Clifford W. Ashley Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the
Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, Delaware Art Museum

Acquisition Information
Gift of Willard S. Morse; collected by the Library

Extent
1 linear foot

Abstract
The collection includes correspondence, exhibition catalogues, and book and magazine illustrations.

Access Restrictions
Unrestricted

Contact Information
Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives
Delaware Art Museum
2301 Kentmere Parkway
Wilmington, DE 19806
(302) 571-9590
hfslibrary@delart.org

Preferred Citation
Clifford W. Ashley Papers, Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, Delaware Art Museum

Related Materials
Students of Howard Pyle Files
Biography of Clifford W. Ashley

American painter and illustrator, 1881-1947

Clifford Warren Ashley was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, on December 18, 1881, son of Abiel Davis and Caroline Morse Ashley. After graduation from New Bedford High School he went to Boston to study art at the Eric Pape School, which N.C. Wyeth, Sidney Chase, and Ashley's cousin Henry Peck also attended. The four students spent the summer of 1901 in Annisquam, Massachusetts, under George L. Noyes's tutelage. That fall Ashley moved to Wilmington to study with Howard Pyle and occupied a studio at 1305 Franklin Street. He was present at Pyle's fiftieth birthday party in 1903, and spent that summer at Chadds Ford. After 1904 Ashley usually spent winters in Wilmington and summers in New Bedford, when he was not traveling elsewhere. In 1906 he and Peck began to share a studio at 1616 Rodney Street. During much of 1908-09 Ashley was occupied with a business venture, buying mahogany furniture in Jamaica and selling it in Rhode Island. In 1913 he left Wilmington to settle in New Bedford, but he returned in the summer of 1915, staying at Stanley Arthurs's studio. The two artists traveled to California and then came back to Wilmington, where Ashley remained through the spring of 1916. At that time he moved his permanent Massachusetts resident to Fairhaven, near New Bedford. He often returned to Wilmington during the winter and may have rented his Franklin Street studio from Arthurs until as late as 1938. When Ashley married Sarah Rodman Scudder Clark in 1932, he began to renovate a farmhouse he had long owned in Westport, Massachusetts, and the couple moved there. They had two daughters, Phoebe and Jane.

The whaling trade was in its dying days in New Bedford as Ashley grew up, and his spirit seemed tied to those faded days and to the great sea that had sustained them. His work manifests an enormous and abiding love for the marine subjects, which appeared over and over again in his illustrations and paintings. Ashley was also a writer and produced important contributions to the literature on whaling, including the visual feast Whaleships of New Bedford, 1929, and a most remarkable tome, The Ashley Book of Knots, 1944. This is replete with drawings of whaling scenes and knot-making and contains approximately 3900 different kinds of knots, many invented by Ashley. He had gotten his first lessons in knot-making as a small child from two uncles who were whaling captains, and this hobby became a passion for him.

By 1904 Ashley's illustrations were appearing in important magazines such as Delineator, Leslie's Monthly, Success, and Collier's, and many more commissions were to follow. He also spent a good deal of time on his marine paintings and had several exhibitions, including one with Arthurs at the Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts in 1934. He also exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy between 1911 and 1922. More recently, in 1973, the Whaling Museum of New Bedford, in conjunction with the Brandywine River Museum, mounted a major show of his works.

Ashley belonged to the Authors' League of America, the Old Dartmouth Historical Society, the Society for Nautical Research of England, the Ship Model Society of England, the New Bedford Port Society, the Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts, the New York Architectural League, the
Century Association, the Salmagundi Club, the Explorers Club of New York City, the New Bedford Yacht Club, and the St. Botolph Club of Boston. He was a trustee of the Swain Free School of Design in New Bedford. Ashley died on September 18, 1947, at Westport.


**Scope and Contents Note**

The Clifford W. Ashley Papers consist of original correspondence between the Delaware Art Museum and the Whaling Museum of New Bedford, Massachusetts, letters from Ashley to Willard S. Morse, exhibition catalogs, and illustrations from books and magazines. The latter were collected by the Library.

**Description of the Collection**

**Box 1**

Folder

1  *American Magazine*
   - Cover illustration, February 1913
   - March 1924
   - Article: Mildred Harrington, “Interesting People,” April 1929

2  Biographical information

3  Book illustrations

4  *Century Magazine*, 1906-1917

5  Christmas cards and invitations
   - Christmas 1921-1924; 1926-1927 (2 copies); 1928 (2 copies); 1929-1930 (2 copies); 1931-1934; 3 no dates; invitation to 1934 party (2 copies)

6  *Collier’s*, 1912, 1914, 1917

7  Correspondence between DAM and the Whaling Museum, 1973-1979
Correspondence from Ashley to Gertude Brinclé, 1920; Correspondence from Ashley to Willard Morse, 1926-1929

*Delineator*, 1904

**Exhibitions**


Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts, Wilmington, Delaware, “Exhibition of Paintings: Stanley M. Arthurs, Clifford W. Ashley,” December 4-22, 1934 (2 copies)


“Exhibition and Private Sale of Paintings, Marine and Landscape by Clifford W. Ashley, at the Gallery of Doll & Richards, 71 Newbury St., Boston,” January 30-February 11, 1914; Messrs. R. C. & N. M. Vose, Boston

“Exhibition by Clifford W. Ashley consisting principally of Recent Paintings of New Bedford Whalers ...” February 28-March 12, 1921 (invitation)
10  Newspaper clippings, 1973

11  *Outing*, 1908

12  Photographs  
    Clifford Ashley in Franklin St. Studio, posing for illustration by Frank Schoonover for "The Last of DuGallie" by Frank H. Spearman in *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 19, 1902 [See also Schoonover, Photos – Models & Illustrations]  
    Portrait of Ashley  
    Artwork

13  *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1907-1911

14  *Scribner’s*, 1904-1913

15  *Sunday Magazine*, 1907-1914