

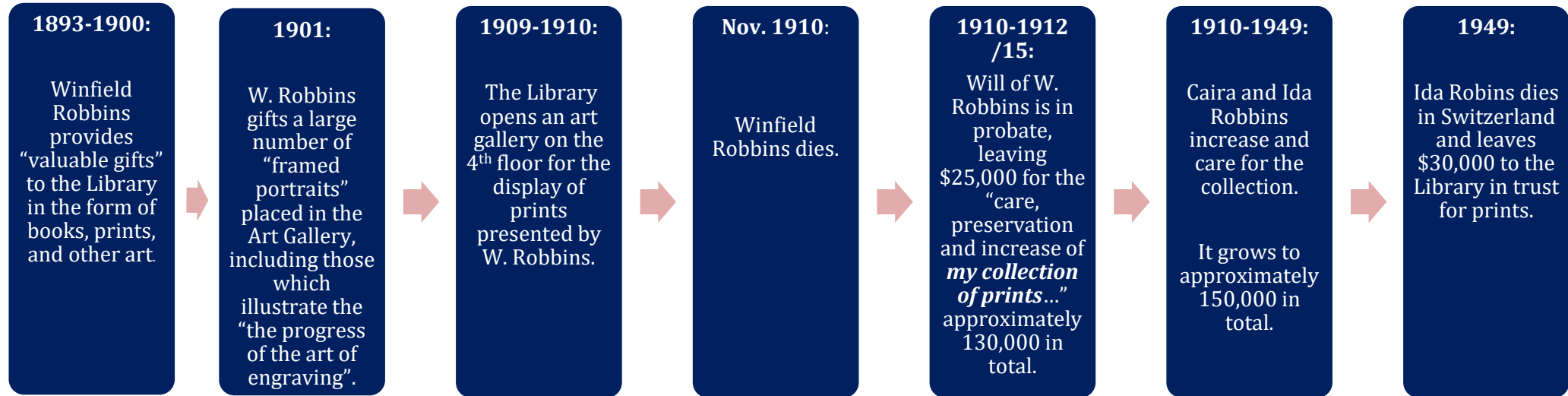


# A Brief History of Art Prints at the Robbins Library

# Will of Winfield Robbins

“Fourth, I give and bequeath to the Robbins Library in the Town of Arlington state of Massachusetts, the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars to be devoted to the *care, preservation and increase of my collection of prints.*”

# TIMELINE OF GIFTS & TRUSTS





# 1925 - Letter from Curator to Cairra Robbins

January  
6 t h  
1 9 2 5

-2-

Dear Cairra:

I am dropping you this line in order to get your advice on a few things pertaining to the management of the library. I am a little disturbed in regard to the safety of the collection of steel engravings.

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the value of the collection as a whole and thus determine how much insurance we should request the Town to carry. At the present time, the Town has but \$54,000 on the contents of the library, and I am fearful in case of a serious fire this would be a very inadequate sum with which to replace the books and the engravings.

Do you think it would be desirable to consider at this time some changes whereby the present generation might have, to some extent, the benefit of this splendid collection? Would it be wise to place the responsibility of their care on the shoulders of Miss Hubbert, and then arrange with some competent lecturer, whom we might secure from the Museum of Fine Arts or through the co-operation of Mr. Belden, to give a

I am a little disturbed  
in regard to the safety of the collec-  
tion of steel engravings.

undoubtedly it would stimulate the general interest of our citizens in the library. If this should seem to you a wise course to pursue, the expenses could be paid from the income of the Art Fund, and here again the library would be benefited, because we have a real problem in securing sufficient funds to carry on the work. The Town

-3-

appropriation has been increased to \$11,500, and the salaries alone at present amount to over \$10,000, so with all the other expenses to meet we are very much hampered, as in the past, to secure sufficient funds for the purchase of new books. Miss Hubbert is giving great satisfaction, and interest in the library has greatly increased during the year. Our circulation of books last year

at an annual salary of \$500, it would be splendid insurance for her continued interest in our welfare.

The matter of the safety of the collection seems very important, and I hope the suggestions for a greater use of these splendid works of art will not seem inopportune to you.

# 1942 – Curator rejects offer, citing restrictions

June 22, 1942

Mrs William P. Derby  
Saxonville Mass

Dear Mrs Derby:

It is with regret that I tell you that I am not allowed to buy anything but portraits for the Robbins Collection.

There are a few other subjects --- landscapes, Biblical subjects, etc. --- among our portraits; but they were deposited here when Mr Winfield Robbins, the donor, left

It is with regret that I tell you that I am not allowed to buy anything but portraits for the Robbins Collection.

Have you tried the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston for suggestions as to the best way to move your prints? Or any of our local galleries? My impression is that the print market is now in a depressed state; but you may be able to locate a collector who is on the alert for your very subjects.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs F. W. Achuff)



# 1946 – Curator's letter to Library Trustees

Print Room  
Arlington Library  
Arlington Mass  
December 16 1946

Mr Francis Keefe  
Secretary, Trustees of the  
Robbins Library  
Arlington Mass

Dear Mr Keefe:

Miss Caira Robbins once told me that her cousin Winfield wanted to "swallow the ocean" --- and as a result our print collection has an enormous number of portraits (possibly as many as 200,000) comprising images, real or imagined, of every conceivable kind of saint and sinner, hero and villain, and even a sprinkling of freaks. There ~~are~~ hundreds of prints which I shall not only not put into mats but not even catalogue.

Miss Robbins asked me to 'use my own judgment' in adding portraits from year to year. Not aspiring to the donor's hope of comprehensiveness, I

hero and villain, and even a sprinkling of freaks. There ~~are~~ hundreds of prints which I shall not only not put into mats but not even catalogue.

portraits, not expensive, and their subjects are important enough to warrant being included. In acquiring new prints I look for "bargains," getting a museum discount whenever possible; and I aim not to buy any portrait which hasn't at least a little esthetic or art value. I don't see any point in these days of photomechanical processes, when pictures of conspicuous persons may be found in every magazine and paper, in adding to an original print collection portraits which are totally without art value..... Those of Cordell Hull and Secretary Byrnes which I am presenting for approval now are good drypoints by a New York artist who apparently has made portraits of all the present court judges. Some of them I have no great craving to possess! But all the important ones ought to be in the Robbins Collection.

