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Guide to the University of Chicago Midway Studios Records 1887-1994



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.MIDWAYSTUDIO
Title	University of Chicago. Midway Studios. Records
Date	1887-1994
Size	3.5 linear feet (6 boxes)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	Midway Studios, the fine arts studios of the Art Department at the University of Chicago since the mid-1940s, founded by the sculptor Lorado Taft in 1906. This collection contains correspondences, newspaper clippings, drawings, photographs, academic journals, notes, brochures, and exhibit signs. Materials document Taft's work and legacy, and the later history of the studio, particularly the work of Director Harold Haydon.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: University of Chicago. Midway Studios. Records, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Historical Note

The Midway Studios, the fine arts studios of the Art Department of the University of Chicago, was founded by Lorado Taft (1860-1936), renowned American sculptor and teacher. Taft's interest in art was awakened in 1874 when he participated in the restoration of plaster casts of European art works, which had been brought to the University of Illinois by its Regent, John Milton Gregory. Gregory's lectures on art were also an early influence on Taft. After receiving his M.A. from Illinois in 1880, he left for Paris where he attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Upon his return in 1886, he settled in Chicago and began a distinguished career as a teacher in the Art Institute, becoming head of the Department of Sculpture. There he pioneered new methods of sculpture instruction by introducing actual carving in marble and group projects. Taft was also associated with the University of Chicago as a professorial lecturer on art. He executed several sculptural works for the University, such as the portrait bust of Silas B. Cobb (1894).

National recognition first came to Taft in 1893 for his groups of the Sleep of the Flowers and the Awakening of the Flowers on the facade of the Horticultural Building at the World's Columbian Exhibition. Taft is also known for his monumental public works. He fervently believed that beauty and art should be a part of everyday life and was constantly noting locations which might be suitable for a public monument. His works include *The Blind* (1908, University of Illinois, Urbana), *the Black Hawk* (1911, Oregon, Illinois), *the Columbus Fountain* 1912, Washington, D.C.), *the Fountain of the Great Lakes* (1913, Art Institute, Chicago), and *the Fountain of Time* (1922, Chicago).

Taft is representative of the sculptural trends of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While he was not in the avant-garde or of the stature of European sculptors whose works were pointing the way to future developments in sculpture, Taft was somewhat in advance of his American contemporaries. He was one of the earliest sculptors in America to explore the possibilities of cast concrete sculpture and the use of ideal and allegorical statues for civic decorations and monumental fountains. Man and the problems relating to his humanity provided the subject matter of his art, and while his compositions were often allegorical in meaning, they were always visualized in concrete, naturalistic terms.

It is for his lectures on art that Taft is perhaps most important. He had a strong belief in the place of art in society, stating, "I cannot think of art as a mere adornment of life a frill on human existence but as life itself." His popular lectures on art were part of his crusade to educate the American public about art and to create an atmosphere conducive to its development. He worked particularly for art education in the public schools. As part of his efforts in this direction, he created a Renaissance pageant to be performed for children.

Closely connected with this are his "Peep Shows" or dioramas of famous sculptors' studios throughout history. (Pictures of these can be found in an article in Box 1, folder 1). In addition to his lectures, Taft was a prolific writer, best known for his books, *The I* (1903) and *Modern Tendencies in Sculpture* (1921).

Taft's Midway Studios were established by the artist in 1906 in a brick barn located on property belonging to the University of Chicago at 60th and Ellis. His studio provided one of the few good facilities for sculptural work in the city. In 1929 the studios were reestablished one block west on Ingleside Avenue due to University expansion. The original barn, containing Taft's private studio and "dream museum" of miniature models of the world's great sculpture, was moved to the new location. There the high-gabled central court, surrounded by studios was recreated and additions were "built like the chambered nautilus, cell by cell," as Taft was fond of saying. Other artists lived and worked at the studios, forming a kind of artistic community recalling a Renaissance bottega. The studios "were one of the few places in the country where artists could come together to encourage, support and stimulate each other in their work." Although Taft did not formally teach there, he greatly assisted his associates in their artistic developments, sometimes even paying their tuition for formal art courses. While not part of

the University during Taft's lifetime, the Midway Studios were used by the University's art students to such an extent that they became a quasi-"official school" for the University. Since the middle 1940's, they have been part of the Department of Art. In 1965 the Midway Studios were designated as a Registered National Historic Landmark, commemorating their significance in the history of American sculpture. During the 1960's the studios underwent renovation and expansion, aided by funds raised by the University of Chicago Women's Board.

