

THE BUILDING / PAUL PHILIPPE CRET RECORDS  
1919-1931  
(predominantly 1919-1929)  
2.5 linear feet

\*BCR 1-6  
Accessioned in 1979  
Completed in August, 1980  
By Marilyn Ghausi

The records of Paul Philippe Cret were found in the North Loft and elsewhere in the Museum in 1978; they were accessioned in March 1979. These records contain professional correspondence and other files of Paul Philippe Cret in his capacity as designer and architect of The Detroit Institute of Arts, in association with Zantzinger, Borie and Medary. Clyde H. Burroughs, Secretary of the Arts Commission, was probably responsible for the collection of these files, since Cret maintained his office in Philadelphia. These records contain correspondence with museum officials, the City of Detroit and others involved in the design and construction of the Museum.

#### HISTORY

In July 1919, the Detroit City Charter established The Detroit Institute of Arts as a municipal department to be administered by a four-member Arts Commission. As one of its first priorities, the Arts Commission took up the task of planning a new museum on a previously acquired property on Woodward Avenue. Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945), a Philadelphia architect, was appointed consulting architect in November 1919 and architect in 1921. A native of Lyons, France, Cret was trained at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts and Atelier Pascal in Paris. His major works before the Institute project, the Pan American Union building in Washington, D.C. and the Indianapolis Public Library, had launched his career as a major architect in the United States. At the time of his appointment as museum architect, Cret became associated with the firm of Zantzinger, Borie and Medary, though he remained the primary designer of the museum building.

Before proceeding to preliminary drawings, Cret studied the literature and analyzed museum functions in terms of planning and design. A Preliminary Report on Plans For The New Museum was submitted to the Arts Commission on January 20, 1920 followed in December by a second Report On Plans . . . (which accompanied the presentation of drawings). Ground was broken on the Institute project on June 22, 1922, and construction continued for approximately five years. The building was dedicated and opened to the public on October 7, 1927. In recognition of the excellence of his work, Cret was awarded the Medal of Honor of The Architectural League of New York (1928) for The Detroit Institute of Arts.

## SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

These records, dating from Cret's tenure as architect of The Detroit Institute of Arts, consist primarily of correspondence and relate exclusively to the design and construction of the building. Of particular interest is the correspondence between Cret and Clyde H. Burroughs, secretary of the Arts Commission; Albert Kahn, commissioner and nationally known Detroit architect; Bryant & Detwiler, general builders and William R. Valentiner, museum director. The correspondence reveals an almost daily concern for details of construction progress and reflects the complexities of funding and carrying through a major architectural project.

The records also document the development of original design features of the museum plan, described by Cret in 1923 as the "mingling of exhibits" of various media, the harmonizing of each room's architecture with its contents, the sequential arrangement of the collections and the provision of space for relaxation and social activities. William Valentiner's contributions to the design arrangement of the galleries is of particular interest in this context.

Other records relating to Paul P. Cret and The Detroit Institute of Arts project can be found at the original architectural firm (H2L2), located in Philadelphia, PA and the Rare Book Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. Additional information also may be found in the records of Clyde Burroughs, William Valentiner and the audio-visual section of the Museum Archives of The Detroit Institute of Arts. The Graphic Arts department maintains a file of architectural drawings of the building by Cret, Zantzinger, Borie and Medary.

### Important subjects include:

- Casavant organ
- Design and construction of the auditorium
- Design and construction of Garden Court
- Design of the interior galleries
- Detroit City Plan Commission
- Landscaping

### Among the correspondents are:

- Booth, Ralph H. (president, arts commission)
- Bryant & Detwiler Co. (general builders)
- Burroughs, Clyde H. (secretary, arts commission)
- Kahn, Albert (arts commissioner and architect)
- Murphy, William H. (music patron)
- Valentiner, William R. (director)

A partial index to the location of subjects and correspondents is at the end of this guide.

