

Guide to the Rebecca Salsbury James Papers

YCAL MSS 16



by Diane J. Ducharme

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
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<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 16

CREATOR: James, Rebecca Salisbury, 1891-1968

TITLE: Rebecca Salisbury James papers

DATES: 1924-1967

BULK DATES: 1930-1939

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.8 linear feet (7 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence and family papers documenting aspects of the career and friendships of Rebecca Salisbury James, especially her involvement with the Stieglitz circle. Correspondents include Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, Isabel Lachaise, and Frieda Lawrence.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.james>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.james>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Rebecca Salisbury James Papers were a gift of Rebecca Salisbury James, 1964-1967.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Box 5: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Use

The Rebecca Salisbury James Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Rebecca Salisbury James Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

REBECCA SALSBUURY JAMES (1891-1968)

Rebecca Salisbury Strand James was born in London in 1891, the daughter of Nathan Salisbury, manager of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. She was raised in New Jersey and was working as a medical secretary in New York when she met the photographer Paul Strand, a member of the Photo-Secession circle. They were married early in 1922. She modeled frequently for her husband and for Alfred Stieglitz, typed submissions to *MSS* and articles for Marsden Hartley, and became a close friend of Georgia O'Keeffe, whom she was said to resemble in looks and personality. The Strands first visited Taos in 1926 as the guests of Mabel Dodge Luhan. Rebecca Strand returned there for three months in 1929 with Georgia O'Keeffe, and the Strands spent the following three summers in Taos, while Paul Strand worked on a series of Southwestern photographs.

Encouraged to paint by her husband, Rebecca Strand developed a technique of painting on glass, perhaps suggested by the earlier experiments of Marsden Hartley. Her work included portraits of Indians and a series of large-scale flower compositions. In February 1932, the Strands held a joint exhibition of their New Mexican work at An American Place. One reviewer commented that Rebecca's paintings were "freshly felt and painted with a refreshing naivete and precision." Rebecca and Paul Strand were divorced the following year, and Rebecca moved to Taos permanently.

In 1949 she married William H. James, a local businessman and founder of the New Mexico Angus-Aberdeen Cattlemen's Association. He had one adopted daughter, Vera James, who died in an automobile accident in 1949. Throughout the 1930s, James continued to paint, exhibiting her work at An American Place and other galleries and holding several one-woman shows, mostly in the West. In the late 1940s she became interested in the recently revived technique of *colcha* embroidery and produced many of these decorative hangings, often on Southwestern themes. Some of her embroideries were displayed at the Museum of International Folk Art in 1963. She also published a small collection of biographical sketches of Taos natives, *Allow Me to Present 18 Ladies and Gentlemen and Taos, N. M. 1885-1939*.

James spent the last few years of her life in semi-retirement due to her poor health, although she contributed comments to the exhibition catalogue of the William and Rebecca James Collection and, in 1966, wrote an introduction to Dorothy Benrimo's *Camposantos*. Rebecca Salisbury James died in Taos in July 1968.

Scope and Contents

The Rebecca Salisbury James Papers consist of correspondence, subject files, and oversize scrapbooks documenting aspects of the career and friendships of Rebecca Salisbury James. The papers span the dates 1924-1967, but the bulk of the material dates from the 1930s.

[Series I, Correspondence](#), which has been alphabetically arranged, consists almost entirely of letters from friends, many connected with Stieglitz or with the Taos artists colony. There is no family correspondence, although letters by Mrs. Jesse Akeley and Frank Butler do mention James's father, Nathan Salsbury.

The most important correspondents associated with the Stieglitz circle are Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Isabel Lachaise. Hartley's letters fill folders 4-19 and are mostly devoted to personal news. Topics include his impressions of Paris, New Hampshire, and Nova Scotia, his financial worries, and his artistic ambitions. A June 1929 letter encourages James in her attempts to paint on glass and recounts Hartley's own experiments with the technique. Many letters contain his often unfavorable opinions of other artists, including Klee, Kandinsky, and Picasso. There are frequent discussions of more personal subjects, including what Hartley called his "New England psychology." A letter written shortly after Hartley's return to the United States in 1930 mentions his love for a woman in Europe and offers support to James in her marital difficulties. Other topics include news of friends, his dislike of his W.P.A. work, and his admiration for Charlie Chaplin.

