

FRANK WESTON BENSON (1862-1951)

PAPERS, 1864-1976

MSS 324

Processed by: Jean Marie Procius
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Volume: 18 boxes
10 linear feet

Provenance: The bulk of the collection was deposited by the heirs on March 3, 1970, with additions on April 14, 1975, February 22, 1977, January 27, 1978, and photocopies of the family journals in March 2002. Fifteen letters from the Essex Institute Autograph Collection were transferred in 1976. Letters collected by Daniel Henderson, Jr., were donated by the heirs in 1976, and a single Frank W. Benson letter addressed to William Wardwell was donated April 1, 2002.

Conservation: Materials are housed in acid-free archival folders and boxes. Scrapbook #1 was disassembled. Brittle newspaper clippings were photocopied onto permanent archival paper; photocopies were disbursed in series order. Fragile photographs have been supported by museum board and placed in acid-free envelopes. Medals were wrapped in acid-free tissue paper and placed in individual acid-free sleeves.

Restrictions: The contents of Box 14 are restricted due to the fragile condition of the materials. Photocopies of the items in Box 14 are available within the subject arrangement. See Scope and Contents note for description of the items. Photocopies of the Benson family journals are for study purposes only.

Copyright: Requests for permission to publish material from the collection must be submitted in writing to the Manuscript Librarian in the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum, for approval by the family. Additionally, no living family member may be quoted, nor any photographs reproduced, without express written permission from the family.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Frank Weston Benson was born March 24, 1862, the son of George Wiggins Benson and Elisabeth Frost Poole Benson of 46 Washington Square, Salem, Massachusetts. In October 1888, he married Ellen Perry Peirson (1860-) of Salem. They had four children: Eleanor Perry Benson (1889-1959, m. Ralph Lawson, 1913); George Emery Benson (b. 1891, m. Corinne Speck Loney); Elisabeth Benson (b. 1892, m. Charles MacPherson Adustin "Max" Rogers); and Sylvia Perry Benson (b. 1898, m. Ralph Lawson, 1959).

A successful and critically acclaimed artist, Frank W. Benson, is considered a master of American Impressionism, and of three media – oil, watercolor, and etching. He studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA) in Boston, and the Académie Julian in Paris. Benson launched his career painting portraits, and soon became known for his careful attention to the effects of light in both his studio settings and his outdoor scenes with leisurely summer motifs. He experimented successfully in new media while continuing to paint in oils throughout his career. Beginning in the 1890s, he began to portray wildfowl and sporting scenes in black and white wash drawings. He then moved to watercolors to depict sporting, landscapes, and still life. Benson experimented with etching as a student at SMFA, and again took interest in 1912, creating numerous plates depicting sporting and wildfowl. As with his watercolors, the prints from these plates were popular and many sold before they were even dry.

Ellen and the children often posed for his paintings. Occasionally, he took photographs of the family posed outdoors, and used the prints for reference in the studio. As an avid sportsman, his fishing and hunting expeditions served as inspiration for many of his paintings and etchings. He also used photographs of wildfowl and of his companions engaged in sporting to complete his works.

Benson's first teaching experience was instructing the Salem Evening Drawing Class while he was studying in Boston. For a short time, he was an instructor at the Portland, Maine, Society of Art and of summer classes in New Hampshire. In 1889, he began teaching at his alma mater with fellow graduate Edmund C. Tarbell. Under their custodianship, the SMFA trained many well-regarded artists and expanded in number of students, course offerings, and into new facilities.

As his career progressed, Benson's work became increasingly popular. In 1889, he received his first award, the Hallgarten Prize, and went on to be known as "America's most medaled painter," winning every major American award during his working life. The Society of American Artists honored Benson with an election to the organization; however, he resigned in 1898 over the Society's conservative response to the budding Impressionist movement. Benson and nine other artists, known as "The Ten," at the forefront of American Impressionism displayed their work in annual shows that were held in New York and traveled to other cities.

Throughout his career, his works were influenced by the landscape of Essex County, Massachusetts, and the coastal region of New England. Many of Benson's best-known Impressionist outdoor works were composed at the family summer home on the island of North Haven, in Maine's Penobscot Bay, and his sporting and wildfowl scenes at his hunting retreat overlooking Nauset Marsh on Cape Cod.

His appreciation of wildfowl was reflected in his personal life as well as his work. He served as the first president of the Essex Ornithological Society in 1916. Later, he supported wildfowl conservation efforts by designing the second duck stamp and was a charter member of Ducks Unlimited. He designed the masthead of the organization, in use from 1938-1966.

