



Art Gallery of Ontario
Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario

E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives

Description & Finding Aid:
Gordon Conn Collection
CA OTAG SC016

Amy Marshall

Gary Fitzgibbon, 2003

Gordon Conn collection

Dates of creation:

[189-]–1967

Extent:

167 photographs
2 cm of textual records
1 watercolour

Biographical sketch:

Gordon Roy Conn (1887–1977) was a Canadian collector, critic and supporter of “traditionalist” painting in Toronto for much of the 20th century. Born in Aylmer, Ontario (4 December 1887), he studied to be a musician and worked as a painter. Although he did not pursue an art career, he maintained connections with many artists and collected pictures and art objects, notably old lace. In the 1930s, living in England, he befriended British art photographer Frederick H. Evans (1853–1943), with whom he shared an interest in Pianola music and from whom he received a number of photographic prints (later donated to the George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y. at a time when the Art Gallery of Toronto did not collect photographs).

Gordon Conn was also a friend of Canadian painter Kenneth Forbes (1892–1980) who painted Conn’s portrait *The Connoisseur* in 1935, now in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario. In 1958, the Ontario Society of Artists declined to show Forbes’s work and that of other traditionalist painters. Forbes, Gordon Conn and others then founded the Ontario Institute of Painters, devoted to the display of work by non-abstract artists. Conn turned over part of his house near Wychwood Park in Toronto—called The Little Gallery—to a series of shows of works of members of the Institute. Near the end of his life, he donated paintings by artists whose photos and papers are in this collection to public art galleries in Ontario. Gordon Conn died 18 June 1977 in Toronto.

Scope and content:

Collection consists of photographs of Canadian artists collected in Toronto by Gordon Conn, probably in the 1920s to 1950s, including photos of Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles, Farquhar McGillivray Knowles, George Agnew Reid, Mary Hiester Reid, Mary Wrinch Reid and (Edmund) Wyly Grier, their studios and works, along with related textual material.

Contains series:

1. Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles photographs
2. Farquhar McGillivray Knowles photographs
3. George Agnew Reid papers
4. Mary Hiester Reid photographs
5. Mary Wrinch Reid papers
6. Wyly Grier photograph

Notes:

Source of title proper:

Title based on the provenance of the collection.

Immediate source of acquisition:

Donated by Gordon Conn and Rheta Black Conn in 1969 and 1981.

Physical description:

Includes 166 black-and-white and colour prints (photographs) and 1 black-and-white negative.

Restrictions on access:

Open. Access to Special Collections is by appointment only. Please contact the reference desk for more information.

Terms governing use and reproduction / publication:

Various copyright holders. Copyright belonging to other parties, such as that of photographs, may still rest with the creator of these items. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain permission to publish any part of the collection.

Accruals:

No further accruals are expected.

General notes:

Titles of series, files and items are supplied and based on their contents, except where otherwise noted. — Curatorial records include Herbert E. Crowley and Nicholas Hornyansky among the artists whose photographs were in the Gordon Conn collection as originally donated. No materials on these artists are now in the collection. —No photographer is identified for photos in the collection. — Series is contained in one box.

Description control:

Description and finding aid prepared by Gary Fitzgibbon in 2003 (revised 2012). — Description based on *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD), Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 2008.

Provenance access point:

Conn, Gordon, 1887–1977

SERIES 1: ELIZABETH MCGILLIVRAY KNOWLES PHOTOGRAPHS**Dates of creation:**

[189-?]-[191-?]

Extent:

30 photographs : b&w prints

Scope and content:

Series comprises photographs of Canadian painter Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles (Ottawa 1866–1928 Riverton, N.H.) and her paintings taken around the turn of the 20th century at an unidentified location.

Notes:

Elizabeth Annie Beach was known as Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles after her marriage to Farquhar McGillivray Knowles in 1890.

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles photos	[189-?] [191-?]	30 photographs : b&w prints ; 20 x 25 cm or smaller File contains photo portraits of the artist, outdoor shots and views of her studio; with photos of her paintings.	1-1

SERIES 2: FARQUHAR MCGILLIVRAY KNOWLES PHOTOGRAPHS**Dates of creation:**

[189-?]-[192-?]

Extent:

23 photographs : b&w prints

Scope and content:

Series consists of photographs of American Canadian painter Farquhar McGillivray Knowles (Syracuse, N.Y. 1859–1932 Toronto) and his paintings.

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Farquhar McGillivray Knowles photos	[189-?] [192-?]	23 photographs : b&w prints ; 20 x 25 cm or smaller File contains photo portraits of the artist, views of his studio and photos of his paintings.	1–2

SERIES 3: GEORGE AGNEW REID PAPERS**Dates of creation:**

[189-?]-1957

Extent:

18 photographs : b&w and col. prints
1 folder of textual records

Scope and content:

Series comprises photos of Canadian painter George Agnew Reid (Wingham, Ont. 1860–1947 Toronto) and his paintings; correspondence with Helen Kemp Frye; lists of paintings; an essay by the artist and a programme for the 150th anniversary (1957) of Jarvis Collegiate Institute, Toronto.

