
Finding aid for the Ruskin Art Club records 6083

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Title: Ruskin Art Club records

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Abstract: The Ruskin Art Club was founded October 12, 1888, and is the oldest women's club in Los Angeles. Its original purpose was to study the technique and history of engraving and etching, inspired by founding member Mary E. Boyce's own collection of prints and extensive library of books on art. The Club's main activity were the annual courses of study in the history of art, architecture, or archaeology. These consisted of lectures delivered by the members to the membership at the monthly Wednesday morning meetings. Programs were printed and distributed amongst the membership and were, in effect, syllabi, including a weekly schedule of specialized topics, the names of the members who would research and present on these topics, and the schedule of the presentations. The records document the Club's activities, with especial emphasis on the annual courses of study as preserved in the minutes and programs.

Storage Unit: 1-4, 8, 10-13

Storage Unit: 5-7, 9, 14, 20, 21

Storage Unit: 15-17, 27, 29-33

Storage Unit: 18, 19, 22, 28

Storage Unit: 23-25

Storage Unit: 26, 34

Historical note

The Ruskin Art Club was founded October 12, 1888, and is the oldest women's club in Los Angeles. The founding members of the Club were Mary E. Boyce, Fanny Brainerd, Dora Haynes, Lora Hubbel, and Mary Widney. Its original purpose was to study the technique and history of engraving and etching, inspired by founding member Mary E. Boyce's own collection of prints and extensive library of books on art. The name "Ruskin Art Club" was chosen by the original members at its first meeting, and is significant, as it signaled both an embrace of English art critic John Ruskin's philosophies about the Arts and Crafts movement, and the rights of women. The Club's activities were designed by its members to give more meaning to their lives than Victorian society ascribed to them. Through "the earnest study of masterful works of art," the club's members would become sensitized to beauty in an increasingly mechanized society, and the club would make art available to a wider audience and thus elevate society's values as a whole. In addition, the appellation "Club" had great significance in 1880s Los Angeles, in which clubs were exclusively the domain of men.

The Club's main activity was the annual course of study in the history of art, architecture, or archaeology. These courses of study, selected by the president, ran for 8 months every year. They consisted of lectures delivered by the members to the membership at the monthly Wednesday morning meetings. Programs were printed and distributed amongst the membership and were, in effect, syllabi, including a weekly schedule of specialized topics, the names of the members who would research and present on these topics, and the schedule of the presentations.

In April 1890, the Club sponsored the first public art exhibition in Los Angeles when it had the entire engraving exhibit from the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition sent to them on loan. The success of this exhibit resulted in a rapid growth in membership to the point where the members imposed a maximum membership of 100 women. The membership also soon outgrew its original meeting location, Mary Boyce's drawing room, and began meeting in various locations around the city, including the Hamburger Department Store, and the Bella Union, Nadau, and Hollenbeck hotels. In the 1920s, the Club moved into its permanent home at 8th and Plymouth. Originally built by the Congregational Church Extension Society as a Sunday School Room and Parish House, the club occupied the building as its club house and headquarters until 2014, when it was sold.

The Club was an influential presence in Los Angeles and across the nation. Many of Los Angeles's influential clubs were founded with Ruskin members in attendance, including the Friday Morning Club and the Ebell Club. The Ruskin also developed a longstanding relationship with another of Los Angeles's important institutions, the Southwest Museum, and in particular with its curator, Hector Alliot. Alliot made his first address to the Club in 1905, and continued to work with them until his death in 1919, particularly in the design of the annual courses of study. In 1889, Mary Boyce attended a meeting of women's clubs in the United States that resulted in the formation of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, with the

Ruskin as one of the original 60 founding members.

Membership began to wane during the Depression, and in the 1960s, the Board of Directors amended the by-laws to permit men to join.

In 1988, the Ruskin Art Club celebrated its centennial, an event recognized in a number of official city commendations. In the aftermath of that celebration, however, a period of crisis ensued: many members, mindful of the organization's dwindling numbers and a societal climate in which club membership was in general decline, proposed to sell the clubhouse and regroup as a more informal, home-based association. The move was defeated by a single vote – Margaret Clausen's, who, then, found herself faced with resuscitating the Ruskin Art Club without many of the older members.

