

A3380

MICROFILM COPIES OF REPORTS FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN  
AND EUROPEAN THEATERS OF OPERATIONS RECEIVED FROM  
THE ALLIED MILITARY GOVERNMENT,  
1943–1946

National Archives and Records Administration  
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Microfilms include reproductions of reports, lists, and card files received from Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives officers in the European and Mediterranean Theaters of Operations.

“These records are part of the Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, Record Group (RG)239.”—Introd.

1. Allied Military Government. Division of Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives – Archives – Microform catalogs. 2. American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas – Archives – Microform catalogs. 3. World War, 1939–1945 – Confiscations and contributions – Europe – Archival resources. 4. World War, 1939–1945 – Destruction and pillage – Europe – Archival resources. 5. Cultural property – Protection – Europe – Archival resources. I. Title.

## INTRODUCTION

On the 3 rolls of this microfilm publication, A3380, are reproduced reports, lists, and card files that consist of selected pages of reports received from Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) officers in the European and Mediterranean Theaters of Operations; information on private art collections; and extracts of card files related to war damage, art looting, and auctions. These records are part of Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, Record Group (RG) 239.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission's textual and photographic records have been described and reproduced as National Archives Microfilm Publication M1944, *Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (the Roberts Commission), 1943–1946*. That publication contains all of the Roberts Commission's records except for two series that the Commission maintained in microfilm format, and that have been published as Microfilm Publications A3380, described herein, and A3383, *Card File of Japanese Works, Collections, Sites, and Installations Requiring Protection, 1946*.<sup>2</sup>

## BACKGROUND

The American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, also known as the Roberts Commission, was established on August 20, 1943, and abolished on June 30, 1946. The Commission worked with the U.S. military, museum officials, art historians, and international commissions to protect European art, monuments, institutions, and records of cultural value from war-related damage or theft. In addition, the Commission aided in the restitution of public and private property appropriated by the Nazis and their German collaborators.

The idea of establishing the Roberts Commission grew out of discussions among American educators and museum officials about the potentially dangerous impact of the European war on historic works of art and artifacts. In the fall of 1942, the American Defense–Harvard Group, established by a group of Harvard University faculty two years earlier, began working with the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to devise plans for protecting cultural property in areas that would soon be occupied by Allied military forces. Representatives of these groups plus officials of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art approached Supreme Court Chief Justice Harlan F. Stone, who was also a National Gallery of

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<sup>1</sup> Originally called the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe, the term “War Areas” was substituted for “Europe” on April 27, 1944, as a result of requests from the Navy Department that the Commission expand its scope to include the Far East.

<sup>2</sup> These series were identified by the National Archives in the Master Location Register as A1, Entries 93 and 72, respectively.

Art board member, with a proposal for a Federal commission that would protect and restitute Nazi-looted art. They also contacted military officials to enlist their support.

After discussing the matter with Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Chief Justice Stone wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in December 1942 to solicit his support. By June, the School of Military Government was training special officers in how to locate and protect works of artistic and historic significance in war zones. The Commission was established later that summer under the chairmanship of Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts. To facilitate contact with the Departments of War and State, its headquarters was located in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

The Roberts Commission cooperated with the U.S. Army in protecting cultural treasures, gathering information about damage to works of art and historic sites, compiling data on cultural property appropriated by the Axis Powers, and implementing restitution procedures. The Commission was instrumental in the War Department's establishment of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Section and recommended armed forces personnel to serve in it. Working through the American Defense-Harvard Group and the ACLS Committee for the Protection of Cultural Treasures in War Areas, the Commission supplied the Army with over 700 maps of important cultural centers in Allied- and enemy-occupied countries in Europe and the Far East. Artistic and historic monuments were identified on the maps and described on accompanying lists. The Commission prepared and distributed additional lists and handbooks to MFAA field officers to aid them in preparing official lists of sites to be protected; gave lectures to Civil Affairs officers on the care and preservation of art objects, monuments, and records; and made information from the MFAA field reports available to Government agencies and scholars. After the war, the Commission identified civilians to continue the work begun by the MFAA program.

