



# Guide to the Anna Lea Merritt Papers 1863-1922

Archives and Special Collections  
Library and Research Center  
National Museum of Women in the Arts

Re-processed by Jason Stieber  
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2 linear feet; 1 container

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## Biography

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A versatile artist and writer, Anna Massey Lea Merritt (1844-1930) was born in Philadelphia to an affluent Quaker family. Her father, Joseph Lea Jr., owned cotton manufacturing and printing factories, and three of her five younger sisters also developed careers in the visual and performing arts.

As a young girl, Lea attended politically progressive schools and studied classics, languages, mathematics, and music with private tutors. Initially, she taught herself to paint, but later she studied anatomy at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia and, after moving to Europe with her family in 1865, she took art lessons with various masters in Italy, Germany, and France.

At the start of the Franco-Prussian War, Lea settled in London, where her teacher - the British painter and picture restorer, Henry Merritt - also became her mentor and, in April 1877, her husband. Unfortunately, he died just three months after their wedding. As a memorial, Anna taught herself to etch and produced a book of Henry Merritt's art criticism and fiction, illustrated with 23 of her prints. A prolific author in her own right, Anna also wrote and illustrated two books about Hurstbourne Tarrant, the English village to which she moved in 1891 and where she spent the remaining four decades of her life. In addition, she published articles about mural painting, gardening, and the obstacles facing women artists.

Merritt executed several major mural commissions, as well as portraits and easel paintings on literary and religious subjects. A member of London's Royal Society of Painters and Etchers, Merritt exhibited her work regularly at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Royal Academy in London, and the Paris Salon. Her paintings and prints were also displayed at a number of prestigious venues, including the 1876 *Centennial Exhibition* in Philadelphia, the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, and the 1893 *World's Columbian Exposition* in Chicago.

## Chronology

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- 1844** Anna Massey Lea is born in Philadelphia to Joseph and Susanna Massey Lea, a prominent Quaker family. Anna is the eldest of six sisters.
- 1858-1860** Attends Eagleswood School, Bryn Mawr, Pa.
- 1861** Attends Agassiz School, Cambridge, Mass.
- 1865** The Lea family moves to Europe in search of medical treatment for Anna's sister, Julia. Before their departure, Anna takes classes in anatomy at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, Pa.
- In Florence, Anna receives private lessons from Stefano Ussi.

- 1865** The family travels to Rome, then Dresden.
- 1869** In Dresden, Anna studies privately with Heinrich Hoffman.
- 1870** Anna moves to London. She settles first on Tite Street and later moves to Cheyne Walk in London's Chelsea district, where her neighbors include artists James McNeill Whistler, Edmund Burne-Jones, William Holman Hunt, George Watts, George Cruikshank, and Lord Frederick Leighton.
- 1871** Begins studies with Henry Merritt (1822-1877), a critic and painter.
- 1876** Participates in the Philadelphia *Centennial Exposition* and wins medals for *St. Genevieve* (1875) and *Patrician Mother* (1876).
- 1877** Marries Henry Merritt, who dies suddenly in June 1877, three months after their wedding.
- Anna documents his life in *Henry Merritt: Art Criticism and Romance*, which is published as a two-volume set in 1879. Anna's success as a printmaker begins with the 23 etchings she creates to illustrate her publication.
- 1881** Helps arrange the exhibition *American Artists at Home and in Europe*, for the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.
- 1882** Accepts commission to paint *James Russell Lowell*.
- 1883** Paints *War*.
- 1888** Exhibits 33 etchings at *Work of the Women Etchers of America*, Union League Club, New York, N.Y.
- 1889** Is awarded Honorable Mention for *Camilla* (1882) at the *Exposition Universelle*, Paris.
- Paints *Henry James* and *Love Locked Out*.
- 1890-91** Settles permanently in Hurstbourne Tarrant, Hampshire, England.
- Love Locked Out* is exhibited at the Royal Academy, and becomes the first work by a woman to be purchased by the Chantry Fund (British Government) for the Tate Gallery.
- 1892** Travels to Egypt seeking better climate for health reasons.
- 1893** Commissioned to paint murals for the vestibule of the Women's Building at the Chicago *World's Columbian Exposition* on themes of benevolence, needlework, and education. Unable to travel to Chicago to visit the exposition herself, she ships the murals. She is awarded a medal for *Eve* (1885).
- 1894** Commissioned to paint murals for St. Martin's Church in Chillworth, Surrey. Paints *Watchers of the Straight Gate*.
- 1895** The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts purchases *The Piping Shepherd* (1895).
- 1900** Publishes "Letter to Artists, Especially Women Artists," in *Lippincott's* magazine.