Benson was a founding member of the Guild of Boston Artists, established in the classical sense of an artisan guild – to promote and provide resources for Boston-area artists. For 37 years, he served as a trustee of the Peabody Museum of Salem. In 1915, he designed a new seal for the institute that reflected the tripartite character of the museum's interests and marked the occasion of

the name change from the Peabody Academy of Science to the Peabody Museum of Salem. He was also elected a member of the Essex Institute in 1894 and remained so until his death in 1951.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Frank W. Benson Collection consists primarily of personal, business, and family materials documenting Benson's career as an artist. The collection contains news clippings, reviews, exhibit catalogues, photographs, awards, records of works, sketches, and correspondence about his work, exhibitions, and teaching. Materials documenting the artist's career were filed chronologically in Scrapbook #1 by Benson and his family. At the time of processing, these items were found to be in fragile condition and were subsequently removed from the pages and disbursed into series order. Clippings and correspondence that are fragile or firmly attached to the acidic pages were photocopied onto permanent paper and filed with the items that were removed from the book. Photocopies are to be used exclusively, as the full-sized pages are brittle and handling them may cause damage to the remaining attached items. See Miscellany in the Personal Papers for several items from Scrapbook #1; all other items will be found in Business Papers. The series designations are a guideline to finding materials by subject and material type; where possible items spanning series description are noted below.

Series I. Personal Papers contains correspondence, diaries, photographs, and miscellaneous items. Arrangement is chronological throughout. **Subseries A. Correspondence** includes letters composed by Benson to family members and to his boyhood companion, Daniel Henderson, Jr. Benson corresponded with Henderson for many years, and the letters illuminate Benson's activities and thoughts about his work as well as his personal life. Ephemera and photographs that Benson enclosed with the letters remain in place, where available. While Benson was in Paris in 1883, he sent Henderson a Christmas card illustrated with a pen and ink drawing. Other illustrated letters include an undated note to his brothers on their victorious sailing race, and a letter dated May 21, 1895, to his brother, John Prentiss Benson, on the occasion of the birth of his daughter, Marjorie Daw Benson. Family correspondents include Benson's son, George, his daughter, Eleanor, her husband, Ralph Lawson, and their children, and grandchildren. Several postcards depicting images of paintings can be found here if there is actual correspondence on the verso. Blank postcards are filed with the photographs documenting Benson's work.

Subseries B. Diaries consists of diaries from fishing and hunting trips which include events and details of sporting activities, and lists of the catch. **Subseries C. Photographs** contains numerous photographs documenting hunting and fishing excursions. Early portraits in the collection include a carte de visite of Benson in Salem circa 1880 and a cabinet card dated December 1882. In London in 1885, Benson posed for a photograph with fellow art student Joseph Lindon Smith and Henry FitzGilbert Waters, the noted Salem historian and genealogist.

Subseries D. Miscellany includes: a passport granted to Benson in 1883 and stamped in Havana and Puerto Rico; Essex County, Massachusetts, birth record certificate; and two autographs, dated 1901 and July 9, 1945. From Scrapbook #1 are membership certificates/licenses for Long Point Company Shooting Club in Ontario; two poems about sporting (author unknown); a letter of commission for Benson as first mate on *The Golden Hind*, the boat of his nine-year-old grandson, Ralph Lawson, Jr.; and a poem entitled "Cruise News" dated April 27, 1911.

Series II. Business Papers contains correspondence, manuscripts, sketches and drawings, printed materials in the form of clippings, ephemera, and serials. **Subseries A. Correspondence** includes award announcements, many in the form of telegrams, communication with museums and galleries and agents about exhibit arrangements, and letters of congratulations from friends and

fellow artists. Fifteen letters, transferred from the Autograph Collection, remain housed together along with a short typescript description of each (Box 3, Folder 1). Most of these letters are addressed to Alice Flint Brooks (-1926), the manager of the SMFA for twenty years, and concern scheduling and student affairs.

Correspondence from Scrapbook #1 does not necessarily have only business associations; many letters addressing his work are from friends and family. Additionally, the subject of the letters may also be of a more personal nature, for instance, Edward S. Morse extends praise and birthday wishes to Benson in 1923. In 1938, Edmund C. Tarbell died several months before a joint retrospective exhibit with Benson opened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Letters of admiration and condolence set to Benson in 1938-1939 were in Scrapbook #2 with ephemera from the exhibit, but have been removed to more stable housing in Business Correspondence.