Further biographical information about Marsden Hartley can be found in the correspondence of Elizabeth McCausland, a niece of Hartley's who planned to write a biography of him. Her letters discuss her interpretation of Hartley's character and her negotiations with his literary executor. Several of the letters include questionnaires about Hartley which were answered by James.

The letters of Georgia O'Keeffe begin in the fall of 1926 and continue until 1967. She seldom dated her letters, but James has supplied dates in many cases. The early correspondence contains much information on the daily lives and activities of Stieglitz, O'Keeffe, and James. Letters written from Lake George, where she and Stieglitz summered, provide news of mutual friends, descriptions of the demanding social routine Stieglitz enjoyed, and complaints of her inability to work amid "the strain of family life." O'Keeffe's growing desire to live and paint in solitude is a major theme of the correspondence. Shortly after her first visit to Taos in 1929, O'Keeffe described for James "the feeling of completeness that I have about Taos." The letters also detail her slow recovery from her 1933 breakdown and the beginnings of her plans to live in New Mexico. A letter written in 1934 notes, "I begin to think of New Mexico with a vague kind of interest. And I also think I want to keep house. . . . I must live somewhere where the people do not run me crazy." (Box 1, folder 30) The correspondence became less frequent after O'Keeffe moved to New Mexico, and the later letters contain arrangements for visits, thanks for presents, and brief comments on her daily activities and her enjoyment of her life in the desert.

Isabel Lachaise's letters are almost entirely devoted to personal news, including the illness of Edward Lachaise and the difficulties she experienced in adjusting to life without Gaston Lachaise. The correspondence also contains information on mutual friends, especially Marsden Hartley and Carrie Stettheimer. Frieda Lawrence's letters are equally personal; topics include James's embroideries and news of Mabel Dodge Luhan. A letter written in 1954 discusses Lawrence's commissioning of a painting by James for the D.H. Lawrence chapel.

The other correspondence consists of single letters from various friends, including Dorothy Brett, Arthur Dove, Marcel Duchamp, Alfred Kreymborg, Gaston Lachaise, John Marin, and Mabel Dodge Luhan. These are usually brief notes on a variety of subjects. For example, Dorothy Brett's letter comments on her painting, her health, and the unpopularity of Indian rights leader John Collier in Taos.

Folders 38-56 house [Series II, Subject Files](#), which contain newspaper clippings, photographs, and other miscellaneous material. The file on Rebecca Salsbury James includes exhibition catalogues, photographs of her and of Georgia O'Keeffe at Taos, an album of portrait studies done by Stieglitz in the 1920s, and a copy of "The Colcha Stitch." The file on Marsden Hartley includes a typescript of his poem "Dusty Residues." Box 2, folder 55 contains a portrait of Paul Strand which was taken during the 1920s by Stieglitz.

Boxes 3 and 4 hold [Series III, Scrapbooks](#), containing greeting cards received by Rebecca Salsbury James and William H. James between 1939 and 1954. Christmas cards predominate, but there are some Valentine and birthday cards as well. Many of these cards are from other members of the Taos artists colony.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1924-1967

0.6 linear feet (2 boxes)

Series I, *Correspondence*, is arranged alphabetically.

b. 1, f. 1	Akeley, Mrs. Jesse C.	1924
b. 1, f. 1	Berger, Norma	1967
b. 1, f. 1	Brett, Dorothy	1931
b. 1, f. 2	British Museum	1924
b. 1, f. 2	Burlingame, Bob	1951
b. 1, f. 2	Butler, Frank E.	1924
b. 1, f. 2	Coke, Van Deren	1962, 1963
b. 1, f. 2	Dove, Arthur	1928, 1939
b. 1, f. 3	Duchamp, Marcel	n.d.
b. 1, f. 3	Duncan, Charles	[1928?]
b. 1, f. 3	Gallup, Donald	1952, 1965
b. 1, f. 4-19	Hartley, Marsden	1928-41, n.d.
b. 1, f. 20	Holmes, Sara and John	1941
b. 1, f. 20	Kreymborg, Alfred	1926
b. 1, f. 20	Lachaise, Gaston	n.d.
b. 1, f. 21-22	Lachaise, Isabel	1933-53, n.d.
b. 1, f. 23-24	Lawrence, Frieda	1945-56, n.d.
b. 1, f. 25	Luhan, Mabel Dodge	[1929?]
b. 1, f. 25	Marin, John	1935
b. 1a, f. 26-27	McCausland, Elizabeth	1951-63
b. 1a, f. 28-35	O'Keeffe, Georgia	1926-67
b. 1a, f. 36	Ridge, Lola	1931, 1939
b. 1a, f. 36	Simonson, Lee	[1928?]
b. 1a, f. 36	Sykes, Gerald	1928-66
b. 1a, f. 36	University of New Mexico. Art Museum	1965
b. 1a, f. 36	Wells, Cady	1946

