

Title: Aaron Sopher Papers
Collection dates: 1938 - 1941

Collection number: MS 24

Extent: 2 linear feet, 3 boxes

Creator: Aaron Sopher

Condition of access: Unrestricted, by appointment only

Language: English

Repository: Enoch Pratt Free Library Special Collections

Contact Information:

Enoch Pratt Free Library

400 Cathedral Street

Baltimore, MD 21201

Phone: 443-984-4251

Email: spc@prattlibrary.org

Source of Acquisition:

The only documentation regarding deposit of the collection of drawings and watercolors in the Aaron Sopher Collection is contained on the original box label: "Sopher, Aaron – Works – 137 drawings and water colors by Aaron Sopher. 42 of them are marked "Baltimore Almanac" which was probably projected by the U.S. Works Projects Administration, Federal Writers' Project, Maryland, but never published. Others are marked as if they had been meant to illustrate the Maryland Guide (which was published in 1940 by the U. S. Works Projects Administration, Federal Writers' Project, Maryland) but they were not used in it. Most of them have local significance but some are general. There are some duplicates. The collection is on indefinite loan to the library by the U. S. Works Projects Administration. Items are to be kept in the Maryland Department locked case." The Maryland Department transferred the collection to Special Collections.

Biographical History:

Aaron Sopher was born in East Baltimore, on December 16, 1905, the tenth of thirteen children. His father, Samuel A. Sopher was the son of a Lithuanian immigrant and his mother, Jennie Saperstein was a Russian immigrant. His father owned a small cigar factory and tobacco shop near Baltimore harbor. Aaron's drawing ability might have been inherited from his grandfather, who owned a bookshop and sold Hebrew religious books and was a prominent scribe who hand lettered the Torah for synagogues. (The word *sofer* means "scribe" in Hebrew.) Sopher attended Maryland Institute of Fine and Applied Arts (now the Maryland Institute, College of Art). While there he trained with institute director Alon Bement who became his mentor; however, when a new director came on board in 1925, he did not award Sopher a diploma because of his frequent absences and lack of discipline. Sopher was a free spirit and wanted to draw people in action. After he left MICA, Sopher made a living by working on free-lance illustration jobs for the *Baltimore Sun* and his drawings began to appear regularly. In 1927 he received his first large commission from the newspaper to illustrate a story about the Baltimore waterfront. These illustrations were the first to bring him wide recognition.

During a two-year residence in New York from 1929-31, his cartoons regularly appeared in *The New Yorker*. After the stock market crash of 1929 artists' prospects dimmed and he needed to supplement his income by designing lampshades. While in New York, Sopher's work, such as sketches of workmen, appeared in *The New Masses*, a leftist publication devoted to social commentary. Other contributors included John Sloan and Reginald Marsh. During the depression, Sopher felt a moral responsibility to portray in a meaningful way, the devastating problems faced by Americans. Throughout his career, his drawings evoked a mood or scene, both humorous and somber of people with universal appeal. His quick, deft lines and apparent spontaneity recall the work of Daumier, Hogarth, and Rowlandson. Aaron Sopher died in Baltimore in 1972.

During his career, Aaron Sopher was supported by Baltimore/Washington regional cultural institutions for his talent, receiving acclaim from The Baltimore Museum of Art, The Peale Museum and the Corcoran Gallery of Art. He was also a personal friend and art advisor to Etta Cone, who with her sister Claribel formed the famous collection of modern art which included Matisse and Picasso. Etta Cone was a patron of Sopher's work, from 1937 through 1949, purchasing 142 of his drawings and watercolors. The book, Aaron Sopher, Satirist of the American Condition by Peter Hastings Falk, was published by the Sound View Press in Madison, Connecticut in conjunction with an exhibition at The Baltimore Museum of Art in 1991.

Scope and Contents Note:

The Aaron Sopher Collection consists of 137 pen and ink drawings and watercolors produced from 1938-1941. The collection is organized by objective and by subject area and is arranged in nine series. Each image has been given a plate number in lieu of a 'folder' number. The # after the image title is one which was found on the drawing, probably given by Sopher.

Series Description:

Series I: Pen & Ink and Watercolors, 1938-1940

The series is broken into 5 subseries by subject area. Subseries 1, "Hospitalized Child"; Subseries 2, Depictions of lower class people; Subseries 3, Baltimore street scenes; Subseries 4, Depictions of upper class people; Subseries 5, Work and transportation scenes.

Series II: Pen & Ink drawings (3"x3") for "Maryland Guide Book".

These 13 small drawings were done to illustrate the Maryland Guide Book that was published in 1940 by the WPA, but were not used in it.

Series III: Pen & Ink drawings for "Almanac".

These 42 drawings were done for another project by the WPA, "Baltimore Almanac" but never published. Several of these drawings although having the same title, are different.

Series IV: Pimlico watercolors.

Paintings done at the Pimlico racetrack.

Series V: BMA and the 9th Annual Maryland Show, 1941.

Drawings of the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Series VI: Images of the woods, 1939. Landscape series.

Series VII: Groups outdoors, 1940. Peopled landscapes.