In a letter dated May 23, 1922, Benson writes to William Wardwell and declares the wash drawing purchased by the latter to be his finest, and that he painted it while salmon fishing during the summer of 1921. A list of names, duties, and wages paid for the guides and assistants on the Bonaventure River trip of 1921 appears with the correspondence from Scrapbook #1. An instance where Benson provides insight into his thoughts on his work is a typescript copy of a letter sent to Mr. Gibb, where Benson states that he learned etching by studying nature, not by studying the methods of producing an etching (Box 3, Folder 2).

An interesting find in this collection is correspondence between Adam E.M. Paff and Houghton Mifflin concerning the costs, profit potential, and contract for the publication of the Paff catalogues, *The Etchings and Drypoints of Frank W. Benson*. Paff sent these items along with a letter to Benson asking him to keep the documentation of the agreement because he was about to embark for Europe.

Although Benson taught art students for many years, he did not write articles or his memoirs. A rare view into his thoughts on his work is "Advice on Painting from FWB," compiled by his daughter, Eleanor, from the oral critiques he gave her initial forays into painting. Additionally, **Subseries B. Manuscripts and Works on Paper** includes several drawings and quick sketches, most notably a sketchbook from a trip to Puerto Rico in 1883.

Subseries C. Photographs consists of photographs kept by Benson as reference for new compositions (Scrapbook #3) and as a record of his career (Scrapbooks #1 and #5). Photographs of paintings and etchings appear in many formats and conditions. Many have notations on the verso naming the purchaser of the original. Few of the photographs in the collection are dated. Dates appearing on photographs of paintings are generally the date the work was complete, exhibited, or sold, not the date of the actual photograph. Organization of the prints is based upon subject of the image: wildfowl, portraits, figures, sporting, landscapes, still life, and interiors. Items that are oversize or extremely fragile are housed apart from the subject groupings (see Contents List). One of these items is a mounted engraving with twenty-two signatures of the guests at a banquet hosted by Samuel Shaw to honor Benson for winning the Shaw prize at the Society of American Artists 1896 exhibition (Box 7, Folder 1).

Subseries D. Honors contains honors granted to the artist which are represented in the collection by medals, certificates of award, and an academic hood worn by Benson when granted an honorary degree by Tufts College. Detailed entries in the contents list include date, level of award, granting institution, and the work housed with the medals; however, the list does not correspond directly to the medals in the collection and has been separated. For a more complete listing of the awards granted to Benson, see *The Sporting Art of Frank W. Benson* by Faith Andrews Bedford (see Bibliography listing).

Subseries E. Financial Records contains two account books, each recording investments and professional accounts, and records of works, which provide details such as title, buyer, price,

date and location of completion, date purchased, and location of exhibition. The lists of works are grouped by agent and media.

Clippings, exhibit catalogues, and periodicals provide reproductions, criticism, and biographical information about Benson in **Subseries F. Printed Materials**. Scrapbook #2 contains clippings and ephemera relating to a joint exhibit with Edward Tarbell in 1938, and obituaries, biographical sketches, and memorial shows for Tarbell and Benson. Ephemera from Scrapbook #1 is mainly comprised of exhibit catalogues and invitations. It also includes an advertisement for a charity raffle which offered prizes of one Benson etching, ten Rhode Island Reds, or eight pairs of silk stockings, to be given May 30, 1922. This subseries also contains many reproductions of Benson paintings and etchings clipped from newspapers, magazines, and catalogues. Most clippings contain at least the title of the work.

Series III. Family Papers contains items related to Benson during his lifetime, such as the family journals of 1881-1883 and a letter from Max Rogers in 1922 addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Benson, concerning the Rogers family visit with the Bensons prior to the wedding of Rogers and Elisabeth. Most of the family correspondence was collected by, or is addressed to, Sylvia Benson Lawson and contains genealogical information, information about identifying and appraising works, and a record of the deposit and donation of this collection. Photographs that were sent with correspondence have been kept with the letters. A family album with photographs taken at North Haven, Maine, includes family members posing for plein-air works and some images of Benson painting. The earliest dated photograph in this collection is a cabinet card portrait of Ellen Perry Peirson, Frank W. Benson's wife, when she was 16 years old in 1876.

Benson's mother-in-law, Ellen Perry Peirson (1828-1903) was the wife of Dr. Edward Brooks Peirson (1820-1874) of 13 Barton Square in Salem. Ellen's 1864 diary provides brief descriptions of her daily activities and some news of family and friends involved in the Civil War.

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Chamberlain, Samuel. "Frank W. Benson – The Etcher." *The Print Collector's Quarterly* 25.2 (1938): 167-184.

