

Guide to the Goelet Family Papers

By Maria Bernier, 2008

Overview of the Collection

Repository: Special Collections, McKillop Library, Salve Regina University, Newport, RI

Creator: Goelet family

Title: Goelet family papers

Dates: 1881-1953, bulk 1893-1898

Quantity: 1.25 linear feet (3 document boxes)

Abstract: Financial records and correspondence related to Ogden Goelet and his family members, including his brother and his son, both named Robert. Much of the material relates to the family's real estate holdings in New York City and Ogden's Newport residence, Ochre Court.

Collection #: SP 02

Location: Unit I, shelf A4

Language: English and French

Biographical Note

Brothers Robert Goelet (1841-1899) and Ogden Goelet (1846-1897) were the scions of a wealthy New York family that had made vast investments in real estate over several generations. Upon the death of their father Robert R. Goelet (1809-1879) and their bachelor uncle Peter (c.1800-1879), they inherited holdings throughout Manhattan. The brothers maintained the empire and expanded it to Newport as well, building neighboring homes on Ochre Point. The Goelets were very much a part of high New York society and were founders of the New York Metropolitan Opera.

Older brother Robert married Harriett Louise Warren and had two children, Robert "Bertie" Walton Goelet and Beatrice Goelet. He graduated from Columbia College in 1860 and later studied law and passed the bar. He was regarded by his peers as a wise businessman with good financial judgment. In later years, the family's main residence was at 591 Fifth Avenue in New York.

Younger brother Ogden married Mary R. Wilson [Mary R. Goelet] in 1878 and had two children, Mary "May" Wilson Goelet [Mary W. Goelet] (1879?-1937) and Robert Goelet (1880-1966). Ogden was a noted real estate investor with properties throughout Manhattan. After 1884, the main Goelet residence in New York City was at 608 Fifth Avenue (49th and Fifth), around the corner from a second house at 4 West 49th Street. The family's stables were located at 7 East 52nd Street. Ogden also owned interests in the Hotel Imperial, which occupied a block on Broadway (1250 Broadway) between 31st & 32nd Streets; the San Carlo apartment building (likely near Broadway and 31st Street); the Gorham Building at 889 Broadway on the northwest corner of 19th Street; the Judge Building at 110 Fifth Avenue on the northwest corner of 16th Street; the properties at 895, 897, and 899 Broadway; 10 East 20th Street; 9 East 19th Street; Abbey's Theatre (later the Knickerbocker Theater) at 1400 Broadway on the northeast corner of 38th Street; and the Kemble Building at 15-25 Whitehall, also identified as the intersection of Whitehall, Stone, and Bridge streets.

After several years of poor health, during which he spent his winters at Nice or Cannes, Ogden died in 1897 on his yacht *Mayflower* at Cowes, England. May and Robert were still teenagers when their father died.

In 1903, Ogden's daughter May married Henry John Innes-Ker, the eighth Duke of Roxburghe, with whom she had only one son, George.

Young Robert was a Harvard graduate who served as a captain in the infantry in France during World War I. He became a major force in the development of American railroads, hotels, and real estate, and he served as a director of Chemical Bank and of New York Trust Company. With three wives and four children, Robert had a more complicated matrimonial history than his sister. He married his first wife, Elsie Whelen, in 1904 and had two children, Ogden and Peter, before his divorce in 1914. He met his second wife, Fernanda Rocchi Riabouchinsky, while in Europe during the war and married her in 1919. They had one son, Robert Goelet, Jr., before divorcing in 1924. He married his third wife, Roberta Willard, in 1925 and with her had a daughter, Mary Eleanor. Robert and Roberta were married until her death in 1949.

In 1947, Robert donated his Newport house, Ochre Court, to the Sisters of Mercy for the formation of Salve Regina College. He and Roberta moved to a new home, Champs Soleil, down the street on Bellevue Avenue.