b. 1a, f. 37	Young, Ella	1927, 1955
b. 1a, f. 37	Unidentified	1926-67

Series II: Subject Files, 1922-1967*0.6 linear feet (2 boxes)*Series II, *Subject Files*, is arranged alphabetically.

b. 2, f. 37a	Benrimo, Thomas Duncan	n.d.
b. 2, f. 38	Brett, Dorothy	1967
b. 2, f. 38a	Cawelti, John G.	n.d.
b. 2, f. 39	Dove, Arthur	1942, 1944
b. 2, f. 39a	Fogg Art Museum	1967
b. 2, f. 40	Hartley, Marsden	1952, 1961, n.d.
b. 2, f. 41	Havighurst, Walter	1953
	James, Rebecca Salsbury	
b. 2, f. 42	Newspaper clippings	1965-67, n.d.
b. 2, f. 43	Photograph album: Stieglitz	[1922-24?]
b. 2, f. 44-45	Photographs	1926-37, n.d.
b. 2, f. 46	Print of tree	n.d.
b. 2, f. 47	Writings - "The <i>Colcha</i> Stitch"	1964
b. 2, f. 48	Johnson, Spud	n.d.
b. 2, f. 49	Lachaise, Gaston and Isabel	1938-44, n.d.
b. 2, f. 50	Lawrence, Frieda	1941-44, n.d.
b. 2, f. 51	Marin, John	1947-62, n.d.
	O'Keeffe, Georgia	
b. 2, f. 52	Newspaper clippings	1950-66, n.d.
b. 2, f. 53	Photographs	1929-62, n.d.
b. 2a, f. 53a	Salsbury, Nathan	1955
b. 2a, f. 53b	Smith, William Jay	n.d.
b. 2a, f. 54	Stieglitz, Alfred	1949
b. 2a, f. 55	Strand, Paul	1965, 1967, n.d.
b. 2a, f. 56	Sykes, Gerald	[1961], n.d.
b. 2a, f. 56a	Taos (N.M.)	1961
b. 2a, f. 56b	Paintings of flowers on silk	n.d.
b. 2a, f. 56c	Unidentified	n.d.

Series III: Scrapbooks

Greeting cards

1939-54

[See: Oversize](#)

Greeting cards

1955-67

[See: Oversize](#)

Oversize

1.4 linear feet (2 boxes)

Oversize contains oversize material from Series III, arranged in box order.

b. 3, f. 57-64	Greeting cards (in Series III)	1939-54
b. 4, f. 65-71	Greeting cards (in Series III)	1955-67

Restricted fragile papers

Box 5: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

b. 5, f. 72	Box 1, folders 5-9
b. 5, f. 73	Box 1, folders 10-12, 14-16
b. 5, f. 74	Box 1, folders 17-19, 26-27
b. 5, f. 74a	Box 2, folder 37a
b. 5, f. 75	Box 2, folder 40

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Art, American
Artist colonies -- New Mexico -- Taos
Artists -- United States -- 20th Century
Embroidery
Folk art -- New Mexico

Geographic Names

Taos (N.M.) -- Intellectual life

Occupations

Artists

Names

Brett, Dorothy, 1883-1977
Hartley, Marsden, 1877-1943
James, Rebecca Salsbury, 1891-1968
Lachaise, Isabel
Lawrence, Frieda, 1879-1956
Luhan, Mabel Dodge, 1879-1962
McCausland, Elizabeth, 1899-1965
O'Keeffe, Georgia, 1887-1986
Stieglitz, Alfred, 1864-1946
Strand, Paul, 1890-1976