Sincerely Yours,

Kathryn M. Schuff  
Curator

# 1950 - Library Annual Report

## REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES FOR THE YEAR 1950

### To the Citizens of Arlington:

Robbins Library, in the year 1950, has continued to render as full and complete library service as its appropriation would permit. We have been unable to build the staff to its full complement due mainly to the shortage of trained workers available to us.

However, the fact that we have been able to render efficient library service under the circumstances has been due to the effort of the Librarian and to the loyalty of her Staff. The Trustees publicly express appreciation.

The year of 1950 completes the final full year of Mrs. Lucinda F. Spofford's tenure of office as Librarian because of the retirement act in effect in Arlington.

Mrs. Spofford came to Robbins Library January 2, 1928. The years that have followed, twenty-three of them, have been full of problems but her training and experience have been valuable assets in solving them. It is the experience of the present Board, and no doubt of previous ones, that she has maintained an active interest in library progress, modern methods developed in a changing world, and has kept the Board informed of new trends and methods in library activities. Mrs. Spofford

income from the

This collection has given the present Board much concern. The income from the bequests, amounting to about \$1,800.00 annually, can only be used for the care of the collection and to acquire additional prints. Over past years part of the income has been allowed to accumulate. The Trustees after considerable consideration decided that a survey should be made by some person with knowledge and training in this field. In our research for an authority Mr. Evan Turner was recom-

Under the Will of Miss Ida Robbins the Robbins Library was increased by \$27,119.88, a partial payment of the legacy of \$30,000.00, the income from the fund to be used in connection with the print collection.

This collection has given the present Board much concern. The income from the bequests, amounting to about \$1,800.00 annually, can only be used for the care of the collection and to acquire additional prints. Over past years part of the income has been allowed to accumulate. The Trustees after considerable consideration decided that a survey should be made by some person with knowledge and training in this field. In our research for an authority Mr. Evan Turner was recom-

mended. He was employed and spent a number of months examining, classifying and filing. He presented the Trustees with a detailed report of his study.

In the budget for 1951 we are asking for funds to start a collection of records. There have been requests for this service and reports from other libraries indicate this to be a valuable addition. Also funds have been requested to acquire microfilming equipment, which will permit filming of local newspapers, magazines, and many other records that a library is expected to keep on file.

The report of the Librarian contains detailed information regarding the activities and general condition of the Library.

Respectfully submitted,

WILSON D. CLARK, JR.,

Chairman, Board of Trustees



# 1958 – Harvard Lamont Library letter

LAMONT LIBRARY  
HARVARD COLLEGE  
CAMBRIDGE 38 · MASSACHUSETTS

November 7, 1958

Miss Judith E. Stromdahl, Librarian  
Robbins Library  
Arlington, Massachusetts

Dear Miss Stromdahl:

Since our meeting last Spring, I have talked to several people at the Fogg Art Museum and have come to the following conclusions.

As I mentioned, print collecting and the appreciation

(continued)

2. Store the collection

If it is necessary that the library retain the print collection, the next best solution would be to pack the collection carefully and store it in a safe place. This would free the space now occupied for other use, and would remove the necessity for keeping a staff member tied up in servicing the collection. If it is stored, it should be checked periodically to keep it in good condition.

3. Vitalize the collection

To me, this would be the least wise course of action, both from the point of effort expended and expense involved. It would mean attempting to create an interest in the graphic arts, finding money to hire a qualified full time curator and also to purchase modern prints to bring the collection up to date. This hardly seems justifiable considering the limited interest that probably would be aroused in a town such as Arlington.

appeal to the average person. In my opinion, the maintenance of a print collection in a town library is rather questionable, since it would be of use primarily to a few people with a well developed knowledge and a keen interest in prints. To make

of a trained person with a good background and appreciation of the graphic arts. From my discussions with several people in the field and my own observations, the quality of the Robbins Collection, in my opinion, would hardly justify such an expenditure.

✓ The following courses of action, in the order listed, would, in my opinion, seem the best to follow.

1. Dispose of the collection

This would be carried out only if the terms of the bequest do not forbid such action and only if, on competent legal advice, there are no other factors barring such action. As it now stands, the collection is receiving little use and is taking up valuable space that could be put to better use. The best method of disposal would probably be to have a print dealer make an offer for the entire collection, or to take it on consignment to be sold for the best possible price.

I hope these ideas will be of some help to you.

Sincerely yours,

*William B. Ernst, Jr.*  
William B. Ernst, Jr.,  
Librarian



# 1965 – Smithsonian Loan

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560

May 7, 1965

Miss Ellen Wiese, Curator  
The Robbins Print Collection  
The Robbins Library  
Arlington, Massachusetts

Dear Miss Wiese:

The imprint below will be used to stamp the collection of  
prints being given by your Trustees to the National Portrait  
Gallery. We are looking forward to receiving these.

Sincerely yours,



Charles Nagel  
Director



# 1970 – Curator's Report to Library Trustees

## THE ROBBINS PRINT COLLECTION: REPORT OF THE CURATOR

1970

During the year 1970 major attention has been given to investigating new approaches to the best use of Print Collection resources. Changing interests of the Library public, restrictions and rising expenses of loaned exhibitions, and some fresh opportunities for conservatorial improvement and innovative exhibitions have urgently prompted these efforts.

Regarding exhibitions: (a) Many potential sources (Museum of Fine Arts, Fogg Art Museum) refuse to lend to any institution which does not employ a regular

night watchman. (b) Collections of high quality of lending where there is no watchman probably approximately 20 per cent higher than they. In instances the fee has risen to an equivalent of the Binet Print Collection, which has given us used to let us have a nominally 3-week show season on exhibitions), now charges for the double. (c) Shipping services for loan prints. This has two unfortunate results: first, over the span of time for which we have rented the Library Staff, including Miss Stromstad tracing lost shipments and requesting proper

In response to these frustrations, I hope, hopefully those who do not require a rental protection while the works are in the Library dependence on local sources. Two different difficulties seem to have arisen:

the need to maintain the customarily high artistic quality of our exhibitions, which the level of cultural sophistication in Arlington demands of us; and (2) the delicate "political" position we must maintain, simply because exhibition space and time is limited. In the past we have adhered to the policy of favoring no

The Robbins Print Collection --2

one Arlington resident over another, in one-man shows; and we have welcomed group shows which develop a spirit of community enterprise.