Other people mentioned in the papers are:

- William Berrian, who was described as a real estate dealer by the New York Times (Dec. 29, 1897).
- Ernest W. Bowditch, a civil engineer and landscape gardener who participated in the design of Ochre Court's grounds.
- James H. Bowditch, a landscape gardener from Boston who worked on the design of gardens and grounds around Ochre Court.
- George G. DeWitt, who acted as an executor for both Ogden and his brother Robert.
- T. Firth, Jr., who paid many bills for Ogden and was possibly a business manager or secretary in New York.
- John R. Johnson, the horticultural consultant who worked onsite in Newport on the establishment of gardens and landscaping at Ochre Court. He is mentioned in the collection from 1894-1896.
- Montgomery Maze, the general manager of Grand Central Palace at least from 1897-1898. He leased the building from the Goelets.
- John Yale, the business manager or secretary in New York City who received and paid Ogden's bills at 9 West 17th Street from at least 1894-1897.

Scope and Contents

The collection includes primarily correspondence and financial records, such as bills and receipts, related to real estate or personal property owned by various members of the Goelet family. Unless specifically noted otherwise in the folder titles, bills and correspondence were sent to Ogden Goelet.

The bulk of this collection relates to Ogden and his son Robert. However, a portion of the material relates to Ogden's brother Robert and to real estate that the brothers owned jointly. The most reliable method for determining which Robert is the subject of a file is to check the dates of the material. Ogden's father lived from 1809-1879, his brother from 1841-1899, and his son from 1880-1966. Considering the dates, bills sent to the "Estate of Robert Goelet" most likely refer to Ogden's father rather than his brother.

It appears that 9 West 17th Street was a business address where Ogden's, and perhaps his brother Robert's, paid receipts were sent.

Arrangement

The files in this collection are divided into five series. The contents of all folders are in chronological order. Dates in the folder titles reflect dates when contents were created. Most folders also contain a small amount of undated material.

Series 1: Ochre Court, Newport, RI

Series 2: New York City real estate

Series 3: Interior furnishings and objects

Series 4: Personal expenses

Series 5: Miscellaneous

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Access: This collection is not restricted.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use: Various copying restriction apply, according to the Special Collections use policy. Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be directed to the Special Collections Librarian. See also the Library's copyright and publication statement.

Related Material in the Salve Regina University Archives

- PG 19: Photographs of university properties
- RG 19: Collection on university properties
- SP 06: Collection on Goelet furnishings

Related collections elsewhere

- New-York Historical Society
- Olmsted National Historic Park
- Richard M. Hunt collection at the American Architectural Foundation

Search Terms

The following terms represent persons, organizations, and topics documented in this collection. To find additional related materials, use these headings to search the HELIN catalog.

Persons:

Goelet, Ogden, 1846-1897

Goelet, Robert, 1841-1899

Goelet, Robert, b. 1880

Hunt, Richard Morris, 1828-1895

Bowditch, Ernest W.

Bowditch, James H.

Corporate Bodies:

Grand Central Palace (New York, N.Y.)

Ochre Court (Newport, R.I.)

Subjects:

Architecture -- Rhode Island -- Newport

Landscape architecture

Document Types:

Correspondence

Invoices

Receipts (Acknowledgments)

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation: [Identification of item], in SP 02: Goelet family papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections, McKillop Library, Salve Regina University, Newport, RI

History of the collection:

- Material was purchased from a private individual in July 2007. The papers had been found in a piece of furniture formerly owned by the Goelet family.
- No original order was apparent, though the sellers had arranged the material into six 3-ring binders and one group of loose material. The binders bore the following labels: Goelet European documents; Goelet NY documents; Goelet Newport, RI (2); Hunt autographs; Robert Goelet. Items were in plastic sleeves, though some sleeves contained several pieces and many individual items were still folded. There was no chronological order to the material.
- Maria Bernier, University Archivist, removed the items from their sleeves, rearranged them into new series, and put them in chronological order.
- New finding aid produced in July 2008 by Maria Bernier, University Archivist.
- Finding aid posted online in __ by __.
- No additional accruals are expected.