- 1901 Exhibits work at the *Pan-American Exposition* in Buffalo, N.Y. and receives an award.
- 1902 Writes *A Hamlet in Old Hampshire*.
- 1908 Writes *An Artist's Garden*.
- 1926 Writes her memoirs.
- 1930 Dies on April 7 in Hurstbourne Tarrant.

## Scope and Content

The Papers of Anna Lea Merritt consist almost entirely of photographs ranging in dates from 1863 to 1922. The most valuable item in the collection is a photograph album of reproductions of Merritt's work. Although the leather cover and binding are in poor condition and many pages are cockled, the photographs (many of which appear to be photogravures or albumen prints) are in good condition. The date the album was compiled is not known, but from the dates of works which appear within, an approximate date of 1922 can be ascertained. Merritt made numerous annotations throughout the album.

Three mounted photographs are also included in this collection. Two are reproductions of works by Merritt, and the third is a view of the interior of the artist's home at Tite Street, London.

The remainder of the collection consists of review articles, a reproduction of a portrait of Anna Lea Merritt, and photographs of Merritt's youngest sister, actress Marion Lea Mitchell. These photos document Mitchell's life and career.

The collection is divided into three series:

- Series I: Clippings
- Series II: Photographs
- Series III: Album

## Provenance

David and Anne Sellin of Washington, D.C. donated the Papers of Anna Lea Merritt to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in December 1991. In addition to the contents of the archival collection, the donation also included one oil painting (a self-portrait of the artist), two etchings, and one watercolor study, which are stored with NMWA's permanent collection. Mr. and Mrs. Sellin acquired the collection from Sidney Jolles of Philadelphia, Pa., who acquired it from the estate of an unidentified Merritt family member.

## Series Descriptions

### Series I: Clippings, undated

This series consists of two news clippings mounted back to back on a single sheet of paper. Both are reviews of plays in which Marion Lea [Mitchell] appeared.

### Series II: Photographs, 1863-1913 and undated

This series contains all loose photographs which are not represented in Series III: Album. Most of these pertain to the life and career of Marion Lea Mitchell. Some are mounted or have had newspaper

clippings attached to them. Each photo is provided with item-level description in the Box Inventory below.

### Series III: Album, ca. 1922

This leather bound item contains photographs of works by Anna Lea Merritt. The Box Inventory lists the photographs in the order they appear in the album. Annotations by Merritt appear in quotations in the box inventory.

## Processing

The collection is contained in one, oversized box, located in the Library and Research Center. The collection was initially processed and a finding aid written in 1991. Follow-up processing and finding aid revisions were performed in 2003. Reprocessed again in 2005, the collection was separated into three series (Clippings, Photographs, and Album) and re-housed in acid-free folders as well as a smaller box to minimize damage to the album from shifting. A phase box was constructed for the album, which suffers from a detached and missing spine, dry rot, and cockled pages.

## Related Materials

The Archives on Women Artists in the Library and Research Center at the National Museum of Women in the Arts maintains a vertical file on Anna Lea Merritt, which includes articles and other secondary research material.