The Roberts Commission worked with other national and Allied commissions and with the State Department in collecting information and developing policies related to cultural property restitution. It also played a major role in efforts of the Office of Military Government, U.S. Zone (Germany) [OMGUS] to recover and restitute Nazi-confiscated works of art. The Office of Strategic Services' (OSS) Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU) relied on the Commission's expertise as well. The Commission recommended fine arts professionals to staff the unit, and its files served as an important resource for investigating enemy personnel suspected of involvement in art looting. In turn, the ALIU furnished the Roberts Commission with information on works of art missing from German-occupied countries.

When the Commission's activities came to a close in June 1946, its work was continued through the Occupied Areas Division of the State Department's Office of International and Cultural Affairs. The Roberts Commission's records were transferred to the custody of the National Archives at the time of the Commission's abolishment in 1946.

## RECORDS DESCRIPTION

The original 23 rolls in this series were filmed for reference purposes by the Roberts Commission and may contain as few as five frames on a roll. For convenience, the frames from those rolls were spliced together into 3 rolls in this publication.

Roll 1 and part of roll 2 contain selected pages extracted from the first 134 Allied Military Government (AMG) reports produced between September 1943 and June 1945. They originally were duplicated on 10 rolls of 35 mm microfilm as the first step toward creating several index-card files between March and June 1945. From the microfilm negatives, over 2,400 enlarged photographic prints were produced, clipped apart, and pasted onto 4- by 6-inch index cards. The resulting card files, known as the Geographical Working Files, 1943–1945, were organized alphabetically by country and are available on Microfilm Publication M1944, rolls 109–128. A description of the system used for extracting and filing data from the AMG reports can be found in the Commission's final report, *Report of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946, pp. 45–46). The AMG reports appear in full within the series MFAA Field Reports, 1943–1946, which is available on microfilm publication M1944, rolls 62–81. An index to the AMG reports is available on M1944, roll 81.

The remaining part of roll 2 and part of roll 3 (old rolls 11–20) contain data collected on index cards such as proposals for protecting damaged cultural institutions, information of damaged cities or institutions, art auctions, and the names of European art specialists. This information was extracted from the Geographical Working Files, 1943–1945, and the Card File on European Personnel, 1943–1945, available on M1944, rolls 109–128, and roll 154, respectively. Roll 3 (old rolls 21–22) also contains lists of private art collections in Belgium and France, arranged alphabetically by surname of the collection's owner. Lastly, roll 3 (old roll 23) includes six inventories in German. The first three contain inventories or lists of the Nathaniel von Rothschild collection in Vienna, the Alphons Rothschild collection, and the Heeresmuseum für Kunst und Industrie. The other three are unidentified.

## RELATED RECORDS AND PUBLICATIONS

### National Archives Microfilm Publications

M1782, *OSS Art Looting Investigation Unit Reports, 1945–46* (1 roll)

This publication consists of the Art Looting Investigation Unit's Detailed Interrogation Reports, Consolidated Interrogation Reports, and Final Report, all of which appear in full within the Roberts Commission's records. They also can be found on rolls 94–95 of National Archives Microfilm Publication M1944 (cited below).

M1944, *Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (the Roberts Commission), 1943–1946* (187 rolls)

A3383, *Card File of Japanese Works, Collections, Sites, and Installations Requiring Protection, 1946* (9 rolls)

### **National Archives Publications**

A description for Record Group 239 is located in the *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States, Volume II, Record Groups 171–515*, compiled by Robert B. Matchette et. al. (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1995).

Further information about RG 239 and other National Archives holdings related to the looting, identification, recovery, and disposition of cultural property during and after World War II can be found in *Holocaust-Era Assets: A Finding Aid to Records at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland*, compiled by Greg Bradsher (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1999).

Additional information concerning the Holocaust may be located on our web site at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov).

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