In the 1990s, a new generation emerged: Jim Burns helped to develop a "Music in Mansions" concert series; composer Alfred Carlson, a student of Arnold Schoenberg, became Ruskin Art Club composer-in-residence; weaver Estelle Carlson launched a popular series of textile exhibitions; choral conductor and silent-movie musician Robert Mitchell performed regularly and the club sponsored a series of weekly luncheon programs. The club also organized summer concerts at the historic Southwest Museum in the Arroyo Seco. In 1997, local historian Joseph Ryan delivered the first "Ruskin" lecture on the history of the club, later published as a monograph, and led the ultimately successful campaign to designate the Ruskin Art Club headquarters as an official Los Angeles historical monument.

As the new century dawned, Gabriel Meyer, the Ruskin Art Club's first male president, steered the club back to its earliest roots in the ideals of John Ruskin and in association with other historic California arts and crafts-oriented institutions: the Judson Studios in Highland Park, the Gamble House in Pasadena, the California Art Club, the Huntington Library and the Southwest Museum. In addition, the club sought to organize itself more effectively for the future by shifting its legal status from a members-only organization to a non-profit public arts corporation. New younger members also spearheaded a host of new programs at the clubhouse in the first decade of the new century: chamber concerts, the "Jazz at the Ruskin" series, annual "Ruskin" Lectures, a symposium honoring the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Arnold Schoenberg, readers' theater presentations, "Ruskin" study groups, a monthly poetry series in collaboration with Pasadena-based Red Hen Press, a "Modern Masters" literary series designed by the club's literary programs director, Elena Karina Byrne, and a series of Saturday literary workshops led by local and nationally recognized writers.

However, by 2008, and the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the founding of the Ruskin Art Club, the physical condition of the nearly 90-year-old clubhouse was increasingly inhibiting the club's mission and its ability to mount programs. In late 2013, the board of directors made the painful and difficult decision to sell the organization's historic mid-Wilshire property, entrusting its fate to a talented restoration architect and to a new future as a private residence – albeit one that remains a Los Angeles cultural and historic monument. This move allowed the Ruskin Art Club, in its 125th year, to return to its original mission – not to manage property, however historic – but to advance the cause of Ruskin's thought in the 21st century and to develop ways to support writers, artists, musicians, architects, and thinkers who espouse Ruskin's values in Southern California.

[Sources: Joseph Ryan, "The Ruskin Art Club: A History" (Los Angeles: Ruskin Art Club), c. 1997); Gabriel Meyer, President of the Ruskin Art Club, October 2014]

Scope and Contents

The Ruskin Art Club records consist of meeting minutes, programs, administrative and financial records, clippings, some correspondence, photographs, and ephemera, created and collected by the members of the Club, 1891-2003. The records describe in detail the activities of the Club, which were in the area of art education for its membership. Of particular importance are the minutes and programs, which describe in detail the lectures delivered to the membership by the membership, and formed the core activity of the Club. Also included are some papers created and collected by Helen Witmer, president of the Club during the 1950s and 60s.

Acquisition

Gift of Ruskin Art Club, April 3, 2014.

Conditions Governing Access

Advance notice required for access.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

[Box/folder no. or item name], Ruskin Art Club records, Collection no. 6083, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California

Separated Materials

The donation included some books from the Club's library. These have been cataloged separately.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Art -- Study and teaching -- California -- Los Angeles -- Archival resources
Women -- California -- Los Angeles -- Societies and clubs -- History -- Archival resources
Women -- California -- Los Angeles -- History -- Archival resources
Los Angeles (Calif.) -- History -- Archival resources
Los Angeles (Calif.) -- Social life and customs -- Archival resources
Correspondence
Clippings
Ledgers (account books)
Minutes
Programs (documents)
Periodicals
Ruskin Art Club
Witmer, Helen
Ruskin Art Club -- Archives
Dearden, James A. -- Correspondence
Grosspelius, Barbara C. -- Correspondence
Witmer, Helen -- Archives
Ruskin, John -- Archives

