and in 1882 his Salon entry, *Novembre*, became one of the first paintings by an American artist to be purchased by the French government. Discussing the painting years later Harrison attributed its handling to "A Scandinavian painter (who) had shown me the secret of atmospheric painting....and....the importance of vibration and refraction in landscape painting." The paintings of this period included peasant subjects that showed the influence of Jules Bastien-Lepage. The limited palette and wistful mood of the early works would continue to be distinguishing features of Harrison's later landscape paintings.

Harrison met the Australian painter Eleanor Ritchie in the course of his summer landscape travels; they married and returned to America, where he began to exhibit annually at the National Academy of Design, and after 1889 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Temporarily forced to stop painting on account of ill health, he spent considerable time between 1889 and 1893 traveling in Australia, the South Seas, and New Mexico, and wrote and illustrated articles for publication. In 1891 Harrison and his wife moved to California, but after her death in 1895 while expecting their first child, Harrison remarried and moved to Plymouth, Massachusetts, where he became a leader of the Tonalist school. He then relocated again, this time to Woodstock, New York at the turn of the century where he founded a school based on his experiments in Tonalism. In 1906 Harrison helped found the Art Students League Summer School in Woodstock, where his pupils would include his niece, the architect and painter Margaret Fulton Spencer.¹ He became known especially for his paintings of landscapes in the snow.

Harrison received numerous prizes and medals, including the gold medal at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1910. He became a member of the National Academy of Design in 1910, National Institute of Arts and Letters, New York Water Color Club, Society of American Artists, and was director of the landscape school of the Art Students League.

In 1909 Harrison's lectures were published in a book entitled *Landscape Painting*; the book was cited as "a standard work for students, and was referred to as "a fine commentary on the technique of the craft." According to art historian William H. Gerds, Harrison was then "the

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leading writer in America on contemporary landscape painting." Harrison's writing reveals an interest in the retinal perception of color, and in tonal harmony; he believed that the term Impressionism was descriptive not merely of the recent movement in French painting, but referred to any work done "honestly and sincerely" before nature. Harrison's painting exemplified the lessons he taught, emphasizing the practice of open-air observation rather than technical facility.

Scope and Contents note

The collection consists of one item: a photograph of Harrison teaching, by Jessie Tarbox Beals, signed and dated 1908. The mount carries the following inscription on the verso: "'Uncle' Birge Harrison teaching at Woodstock, NY."

Arrangement note

No arrangement.

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access note

Collection is open for research.

The archives reserves the right to restrict access to materials of sensitive nature. Please contact the department for further information.

Conditions Governing Use note

The collection is the physical property of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Archives. The Museum holds literary rights only for material created by Museum personnel or given to the Museum with such rights specifically assigned. For all other material, literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. Researchers are responsible for obtaining permission from rights holders for publication and for other purposes where stated.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Provenance note

This item was a gift of Elizabeth B. Carson, of Lexington, Virginia, in 1983.

Processing Information note

Controlled Access Headings

Person(s)

Corporate Name(s)

Genre(s)

Geographic Name(s)

Subject(s)

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements note

Nearly all materials are sleeved in plastic.

Collection Inventory

Folder	Date		
photograph of Harrison teaching, by Jessie Tarbox Beals	1908	Flat file 47	1