In more recent decades Midway Studios has become a hub of the University's Fine Art programs, hosting a variety of studio classes and workshops. Many sculptures by Taft, including the "Angel," found their way to the university campus in the years following his death and renovation of the studio, further connecting his legacy to the campus community at large.

Scope Note

The collection contains correspondence, press clippings, photographs and other items documenting the work of Lorado Taft and his associates and the affairs of Midway Studios from the late 1890s to the 1970s, with the majority of the collection including documents and photographs from the 1960s. Included are written materials connected with the 1962 exhibition of clay models and photographs of Taft's sculpture "Moment of Creation," documents related to management and funding of the studios and correspondence from Director of the Studios Harold Hayden. The collection also includes newspaper clipping and correspondences concerning the restoration of Midway studios in the 1960s, and subsequent interest in the history of Mr. Taft's artistic legacy. Included in the collection are documents from Mr. Taft's career and lifetime, correspondences from university officials and donors, photographs of the sculptures, exhibit signs, and brochures and information for the University of Chicago's Fine Art program. Also included are photographs of art not by Taft, and photographs of Taft and his team, and of the Midway Studios. The final box includes the certificate verifying Midway Studios recognition as a heritage site.

Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

Harold Haydon Papers

Other correspondence by or related to Taft can be found in the President's Papers 1889-1925 and 1925-45 and the Thomas Chrowder Chamberlin Papers Addenda. An article on Taft's Midway Studios appears in the University Record (new series) 15:144-46.

Subject Headings

- Taft, Lorado, 1860-1936
- Haydon, Harold, 1930-1979
-

- University of Chicago. Midway Studios
- University of Chicago. Dept. of Art
- World's Columbian Exposition (1893: Chicago, Ill.)
- Artists' studios

INVENTORY

Series I: Historical

This series is comprised of newspaper clippings, journals, and publications regarding Lorado Taft, the Midway Studios, and the subsequent restoration by the Women's League of Chicago and the restoration of the Fountain of Time in the 1990s.

Box 1

Folder 1

Lorado Taft circa 1931-1972.

- Lists of Works
- Press clippings

Box 1

Folder 2

Associates (biographical information and newspaper clippings)

- Exhibition of Taft's Works - "Moment of Creation", 1962.

Box 1

Folder 3

Correspondence regarding Lorado Taft's work and Midway Studio, 1962.

Box 1

Folder 4

Press Materials circa 1900-1962.

- Press release
- Manuscript of article by Frank Holland
- Description of Taft's sculpture
- Lists of Taft's works
- Poster
- Program

Box 1

Folder 5

Press clippings about Midway Studios Development, circa 1962.

Box 1

Folder 6

Press clippings and journals 1929, 1963-1966.

Box 1

Folder 7

Press clippings about the fund raising efforts of University of Chicago Women's Board, circa 1962-1966.

Box 1

Folder 8

Edward D. Dart (architect of renovations to Midway Studios in the 1960s) biographical, includes an expository letter Harold Haydon (former Director of Midway Studios), circa 1960s.

Box 1

Folder 9

University of Chicago Magazine, Fountain of Time article, February 1991.

Series II: Correspondence

This series contains correspondence from university officials and associates of the arts, concerning the acquisition of Taft's art, the renovation of the Midway Studios, and later matters concerning the building and legacy of Taft.

Box 1

Folder 10

Correspondence relating to Taft's Legacy and Midway Studios, circa 1886-1972.

Box 1

Folder 11

Correspondence about restoration of Midway Studios with attached receipts, 1962-1966.

Box 1

Folder 12

Correspondence, 1962-1963

Box 1

Folder 13

Correspondence, forms, 1964-1966

Box 1

Folder 14

Correspondence with attached notes, 1968, 1972-1975

Box 1

Folder 15

Gifts to the University 1962, 1969.

Box 1

Folder 16

Typed correspondence on card depicting Taft's The Blind sculpture, 1994.

Series III: Exhibit and Brochures

This series contains brochures from the University of Chicago's Fine Arts program advertising Midway Studios, and the signs and labels for a Lorado Taft exhibit, presumably held by the university.

Box 1

Folder 17

Description of Studios-Midway Studios Brochure, undated

Box 1

Folder 18

University of Chicago Master of Fine Arts Brochures, undated

Box 1

Folder 19

Pages from University of Chicago arts program brochure, undated

Box 1

Folder 20

Signs and labels for Lorado Taft exhibit display, undated

Series IV: Photographs

This series contains mostly photographs of Taft and his associates, and photographs of Taft's sculptures, medals, and other art work completed by the Midway Studios and displayed on campus and elsewhere. Photographs of art by other artists are included in the series as well.

Box 2

Folder 1

Framed photo of Taft birthday dinner, 1925.