Following this plan in 1970, we held two exhibitions, spring and fall, of recent paintings by the Arlington Art Association. Entries to these exhibitions are judged entirely by the Association committee. No one at the Library participates in the selection process, though we do enforce display regulations so that the walls will seem reasonably uncluttered. In addition, we were glad to give space in June to the artistic achievements of pupils in the Arlington public

Most of the exhibitions I have described seem a good step away from the proper activities of a Print Room. This has come about through a primary intent of maintaining a lively public interest in the displays of the Art Gallery, whatever their subject, and also from an effort to have some color on the walls for at least a fair part of the year, as against the black-and-white of many prints.

The December exhibition is again an attempt to uncover new fields of artistic activity: Robbins benefits from this diversity, imagination, and color. Through Janislee Wiese I discovered the craft work of the Mothers of the Cambridge Nursery School and obtained a selection of the articles (puppets, hand-dyed scarves, children's togs, Christmas tree ornaments) which they had had for sale in the

The Robbins Print Collection --3

pre-Christmas Sugar 'n' Spice Fair, in November. Many of these pieces show real inventiveness and are inspiring some of the Arlington mothers to similar activities; but above all they send a bright note into the holiday season at the Library.

Most of the exhibitions I have described seem a good step away from the proper activities of a Print Room. This has come about through a primary intent of maintaining a lively public interest in the displays of the Art Gallery, whatever their subject, and also from an effort to have some color on the walls for at least a fair part of the year, as against the black-and-white of many prints. We did have

The Robbins Print Collection --4

temptation to theft. Moreover, they do not leave the Library building except on very rare occasions, when they can be covered by the borrower. In this year of general belt-tightening, our customary practice of automatic policy renewal should, I believe, be soberly reconsidered.

Looking forward to a constructive and adventurous 1971, I respectfully submit this report.

Dr. Ellen Wiese

Curator  
The Robbins Print Collection



# 1977 – Local media coverage

The Arlington Advocate, Thursday, November 17, 1977

## *At Robbins Library*

# Winfield Robbins' Legacy Of Prints Intended To Preserve Doomed Art

By Richard G. Niebuhr

The Robbins Library houses on its third floor a collection of art prints whose large number would probably surprise most Arlington residents.

One hundred fifty thousand black and white and a few color prints are kept in long cardboard boxes stacked on the shelves of a series of wooden cabinets which line the three walls of the library's art room. Dating from the 19 and early 20th centuries, the collection

consists largely of prints from Europe and the United States.

According to Dr. Eliza Robbins, the collection, 120,000 prints, was given to the library by Winfield Robbins.

Winfield Robbins was a member of a family which gave so many names to the town. His aunt and uncle were Mary and Amos Robbins. She gave the town its name in his husband's memory.

Nephew Winfield, who was not only the prints, but paintings and other works of art, left the collection in 1910 for construction of a town hall in his father, Amos', memory. His brother Milton, who died two months later, also contributed to this memorial.

Winfield's cousins Cairra, Eliza and Ida were the last of the Robbins family. Their contributions included the Robbins House, the



Robbins' motive in accumulating his massive collection lay in his belief that print-making was a doomed art which would eventually be replaced by photography.

Among the many historical prints in the Robbins collection is this one of a King Wilhelm.

His assumption was correct. Prints, which reached the height of their popularity during the 18th and early 19th centuries, were made to reproduce individual and group portraits, to record social and political events, and to recreate landscape scenes. All of these things the camera, as it became refined in the late 19th century, was able to do faster, cheaper, and with more realism.

The term print itself is a general one and refers to the picture produced when an artist applies an inked surface to paper. The type of

collection includes a multi-colored woodcut and the carved blocks used to create it.

The production of an engraving differs from that of a woodcut in two ways. Firstly, the carving is done on a metal plate instead of a wooden block; and, secondly, the ink is applied to the cuts instead of to the raised

works by the 17th century Flemish artist Anthony Van Dyck.

These engravings, actually made after Van Dyck's death from plates he had prepared, confirm by their beauty the tribute that art historians have given Van Dyck as one of the greatest portrait artists of his time.

Other engravings in the Robbins collection are of historical interest for their portrayal of famous persons of past centuries such as Mary, Queen of Scots, at the time of her marriage to her second husband, Lord Darnley, a man who she later conspired to murder.

Though the production of a mezzotint, a third print in the Robbins collection, is not as complicated as that of either a woodcut or an engraving, the mezzotint has an advantage over the other two types of prints. Made by scratching a metal plate into which thousands of tiny holes of varying depths have been punched, the mezzotint contains different tones of gray, giving it a more three-dimensional appearance than the strictly black and white prints.

The library's prints are of various origins, however, and include some Oriental prints including a brightly-colored folding book from 19th century Japan.

It does that, in the event of a fire, the collection of Robbins Library, which will be made more accessible to the public, she would like to see closer to the first floor of the library as some people have complained of having to come to the top floor to see the prints.

She also would like a cork-lined wall to display more prints than she now can with the library's limited number of picture frames.

# 1978 – Library eliminates Curator role



700 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, Massachusetts 02174 617-643-0026

August 14, 1978

MEMO TO: Board of Trustees  
FROM: Jim Fish, Robbins Library Director  
RE: Print Collection Duties

There are, in my opinion, several "givens" that should serve as background in any discussion concerning the Robbins Library Print Collection.

RECOMMENDATION: The position of Print Curator be abolished as such and be replaced by a redistribution of responsibility between the Art and Music Librarian and a print consultant.

gallery. Since space needs have curtailed that function, there is limited space for exhibits, etc. In addition, perhaps because of the geographic isolation or the lack of appeal of the recent exhibits, very few exhibits draw much attention currently, and the Print Collection tends to remain locked up.

3. Presently, there are several functions associated directly or indirectly with the print collection: (a) exhibits; (b) care and preservation of the prints; (c) acquisition of new prints; (d) purchase of circulating prints.