Minutes 1893-1944**Scope and Contents**

The Minutes of the Ruskin Art Club consist of ledgers, typescripts, and manuscripts of minutes for the club meetings, from 1893 through 1944. The minutes are generally written in narrative style and after detailing the business of the meetings (such as the reading of the previous meeting's minutes and transcribing any announcements), the bulk of the individual minutes consist of transcriptions of the meetings' presentations. Some of the annual minutes, especially in the 1930s, also include committee reports and minutes of business meetings.

Box 1, folder 1

Supplementary minutes 1893-1894**Scope and Contents**

Also includes a small pamphlet published as the introduction to "California History Cards: Mission Series".

Box 1, Folder 2

Minutes 1894-1895

Box 1, folder 3

Minutes 1896-1897

Box 1, folder 4

Minutes 1897-1899

Box 1, folder 5

Minutes 1899-1900

Box 5, folder 1

Minutes 1900-1902

Box 5, folder 2

Minutes 1917-1922

Box 1, folder 6

Board Minutes 1917-1926

Box 2, folder 1

Minutes 1929-1930

Box 2, folder 2

Minutes 1930-1931

Box 2, folder 3

Minutes 1931-1932

Box 2, folder 4

Minutes 1932-1933

Box 2, folder 5

Minutes 1933-1934

Box 2, folder 6

Minutes 1934-1935

Box 2, folder 7

Minutes 1935-1936

Box 2, folder 8
 Box 2, folder 9
 Box 2, folder 10
 Box 3, folder 1
 Box 3, folder 2
 Box 3, folder 3
 Box 3, folder 4

Minutes 1936-1937
Minutes 1937-1938
Minutes 1938-1939
Minutes 1939-1940
Minutes 1940-1941
Minutes 1941-1942
Minutes 1942-1944

Papers and Programs 1893-2003 bulk 1893-1987

Scope and Contents

The series consists of the Ruskin Art Club's annual courses of study programs and guestbooks.

Box 9, folder 1
 Box 3, folder 5

[Lecture outlines] 1889, 1890

"Book for Preserving Valuable Papers Written on the Subjects Studied by the Ruskin Art Club" 1893

Scope and Contents

Hard bound notebook with handwritten copies of papers presented to the Ruskin Art Club. The flyleaf of the notebook is inscribed with the title and date, and "Room/Baker Block".

Box 7, folder 4

"The Ruskin Art Club" 1893, 1924

Scope and Contents

Published (1893) volume of the courses of study from 1888-1893. Signed by Mary E. Boyce, and given to the Ruskin Art Club by Mrs. J.B. Owens. The introduction to this volume states the reason for its publication: "The programs are in demand for the use of other clubs, and this is primarily the reason of combining them into one series and producing this publication, which will also constitute the club's contribution to the exhibit made by the General Federation of Women's Clubs at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago." Accompanied by a certificate from the Mission Play Foundation commemorating the purchase of 10 memberships; dated May 21, 1924.

Box 8
 Box 9, Folder 2
 Box 9
 Box 9
 Box 10

[Programs] 1897-1904

Fourth Annual Exhibition catalog 1905

Ruskin Art Club Year Books [programs] 1897-1910

Ruskin Art Club Year Books [programs] 1910-1924

[Programs] 1914-1916

Scope and Contents

This volume of programs was created scrapbook style.

Box 11
 Box 12
 Box 13
 Box 6, folder 12

Ruskin Art Club Year Books [programs], vol. 1 1924-1936

Ruskin Art Club Year Books [programs], vol. 2 1936-1949

Ruskin Art Club Year Books [programs], vol. 3 1949-1960

Programs 1964-1974

Scope and Contents

Unbound programs for 1964-1965; October 9, 1968; 1969-1970; 1970-1971; 1972-1973; and 1973-1974.