Series VIII: Buildings. Houses and views in Maryland.

Series IX: Large format. Variety of large format drawings and watercolors.

Container List:

Series I: Pen & Ink and Watercolors, 1938-1940

Subseries 1: "Hospitalized Child"

Box 1	Plate 1	Illustration for "The Hospitalized Child and His Family-postoperation, #2", undated pen & ink & wash
	Plate 2	"On the sundeck CMSC – Johns Hopkins Hospital", #104, Undated, pen & ink

Subseries 2: Depictions of lower class people

Box 1	Plate 3	"The Flower Sellers", #167, 1939. pen & ink & wash
	Plate 4	"Oriole Cafeteria, Baltimore", #172, 1939. pen & ink
	Plate 5	"Baltimore Cafeteria", #177, 1938. pen & ink
	Plate 6	"Street Scene, no. 2", #277, undated, pen & ink & wash
	Plate 7	"Christmas Trees", #181, 1939. pen & ink & watercolor
	Plate 8	"Relief Case", #171, 1939. pen & ink
	Plate 9	Untitled (somber, seated man), 1941. pen & ink & wash
	Plate 10	"Street Car", #153, 1939. pen & ink
	Plate 11	"Profile", #257, 1940. pen & ink & wash
	Plate 12	"Colored Lady", #138, undated, pen & ink & wash
	Plate 13	"Figure", #178, undated pen & ink
	Plate 14	"Refugees", #28, #180, undated, oil paint on canvas board
	Plate 15	"Bomb's Victim", #179, 1939. pen & ink & paint

Subseries 3: Baltimore street scenes

Box 1	Plate 16	"St. James Court, Baltimore", #159, undated pen & ink & color wash
	Plate 17	"Night Scene, no. 3", #126, undated pen & ink & color wash
	Plate 18	"Negro Section", #221, undated, pen & ink & wash
	Plate 19	High Street, Baltimore", #128, 1938. pen & ink & wash
	Plate 20	"View from Gough St. and Central Ave., Baltimore", #158, undated pen & ink & wash
	Plate 21	"Looking West on Fayette Street, Baltimore", #139 (no. 9), 1938. pen & ink & wash
	Plate 22	"South Sharp Street, Baltimore", #157, 1939. pen & ink & wash
	Plate 23	"Alicenna Street, Baltimore", #149, 1939. pen & ink & Color wash
	Plate 24	"East from Recreation Pier, Baltimore", #154, 1939. pen & ink

Subseries 4: Depictions of upper class people

Box 1	Plate 25	“Lunch”, #147, 1938. pen & ink & watercolor
	Plate 26	“New Years Eve, no. 1), #137, undated pen & ink & wash
	Plate 27	“New Years Eve, no. 2), #176, undated, pen & ink & wash
	Plate 28	“Sanitary Market”, #165, undated, pen & ink & wash
	Plate 29	“The Three Hats”, #150, undated, pen & ink & watercolor
	Plate 30	“Old Man”, #254, 1940. pen & ink & crayon
	Plate 31	“Light Lunch”, #160, 1939. pen & ink & watercolor
	Plate 32	“Refreshment”, #308, 1940. pen & ink & watercolor

Subseries 5: Work and transportation scenes

Box 1	Plate 33	(A harvest scene), 1939. pen & ink & crayon
	Plate 34	“Industrial Scene”, 1939. pen & ink & crayon
	Plate 35	“Maryland Indians”, 1939. pen & ink & crayon
	Plate 36	Conestoga Wagon – once a feature of the turnpike roads Of Maryland and Pa.”, 1939. pen & ink & crayon
	Plate 37	(loading a B.O. RR car), undated, pen & ink
	Plate 38	“Railroad – Transportation”, undated, pen & ink & crayon
	Plate 39	“Fellow Passengers”, #256, undated, pen & ink & watercolor
	Plate 40	“Railroad Station”, #305, 1940. pen & ink & watercolor
	Plate 41	“Overlea Trolley Station, Maryland”, #162, 1939. pen & ink & wash

Series II: Pen & Ink Drawings (3”x3”) for “Maryland Guide Book”

Box 2	Plate 42	“Indians”
	Plate 43	“Art”
	Plate 44	“Press”
	Plate 45	“The Shot Tower”
	Plate 46	“Salisbury? Cambridge?”
	Plate 47	“Labor? Industry?”
	Plate 48	“Conestoga Wagon? Transportation?”
	Plate 49	“Agriculture”
	Plate 50	“The State House, Annapolis”
	Plate 51	“Agriculture”
	Plate 52	“Old Limestone Bridge”
	Plate 53	“Industry? Labor?”
	Plate 54	“Cumberland – Railroad York”

Series III: Pen & Ink Drawings for “Almanac”

Box 2	Plate 55	p.3 – “February’s Slump”
	Plate 56	p.6 – “The Weather for 1941”
	Plate 57	p.8 – “‘Oh-Sha-Na-See’ and the bivalve”
Box 2	Plate 58	p.11 – “Maryland beaten biscuits recipe”
	Plate 59	p.14 – “Baltimore Almanac”
	Plate 60	p.14 – “Baltimore Almanac”
	Plate 61	p.18 – “G. Washington and Md hospitality”
	Plate 62	p.20 - “Divorce in the Free State”
	Plate 63	p.21 – “March”