Dates and data regarding the subjects of Merritt's photographs have been checked against information contained in *Love Locked Out: The Memoirs of Anna Lea Merritt*. Edited by Galina Gorokhoff, this is the only monograph published about Merritt's life and work. In some cases, dates for paintings recorded by Merritt in Series III: Album differ from the dates listed by Gorokhoff. The publication includes a checklist of Merritt's paintings and a selected bibliography. Her acknowledgements point to additional resources for primary materials.

Merritt's sister, Marion Lea Mitchell, was a well-known actress from the late 1880s through the early 1900s. There is not a great deal of biographical information available on her, however. She is known to have co-produced Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler* with fellow actress Elizabeth Robins for the first time in 1891. Correspondence between Mitchell and Robins resides in the Papers of Elizabeth Robins, which are held by New York University.

## Box Inventory

### **SERIES I: CLIPPINGS**

#### **Folder 1**

Two news clippings mounted back to back on a single sheet of paper. Both are reviews of plays in which Marion Lea [Mitchell] appeared. Merritt annotated one clipping, "Weymouth paper" and the other, "Jersey, January 16<sup>th</sup>"

### **SERIES II: PHOTOGRAPHS**

#### **Folder 2**

Photographic reproduction of a portrait of Anna Lea Merritt by John Mac Lure Hamilton (1853-1939), ca. 1900s or 1913. 8 ½ x 7 in.

### Folder 3

Photographs of Marion Lea Mitchell:

In white dress, ca. 1863-64. Studio of F. Gutekunst. 4 ½ x 2 ½ in.

Seated with doll, ca. 1865. Studio of Fratelli Alinari. 4 x 2 ½ in.

Seated, ca. 1870. Studio of Robert Eich. Annotation on verso, "M. Lea left alone at boarding school in Dresden, age 9" 4 ¼ x 2 ½ in.

In white dress, ca. 1872. Studio of Taylor and Brown. Annotation on verso, "Marion Lea in fancy dress, age about 11- as a shepherdess for a children's ball at New Port, about 1872." 8 x 6 in.

Three-quarter pose, ca. 1870s. Studio of Gutekunst. 6 ½ x 4 ½ in.

Head only (cropped), ca. mid-1870s. Studio of Chas Gillman. 4 x 2 ½ in.

### Folder 4

Photographs of Marion Lea Mitchell:

Two women standing, Marion on right, n.d. Studio of Hinkle. 4 x 2 ½ in.

Enlargement of above photo with just Marion pictured.

In costume for a play, standing next to a seated man. Set depicts rural landscape and log cabin [tintype?]. 5 x 3 ½ in.

Theatrical tableau with Marion in costume for a play. Two newspaper clippings glued to back. Studio of Lambert Weston and Son. Annotation at base of photo, "six copies" 6 ½ x 4 ¼ in.

Theatrical tableau of "Miss Marion Lea and Mr. Cyril Maude in 'That Doctor Cupid'," ca. 1878. Studio of Vernon Kaye. 6 ½ x 4 ½ in.

In profile, ca. 1884. Studio of H. S. Mendelssohn. 6 x 4 ¼ in.

Head and shoulders portrait. Studio of Elliott and Fry. 6 ¼ x 4 ½ in.

Head and shoulders portrait, looking over left shoulder. Studio of Martin and Sallnow. 6 ½ x 3 ½ in.

Reclining on sofa with left arm extended. Annotation on verso, "M. Lea probably in a part about the beginning of the 20th century." 4 ½ x 6 ½ in.

### Folder 5

Mounted photographs:

Reproduction of *Love Locked Out* (1889), signed and annotated by Merritt. 11 ¾ x 6 ½ in. (photo), 15 x 10 ½ in. (mat).

Reproduction of *Eve* (1885), signed and annotated by Merritt. 8 ½ x 12 in. (photo), 12 x 15 in. (mat).

Of Merritt's home at 32 Tite Street, London, ca. 1870s [albumen print?]. Annotated on verso of mat, "End of drawing room at 'The Cottage,' Old Chelsea, 32 Tite Street." 8 x 5 ¾ in. (photo), 14 x 11 ½ in. (mat).