Notes:

Other material on the artist will be found in the George Agnew Reid fonds (SC010). — The artist was the subject of an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1986 entitled *Sympathetic Realism: George A. Reid and the Academic Tradition*. — George Agnew Reid married Mary Augusta Hiester in 1885; a year after her death in 1921, Reid married Mary Evelyn Wrinch.

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
George Agnew Reid photos	[189-?] [194-?]	18 photographs : b&w and col. prints ; 18 x 24 cm or smaller File contains photos of the artist and his (second) wife Mary Wrinch Reid, his studio and his paintings.	1–3
George Agnew Reid	1939	1 folder of textual records	1–4

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
records		File contains correspondence from Helen Kemp Frye of the Art Gallery of Toronto, 1939–1940; a list of “Canadian historical paintings” by George Agnew Reid; a list of “Historical pictures of Canadian life” and “The coming of the white man” by George Agnew Reid; with a Jarvis Collegiate Institute 150 th anniversary programme (1 June 1957).	

SERIES 4: MARY HIESTER REID PHOTOGRAPHS

Dates of creation:

[189-?]-1922

Extent:

90 photographs : b&w prints

Scope and content:

Series comprises a photo of Canadian painter Mary Heister Reid (Reading, Pa. 1854–1921 Toronto), with installation shots of the 1922 memorial exhibition of her paintings at the Art Gallery of Toronto, and a photo of an oil portrait of her by her husband George Agnew Reid.

Notes:

The artist was the subject of an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2001 entitled *Quiet Harmony: the Art of Mary Heister Reid*.

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Portraits of Mary Heister Reid	[189-?] [191-?]	2 photographs : b&w prints ; 17 x 22 cm and 8 x 7 cm File contains photos of Mary Heister Reid and of a portrait painted by her husband, George Agnew Reid. Photos are matted.	1–5
Installation shots of 1922 exhibition	1922	88 photographs : b&w prints ; 9 x 14 cm File contains installation shots of the Memorial Exhibition of Mary Heister Reid at the Art Gallery of Toronto in October 1922. Photo are numbered R 1.1–12; R 2.1–19; R 3.1–[16]. — Some photos are duplicates.	1–6 1–7

SERIES 5: MARY WRINCH REID PAPERS

Dates of creation:

[189-]-1967

Extent:

2 folders of textual records
 5 photographs
 1 watercolour

Scope and content:

Series comprises correspondence of Canadian painter Mary Wrinch Reid (Kirby-le-Soken, England 1877–1969 Toronto), with lists of exhibitions and paintings and biographical information, photographs of the artist, a watercolour and other material.

Notes:

Curatorial records list a mounted photograph of George Agnew Reid in this series; the item was not found in 2003.

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Mary Wrinch Reid records	[193-] [196-?]	1 folder of textual records File contains an essay, "Colour block process," a list of exhibitions 1894–1935, lists of artworks, a list of biographical information and a biographical sketch for the exhibition "Paintings by Mary Wrinch," Jerrold Morris Gallery, Toronto [1966]. Some items are handwritten.	1–8
Mary Wrinch Reid's correspondence	1943 1967	1 folder of textual records (28 leaves) File contains Mary Wrinch Reid's correspondence with the National War Committee, YMCA; the Society of Canadian Painter-Etchers and Engravers; the Royal Ontario Museum; the Art Gallery of Toronto; The Bishop Strachan School; the Windsor Art Association; the Ontario Society of Artists; Colin S. MacDonald; J. Russell Harper; the National Gallery of Canada; Paul Duval; the Art Gallery of Hamilton; Jerrold Morris Gallery; and Jones and Morris Commercial Photographers.	1–9
Miscellaneous items	[1896?] [196-]	5 photographs 1 watercolour File contains photos of Mary Wrinch Reid; a watercolour of two cloisonné vases by Clement Heaton (signed); a reproduction of the watercolour <i>Grey Old London</i> (1908) by Owen Staples; and a calendar for 1911, <i>Great Masters of Ukiyo-e</i> . Includes 4 black-and-white and colour prints (photographs) and 1 black-and-white negative.	1–10

SERIES 6: WYLY GRIER PHOTOGRAPH**Date of creation:**

[192-?]

Extent:

1 photograph : b&w print

Scope and content:

Series comprises an undated photograph of Canadian portrait painter (Sir Edmund) Wyly Grier (Melbourne, Australia 1862–1957 Toronto) and others in Egypt, probably in the 1920s.

Notes:

Wyly Grier, president of the Ontario Society of Artists (1908–1913) and the Royal Canadian Academy (1929–1939), was knighted in 1935.

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX- FOLDER
Photograph of Wyly Grier	[192-?]	1 photograph : b&w print ; 9 x 14 cm Item is a photo of Wyly Grier and three others seated on camels beside the Sphinx in Egypt.	1–11