## SERIES DESCRIPTION

Series I, Correspondence, 1919-1931 (1919-1929)

\*BCR 1-5 Subseries: Correspondence, filed chronologically, following original arrangement. In addition to correspondence the files contain memoranda, telegrams and notes relating to the design and construction of The Detroit Institute of Arts.

Subseries: Correspondence with Bryant & Detwiler, general builders, April to May 1925, filed chronologically.

Series II, Design and Construction Files, 1920-1929

\*BCR 5 Subseries: Bound and unbound design and construction progress reports and memoranda, filed chronologically.

Subseries: Bound and unbound specifications, schedules and contract documents, filed chronologically.

Undated items are at the back of each subseries

## DESCRIPTION OF AUDIO-VISUAL AND SPECIAL RECORDS

Photographs have been accessioned under the following AVP numbers:  
AVP 13:715.01

Drawings, blueprints and reproductions have been accessioned under the following AVD numbers:  
AVD 13:20.01-.03

Additional architectural drawings are located in The Museum Archives and Graphic Arts department.

## DESCRIPTION OF MICROFILMED RECORDS

The Building/Paul P. Cret Records are microfilmed as AVM 13:2  
All records were microfilmed with the exception of audio-visual and special records.

CONTAINER LISTING

Series I: Correspondence, 1919-1931 (1919-1929)  
Subseries: Correspondence, 1919-1931

\*BCR 1  
1-22 Correspondence, October 21, 1919-December 29, 1923

\*BCR 2  
1-22 Correspondence, January 4, 1924-January 11, 1926

\*BCR 3  
1-24 Correspondence, January 14, 1926-March 9, 1927

\*BCR 4  
1-25 Correspondence, March 10, 1927-March 5, 1931

Series I: (continued)  
Subseries: Correspondence with Bryant & Detwiler Co.,  
April 1, 1925-May 29, 1925

\*BCR 5  
1-2 Correspondence with Bryant & Detwiler Co., April 1, 1925-  
May 29, 1925

Series II: Design and Construction Files, 1920-1929  
Subseries: Bound and unbound design and construction  
progress reports and memoranda

\*BCR 5  
3 Preliminary Report on Plans For The New Museum, January 10, 1920  
4 Memorandum on Questions of Principle Regarding the Plans of  
Cret, Zantzinger, Borie and Medary, May 6, 1920?  
5 Report on Plans For The New Museum of The Detroit Institute of  
Arts, December 27, 1920  
6 Memorandum on Zantzinger Visit to Detroit, September 30, 1922  
7 Report on Cret Visit to Detroit, October 17, 1924  
8 Report of Trip to Detroit, October 7-9, 1925  
9 Memorandum on Zantzinger Visit to Detroit, June 21, 1926  
10 Report of Livingston Visit to Detroit, October 18-19, 1926?  
11 Memorandum of Zantzinger Visit to Detroit, April 28, 1927

Series II: (continued)  
Subseries: Bound and unbound specifications, schedules and contract documents

\*BCR 5

- 12 Contracts, 1921-1922
- 13 Specifications, Auditorium and Lecture Hall Chairs, December 14, 1926
- 14 Schedule, Electric Lightbulbs & fixtures, December 31, 1926
- 15 Bid for Auditorium equipment, New York Studios, January 17, 1927
- 16 Schedule of Furniture & furnishings, January 20, 1927
- 17 Specifications, Pedestal of Le Penseur (The Thinker), December 5, 1927
- 18 Specifications, Alterations to Exhibition Rooms, n.d.
- 19 Specifications, Textile cases, n.d.
- 20 Estimates, miscellaneous, n.d.

ADDITIONS

- 21 Specification Covering-Contract #1 for Excavation, Grading etc. June 5, 1922
- 22 Specification Covering-Contract #2 for Excavation, Grading etc. July 10, 1923
- 23 Bids rejected August, 1925
- 24 Bids rejected August, 1925

PARTIAL INDEX TO SUBJECTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

This index is not comprehensive, even for the names listed here, and should be supplemented by a thorough reading of the series descriptions and container listings.