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

Series 1: Ochre Court, Newport, RI

Historical Note: Ochre Court, commissioned by Ogden Goelet as his family's summer residence in Newport, was the first of four Newport mansions designed by Richard Morris Hunt. As the country's foremost architect in the late 19th century, Hunt drew inspiration for the 50-room limestone palace from late Gothic French architecture. Inside the house, Hunt utilized design elements from French renaissance chateaux and churches to create a three-story Great Hall, from which radiate impressive ground floor reception rooms such as a dining room, ballroom, and library. Private upstairs family rooms were richly designed with imported antique fireplaces and lavish wall coverings. Hunt emphasized the Goelets' social position and their patronage of learning and the arts with exuberant decoration in classical ceiling paintings, royal heraldic devices, carved emblems and statues, and a rich collection of antique stained glass. Many of the furnishings were obtained through high-end dealers such as L. Alavoine, Jules Allard Fils, and L. Marcotte. Hunt brought in other experienced New York companies such as James Sinclair & Co. to erect the stonework and Ellin, Kitson & Co. to carve the Caen limestone interiors and gilded woodwork. Ochre Court was one of the first fully electrified residences in Newport, using its own generator. Construction of the house officially spanned the years 1888 to 1891, but it appears that many smaller tasks of decorating the interior and completing the gardens continued well into the mid 1890s.

The estate grounds, designed by Olmsted Brothers, had formal perennial gardens and walkways shaded by several mature specimen trees.

It was Robert's gift of Ochre Court to the Religious Sisters of Mercy in 1947 that established Salve Regina College.

Scope and Contents: The files in series 1 date from 1892 to 1897 and represent 0.417 linear feet. This series documents the later stages of construction, landscaping and furnishing of the mansion. There is very little information about the planning and design process or the primary construction of the building.

The folders "Expenses related to construction..." contain many receipts and correspondence from Richard Morris Hunt, who seemed to be working as the project manager, overseeing even the last stages of

decoration and exterior work. Receipts from his firm cease shortly after his death in July 1895. The “landscape expenses” files document work that was done on the grounds after the Olmsted’s work was completed. Some of these details were overseen by James H. and Ernest Bowditch. Many Newport companies from the turn of the century are represented in this series, and many local individuals are named.

Box 1:

1. Ochre Court: Expenses related to construction, maintenance, services, etc., 1893
2. Ochre Court: Expenses related to construction, maintenance, services, etc., 1894
3. Ochre Court: Expenses related to construction, maintenance, services, etc., 1895-1896
4. Ochre Court: Expenses related to construction, maintenance, services, etc., 1897
5. Electrification of Ochre Court, 1892-1897
6. Expenses and supplies related to Ochre Court or from Newport companies, 1893-1897
7. Ochre Court: Utility bills, 1893-1897
8. Ochre Court: Landscape and garden expenses, 1894
9. Ochre Court: Landscape and garden expenses, 1895
10. Ochre Court: Landscape and garden expenses, 1896
11. Ochre Court: Landscape and garden expenses, 1897

Series 2: New York City real estate

Scope and Contents: The files in series 2 date from 1893 to 1899 and represent 0.25 linear feet. This series documents expenses related to real estate in New York City owned by the Goelets. Most properties are listed by address. The files include some bills to Ogden that were paid posthumously by business managers and some invoices from Department of Water Supply, Consolidated Gas Co., and the city of New York. While it shows a representative picture of their real estate investments, this series does not describe the family’s entire holdings.

Box 2:

1. Ogden Goelet: Expenses related to New York City real estate, 1893-1898
2. Ogden Goelet: Expenses related to New York City residence at 608 Fifth Avenue, 1896-1897
3. Ogden Goelet: Taxes and utility bills for New York City real estate, 1896-1897
4. Ogden Goelet: List of checks to be signed, February-March 1893
5. Ogden Goelet: Miscellaneous documents related to New York residence or Ochre Court, undated
6. Estate of Robert Goelet: Expenses related to New York City real estate, 1897-1898
7. Robert Goelet: Expenses related to New York City real estate, 1897-1898
8. Robert Goelet: Utility bills for New York City real estate, 1898
9. Robert Goelet and Ogden Goelet: Expenses related to New York City real estate owned jointly, 1897
10. Robert Goelet and Ogden Goelet: Expenses related to New York City real estate owned jointly, 1898
11. Robert Goelet and Ogden Goelet: Expenses related to Knickerbocker Hotel owned jointly, 1897-1898
12. Robert Goelet and Ogden Goelet: Expenses related to Grand Central Palace/Industrial Building owned jointly, 1897-1898
13. Robert Goelet and Ogden Goelet: Taxes and utility bills for New York City real estate owned jointly, 1897-1898
14. Statement of expenses paid by William Berrian on behalf of Robert Goelet and Ogden Goelet, 1897-1898
15. Statements of expenses paid by T. Firth, Jr. on behalf of the Estate of Robert Goelet, 1897-1898