## SERIES III: ALBUM

### Folder 6 / Album

Album. 12 x 16 in. Leather bound with photographs of works by Anna Lea Merritt (*photocopies of album pages are located in Folder 6*). The following are listed in the order they appear in the album. Annotations by Merritt appear in quotations. Titles of paintings are underlined, and dates of paintings appear in parentheses.

1. *Henry Merritt*, 1822-1877 (painted 1877). "from memory soon after death." Critic and artist, as well as husband of Anna Lea Merritt.
2. *Warren de la Rue, esq.*, 1815-1889 (painted 1883). English astronomer, inventor of celestial photography.
3. *Reapers* (1906)
4. *Binding Sheaves* (1918)
5. *Miss Ethel d'Arcy* (1888)
6. *A Little Quakeress* (1881)
7. *Saint Genevieve* (1875)
8. *Miss Minna Farrer* (1879)
9. *Miss Dorothy Beale*, 1831-1906, (painted 1892). English educator and principal of Cheltenham.
10. *Mrs. Holman Hunt* (1888), wife of painter Holman Hunt.
11. *Eustace and Percy* (1883), "sons of Sir Lambton Loraine Bt."
12. *Admiral Sir Lambton Loraine Bt.* (1885)
13. *Ring a Round of Roses* (1887), "a sketch for portrait group of Loraine family."
14. *A Picturebook* (1889)
15. *Miss Claire Raignel* (1916)
16. *Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes*, 1809-1894 (painted 1882), author physician, teacher, "painted in six hours, Boston, 1882."
17. *James Russell Lowell*, 1819-1891 (painted 1882), poet, educator, editor, "ambassador from U.S. painted in London, 1882."
18. *Henry James*, 1843-1916 (painted 1889) author, critic.
19. *The Countess of Dufferin* (1877), Lady Harriet Dufferin, "painted at Government House, Ottawa."
20. *Marion Lea* (1886), actress, youngest sister of Anna Lea Merritt.
21. *Mrs. Stirling and Ellen Terry as the Nurse and Juliet* (1883), dame Ellen Alicia Terry [1848-1928], English Shakespearean actress and Mary Anne Stirling [1815-1895], English actress and later Lady Hutton Gregory. Painting commissioned by Mrs. Warren de la Rue.
22. *Eve* (1885), "International Expo. at Chicago, 1892-93."
23. *I Will Give You Rest* (1900), also known as "The Helping Hand", "Given to Waksall Brotherhood, Staffordshire."
24. *Mrs. G.C. Cheape* (1891), "Mistress of the Wellfield Beagles."
25. *Pursuit of Happiness* (1889)
26. *War* (1883)
27. [*Under the Red Cross* (?), 1915]
28. *Col. Sir Colin Scott Moncrieff* (1892), "Cairo."
29. *Alfred and Charles, sons of Lionel Tennyson* (1883)
30. *Charles and Frank, sons of C.C. Macrae* (1887), two photographs, one mounted and one loose, "both gave their lives in war at Loos."
31. *The Earl of Dundonald* (1888), "Col., 2nd Life Guards."

32. *Love Locked Out* (1889)
33. *Merry Maids* (1899), two photographs
34. *When the World was Young* (1890), two photographs showing two different versions of painting [color repro of Joan of Arc-like figure with angel- no title or annotation] "Altar piece for St. Martin's Mission Church, Blackheath, 1895."
35. *First Step on Life Journey* (1922)
36. *With Faith, Hope and Charity in the Valley of Shadows* (1922), "Helena Mitchell sat for Hope in 1912."
37. *The End of Life's Journey* (1922)
38. *Watchers at the Straight Gate and Narrow Way* (1894)
39. *Love, the Intruder* (1909)
40. *Love and the Bachelor Maid* (1907 or 1909)