

Watson family collection 1990.13

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Friends of Wood Memorial Library and Museum

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P.O. Box 131

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Business Number: 860-289-1783

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URL: <https://woodmemoriallibrary.org/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Friends of Wood Memorial Library and Museum
Creator:	Watson, Amelia M. (Amelia Montague)
Creator:	Watson, Edith S., 1861-1943
Title:	Watson family collection
ID:	1990.13
Date [inclusive]:	1877-1940
Physical Description:	,47 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The Watson family collection consists of a photographic scrapbook, artwork, documents about the Watson homestead on Main Street, and other materials related to artist Amelia M. Watson (1856-1934), her sister photographer Edith S. Watson (1861-1943) and their family, all of South Windsor, CT.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Watson Family Collection (90.13), Wood Memorial Library and Museum, South Windsor, CT.

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Biographical / Historical

Sisters Amelia M. Watson (1856-1934) and Edith S. Watson (1861-1943) were born in East Windsor Hill (part of South Windsor, CT) and shared an interest in the art of watercolor painting from an early age, and at one point set out to become working artists by building their own studio. For about a decade, they traveled throughout New England, showing and selling their artwork. In the 1890s, they went their separate ways. Both women lived independent lives and traveled widely, Edith primarily to Canada, Amelia to the American South.

Amelia spent time in Florida and maintained a second home and studio in Tryon, North Carolina, where one of her neighbors was the actor William Gillette, a friend and patron. While all of these locales appear in Watson's drawings, she also made many watercolors of Connecticut, depicting the old houses and landscapes of her home state, especially the area around East Windsor Hill, where she and her sister maintained a house and studio called "Wild Acres." Amelia occasionally painted in oils.

An active figure in artistic and cultural circles in Hartford and in Boston, Amelia was a member of the Boston Art Club. From 1878 to 1902, she taught art at the Martha's Vineyard Summer School. She was also one of the first teachers at the Hartford Art School, where she taught "decorative design" and encouraged other women to pursue the study of art.

While Amelia was not primarily a book artist, her book decorations are among her most enduring works. In 1896, she illustrated *Cape Cod*, by Henry David Thoreau, first published in 1865. Watson made watercolor sketches for the book during a tour of Cape Cod with her close friend, the writer Margaret Warner Morley. She drew directly on a copy of Thoreau's book, adding decorations to chapter headings, endings, and in the margins. In addition to *Cape Cod*, she contributed a cover design and frontispiece to *The Carolina Mountains*, a book by her companion Margaret Morley that Houghton Mifflin published in 1913. In 1916, a drawing by Watson appeared as the cover design for *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* by John Muir, also published by Houghton Mifflin.

Before turning to photography Edith S. Watson painted and exhibited along with her sister, Amelia. In the 1890s she studied photography under her uncle, Sereno Watson, who taught photography at Harvard University. In 1896 Watson travelled to Canada and spent the next 35 years traveling across the country photographing rural life. She concentrated on images of women at work in a variety of rural communities, including Newfoundland outposts, Doukhobor communities in British Columbia, and Haida villages on the West Coast.

In 1911 Watson met Bermudian journalist Victoria Hayward. The two lived and worked together for many years, writing numerous magazine articles and publishing a book of photography entitled "Romantic Canada" in 1922. Watson also did publicity shots for hotels, railway lines, and various other companies. Her photographs were exhibited at the Boston Art Club, the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, and, more recently, at the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery in Halifax in 1992. She also painted.

Sources: Wikipedia <https://connecticuthistory.org/an-artist-and-her-books-amelia-watson-1856-1934/> https://cwahi.concordia.ca/sources/artists/displayArtist.php?ID_artist=5624

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Scope and Contents

The Watson family collection consists of a photographic scrapbook, artwork, documents about the Watson homestead on Main Street, and other materials related to Amelia M. Watson (1856-1934), her sister Edith S. Watson (1861-1943) and their family, all of South Windsor, CT. Amelia is best known as a watercolorist and Edith as a photographer, but Amelia also used oils and Edith also painted. In addition to the archival collection, Wood Memorial Library & Museum also houses numerous works of Amelia and Edith.

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Publication Statement

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