RECOMMENDATION: The position of Print Curator be abolished as such and be replaced by a redistribution of responsibility between the Art and Music Librarian and a print consultant. The Art & Music Librarian would be responsible for exhibits (where closer coordination of activities could be maintained); housing the Robbins Print Collection (including the creation and maintenance of an up-to-date catalog, perhaps through a CETA project); and the purchase of circulating art. The consultant would be paid on a negotiated hourly basis when called upon to provide expertise in the areas of preservation, restoration, etc. and professional guidance in the acquisition of new prints.



# 1985 - Library addresses consultant role/cataloguing



700 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, Massachusetts 02174 617-643-0026

## MEMORANDUM

December 5, 1985

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Maryellen Remmert *mer*

RE: Robbins Print Collection

Before writing a report on the proposed duties of and art curator/consultant for the Robbins Print Collection, I first read reports written previously about this collection (copies are attached) and then physically viewed the collection.

The Robbins Print Collection consists of portraits - European (4 cabinets), American (3 cabinets), and general (10 cabinets) - and other prints:

Board of Trustees (continued)

December 5, 1985

to catalog any of those prints not already catalogued, to advise whether the print collection or any part of it would make an appealing display for residents of Arlington, and to make general recommendations as to the proper use of the print collection. Other areas which could be covered in the consultant's report are included in "Problems at Robbins", on page 5 of Trustee Bette Pinckney's April 1978 report.

As regards qualifications of the consultant, I would refer to the top of page 5 of Bette Pinckney's 1978 report.

MER:ck  
Attachments

Of concern, is whether the quality of the prints justifies the large expenditure which would be necessary for their cataloguing; and whether exhibits of the prints would attract an audience in Arlington. This concern was also expressed in 1958 by the Director of the Lamont Library at Harvard University. (A copy of this letter is attached.)

versity. (A copy of this letter is attached.)

It is thus questionable whether the entire collection even needs to be catalogued. Both the value of the individual prints and their intended use effect the amount of money allocated to their cataloguing. A decision may have been reached by a previous Board of Trustees to limit the library's efforts to storage of the original collection. (referred to in a 1978 memo from Jim Fish p.2 - Future). Perhaps, the trust fund money, which could be used for a curator to catalog the remaining collection, would best be used to renovate the art gallery area or purchase original works which would increase the collection.

My recommendation to the Board is to employ a consultant to assess the value of the collection, to advise whether the library should expend funds

# 1986 – Request for Town Counsel opinion



700 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, Massachusetts 02174 617-643-0026

MEMO

February 11, 1986

TO: John Maher, Town Counsel  
FROM: Maryellen Remmert, Director  
RE: Robbins Print Collection

As I mentioned in a recent telephone conversation, the Board of Trustees would like to know if it is possible for them to dispose of the Robbins Print Collection (or portions of it), either by gift, placing it on permanent loan or by selling it.

Mr. J. Maher

-2-

February 11, 1986

November 4, 1958

"The Librarian reported on her conversation with Town Counsel who has been asked for an opinion on the power of the Trustees to dispose of the collection, either by gift or placing it out on permanent loan. Mr. Purcell reported he is trying to establish permanent ownership of the collection. No record has yet been found indicating that the collection has been given either to the Town or Library; bequests for its care and upkeep have been left to the Trustees of the Robbins Library."

November 18, 1958

"Mr. Purcell stated that inasmuch as the bequest read, 'I give to Robbins Library, said sum, to be devoted to the care, preservation, and increase of my collection of prints' such ownership must be established before

Mr. J. Maher

-3-

February 11, 1986

1900 - Mr. Winfield Robbins has put us increasingly in his debt by the gift of many books and pictures.

1901 - It is a pleasure again to express our thanks to Mr. Winfield Robbins for his great generosity to the Library. In addition to the sixteen volumes which he has sent us the past year, he has recently given a large number of framed portraits of persons distinguished in the history of America and Europe.

These portraits have been selected with great care and form a collection of much interest and value. They have been placed in the Art Gallery where they will be enjoyed by large numbers of people for a long time to come. In the adjoining room is a smaller collection, also given by Mr. Robbins, of portraits distinguished for their artistic merit, or as illustrating the progress of the art of engraving.

As I mentioned in a recent telephone conversation, the Board of Trustees would like to know if it is possible for them to dispose of the Robbins Print Collection (or portions of it), either by gift, placing it on permanent loan or by selling it.

portrait collection and from 1926 to 1948 prints were added to the collection. The will (probated April, 1949) left \$30,000 to the library, the income only to be used for the purchase and care of prints. [now - Robbins Print Fund.]

In 1950, the library accepted a collection of portraits and prints from F.R. Fraprie.

Funds from the two trust funds over the years have been used for a curator, for cataloguing and preservation of the collection, and for purchasing new prints.

In 1958, the Board of Trustees employed a consultant to review the print collection as illustrated by minutes of the Trustee meetings.

"In searching through some old Library Reports for 1900-1920, the Librarian reported that she has found some references to the 'gift' of the Print Collection to the Library by Mr. Winfield Robbins. Mr. Purcell was contacted and he agreed these references might help to establish the ownership of the collection which is in question."

May 8, 1962

"The collection contains a large number of reproductions of paintings which could well be disposed of. However, when it was pointed out that under the present interpretation of the will, this could not be done, Miss Wiese suggested this material be stored away."

I reviewed Library reports for 1900-1920 for references to gifts of prints by Winfield Robbins. Some examples follow:

asking them to accept five (5) paintings.

-Two articles from the Arlington Advocate concerning the wills of Winfield and Ida Robbins in regard to the print collection.

-A letter concerning the Fraprie Collection which was added to the Robbins Collection in 1950.

MER:ck

Enc. (5)



# 1986 – Letter from BPL Keeper of Prints



## Boston Public Library

Boston, Massachusetts 02117

29 August 1986

Maryellen Remmert, Director,  
Robbins Library  
700 Massachusetts Avenue  
Arlington, Massachusetts 02174

Dear Maryellen:

Thank you for your hospitality at the Robbins Library on the morning of August 5th. I was astounded at the very large size of the print collection at the Library and was fascinated to learn of the two funds connected with it, with principal if I understood correctly of \$25,000 and \$30,000; equally interesting was the history of the print collection at the Library—so long and persistent an effort to make the collection a working and useful

29 August 1986 - 2 -

you on how such a large inventory could be carried out, and might be able to suggest possible appraisers. Care is required to be sure the cost of appraisal is kept within acceptable limits.

