

Gray's Watercolor Collection

Collection Summary

Identifier:	AR 1
Title:	Gray's Watercolor Collection
Dates:	1960s-1970 circa
Extent:	4 watercolor paintings
Creator:	Gray's Watercolors
Language:	English

Repository: South Dakota State University Archives & Special Collections, University Station, Box 2115, 1300 North Campus Drive, Brookings, South Dakota, 57007

Access Note: Open. Materials must be used in-house and do not circulate.

Preferred Citation: Title or description of item, date, AR 1, box number, folder number, Gray's Watercolor Collection, South Dakota State University Archives and Special Collections, Brookings, South Dakota.

Abstract

Founded in 1965, the College Watercolor Group emerged from Paul McConaughy's search for an economical way to produce limited-edition watercolor prints. Beginning with a popular series depicting Cornell University buildings, the group expanded nationwide, producing affordable watercolor images of college campuses across the United States. Using a process inspired by nineteenth-century Currier and Ives prints, each work began as a pen-and-ink drawing reproduced as a lithograph on watercolor paper and then hand-colored by artists. The business evolved into Gray's Watercolors, a name derived from the shared artist surname "Gray," adopted by multiple contributors as the studio grew in size and reputation.

This collection consists of commissioned watercolor prints created primarily in the late 1960s to 1970s. Evidence such as building name changes suggests many works date from after 1975. Some images, including depictions of structures no longer standing, were likely produced from photographic sources. Together, the materials document a distinctive collaborative printmaking enterprise and its role in popularizing campus architecture through accessible fine art.

History

In 1965, Paul McConaughy sought an inexpensive method for producing limited-edition watercolor prints. He tested his idea at his alma mater by creating a series of prints depicting buildings at Cornell University. The prints were immediately popular, leading to the formation of the College Watercolor Group. The group soon expanded production to include affordable watercolor prints of college buildings from across the United States.

Modeled after the nineteenth-century approach used by Currier and Ives, the process began with a pen-and-ink drawing of a building, which was reproduced as an 8 x 10 lithograph on watercolor paper. Artists then hand-colored each print. The group offered limited-edition sets of four scenes as well as larger individual prints, available framed or unframed.

As professional artists joined the staff, the overall quality of the work improved significantly. One artist, E. B. Walden, began signing his prints using the surname Gray, derived from the watercolor pigment Davy's Gray. Other artists adopted the same surname while using different first names, with Walden signing as Davis Gray. More than a dozen artists eventually used the Gray name, and this naming convention led to the business becoming known as Gray's Watercolors.

Scope and Content

This appears to be a collection of commissioned works, created sometime in the 1960's or 1970's according to the organization's web site. These were most likely done in the later part of that period, as evidenced by the citation on the picture of Lincoln Hall as the "Lincoln Music Hall" the library had already shifted, so this was after 1975 or so. Given this date, the painting of Old North (razed in 1962) was very likely done from a photograph, as the others also may have been reproduced.

Access Points

Subjects

- College buildings

Names

- Gray's Watercolors
- Gray, Flannery
- Gary, Allan
- South Dakota State University

Genre

- Paintings
 - Watercolors
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Container List

Box	Folder	Description	Date(s)
1	1	Coughlin Campanile	1960s-1970s circa
1	2	Coolidge Sylvan Theater	1960s-1970s circa
1	3	Old North	1960s-1970s circa
1	4	Lincoln Music Hall	1960s-1970s circa