

The Gilder – deKay – Palmer Collection

A Gilded Age Archive of American Art, Literature, and Cultural History

Prepared for consideration by the
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Presented by the Gilder Palmer Family
Custodians of the Four Brooks Farm Historical Archive

Proposed Acquisition / Donation Structure:
Collection Appraised Value: **\$1,500,000+**
Proposed Purchase Price: **\$875,000**

Introduction

The Gilder–deKay–Palmer Collection represents one of the most intact surviving family archives from the cultural circle surrounding Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century Magazine*, and Helena deKay Gilder, artist and founder of the Society of American Artists. For more than three generations, the Gilder family stood at the center of American intellectual life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their circle included presidents, artists, writers, reformers, musicians, and leading figures of the American Renaissance. Through paintings, sketches, diaries, correspondence, and personal artifacts, the collection documents the relationships that shaped the cultural identity of the United States during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

Cultural Figures Represented

Individuals appearing in the archive include: • President Grover Cleveland and Mrs. Cleveland

- Ulysses S. Grant
- Walt Whitman
- Winslow Homer
- Louis Comfort Tiffany
- George MacDonald
- Joseph Jefferson
- Rodman deKay Gilder
- Louisa and Comfort Tiffany
- Cecilia Beaux and her artistic circle

Together these figures form a remarkable portrait of the American cultural renaissance that followed the Civil War and shaped the nation's artistic identity.

Highlights of the Collection

Category	Examples within the Archive
Paintings and Portraiture	Portrait of Helena deKay Gilder attributed to John La Farge; Cecilia Beaux related works
Artist Sketchbooks	Helena deKay Gilder sketches of friends, artists, and literary figures.
Correspondence	Extensive private letters including Anne Douglas Sedgwick correspondence with Richard Watson Gilder
Unpublished Letters	Previously unseen correspondence including John La Farge letters to the Gilder family.
Personal Diaries	Gilder family journals including Civil War era materials.
Photographic Albums	Three generations of photo albums documenting Gilded Age society.
Memorabilia	Personal objects including Richard Watson Gilder's watch fob and related family artifacts
Red Cross Archives	Documents relating to the founding of the Red Cross in France and American Red Cross

Relevance to Philadelphia and the Mid-Atlantic Region

The collection bears deep connections to the artistic and cultural institutions of Philadelphia and the surrounding Mid-Atlantic region. The celebrated portraitist Cecilia Beaux—long associated with Philadelphia's artistic community—appears prominently within the archive through both artwork and correspondence. Related letters connect her with Catherine Anne Drinker and members of her extended circle. These materials provide important context for the development of American portrait painting, artistic training, and cultural patronage in Philadelphia during the late nineteenth century. Because of these regional connections, the Philadelphia Museum of Art is uniquely positioned to interpret and present the material to scholars and the public.

Institutional Context

Materials relating to the Gilder family and their circle already reside in major American archives including:

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art
 - The Smithsonian Institution
 - Stanford University
 - The New York Public Library
 - The New York Historical Society
 - Yale University
 - Harvard University
 - Williams College
 - The Whaling Museum, New Bedford
- However, these materials exist as fragments across many institutions. The Gilder–deKay–Palmer Collection represents a rare opportunity to preserve a coherent family archive within a single institution.

Acquisition Opportunity

The Gilder Palmer family believes the Philadelphia Museum of Art would be an ideal steward for this remarkable archive. The collection has been professionally evaluated and carries an estimated appraised value exceeding \$1,500,000. The family proposes a combined purchase / donation arrangement allowing the museum to acquire the entire collection for \$875,000. This structure allows the archive to remain intact while ensuring that the materials are preserved within one of the nation's most respected museums.

Conclusion

The Gilded Age produced an extraordinary network of artists, writers, reformers, and political figures whose influence continues to shape American cultural life. The Gilder–deKay–Palmer archive captures this world through personal documents, artworks, and memorabilia that have remained within the family for more than three generations. Many of these materials are being presented publicly for the first time. Their preservation within a leading institution would offer scholars and future generations a rare and intimate view of American cultural history. Respectfully submitted,

The Gilder Palmer Family

Four Brooks Farm Historical Archive