I enclose an article from today's New York Times which deals with deaccessioning. I have marked two paragraphs which seem to me to contain some pertinent information.

Good luck, and let me know

if I can help you, in any way,

further along the road,

*Sinclair*  
Sinclair H. Hitchings  
Keeper of Prints

...equally interesting was the history of the print collection at the Library—so long and persistent an effort to make the collection a working and useful part of the institution, an effort in the end unsuccessful.

through one of the major auction houses. If you reach that point, Gunars Rutkovskis, who heads acquisitions here, and I could advise

# 1987 – Arlington Historical Commission letter



THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
TOWN HALL  
ARLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02174  
Menotomy • 1635 West Cambridge • 1807 Arlington • 1867

August 10, 1987

Maryellen Remmert  
Director  
Robbins Library  
Arlington, MA 02174

Dear Maryellen:

When I picked up the items from the Robbins Library to place in the Whittemore-Robbins House on loan this past spring, I dated and initialed the items that I took on my original request letter. Could I have a copy of that

of little value. I have to agree with the others who have gone through the collection and determined that it should be sold or otherwise disposed of, if at all possible. The European prints would have even less value to a local library collection.

collection and determined that it should be sold or otherwise disposed of, if at all possible. The European prints would have even less value to a local library collection.

I hope this is helpful to you. I look forward to a copy of our loan information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Barbara Franco".

Barbara Franco  
Secretary



# 1989 - Town Counsel opinion

JOHN F. MAHER  
TOWN COUNSEL

TOWN OF ARLINGTON  
MIDDLESEX COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS



OFFICE:  
50 PLEASANT STREET  
ARLINGTON, MASS. 02174  
641-4589

MEMO TO: Board of Library Trustees  
Maryellen Remmert - Loud, Library Director  
FROM: John F. Maher, Town Counsel  
SUBJECT: Print Collection  
DATE: November 3, 1989

Your Board through the two basic questions to me of 150,000 prints that were given by Winfield Robbins and his son to the Town of Arlington in bequest of \$25,000 (and the amount of \$30,000), the income care of the prints. The first question is whether the Town or the Library is free to use the collection or, on the other hand, is legally constrained from doing so. The second question is what the Town would have to utilize the bequest for.

library purposes other than strictly for the care of the prints. I shall treat each inquiry in turn.

There would clearly be a restraint upon the Town from disposing of the prints if they were given in trust to the Library or never given at all but rather

Library has been in possession of same, I am of the view that the Town has outright title to the prints. Also ameliorative of any remaining concern is that the Town of Arlington was, in fact, the beneficiary of the residuary clause in Mr. Robbins Will which means that anything not specifically bequeathed to anyone in his Will would pass to the Town.

were loaned to the Library. The surest way of establishing the existence of a trust is to locate the legal document which would have been necessary to establish same. I have not been able to locate in any of the Town records any trust document nor does any appear on record at the Middlesex Registry of Probate. I have, however, found through my research of Town records, the following indications of the donative intent of Mr. Robbins:

A. Excerpts from the Library Section of Town Reports for various years.

1893 - "The continued interest of Mr. Winfield Robbins in the library has been evidenced by various valuable gifts during the year".

1894 - "Mr. Winfield Robbins continues his generous gifts to the Library including two bronze statues".

1897 - "Mr. Winfield Robbins has continued his well known generosity by the gift of 31 volumes..."

1898 - "Mr. Winfield Robbins has added to his already numerous gifts...of seventeen volumes".

which he has sent us the past year, he has recently given a large number of framed portraits of persons distinguished in the history of America and Europe.

These portraits have been selected with great care and form a collection of much interest and value. They have been placed in the Art Gallery where they will be enjoyed by large numbers of people for a long time to come. In the adjoining room is a smaller collection, also given by Mr. Robbins, of portraits distinguished for their artistic merit, or as illustrating the progress of the art of engraving".

1899 - "We are now able to open to the inspection of the Town in our well-lighted art gallery the splendid collection of engravings presented to the Library by the late Winfield Robbins. The pictures which have been framed and hung upon the walls are only a part of Mr. Robbins's gift, and will excite the gratitude and pride of every citizen".

1910 - "Arlington is indeed fortunate to be the owner of this magnificent collection...engravings received from the late Winfield Robbins".

1912 - "Adjacent to the Music Department and on the

Collection. As curator of the collection, Dr. Ellen P. Wiese schedules exhibits of the prints and other works of art round the year".

Note should also be taken of these entries in the Board's Minutes:

December 5, 1910 - "Voted: Judge Permonter be authorized to investigate insurance on art collection given by Mr. Robbins to the Library." (emphasis supplied)

November 1, 1958 - "In response to wishes of the donor, Winfield Robbins, the (Caira Robbins) began the great task of cataloging the Print Collection." (emphasis supplied)

A review of an excerpt from the Arlington Advocate reveals the following:

January 26, 1961 - Few people perhaps know that the art gallery at Robbins Library is adorned by an excellent collection of engravings and prints collected by Mr. Winfield Robbins and presented to the Library." (emphasis supplied)

There are but two countervailing references of note. The first appears in a letter from the hired curator of the collection in a letter to the former Library Director, Miss Stromdahl dated October 24, 1958.

This action can be commenced only by ten taxpayers in a "friendly" lawsuit against the Town to which the Attorney General is made a party. In order to accomplish this the plaintiffs would need the assistance of counsel since my office would naturally represent the defendant Town and Board of Trustees. The only other option would be to induce the Attorney General to initiate the suit and serve as the plaintiff.

Of course, only if the prints were previously sold would the purpose of the trust fund be "impracticable to observe". No suit on Cy Pres could therefore be begun until same are disposed of.

One final note, in order for the Prints to be sold Town Meeting would have to authorize same. Any proceeds would enure to the benefit of the Town's free cash since if there is no trust for the benefit of the Library, they must as a matter of law be owned by the Town.

If the Robbins Trusts were changed by a cy pres action, then I am sure that the income would be applied to some library purpose.

I would be pleased to meet with the Board at its convenience to discuss this further if it wishes.

