

# CRANBROOK

ARCHIVES

## **Arthur Nevill Kirk, 1881-1958**

Papers, 1926-1967

.5 linear ft.

- Acquisition Number: 2002-15
- Acquisition: The collection was donated to the Cranbrook Archives in two lots. In 1970, Huldah Creaser donated the lantern slides and the photo album. In August 1985, the Archives of American Art in Detroit donated the correspondence, biographical information and enameling recipes.
- Access: Access to the collection is unrestricted.
- Copyright: Copyright to this collection is held by the Cranbrook Educational Community.
- Preferred Citation: Arthur Nevill Kirk Papers, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.
- Photographs: In Photograph Special File, and the Lantern Slides are stored with the Glass Plate Negative Collection.
- Processing: The collection was inventoried in September 1989 by Gregg Trendowski, and processed by Leslie S. Edwards in November 2002.



## History

Arthur Nevill Kirk was born 20 Jul 1881 in Lewes, Sussex, England. In 1915-16, he served in the British Army in the Queen Victoria's Rifles. Kirk attended the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London where he studied traditional craftsmanship from 1916-1920, and after graduation, taught for seven years as a metalsmith instructor. In 1920, Kirk married Vera Marion Alexis Davy, who had also studied metal work at the Central School of Arts & Crafts.

From 1924-1927, he also served as Director of the Chalice well Crafts School in Glastonbury (Somerset, England) held in connection with the Glastonbury Festival. He was a member of the Arts and Crafts Society in London and the Royal Society of Miniature Painters. Kirk exhibited his works in England and New Zealand, and in 1925 was awarded the gold medal for metal work at the Paris Exhibition of Decorative Art.

In the fall of 1926, George Booth visited Kirk at his studio in Hampstead, England and persuaded him to conclude his ecclesiastical work in England and come to the United States to instruct at the Detroit Society for Arts and Crafts. In addition, Kirk would work part-time designing ecclesiastical pieces for Christ Church Cranbrook. In Sept 1927, Kirk arrived at Cranbrook, organizing the metalsmithing shop and beginning his work on ceremonial objects for Christ Church Cranbrook. Kirk also taught at Cranbrook School 1927-1929, and in 1929 was appointed director for the metals shop at Cranbrook Academy of Art. His wife, Vera, and daughter, Marion, joined him at Cranbrook in 1928.

On 1 Oct 1930, the Cranbrook Foundation drew up a "plan of operation" for the Silver Department at Cranbrook. Kirk was to receive \$200 per month to assist him in establishing his department independently. He was to purchase all silver and supplies with his own funds, and any staff he chose to employ would be paid by him, not the Foundation. Kirk was also responsible for insurance for the staff, as well as fire and theft insurance for the department. In return, Kirk and his family had free use of a house in the Faculty Group, as well as a studio workshop. He was free to take commissions and produce and sell work on his own. For any work he produced for the Foundation, Kirk would be paid cost plus 20%. In addition, Kirk was encouraged to accept up to six students during fixed hours, including Saturday mornings. Any income from tuition was his, although all fees had to be approved by the Foundation, and 10% paid to the Foundation as a "registration fee."

By 1933, the Depression forced the Cranbrook Foundation to close many of the craft shops, and the silver department was one of them. The Kirks were devastated as they had sold all their belongings to relocate to the United States, and were financially unable to move again. From 1934-1937, Kirk worked at the Henry Ford Artisan Studio in Highland Park, accepting commissions for work, primarily from churches in the eastern United States. He also offered classes in jewelry, enameling and silversmithing. By 1939, Kirk was teaching classes in metalwork and enameling at the Art Department at Wayne University, a position which he held until 1947.

Arthur Nevill Kirk passed away 7 Dec 1958 in Bloomfield, Michigan after a long illness. His work can be seen at Christ Church Cranbrook, St. Paul's Cathedral in Detroit, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Washington Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and the Covington Cathedral in Lexington, Kentucky.

### **Scope and Content of Collection**

The collection consists of one photo album containing 60 black and white photographs (all identified) of the work of Kirk. Also included is a collection of lantern slides, and several loose photographs.

There is one folder of manuscript material which includes a biography of Kirk written in 1926 for an article in *Town and Country News*, correspondence between Vera Kirk and Huldah Creaser, an inventory and price list (undated) and several recipes for enamels. Due to the size of the collection, the folder has been housed with the Photo album and stored in the Archives' vault.

### **Related Collections**

- George Gough Booth Papers, 1981-01
- Margaret Biggar Scrapbooks, 1991-27
- Cranbrook Foundation Records RG:I Office Files, 1981-05
- Oral History Interview: Tape 18 - Marion (Kirk) Jones