



James Ormsbee Chapin Papers

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

Acquisition Information

Bequest of Mary Chapin, October 1994

Extent

.2 linear feet

Processed

Sarena Fletcher, 2002

Abstract

The James Ormsbee Chapin Papers contain correspondence, sketches, articles, reproductions and proofs.

Access Restrictions

Unrestricted

Contact Information

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Preferred Citation

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Biography of James Ormsbee Chapin

American painter and illustrator, 1887-1975

James Ormsbee Chapin was born in West Orange, New Jersey, on July 9, 1887. When he was sixteen, he took a job in a New York bank. In the evenings, he attended drawing classes at Cooper Union and later at the Art Students League. Six years or so later, with a small but sufficient sum of money to sustain him, Chapin left the bank to study in Europe. He distinguished himself as an award-winning student at the Royal Academy in Antwerp, Belgium, before leaving for Paris where he was influenced by the work of Cezanne.

Chapin returned to the United States in 1912 to alleviate family debts by working at various illustration jobs. In 1915 or 1916 he met Robert Frost at his publishers, Henry Holt & Co., for whom he designed books. This friendship lasted over 30 years. Chapin married Abby Forbes, a schoolteacher, in 1918 and had one son together. They separated within a few years of marriage.

After several years working as a commercial artist, Chapin found he was greatly dissatisfied. In 1924 he fled New York, settling in the quiet mountains of New Jersey. There he rented a log cabin on the farm of the Marvin family for four dollars a month. Chapin spent the next four and a half years painting the Marvin family as he saw them day by day.

In 1935 Chapin accepted a one-day-a-week job at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts as instructor to the advanced portrait class. In the late 1930s, he accepted a teaching position in California. There he met and soon after married Mary Fischer. After living in New York for five years, Chapin and his wife moved to an old farmhouse in New Jersey with their two sons. In 1969 the Chapins moved to Toronto. Chapin died in July 1975, shortly after becoming a Canadian citizen and only days after his eighty-eighth birthday.

James Chapin holds the Temple Gold medal for the best painting by an American given by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Logan Portrait Award by the Art Institute of Chicago.

Organization of the Papers

Series I. Administrative Material

Series II. Biographical Information

Series III. Correspondence

Series IV. Artwork

Subseries A. Original Artwork

Subseries B. Illustration

Subseries C. Miscellaneous Reproductions/Photocopies

Description of the Papers

Series I. Administrative Material

Folder

- 1 NEH grant application for a biography of James Ormsbee Chapin by Brenda R. Billingsley, 1993

Series II. Biographical Information

Folder

- 2 Lecture at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, circa 1934-1935
- 3 Newspaper articles: Purdie, James, "A giant in American realist art draws fresh strength from Canada," *The Globe and Mail*, Saturday, January 11, 1975, page 29; Furman, Bess, "Poet in Waiting bids for a rating: Frost aims to hang paintings to get U.S. out of small potatoes class," *The New York Times*, Thursday, October 16, 1958, section L, page 39.
- 4 Material relating to the Marvin family

Series III. Correspondence

Folder

- 5 Frank Rehn/L. Vermont correspondence. Draft letter from unknown to Mr. Rehn, dated November 16, 1926
- 6 Correspondence from Grant Wood, Iowa City, Iowa to James Chapin: June 28, 1939; August 8, 1939; August 15, 1939; January 27, 1941
- 7 Correspondence between the Chapin family and Delaware Art Museum
- 8 Correspondence between Brenda Billingsley and Delaware Art Museum

Series IV. Artwork

Subseries A. Original Artwork

Folder

- 9 Sketches (2): Drawing of James Chapin by Reginald Marsh; "Leaf from an artist's sketchbook"
- 10 Pencil sketches (7)

Subseries B. Illustrations

Folder

- 11 Book jackets (13) and illustration (1)
- 12 Photocopy of inscription, title page, and illustrations from *North of Boston* by Robert Frost, pictures by James Chapin, New York: Henry Holt and Company, no date (original book in SP COLL PS3511 .F6 1919)
- 13 Scribner's Magazine cover proofs (2)

Subseries C. Miscellaneous Reproductions/Photocopies

Folder

- 14 Photocopy of inscriptions and title page from *Robert Frost Collected Poems*, New York: Random House, 1930 (original book in SP COLL PS3511 .F6 1930)
- 15 Reproductions