Box 6, folder 10
 Box 4, Folder 8

[Huntington Library event] 1969

[Presentations and events] 1991, 2003, undated

Scope and Contents

Audiotapes, videotape, CD-ROMs, and notes of and about presentations to the Ruskin Art Club.

Box 17
 Box 18
 Box 18
 Box 18

Guest Book 1929-1931

Guest Book 1957-1959

Guest Book 1960-1962

Guest Book 1962-1965

Box 18	Guest Book 1964-1967
Box 18	Guest Book 1967-1969
Box 17	Guest Book 1975-1987
	Administrative records 1891-1991
Box 3, folder 6	[Administrative notebook] 1925-1935 Scope and Contents Memorandums, financial records, correspondence regarding club status and finances, clippings, receipts, and copies of minutes from 1935 (incomplete).
Box 7, folder 1	Constitution and amendments 1926-1969
Box 3, folder 7	Treasurer's reports 1955-1964
Box 4, folder 2	Treasurer's reports 1980-1981
Box 4, folder 3	Business 1983-1991
Box 4, folder 1	[Financial records] 1927, 1959, 1964-1968
Box 4, folder 4	Treasurer's reports 1986-1989
Box 4, Folder 5	[Insurance policy letters] 1964-1965
Box 14	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1891-1896
Box 14	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1928-1930
Box 6, folder 11	[Sample membership certificate] undated
Box 14	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1929-1930
Box 16	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1930
Box 15	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1939-1950
Box 15	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1950-1959
Box 16	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1959-1963
Box 16	[Financial and membership ledgers] 1963-1968
Box 6, folder 13	[Miscellaneous notes] undated
box 7, folder 5	Curator's Lists 1926, 1927, undated
Box 9, folder 4	Curator's Book 1912
Box 7, folder 6	[Clubhouse property deed and mortgage document] 1926
Box 7, folder 7	[Clubhouse historic-cultural monument application] 1996
	Photographs circa 1903-1990s
Box 4, folder 6	[Photographs of John Ruskin and Ruskiniana] undated
Box 33	[Picture postcards of Coniston sent to Letha (Storrow) Lewis] circa 1903
Box 33	[Photographs and slides] circa 1960s-1990s Scope and Contents Snapshots of the Ruskin Clubhouse (exteriors and interiors), members, and a 1998 (?) visit to the Southwest Museum to view the Ruskin Art Club collection; commercial slides of Ruskin's estate.
box 34	[Photographs of Club presidents] circa 1910s-1960s
box 34	[Photograph of Ruskin Art Club clubhouse] 1926
box 34	[Mounted photographs of Yosemite and sculpture] undated
	History and Publicity 1896-1990
Box 6, folder 8	[Newspaper clippings about John Ruskin and copy of "Dame Wiggins of Lee" 1896-1990
Box 9, folder 3	Hollywood USO citation circa 1944
Box 6, folder 9	For RAC Scrapbook 1958-1959
Box 19	Scrapbooks 1979-1984
	Publications, Bibliographies, and Journals 1879-1965 Scope and Contents This series consists primarily of journals from the Club's library. The books that were originally part of the records have been cataloged separately.