JFM/so

cc: Board of Selectmen  
Town Manager

and supervision of my collection to be under the sole control of Miss Caira Robbins". (emphasis supplied)

It could be argued obviously that reference by the munificent Mr. Robbins to "my collection" is indicative of a prior lack of donative intent when the prints were turned over to the Library. If, however, the gift of the prints was complete when received, then any attempt by Mr. Robbins to exert any control over them through his Will would be ineffective. Perhaps the reference to "my collection" can be seen as descriptive only.

And since Mr. Robbins clearly gave so many other gifts

spent for anything other than expenses related to the prints. However, in the event that the prints are sold or otherwise disposed of, then the doctrine of Cy Pres could be utilized. This doctrine permits the use of trust funds for purposes other than the express purposes provided in the trust.

"If it shall have become impracticable to observe or carry out such purpose or purposes, or such terms, or, if the occasion therefor shall have terminated... (The court) shall determine the purposes or uses to which the property involved shall be devoted..." Section 3(10) M.G.L. 24C.

# 1990 – Appraisal summary from James A. Bergquist

PO Box 2075

38 Stearns Street  
Newton, Massachusetts 02159  
20 November 1990

Robbins Library  
700 Massachusetts Avenue  
Arlington, Massachusetts 02174

Dear Maryellen,

Thank you again for your good labors in making the print collection accessible. I did, as I mentioned to you, manage to look at everything (excepting whatever may be framed or housed elsewhere in the library which, when you finally gather it together, I will evaluate for you). All twenty-four cabinets were openable and contain prints which can be divided into three categories.

Category One is American prints. Of the roughly 4,600 in this section, about 120--comprising the better Nineteenth- and early-Twentieth-Century portraits--are matted. There are, among these, about twenty which are worth a few hundred dollars each. The only commercially distinguished prints among them are three early-Eighteenth-Century mezzotint portraits of American Indians, which together have a value of \$4,000±. The remaining roughly 4,500

what are clearly the better European prints. These number roughly 1,750. Among them are perhaps forty prints which are worth at least a few hundred dollars; most of the rest, by virtue of being either unimportant portraits or prints in poor condition, are of nominal value.

In addition, there is a copper-plate for a Nineteenth-Century etched portrait of Victor Hugo (based, I believe, on a painting by Leon Bonnat). This has a value of \$250.

Category Three is Japanese prints, along with a few broken books of decorative Chinese paintings. My knowledge of Japanese prints is thinner than the paper on which they are printed! However, what exposure I have indicates to me that the twenty-odd volumes of Japanese prints are all from the later-Nineteenth or early-Twentieth Centuries and are of little significant artistic value. Their commercial value I will ascertain for you in January when I will be visited by one of my Japanese print dealer colleagues from London. I shall ring you then and arrange a time when we might view this material.

I have spoken at length about the American prints with Kenneth Newman of The Old Print Shop in New York City. From his reading of my descriptions, I would deduce the aggregate value of the

in New York City or Butterfield's in San Francisco. But transport and the low average-value of these prints probably precludes using these firms as well. Locally there are two auction houses of some note: Skinner's in Bolton, Mass., and Grogan's in Boston. It might be entertaining to have their appraisal. I suspect their answers would be to select-out a handful of the better things. Selling the remaining bulk prints in a local auction market would be difficult.

3) would be relatively quick and easy, provided you got a sufficient offer. That the collection is such a heterogeneous agglomeration could be overcome by, for example, selling it in its three parts to dealers in those three fields. On this, I would be happy to consult or to act as agent-seller.

Kindest regards. I look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Cordially yours,

JAMES A. BERGQUIST

But there is precious little in this collection which would appeal to, for instance, the Boston Public Library or the Museum of Fine Arts. They, most auction houses, and most dealers would happily cull out a few hundred of the better images. But so doing would destroy the salability of the collection as a whole. I cannot think of a single non-profit institution which would pay a reasonable price for, or indeed would want to undertake accessioning, the entire collection.

such.

The upright cabinets contain, matted and in 134 archival boxes,

restriction on the minimum value of a single lot of £1,000. in London and \$2,000. in New York. This rules out everything in your collection. The next level down would be, perhaps, Doyle's



# 2000 – Letter of Advice from Marjorie Cohn

## HARVARD UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS

ARTHUR M. SACKLER MUSEUM   FOGG ART MUSEUM   BUSCH-REISINGER MUSEUM   STRAUS CENTER FOR CONSERVATION

32 QUINCY STREET  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138  
TELEPHONE 617.495.9400  
FAX 617.495.9936

18 March 2000

Maryellen Loud  
Librarian  
Robbins Library  
700 Massachusetts Avenue  
Arlington, MA 02476

Dear Maryellen,

Yes, we are returning to the same difficult questions. I have delayed this long in responding because I needed to ask several former and present graduate students who are competent in prints whether they wanted to survey the Library collection. Unfortunately, none of them are interested in the project, having too many other things 'on their plate.' Also, James Bergquist considers his earlier review of the collection sufficient, and so I have not found anyone for you who is trained in prints, with an eye to what might be valuable enough

I think that, given the quality of the prints, you are not going to find an art or general culture museum that will want them.

hire a teacher over the summer. This person could set aside any prints that seemed to have potential for classroom use or student projects. Also, if you feel that this person would be sensitive to formats and techniques, they could do a little classification and organization along those lines. I'd be glad to give a hands-on instructional session at the beginning of the project.

As for putting the work on deposit at another institution, I cannot conceive of any institution except a public library that would have use for the mass of material.. Obviously, if the prints were sorted strictly by subject, the collection could be split up and perhaps out to specialized repositories. But I think that, given the quality of the prints, you are not going to find an art or general culture museum that will want them.

Give me a call, or have Ms. Gentile a call, if you want to pursue this.

Sincerely yours,



Marjorie B. Cohn  
Carl A. Weyerhaeuser Curator of Prints

TEL: 617-495-2393  
FAX: 617-496-3800  
E-M: cohn@fas.harvard.edu

# 2008 – Memo from Town Counsel

TOWN OF ARLINGTON  
MIDDLESEX COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS



JULIANA BEHAAN RICE  
TOWN COUNSEL

OFFICE:  
50 PLEASANT ST.  
ARLINGTON, MA 0  
781-316-3115  
FAX 781-316-3115

## MEMORANDUM

To: Maryellen Loud, Library Director  
Cc: Brian Sullivan, Town Manager  
From: Juliana Rice, Town Counsel  
Date: November 10, 2008  
Re: Robbins Art and Robbins Print Funds

Maryellen,

You asked me to consider permissible uses for the Robbins Library Art Fund and Robbins Library Print Fund. The specified use of each fund is set forth below:

Extract from the Will of Winfield Robbins ("Robbins Library Art Fund")

Fourth  
State of  
to be  
devote  
under

Extract

I give  
(\$30,000)  
and care of prints.

