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Mapping the “White, Marmorean Flock”: Anne Whitney Abroad, 1867–1868: Primary Sources

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Abstract:

This article and the associated maps and timeline use Anne Whitney’s letters as the framework for an examination of the art and life of an American artist abroad. It illustrates Whitney’s first sixteen months of travel through these and other contemporary sources to visualize her movement and activities through space and time. This project seeks to revise the impression of Henry James’s ‘white, marmorean flock’ as a collective and look at Whitney as an individual with unique reactions to Italy, informed not only by the celebrated works of art and architecture around her but also by the experience of life abroad in all of its complexity.

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Mapping the “White, Marmorean Flock”: Anne Whitney Abroad, 1867–1868: Primary Sources by Jacqueline Marie Musacchio

with Jenifer Bartle and David McClure, assisted by Kalyani Bhatt

Primary Sources

This article is based on my research in the Anne Whitney archive at Wellesley College. When Whitney died in January 1915, her friend, the author Olive Tilford Dargan, inherited the cache of some 4,000 letters, documentation, and photographs assembled over the entire span of Whitney’s long life. But Dargan never published the letters or the biography she had hoped to write. Instead, she handed over the boxes containing this material to another friend of Whitney’s, the author Antoinette Rotan Peterson, who then gifted them to Wellesley in 1944.^[1] Although Peterson did not state her reasons for doing so, she knew that Whitney and her family had multiple connections to the college. They were acquainted with the founders, Pauline and Henry Fowle—the Durants were from Watertown like the Whitneys—and they were invited to the college’s opening ceremonies in 1875.^[2] Whitney and her sister Sarah were good friends of Durant’s cousin, painter Ellen Robbins, and Whitney was close to Wellesley’s second president, Alice Freeman, and her husband and Wellesley trustee George Herbert Palmer, as well as a number of important professors and trustees, including Florence Converse, Eben Norton Horsford, and Vida Scudder. Whitney even taught a modeling class at Wellesley in early 1885.^[3] And one of her most celebrated statues, of English reformer Harriet Martineau, was installed in College Hall, the original campus building, from 1886 until 1914, when both College Hall and most of its contents, including Whitney’s statue, were destroyed in a fire. The 93-year-old Whitney was devastated by this loss; her friends, among them the sculptor Daniel Chester French, tried to find the original plaster model in Florence to commission a new marble, though it had almost certainly been discarded years earlier.^[4] Whitney revised her will to leave a significant portion of her estate to Wellesley, noting, “I do this in the belief that among all the educational establishments of New England she stands pre-eminent for breadth and liberality of sentiment – for hospitality to advancing thought and for recognition of and practical adherence to the unchanging principles of progressive life in school, church, and state.”^[5] But Whitney’s financial circumstances required her to change her will again, eliminating the Wellesley bequest, shortly before her death in January 1915. Wellesley still has eight sculptures by Whitney, as well as work by her friends Margaret Foley, Elizabeth Bigelow Greene, and Ellen Robbins. Given these circumstances, it would be difficult to find a more appropriate home for this archive.

Scholars have utilized the Whitney archive for many years. It was organized to some extent by Elizabeth Rogers Payne in the 1950s and 1960s, but it is now being processed according to best

practices to make it more accessible. The cache as a whole—letters, documents, ephemera, and photographs—is designated Wellesley College Archives (henceforth WCA), MSS 4; the finding aid is available through the [Archives website](#). While some letters now have complete accession numbers (for example, Whitney's first letter following her first departure for Europe is MSS 4.127), others do not, so the citations given in this article vary slightly in format. Because she and her sister Sarah wrote most of the abroad letters over a period of approximately two weeks, the start date alone appears in the citation but I used the actual date of the event she writes about on the timeline when I can determine it. There are almost 400 letters to and from Whitney during the five years she lived abroad; my article is based on the approximately 100 letters written during the first sixteen months, as well as additional letters from before or after that period when necessary to demonstrate particular points.

Whitney's letters are in remarkably good condition given their age. However, occasionally it is impossible to transcribe a word or group of words due to handwriting, paper loss, or other damage. And of course the letters traveled across land and sea, necessitating the use of lightweight, onionskin paper to save postage costs; depending on the ink used, words bled through and this can also make transcription difficult. When I could not complete a transcription, for whatever reason, I inserted [*illegible*] in the text. Throughout this article and the associated timeline and maps I chose to retain Whitney's inconsistent and often incorrect spelling, abbreviations, superscripts, and punctuation to capture her true voice. In fact at times the reader can get some sense of the speed with which she wrote, and the way her mind jumped from one idea to another, by this writing style (something that is, I believe, even more evident in the original letters, as Whitney's handwriting varies considerably). However, I omitted any words she struck out, even if they were still legible, and I included her inserted words and phrases, whether written above or below the line or along the edge of the page, to maintain her narrative flow as much as possible. In the instances where I use unpublished documents from other archives, written by Whitney or her contemporaries, I follow these same guidelines, again to give the most accurate sense of the author's voice. I also included as many photographs from Whitney's own collection as possible to illustrate her letters; in the instances where there was nothing relevant, I used contemporary sources she may have known. The maps, too, are from guidebooks she mentioned or could have used. I wanted this historical accuracy to give the best possible sense of Whitney's life abroad.

Jacqueline Marie Musacchio is Professor of Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art at Wellesley College. Many of her publications have focused on the material culture of private life, including *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (Yale University Press, 1999), *Art, Marriage, and Family in the Florentine Renaissance Palace* (Yale University Press, 2009), and an essay and entries for the exhibition catalogue *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (Yale University Press, 2008). Her earlier article for *NCAW*, "Infesting the Galleries of Europe: The Copyist Emma Conant Church in Paris and Rome" (Autumn 2011), won the 2012 Online Publishing Prize from the Association of Research Institutes in Art History. This research is part of her current book project, *At Home Abroad: Anne Whitney and American Women Artists in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy*.

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Notes

- [1] Information on the provenance of the Whitney archive is based on Elizabeth Rogers Payne, "Anne Whitney: Nineteenth-Century Sculptor and Liberal," typescript, Wellesley College Archives, 17–21 and 1764a–1770.
- [2] Letter from Sarah Whitney to Anne Whitney, begun September 5, 1875, WCA MSS 4.256.
- [3] Datebook of Addy Manning, January 1, 1885–May 15, 1887, WCA MSS 4.
- [4] Letters from Daniel Chester French to Francis J. Garrison, April 3, 1914, WCA MSS 4 and Francis J. Garrison to Anne Whitney, April 8, 1914, WCA MSS 4.
- [5] Payne, "Anne Whitney: Nineteenth-Century Sculptor," 1748–1749. I have not located this version of her will.