- Box 25-26 **The American Magazine of Art 1923 January-1928 November**
 Scope and Contents
 Incomplete run: missing vol. 14 no. 2; vol. 15 no. 9; vol. 16 nos. 2, 6, 11-12; vol. 17 no. 8;
 vol. 18 nos. 5-7, 10-12; vol. 19 nos. 11-12.
- Box 30-31
Box 20-22 **The Architectural Record 1901 February, April; 1902 January, April, August**
[Articles on topics of interest to the Club] circa 1905-1910
 Scope and Contents
 Articles from magazines, including The American Magazine, National Geographic,
 Harper's Monthly, the Era Magazine, Munsey's Magazine, the Book Buyer, the Atlantic
 Monthly Advertiser, and the Booklovers Magazine, on topics including Mexico, Mexican
 and American deserts, and artists. The articles are handbound in paper covers.
- Box 27-28 **Brush and Pencil 1902-1907**
 Scope and Contents
 December 1902-April 1907. Not a complete run.
- Box 32
Box 20 **Hollywood Bowl magazine 1941-1942, 1965**
"Little Journeys" by Elbert Hubbard (New York: The Roycrofters) 1918-1919
 Scope and Contents
 Includes Business Men A.T. Stewart, Philip Armour, Andrew Carnegie; Great Reformers
 Oliver Cromwell, Anne Hutchinson; Great Teachers Booker T. Washington.
- Box 20 **"Los Angeles County Culture and the Community", published by the Civic Bureau of**
Music and Art of Los Angeles County circa 1931
 Scope and Contents
 Accompanied by a letter from Leila E. Smith, Civic Bureau of Music and Art, to Mrs.
 Thomas A. Berkebile, President of the Ruskin Art Club, requesting photographs for a new
 edition. Reverse of the letter has handwritten notes about possible pictures.
- Box 31 **The Masterkey 1980 July-September; 1981 October-December**
 Related Materials
 Published by the Southwest Museum
- Box 22 **[Miscellaneous journals] 1883, 1900, 1905, 1908, 1940-1941, undated**
 Scope and Contents
 Clipping from Century Magazine (February 1883); Overland Monthly reprint (1898); The
 Literary Digest (January 27, 1900); The International Studio (April 1905); American
 Photography (1908); Contributions to the Intellectual Life of the Western Hemisphere
 1890-1940 (Fiftieth Anniversary of the Pan American Union, 1940); Yehudi Menuhin
 program (1941); Magazine of Celebrities (1941); unidentified magazine fragment.
- Box 22
box 34
Box 29 **Museum of Fine Arts Boston Gallery Books circa 1890**
[Prints of artwork] circa 1900
[Programs for musical performances] 1939-1942
 Scope and Contents
 Programs for the Philharmonic Orchestra of Los Angeles (1941-1942); the Coleman
 Chamber Concerts at Pasadena Community Playhouse (October 19, 1941 and February 8,
 1942). Also includes a program for the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood for August
 9, 1942.
- Box 23-24 **The Salon; a collection of the choicest paintings recently executed by distinguished**
European artists, by Prof. Charles Carrol 1881
 Physical Description: Nos. 1-20; no. 9 is a fragment. In fragile condition.
-

- Box 7, folder 3 **Spanish Arts and Architecture circa 1930**
 Scope and Contents
 Typed list of books on the subject held in the Art Department of the Los Angeles Public Library.
- Box 30 **Scribner's Monthly 1879 August**
 Helen Witmer 1956-1969
 Scope and Contents
 The Helen Witmer papers consist almost exclusively of material (notes, typescripts, letters) regarding Witmer's presentations to the Club on John Ruskin.
- Box 6, Folder 1 **James Dearden-Helen Witmer correspondence 1965-1966**
 Scope and Contents
 Letters between Helen Witmer and James Dearden, Curator of the Ruskin Galleries. The letters discuss various matters pertaining to materials about John Ruskin, some of which Mrs. Witmer requested for presentations to the Club.
- Box 6, folder 2 **Barbara C. Gnosspelius letters to Helen Witmer 1958-1959**
 Scope and Contents
 Letters from Mrs. Gnosspelius, Curator of the Ruskin Museum, to Helen Witmer. Many are in response to requests for photographs of Ruskin.
- Box 6, folder 3 **[Helen Witmer notes and script for presentation "Ruskin as Art Critic", November 12, 1969] 1969**
- Box 6, folder 4 **[Helen Witmer notes for Ruskin presentations] circa 1958-1964**
- Box 6, folder 5 **[Helen Witmer notes for Ruskin presentations] 1962**
- Box 6, folder 6 **[Helen Witmer Ruskin birthday paper] 1956 February 8**
- Box 6, folder 7 **[Ruskin programs] 1956-1964**
 Scope and Contents
 Original folder entitled "All here relating to Ruskin programs, book reviews-panel discussion/April 15, 1964".
- Box 7, folder 2 **"Effie in Venice", "Millais and the Ruskins"**
 Scope and Contents
 Copies of radio program scripts from the BBC, sent to Helen Witmer.