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A Guide to the John Gordon Papers A0020

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

American Folk Art Museum Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	American Folk Art Museum Archives
Creator:	Gordon, John, (1921-2003)
Source:	Gordon, Leah
Title:	John Gordon Papers
ID:	A0020
Date [inclusive]:	1964-1980
Physical Description:	1.00 cubic feet (standard document cases)
Language of the Material:	English
Mixed Materials [box]:	1
Mixed Materials [box]:	2
Abstract:	John Gordon was a dealer of American folk art in New York from 1964 to 1980. This collection contains photographs of works owned or handled by Gordon during that period, as well as related correspondence, publicity, and publications.

Preferred Citation

[item description], [date], John Gordon Papers, [box and folder number], American Folk Art Museum Archives, New York

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Biographical Note

John Gordon (1921-2003) was an American folk art expert who amassed one of the country's finest private collections of pots, whirligigs, weathervanes, and paintings.

Gordon grew up in Philadelphia and studied at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art, enlisting in the Signal Corps just after Pearl Harbor. In the army, he painted murals and taught art to soldiers at a camp in Missouri.

After the war, he taught art courses at the Philadelphia Museum, where his imagination focused on artifacts like redware pottery. He also worked as an industrial designer before moving to New York in the early 1950s as an art director for McGraw-Hill magazines. He started collecting and honed his knowledge at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, where he pored over its collection of Pennsylvania folk art.

In New York, he collected systematically and, in 1964, he opened a gallery of American folk art in his second-story apartment on West 57th Street, moving it to a separate second floor space on 57th Street in the early 1970s.

In pursuit of fine Americana, he and his wife, Leah Shanks Gordon, drove from New England to New Mexico, Pennsylvania to California, visiting auctions, antiques shows, and dealers.

Gordon closed his gallery in 1980 but kept buying and selling privately until 1999, when 660 items from his collection were auctioned at Christie's (see "The John Gordon Collection of Folk Americana" January 15 and 19, 1999). Pottery, weather vanes and painted cabinets, as well as some idiosyncratic later art, brought a total of \$2.8 million.

The Gordons loaned works to several museum exhibitions, such as *The Flowering of American Folk Art 1776-1876* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1974 (including catalog entries 233, 242, 303 and 365), and *Flowers in Folk Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris in 1984.

Gordon was also guest curator of *Masterpieces of American Folk Art* at the Monmouth Museum in Lincroft, New Jersey (September 30-November 29, 1975), produced by Monmouth County Historical Association and the Monmouth Museum.

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Scope and Contents

The John Gordon Papers contains annotated photographs of works owned or handled by Gordon during his work as a dealer of American folk art in New York City from 1964 to 1980. It also contains correspondence and announcements pertaining to these works, as well as a selection of press articles. An entire folder contains materials related to *Masterpieces of American Folk Art* at the Monmouth Museum, which was organized for the Bicentennial and which Gordon curated. It contains correspondence and photographs related to the exhibition, as well as the catalog. The collection is organized alphabetically by subject, and in a few instances, by the name of an artist or institution.

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Arrangement

Alphabetical by subject or artist

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

American Folk Art Museum Archives

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Leah Gordon, 2006

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research. Access to sensitive materials may be restricted at the discretion of the American Folk Art Museum.

Conditions Governing Use

The John Gordon Papers are owned by the American Folk Art Museum. The collection is subject to all copyright laws, and is dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Folk Art, Pennsylvania Dutch
- Folk art -- United States
- African American folk art

- Gordon, Leah