You asked me whether interest from these funds could be used to:

1. Buy art books or DVDs on art appreciation, how to draw, paint, sculpt
2. Buy original artwork (oil paintings, watercolors, photographs)
3. Workshops, lectures for public: art appreciation, how to draw, etc.

Of these three proposed uses, in my view, the second one is the only one for which a reasonable argument can be made that it fits within the terms of the bequests as they currently stand.<sup>1</sup> The instruments creating both funds contain language that would support the idea of acquiring additional artwork. See Extract from the Will of Winfield Robbins ("to be devoted to the care, preservation and increase of my Collection of Prints"); Extract from the Will of Ida Robbins ("to be used for the purchase and care of prints") (emphasis added). Purchasing additional prints is clearly an acceptable use of the interest generated by either fund.

Purchasing non-print original artwork is a more difficult question, but I think we could still defend it. On one hand, someone could argue that oil paintings, watercolors, and photographs are not the same as prints and that, therefore, acquiring such items would not be a permissible use of the funds. In response, however, I would cite the December 16, 1946, letter of Kathryn Achuff, Robbins Library Print Room Curator, to Francis Keefe, Secretary to the Trustees of the Robbins Library (copy attached). In this letter, Mrs. Achuff recounts that Caira Robbins (tasked by her cousin Winfield Robbins with overseeing his print collection) instructed Mrs. Achuff to exercise her own judgment in acquiring additions to the print collection. Mrs. Achuff exercised that judgment by purchasing "portraits of contemporaries and near-contemporaries" that had "at least a little esthetic or art value." Although Mrs. Achuff's purchases could, of course, have no relevance on the intent of Winfield Robbins in making his bequest 40 years earlier, I see some import in the fact that Caira Robbins, a contemporary of Mrs. Achuff, apparently trusted her to carry out Winfield's intent.<sup>2</sup>

In this same letter, I note with interest Mrs. Achuff's statement that "Miss Caira Robbins once told me that her cousin Winfield wanted to 'swallow the ocean'" in

such purchases, I would advise hewing as closely as possible to the principles set forth in Mrs. Achuff's letter and Miss Newton's notes. I would concentrate on collecting portraiture and works created by artistic techniques at risk of dying out. I would also endeavor to select works with some inherent "esthetic or art value."

I hope these thoughts are helpful. Please bear in mind that I have no expertise whatsoever in art of any kind. I would be pleased to consider input from someone with such expertise and revise my advice accordingly.

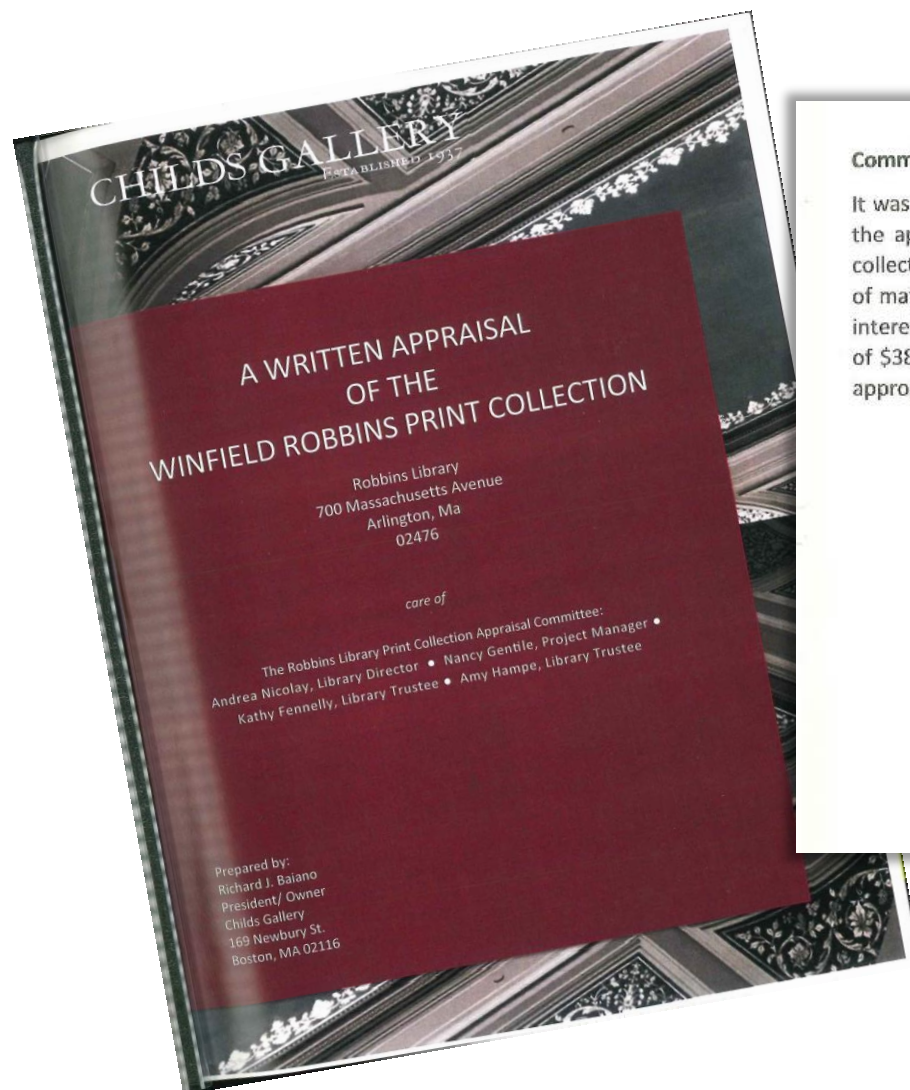
I hope these thoughts are helpful. Please bear in mind that I have no expertise whatsoever in art of any kind. I would be pleased to consider input from someone with such expertise and revise my advice accordingly.