Architectural League of New York (award) 4/20  
 Auditorium (design and construction) 1/3-4, 1/8-9, 2/1 2/3-5  
 2/22, 3/8-9, 3/16-17, 3/22-24, 4/1, 4/6-9, 4/15, 4/23,  
 5/3-4, 5/11, 5/15  
 Booth, Ralph H. (president, arts commission) 1/4, 1/8, 1/22, 4/14, 5/6  
 Bryant & Detwiler Company (William Rohns, superintendent) 2/15-16 5/1-2  
 Chapel, Gothic 1/5-6, 1/16-17, 1/21, 2/22, 3/7, 4/6, 5/1  
 Contracts 1/3-5, 1/22, 2/1-5, 2/7, 2/9, 2/12-13, 3/1, 3/4, 3/7, 4/12,  
 4/18-19, 5/11-12  
 Cornerstone 2/1-2  
 Court, Garden (Rivera) 1/9, 2/3, 3/20, 4/9, 5/3-4  
 Court, Interior (Kresge) 1/9, 2/3, 2/12, 3/8  
 Cret, Paul P. (appointment) 1/1, 1/3  
 Dedication (building) 4/14  
 Detroit City Plan Commission 1/1, 2/22, 3/4-5, 3/8, 3/10, 3/13-14  
 3/19, 3/21, 4/3  
 Galleries (interior arrangement of) 1/6-7, 2/12, 5/3, 5/5  
 Gothic Chapel. See Chapel, Gothic  
 Great Hall 2/3, 2/17, 3/1  
 Greber, Jacques (landscape architect) 4/16-17, 4/24-25  
 Groundbreaking 1/10  
 Inscriptions 2/18-21, 3/1, 3/10, 3/14-15 3/17, 4/9-12, 5/1  
 Kahn, Albert (arts commissioner and architect) 1/1-4, 1/6-9, 1/13, 2/4-5 2/13,  
 3/7, 3/19, 3/22  
 Kitchen, colonial 4/20-21  
 Kresge Court See Court, Interior  
 Landscaping 2/15, 2/22, 3/4, 3/11, 3/13-15, 3/17-18, 3/20, 4/1, 4/16-17  
 4/20, 4/24, 5/9  
 Lighting (experimental room) 3/4-6  
 Murphy, William H. (music patron) 3/4, 3/8 See also Organ, Casavant  
 Organ, Casavant 2/4, 2/15, 3/1, 3/3-5, 3/8, 3/11-17, 4/7  
 Pewabic Pottery 2/19, 2/21, 3/15, 5/10  
 Rodin, Le Penseur (The Thinker) 1/18-19, 3/20, 4/5-6, 4/9-10, 4/25, 5/17  
 Rohns, William (superintendent) See Bryant & Detwiler Company  
 Sculpture, exterior 2/9-12, 3/1, 4/3, 4/13, 5/3, 5/7  
 See also Rodin, Le Penseur  
 Tannahill, Robert H. (benefactor) 4/20, 5/10  
 Valentiner, William R. (director) 1/5-6, 1/8, 2/12, 3/15, 5/1, 5/10  
 Whitby Hall 1/7, 1/9, 1/11, 3/17-18, 3/19, 4/22  
 Woodward Avenue, (subway) 2/8 (widening of) 2/11, 2/15, 2/19, 3/4-5  
 3/8, 3/10-11, 3/14-16, 5/1  
 Yellin, Samuel (ironsmith) 2/6-7, 2/9, 2/17-18, 3/9, 3/12, 3/18, 5/2

\* Numerical code refers to box and folder.

THE BUILDING/PAUL PHILIPPE CRET RECORDS

Please consult the archivist regarding use of these records