Plate 64	p.21 – “March”
Plate 65	p.22 – “Harriet Tubman – heroine of Underground Railway
Plate 66	p.23 – “March – ‘Skirts that are of springtime hue. March Wind will get fresh with you.’”
Plate 67	p.24 – “Baltimore Almanac”
Plate 68	p.24 – “Baltimore Almanac”
Plate 69	p.25 – “March – ‘As March marches on and winter wanes, Etc’”
Plate 70	p.26 – “Baltimore Almanac”
Plate 71	p.26 – “Baltimore Almanac”
Plate 72	p.27 – “March – ‘It was the Irish not Pat wot scared ‘em Away’”
Plate 73	p.30 – “The tobacco and Mrs. Beard”
Plate 74	p.30 – “Forest Rangers of Baltimore”
Plate 75	p.33 – “April”
Plate 76	p.33 – “April”
Plate 77	p.39 – “April”
Plate 78	p.41 - “April”
Plate 79	p.44 – “Demeter”
Plate 80	p.44 – “Demeter”
Plate 81	p.44 – “Demeter”
Plate 82	p.46 – “Baltimore Almanac”
Plate 83	p.51 – “May – ‘When civilization’s blasted out, etc.’”
Plate 84	p.54 – “hair dye”
Plate 85	p.56 - “Saint Anthony and the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904”
Plate 86	p.57 – “June”
Plate 87	p.57 – “June”
Plate 88	p.61 – “June – ‘Pigs’ feet’”
Plate 89	p.61 – “June – ‘Pigs’ feet’”
Plate 90	p.66 – “Bathing in Jones Falls”
Plate 91	p.71 – “When the heat is so abominable then we write our Doggerel terrible”
Plate 92	p.71 – “August”
Plate 93	p.76 – “August”
Plate 94	p.94 – “Court trial of a tree”
Plate 95	“Brooklyn Supreme 3200 lbs. Timonium – biggest horse in The world – 1940”
Plate 96	“Timonium - the proud owner”

Series IV: Pimlico watercolors

Box 3	Plate 97	“At the Track” undated
	Plate 98	“Pimlico, no. 28, 1941
	Plate 99	“Pimlico, no. 26, 1941
	Plate 100	“Pimlico, no. 27, 1941

Series V: BMA and the 9th Annual Maryland Show

Box 3	Plate 101	“untitled”
	Plate 102	“9 th Annual Maryland Show”, no. 9, 1941
	Plate 103	“Print Room – Baltimore Museum of Art”, March 1941
	Plate 104	“Thorne Miniature Rooms, BMA”, March 1941
	Plate 105	“Baltimore Museum of Art”, no. 11, March 1941

Series VI: Images of the woods

Box 3	Plate 106	“Double Rock”
	Plate 107	untitled landscape
	Plate 108	untitled landscape, 1939
	Plate 109	“Rocks – Baltimore County, Md.”
	Plate 110	“Woodland Stream, Baltimore County”
	Plate 111	“Fallen Tree”, 1939
	Plate 112	“Woods – Baltimore County, Md.”, 1939

Series VII: Groups outdoors

Box 3	Plate 113	“On the Rocks”, 1940
	Plate 114	“Picnic Scene”, 1940
	Plate 115	“Picnic”, 1940
	Plate 116	“Park Band”, 1940
	Plate 117	“Zoo”, 1940
	Plate 118	“Sideshow”

Series VIII: Buildings

Box 3	Plate 119	“View from Maryland Yacht Club, Baltimore”
	Plate 120	“Old House on Greenspring Road, Md”
	Plate 121	“Old House on Greenspring Road, Md”, no. 2
	Plate 122	“Old Farmhouse, Maryland”, 1939
	Plate 123	“Old Graveyard on Belair Road, Baltimore”, 1939
	Plate 124	“Backyard – Overlea, Md.”, 1938
	Plate 125	“Old House – Baltimore County, Maryland”, 1939
	Plate 126	“House in Baltimore County”
	Plate 127	“The Gate house”, 1939
	Plate 128	“The Back Lawn”
	Plate 129	“One of the 3 Ellicott homes at Ellicott City, Maryland, 1939
	Plate 130	“Ellicott City, Md”, 1939
	Plate 131	“Old Mansion near Ellicott City, Maryland”

Series IX: Large format

Box 3	Plate 132	“St. Leo’s – Exeter and Stiles Streets – Baltimore”, no. 413
	Plate 133	“View from Riverside Park – Baltimore”, no. 340
	Plate 134	“Riverside Park – Baltimore”, no. 339
	Plate 135	“Baltimore Waterfront from Riverside Park”, no. 342

- Plate 136 “Race Track Characters” (black & white ink drawing on one Side/watercolor on reverse), 1942
- Plate 137 “Head of Christ”, watercolor, 1942
- Plate 138 Reproduction of Sopher watercolor of Shot Tower and Surrounding neighborhood

Processed by: Anita Carrico, November 2006