



Thornton Oakley Papers

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

Acquisition Information

Material collected by the Library

Extent

1.25 linear feet

Processed

Sarena Deglin, 2003

Contents

Correspondence, photographs, exhibition catalogs, and magazine illustrations

Access Restrictions

Unrestricted

Contact Information

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Preferred Citation

Thornton Oakley Papers, Helen Farr Sloan Library & Archives, Delaware Art Museum

Biography of Thornton Oakley

Thornton Oakley was born March 27, 1881, in Pittsburgh. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania and received B.S. and M.S. degrees in architecture in 1901 and 1902. He studied with Howard Pyle for three years, beginning in 1902 at Chadds Ford. He described his first day there in a talk given at the Free Library in Philadelphia in 1951:

"There we four - my new cronies—Allen Tupper True, George Harding, Gordon McCouch and I—made our first sketches from a model, and our efforts were frightful to behold! Not one of us had had a palette in our hands ever before: I had not the least idea as to procedure. My attempts were terrifying to behold, and when H.P. came to me to criticize my work he paused for a long, long time before speaking, and I know that he must have been appalled."

Oakley became an illustrator and writer for periodicals, including *Scribner's*, *Century*, *Collier's*, and *Harper's Monthly*. In the years 1914-19 and 1921-36 he was in charge of the Department of Illustration at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art. In 1914-15 he also taught drawing at the University of Pennsylvania, and gave lectures at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Curtis Institute. He was a member of the jury of selection and advisory committee of the Department of Fine Arts at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915 and the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial Exposition in 1926.

During World War I lithographs of his patriotic drawings of war work at the Hog Island Shipyard, Pennsylvania, were distributed by the United States government. During World War II he did three sets of pictures of the war effort for the *National Geographic* in 1941, 1943, and 1945. After the war he was commissioned to paint industrial subjects for the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Philadelphia Electric Company, Sun Oil, and other industries. In 1938-39 he did six mural panels for the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia on epochs in science.

Oakley was deeply influenced by Howard Pyle's philosophy of illustration. In the talk at the Free Library referred to above, he said: "We never heard one word from our beloved teacher concerning tools and methods. His utterances were only of the spirit, thought, philosophy, ideals, vision, purpose." Oakley presided at the private viewing of the Howard Pyle Memorial Exhibition at the Philadelphia Art Alliance in 1923, when reminiscences of Pyle were given by Elizabeth Green Elliott, Jessie Willcox Smith, George Harding, and Frank E. Schoonover. In praising Pyle, Oakley said: "Illustration is the highest type of pictorial art ... because illustration is simply a pictorial MAKING CLEAR, and if a picture makes clear a message in a big way, it is an illustration, whether it be made for magazine, book, mural decoration, or exhibition." In an essay on "Illustration" for the *American Magazine of Art* in August 1919, he spoke of illustration as inspiration and the expression of man's highest ideals.

Oakley made a large collection of Pyle, drawings, prints, books and other items, including letters and sketchbooks, which he presented to the Free Library in Philadelphia in November 1951. He died in Bryn Mawr on April 4, 1953.

By Phyllis J. Nixon

Source: Elzea, Rowland and Elizabeth H. Hawkes, eds. *A Small School of Art: The Students of Howard Pyle*. Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1980.

Organization of the Papers

Series I. Biographical and Personal

Series II. Correspondence

Series III. Printed Matter

Series IV. Photographs

Series V. Magazine Illustrations

Description of the Papers

Box 1

Series I. Biographical and Personal

Folder

- 1 National Cyclopedia of American Biography
- 2 Obituary
- 3 "An Incomplete Record of the Work of Thornton Oakley...up to June 1920" in Oakley's hand, 24 pp

Series II. Correspondence

Folder

- 4 Regarding First Unitarian Church, Philadelphia, 1921-1922
- 5 With Constance Moore "Connie" 1945-1953
- 6 Photocopies of correspondence with Richard W. Lykes regarding Pyle students, 1940s-1950

- 7 Correspondence with English painters, 1945-1949 [donated by Benjamin Eisenstat, 6/5/1984]
- 8 Photographs [donated by Benjamin Eisenstat, 6/5/1984] – Thornton Oakley in his studio, Christmas 1943
- 9 Christmas cards
- 10 Artwork (sketch)

Series III. Printed Matter

Folder

- 11 “H.P., His Art and Personality” address given November 8, 1951 at Free Library of Philadelphia (3 copies)
- 12 *Westward Ho!* by Charles Kingsley, illustrated by Thornton Oakley. Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1920.
- 13 *Westward Ho!* illustrations
- 14 Postcards
- 15 Newspaper articles
- 16 Exhibition catalogs: “Thornton Oakley (1881-1953): The Exhibition,” January 22 through March 20, 1983. Brandywine River Museum of the Brandywine Conservancy, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania; *The Art of Soviet Russia*, Pennsylvania Museum of Art and the American Russian Institute, 1934-1935. Signed by Alexander Antonovich Troyanovsky, A. Deineka, Christian Brinton and Alexander Portnoff; *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Thornton Oakley*, Woodmere Gallery, Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, January 6th through January 27th, 1952
- 17 Music, lyrics, and poetry – “I Long for Peace among the Hills,” Verse and Illumination by Thornton Oakley; “My Wondrous Land,” words by Thornton Oakley, music by Guy Marriner, 7 copies [2 copies gift of Gordon Pfeiffer, March 1972, one of which is signed by Oakley and Marinner]; “PMSIA,” words by Thornton Oakley, music by Robert Elmore, 3 copies, all signed by Oakley and Elmore [1 copy gift of Gordon Pfeiffer, March 1972]

Series IV. Photographs

Folder

- 18 2 photographs of Oakley in his studio

Box 2

Series V. Magazine Illustrations

Folder

- 1 *American Magazine of Art* – 1919, 1925
- 2 *Appleton's Magazine* – 1907
- 3 *Asia* – 1918
- 4 *Century* – 1905-1912, 1916-1919
- 5 *Collier's* – 1904-1918
- 6 *Everybody's* – 1906-1909
- 7 *Forum* – 1926-1927
- 8 *Harper's Magazine* – 1906

Box 3

Series V. Magazine Illustrations

Folder

- 1 *Harper's Monthly* – 1905
- 2 *Harper's Monthly* – 1906
- 3 *Harper's Monthly* – 1907
- 4 *Harper's Monthly* – 1908-1915
- 5 *Harper's Monthly* – 1916, 1918
- 6 *International Studio* – 1913, 1915
- 7 *Ladies' Home Journal* – 1908
- 8 *Leslie's* – 1904
- 9 *Metropolitan* – 1907-1910

Box 4

Series V. Magazine Illustrations

Folder

- 1 *National Geographic* – 1942, 1943
- 2 *National Geographic* – 1942-1945
- 3 *Nation's Business* – 1919
- 4 *Pennsylvania Magazine* – 1947
- 5 *Scientific American* – 1918
- 6 *St. Nicholas* – 1908-1909
- 7 *Scribner's* – 1905-1916
- 8 *System* – 1909
- 9 *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* – 1948

Box 5

Duplicate copies of music, lyrics, and poetry (see Box 1, Folder 17)