Peirce, Heman Winthrop. *The History of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1877-1927*. Boston: T.O. Metcalf Co., 1930.

Whitehill, W.M. *The East India Marine Society and the Peabody Museum of Salem: A Sesquicentennial History*. Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1949.

RELATED COLLECTIONS

Frank Weston Benson Papers, 1913-1933. *Acc.* 2001.024

Frank Weston Benson Papers, 1929-1990. *Acc.* 2004.011

Frank Weston Benson Papers, 1930-1980. *Acc.* 2004.008

Phillip Little Papers, 1838-1942. *Fam. Mss.* 559

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PAPERS, 1864-1976

SERIES LIST

SERIES I. Personal Papers

- A. Correspondence**
- B. Diaries**
- C. Photographs**
- D. Miscellany**

SERIES II. Business Papers

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- B. Manuscripts, Works on Paper**
- C. Photographs**
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SERIES III. Family Papers

CONTENTS LIST**SERIES I. Personal Papers****A. Correspondence**

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	2	Letters received	1905-1948, undated
	3	Letters sent to Daniel Henderson, Jr.	1882
	4	Letters sent to Daniel Henderson, Jr.	1883-1884
	5	Letters sent to Daniel Henderson, Jr.	1894-1926
	6	Envelopes of Henderson correspondence	1882-1926
	7	Letters sent to family	1895-1917, undated
	8	Letters sent to family	1918-1928
	9	Letters sent to family	1929-1947
	10	Envelopes of family correspondence	1887-1945, undated

B. Diaries

2	1	Diaries [2 volumes]	1888-1909, 1917-1920
	2	Diaries [1 vol. and 16 pages]	1916-1921
	3	Record of fish caught [1 volume]	1924-1926

C. Photographs

2	4	Portraits and photos of Frank Weston Benson	circa 1880-1900, undated
	5	Salmon fishing and duck hunting	undated
	6	Album of hunting and fishing trips	1924

D. Miscellany

2	7	Passport, birth record, autographs	1883-1945
	8	Shooting licenses, miscellaneous (from Scrapbook #1)	1911-1925, undated

SERIES II. Business Papers**A. Correspondence**

3	1	Letters sent	1895-1919, undated
	2	Letters sent	1922-1947
	3	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	1886-1912
	4	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	1912-1916
	5	Correspondence with Adam E.M. Paff	1916-1919

A. Business Correspondence (continued)

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Date</u>
3	6	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	1917-1918
	7	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	1919
	8	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	1920
	9	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	1921-1926
	10	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	1927-1942
	11	Letters received (from Scrapbook #1)	undated
	12	Letters received (from Scrapbook #2)	1938-1939, undated

B. Manuscripts and Works on Paper

3	13	“Advice on Painting from FWB” Notes for discussion on etching	undated
	14	Sketchbook: San Juan and Puerto Rico [1 volume]	1883
	15	Ink drawings	1882-1883
4(OS)		Portfolio: charcoal and crayon sketches	undated

C. Photographs

5		Scrapbook: clippings and photographs used for sketching (Scrapbook #3) [1 volume]	undated
6		Scrapbook: photographs of paintings and etchings (Scrapbook #5) [1 volume]	undated
7	1	Photograph reproductions of works [fragile]	undated
	2	Photograph portraits of Benson	1898, 1915, undated
	3	Photograph portraits of Benson, “The Ten”	1904, 1908, undated
	4	Photo reproductions of works commissioned by Library of Congress	undated
	5	Photo reproductions of works	undated
8	1	Photo reproductions of works from Scrapbook #1	
	2	Photo reproductions of works: Wildfowl	
	3	Photo reproductions of works: Sporting & Landscapes	
	4	Photo reproductions of works: Portraits & Figures	
	5	Photo reproductions of works: Still Life & Interiors	
	6	Photographs of art students taught by Benson	circa 1882, circa 1900, undated
	7	Record with photos of works exhibited at MFA	1935
9	1	Glass plate negatives: Benson, subjects for painting	undated
	2	Safety Film negative: painting <i>Autumn</i>	undated