<sup>1</sup> As John Maher has previously explained to you, the terms of a charitable bequest can be amended through a judicial action known as *cy pres* if the originally stated purpose has become impossible or impracticable. Such an action will succeed only if the underlying written instrument evidences a "general charitable intent." We would likely need to conduct a search for the entire wills of Winfield and Ida Robbins and other supporting documentation to prove such an intent to the Probate Court. The limited material in my possession is somewhat contradictory on the question of general charitable intent.

<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, this evidence would be less germane to the bequest by Ida Robbins, who survived her younger sister Caira by 11 years. Nonetheless, it would not be absurd to surmise that Ida was familiar with the terms of Winfield's bequest and with the work being done by Mrs. Achuff with regard to Winfield's print collection at the time that Ida made a bequest similar in content to Winfield's.



# 2018 – Appraisal by the Childs Gallery



## Commentary:

It was striking to me that the numerical value of the collection does not significantly vary from the appraisal completed in 2001. This is consistent with my opinion that the value of the collection has fallen since that time, due to an overall and continual declining market for this type of material. In my opinion, the collection is composed of primarily decorative art objects more interesting for subject matter than fine art importance. Adjusted for inflation, the 2018 value of \$381,724 is approximately \$150,000 less in value than in 2001 (\$514,261). This represents approximately a 25% decline of value of the collection from 2001 to today.

  
Richard J. Baiano, President  
Appraiser

# 2019 – Email from Marjorie Cohn

I hope [Town Meeting] votes to deaccession them. They have vexed too many generations at the library!

-- Jerry

Marjorie B. Cohn  
Carl A. Weyerhaeuser Curator of Prints, Emerita  
Harvard Art Museums

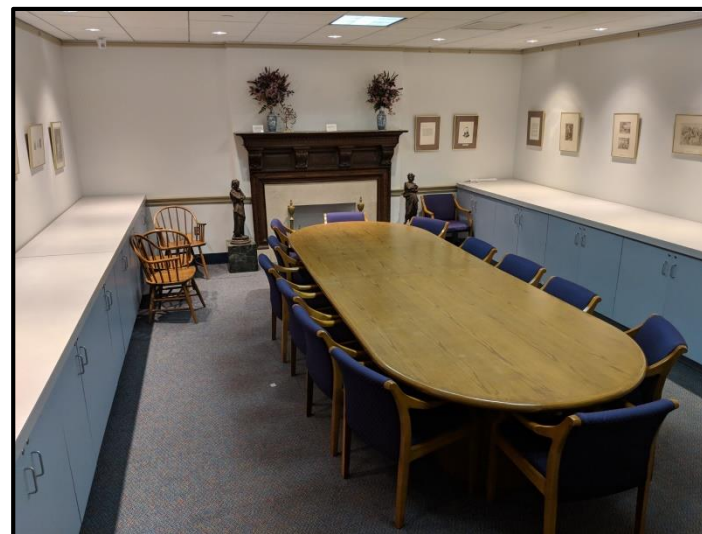
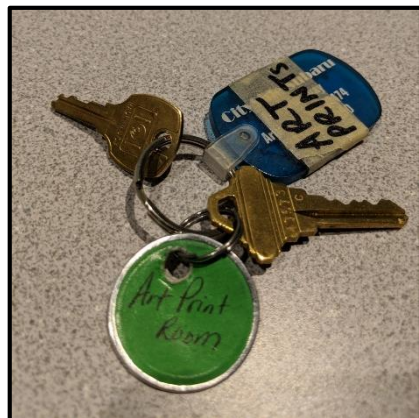
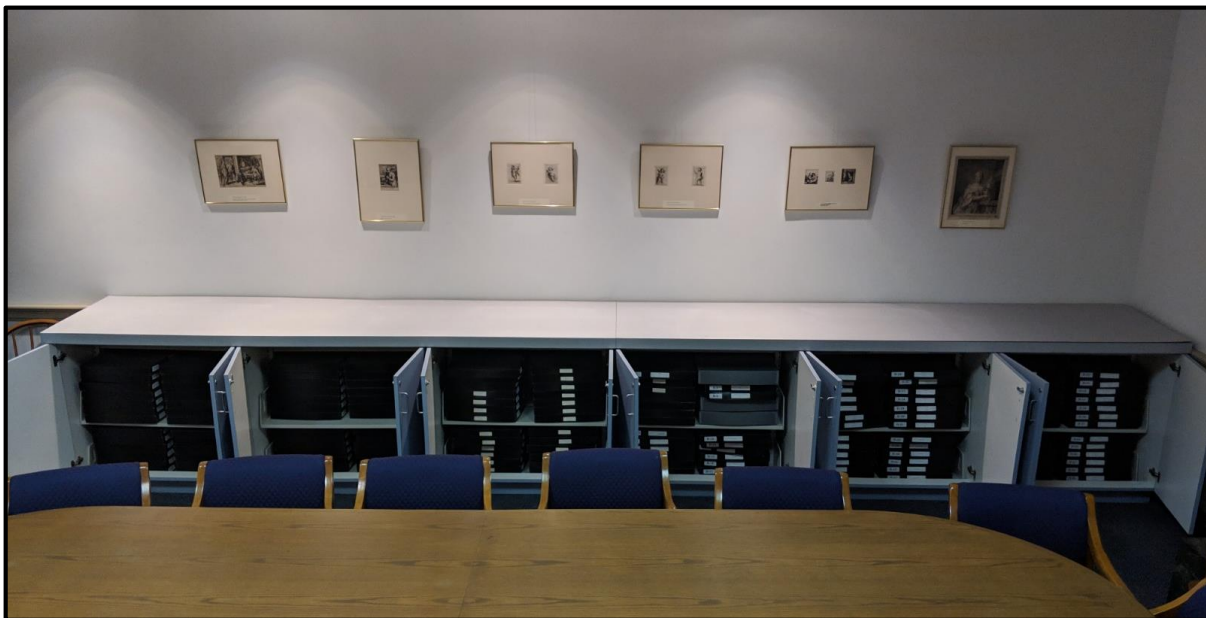


# Prints storage: 4<sup>th</sup> floor Art Print Room





# Print storage: 4<sup>th</sup> floor Conference Room





XVIII<sup>e</sup> SIÈCLE

Thank you