16. Goelet Estate: Utility bills for New York City real estate, 1897
17. Utility bills for New York City real estate owned by unidentified Goelet family members, 1896-1898
18. Taxes and utility bills sent to Goelet family business associates, 1897-1899
19. Real estate expense statements, 1898-1899

Series 3: Interior furnishings and objects

Scope and Contents: The files in series 3, Interior furnishings and objects, date from 1882 to 1897 and represent 0.25 linear feet. This series documents some of the purchases made by the Goelets when furnishing and decorating their homes in Newport and New York City. In some cases, it can be difficult to determine whether furnishings were intended for Ochre Court or for the New York residence. Some clues can be gleaned from dates and the addresses where the bills were sent. Papers from Allard Fils, Ch. Rafard, and other European sources are written in French.

Box 2:

20. Purchases from L. Alavoine Co., 1895-1897
21. Purchases from Jules Allard Fils, 1883-1891
22. Purchases from Allard & Sons, 1894
23. Purchases from L. Marcotte & Co., 1882-1897

Box 3:

1. Purchases from Ch. Rafard and George Donaldson, 1891-1893
2. Purchases from other European sources, 1883-1893
3. Purchases from other American sources, 1882-1893

Series 4: Personal expenses

Scope and Contents: The files in series 4, Personal expenses, date from 1881 to 1949 and represent 0.292 linear feet. This series documents individual purchases of personal items. Personal expenses are defined to include any non-furnishing and non-real estate expenses, such as clothing, books, wine, household and yacht supplies, fishing supplies, etc. The folder with Ogden's shipping receipts provides some understanding of the transport of furnishings from Europe to his homes in New York City and Newport.

Box 3:

4. Ogden Goelet: Personal expenses, New York City, 1881, 1893-1897
5. Ogden Goelet: Membership dues and donations, New York City, 1894-1897
6. Ogden Goelet: Membership dues, Newport, 1897
7. Ogden Goelet: Personal expenses from European sources, 1886-1895
8. Ogden Goelet: Shipping receipts and correspondence related to shipments, 1892-1897
9. Ogden Goelet: Currency exchanges, 1893
10. Mrs. Ogden Goelet [Mary R. Goelet]: Personal expenses from European sources, 1890-1895
11. Robert Goelet and Ogden Goelet: Joint personal expenses, 1898
12. Robert Goelet: Personal expenses from American sources, 1897, 1938-1953
13. Robert Goelet: Personal expenses from European sources, 1892, 1928-1949
14. Robert Goelet: Correspondence related to shipments, 1928
15. Mrs. Robert Goelet [Roberta Goelet]: Personal expenses from European sources, 1928-1939

Series 5: Miscellaneous

Scope and Contents: The files in series 5, Miscellaneous, date from 1883 to 1928 and represent 0.042 linear feet. This series contains various correspondence, legal documents, and papers that do not fit into other series.

Box 3:

16. Legal documents: Goelet family settlements, trusts, mortgage, etc., 1899-1905, 1913
17. Ogden Goelet: Correspondence with artist Charles Chaplin, 1883
18. Ogden Goelet: Correspondence with Pendletons regarding Cave Cliff, 1890
19. Ogden Goelet: Miscellaneous correspondence, 1893-1897
20. Robert Goelet: Miscellaneous correspondence, 1928 and undated
21. Dog pedigrees, ca. 1893
22. Inventories of household and yacht items, 1897