D. Honors

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Date</u>
10	1	Medal, Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association	1892
	2	Medal, World's Columbian Exposition	1892-1893
	3	Chronological Medal, Carnegie Institute, for <i>Portrait of a Boy</i>	1896
	4	Second Class Medal, Carnegie Institute for <i>Children in the Woods</i>	1899
	5	Silver Medal, Exposition Universelle Internationale, for <i>The Sisters</i>	1900
	6	Silver Medal, Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, for <i>The Sisters</i>	1901
	7	Gold Medal, Universal Exposition, St. Louis, for <i>The Sisters</i>	1904
	8	Commemorative Medal, Universal Exposition, St. Louis	1904
	9	Silver Medal, Corcoran Gallery of Art, for <i>Against the Sky</i>	1907
	10	Norman Wait Harris Prize, for <i>Solitaire</i>	1909
	11	Joseph Pennell Medal, Philadelphia Watercolor Club	1919
	12	Frank A. Logan Medal, Art Institute of Chicago, for <i>Still Life</i>	1922
	13	Frank A. Logan Medal, Art Institute of Chicago	1924
	14	Gold Medal, Sesquicentennial International Exhibition	1926
	15	XI Olympiad, Berlin	1936
	16	Honorary Medal, International Business Machines	1940
	17	William Brewster Medal, American Ornithologists Union	undated
	18	John Endecott Medal, Massachusetts Bay Tercentenary	c.1930
	19	Society for Sanity in Art Medal	1939
11		Hood worn by Benson while receiving Honorary Master of Fine Arts degree at Tufts College	1935
4(OS)	1	Clarke Prize, National Academy of Design, for <i>Twilight</i>	1891
		Associate Membership, National Academy of Design	1898
		Silver Medal, Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, for <i>The Sisters</i>	1901
		Membership Certificate to the Tavern Club, Boston	1902
		Gold Medal, Carnegie Institute, for <i>A Woman Reading</i>	1903
		Gold Medal, Universal Exposition, St. Louis, for <i>The Sisters</i>	1904
		Gold Medal, Universal Exposition, St. Louis, for <i>The Hilltop</i>	1904
		Commemorative diploma, Universal Exposition	1904
		Academician membership, National Academy of Design	1905
		Memorial Certificate, American Artists' Professional League	1945

D. Honors (continued)

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Date</u>
12	1	List of Medals, Carnegie Institute Award (from Scrapbook #1)	1899, undated
	2	National Institute of Arts & Letters	1945

E. Financial Records

12	3	List of prices of works, list of buyers	undated
	4	Account book [1 volume]	1919-1932
	5	Account book [1 volume]	1932-1951
	6	Record of works	1920-1925
	7	Records of watercolors and wash drawings	1936-
	8	Inventory of works including galleries, sales, and owners	undated

F. Printed Materials

13		Scrapbook: Memorial shows, obituaries for Benson, Tarbell (Scrapbook #2) (1 vol.)	1938-1956
14		Clippings from Scrapbook #1 [restricted]	
15	1	Copies of clippings from Scrapbook #1	1899-1921
	2	Copies of clippings from Scrapbook #1	1922-1929
	3	Copies of clippings from Scrapbook #1	1930-1973, undated
	4	Copies of clippings from Scrapbook #1	multiple, undated
	5	Copies of clippings	undated
	6	Ephemera from Scrapbook #1	1904-1921
	7	Ephemera from Scrapbook #1	1921-1944, undated
	8	Auction and exhibit catalogues, invitations	1906-1951
	9	Exhibit catalogues, invitations to exhibitions	undated
16	1	Exhibit catalogues	1942-1976
	2	Clippings of reproductions	undated
	3	Proofs from Paff's <i>Etchings and drypoints...catalogue</i>	published 1917
	4	<i>The Art Student, Brush and Pencil</i>	1882-1900
	5	<i>Harper's Monthly Magazine</i>	June 1909
	6	<i>Country Life</i>	1920
	7	<i>The Print Connoisseur</i>	1922
	8	<i>The Sportsman</i>	1927
	9	<i>Yankee</i>	1940
	10	<i>Boston Public Library Quarterly, Newsweek</i>	1952, 1973

SERIES III. Family Papers

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Date</u>
17	1	Papers of Sylvia Benson Lawson	1966-1976, undated
	2	Correspondence	1922-1955
	3	Diary of Ellen Perry Peirson	1864
	4	Benson Family Journals, photocopy [2 volumes]	1881-Feb. 1882
	5	Benson Family Journals, photocopy [2 volumes]	Sep.-Nov. 1882
	6	Benson Family Journals, photocopy [2 volumes]	Nov. 1882-Jan. 1883
	7	Benson Family Journals, photocopy [2 volumes]	Jan. 1883-Apr. 1883
	8	Benson Family Journals, photocopy [2 volumes]	Apr. 1883-Jul. 1883
	9	Photographs	undated
18		Family photograph album	1907-1908, undated