Box 2

Folder 2

Framed photo of Midway Studios, 1938.

Box 2

Folder 3

Unlabeled photo of Fountain of Time, undated

Box 2

Folder 4

"Picasso," photo of sculpture, undated

Box 2

Folder 5

"Tatlin," photo of sculpture, undated

Box 2

Folder 6

"African," photo of sculpture, undated

Box 3

Folder 1

Sculpture, Architectural: The Spirit of Loyalty (The Patriots), undated

Box 3

Folder 2

Sculpture, Monuments: Alma Mater, 1929.

Box 3

Folder 3

Sculpture, Architectural: The Spirit of Loyalty, undated

Box 3

Folder 4

Sculpture, Monuments: Black Hawk, undated

Box 3

Folder 5

Sculpture, Fountains: Fountain of Time, circa 1910.

Box 3

Folder 6

Unlabeled photo of Taft with clay model, undated

Box 3

Folder 7

Unlabeled photo of Taft with sculpture sections, undated

Box 3

Folder 8

Portrait of Taft, 1925.

Box 3

Folder 9

Sculpture, Fountains: Fountain of Time, 1922.

Box 3

Folder 10

Sculpture, Fountains: Fountain of Time, 1922.

Box 3

Folder 11

Unlabeled photo of young women posing for Fountain of the Great Lakes, undated

Box 3

Folder 12

Unlabeled photo of Midway Studios, undated

Box 3

Folder 13

Unlabeled photo of Midway Studios, undated

Box 3

Folder 14

Unlabeled photo of Fountain of Time, undated

Box 3

Folder 15

Taft working on Lincoln, the Young Lawyer, 1927.

Box 3

Folder 16

Unlabeled photo of women sculpting from human subjects, circa 1890.

Box 3

Folder 17

Labeled photo of women sculpting from human subjects, circa 1890.

Box 3

Folder 18

Sculpture, Monuments: Shaler Memorial, 1923.

Box 3

Folder 19

Unlabeled photo of Midway Studios, undated

Box 3

Folder 20

Unlabeled photo of Taft et al at dinner table in Midway Studios, undated

Box 3

Folder 21

Unlabeled photo of work on Fountain of Time, undated

Box 3

Folder 22

Unlabeled photo of Fountain of the Great Lakes, undated

Box 3

Folder 23

Unlabeled photo of sculpture models, undated

Box 3

Folder 24

Unlabeled photo of workspace in Midway Studios, undated

Box 3

Folder 25

Unlabeled photo of Fountain of Time, undated

Box 3

Folder 26

Unlabeled photo of sculpture models, undated

Box 3

Folder 27

Unlabeled photo of sculpture models, undated

Box 3

Folder 28

Unlabeled photo of Taft et al at dinner table in Midway Studios 2, undated

Box 3

Folder 29

Photo of young Taft with sculpture model, 1887.

Box 3

Folder 30

Unlabeled photo of young Taft with sculpture model, 1887.

Box 3

Folder 31

Unlabeled photo of Taft with sculpture, undated

Box 3

Folder 32

Unlabeled photos of sculpture models, undated

Box 3

Folder 33

Unlabeled photo of sculpture model, undated

Box 3

Folder 34

Unlabeled photo of sculpture models, undated

Box 3

Folder 35

Unlabeled photo of sculpture models, undated

Box 4

Folder 1

Photos of Lorado Taft and Associates, undated

Box 4

Folder 2

Photos of Midway Studios, undated

Box 4

Folder 3

Exhibition at Midway Studios (includes negatives), 1962.

Box 4

Folder 4

Photographs for Midway Studio brochure, undated

Box 4

Folder 5-6

Taft's sculptures, undated

Box 4

Folder 7

Sculpture by associates, undated

Box 4

Folder 8

Taft, Lorado, Sculpture: Medals, 1860-1936.

Box 4

Folder 9

Taft, Lorado, Sculpture: Portraits, 1860-1936.

Box 4

Folder 10

Taft, Lorado, Sculpture: Architectural, 1860-1936.

Box 4

Folder 11

Taft, Lorado, Sculpture: Unclassified, 1860-1936.

Box 5

Folder 1

Taft, Lorado, Sculpture: Fountains I, A-G, 1860-1936.

Box 5

Folder 2

Taft, Lorado, Sculpture: Fountains II, H-Z (Except the Fountain of Time), 1860-1936.

Box 5

Folder 3

Photos of non-Taft sculptures, Folder 1, c. 1928-1973.

Box 5

Folder 4

Photos of non-Taft sculptures, Folder 2, c. 1932-1963.

Box 6

Framed certificate designating Midway Studios as a historic landmark, 1935.