

SFMOMA Research Library
151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

**Finding Aid to the San Francisco Museum of Art, Office of the Director
Records, 1959-1965**

Collection Number: ARCH.ADM.004

Funding for the processing of this collection was provided by the Getty
Foundation.



The Getty Foundation

Finding Aid written by: Dayna Holz

Date Completed: April 2008

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COLLECTION SUMMARY

Collection Title

San Francisco Museum of Art, Office of the Director records, 1959-1965

Collection number

ARCH.ADM.004

Creator

San Francisco Museum of Art

Extent

9.2 linear feet (9 cartons, 1 oversize box)

Repository

SFMOMA Library & Archives
151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Abstract

The San Francisco Museum of Art Office of the Director Records contain administrative records from the Museum generated between 1959 and 1965, corresponding generally with the 1958-1965 tenure of its second director, George Culler. Highlights of Culler's years at the Museum include the expansion and formal establishment of the Education Department, a graphic design program for publications, and an exploration of publicity through television and radio programs. Records are divided by calendar year and arranged alphabetically within each year.

Language

Records are primarily in English.

Physical location

Collection is housed in the SFMOMA Archives.

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS

Access and use restrictions

Collection is available for use. Some materials are restricted for confidentiality or condition. Contact SFMOMA Archives.

Publication information

All requests for permission to publish should be directed to the SFMOMA Archivist.

Preferred citation

[Identification of item], [box year and folder title], Office of the Director, 1959-1965, Administrative Records, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Access points

Topical Subjects

Art appreciation—Study and teaching—California—San Francisco
Art appreciation—Study and teaching (Elementary)—Activity programs—California—San Francisco
Art, Modern—20th century—Exhibitions
Art museum curators
Art museum directors
Art museums and community—California—San Francisco
Art museums—Collection management—California—San Francisco
Art museums—Educational aspects
Art museums—Employees
Art museums—Exhibitions
Art museums—Public relations—California—San Francisco
Art rental and lending services—California—San Francisco
Museum buildings—California—San Francisco

Personal and Corporate Names

San Francisco Museum of Art
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
San Francisco Museum of Art—Archives
San Francisco Museum of Art—Board of Trustees
San Francisco Museum of Art—History—Sources
San Francisco Museum of Art—Records and correspondence
War Memorial Veterans Building (San Francisco, Calif.)

Culler, George

Related materials

SFMOMA Archives Office of the Director Records, 1935-1958
SFMOMA Archives Office of the Director Records, 1966-1972
SFMOMA Archives Education Department Records, 1961-1966
SFMOMA Archives Exhibition Records
SFMOMA Archives Photographs Collection
SFMOMA Archives Women's Board Records

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition

Institutional records generated by SFMA or collected by SFMA staff in the performance of work duties.

Level of description

Records are described at the carton level. Some records are described at the folder or item level.

Processed by

Dayna Holz, 2007-2008.

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

While Grace McCann Morley continued as the officially named Director of the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMA) until December 31, 1960, George Culler was hired as Associate Director in 1958 and functioned as the Museum's director until 1965. Previously Director of Museum Education at The Art Institute of Chicago, Culler's background was as an artist and an educator. His seven years at the SFMA represent a time of transition and reorganization, where the Museum and the Board of Trustees struggled to define its objectives and organizational structure after Morley's departure, the Museum's forceful leader of twenty-three years.

George Delbert Culler, born February 27, 1915, was a painter and printmaker who found his way to museum work via art education. After several teaching jobs, Culler started working in the Education Department of the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1946. By 1949, he was Director of the Akron Art Institute, and in 1955 went to work at the Art Institute of Chicago. After an exhaustive search to find a replacement for Morley, the SFMA's Board of Trustees invited Culler to head the Museum, acting as Director for over two years before receiving the title upon Morley's official retirement.

Though education had been an active part of the Museum's programming since its opening in 1935, Culler immediately set to work upon his arrival to formalize and expand the department. One of the significant and lasting contributions Culler made to the Museum was the establishment of the Education Department. Much in the same way the 1937 Carnegie Grant helped to launch educational initiatives in the early days of the Museum, Culler secured a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation in 1961 that provided the seed money to formally create the Education Department. The Rosenberg Foundation grant, totaling \$51,000 over three years, was used specifically to establish a Children's Education Department, which included a variety of experimental activities and expansion of the existing Museum educational activities. During the years of the Rosenberg grant, and continuing beyond the funded period, the Museum held children's art classes, loaned artworks to schools via the Rental Gallery in Schools Program, held screenings of films for children, offered frequent tours to school groups, sent staff to lecture in schools through an extension program, and held training sessions for educators on how to more effectively teach art to children.

To specifically address the need to support local contemporary artists, Culler and various Board of Trustees members formed what came to be known as the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art (SECA) in 1961. This "collector's club" (as it was originally referred to) for men served to introduce artists to collectors, where a Selection Committee chose works for exhibition in the Museum with the hope that local young talent would benefit from the exposure, ultimately supporting the development of contemporary art in the Bay Area. Another significant program established during Culler's tenure, the SECA program still exists today, though with a larger and more diverse membership.

As a former professional illustrator, Culler had an interest in design, and instituted a program to support local artists and designers through commissions for Museum publications. Conceived of in 1959 and implemented in 1960, the Museum embarked on an active graphic design initiative which introduced a more updated and contemporary look to Museum publications and mailings. Guest-designers were used for each of the monthly calendars, considered a "new exhibition program of graphic design in use." A Graphic Design Group was formed in 1960, led by local graphic artist and the Museum's on-call designer Gene Tepper. Except for occasional letters of complaint about the problems of hanging the odd-sized calendars on bulletin boards, the program was popular and radically changed the appearance of all Museum publications.

Culler was an active scholar and was frequently asked to lecture, serve on juries, and write articles. For periods during his time in San Francisco, he hosted a weekly television series and a regular radio broadcast. Respected within the design field, Culler acted as Program Chairman in 1960 for

the progressive International Design Conference in Aspen. Respected within the museum education field, Culler conducted a ten-day seminar on Museum Education Methods for the American Association of Museums in 1963. Ultimately, his commitment to education led him back to academia, and Culler left the Museum in early June 1965 for a position at the Philadelphia College of Art.

Bridging the more than one-year gap between Culler and his successor Gerald Nordland was Acting Director Clifford Peterson. Peterson, longtime Controller of the Museum, functioned largely as a manager of operations during his term as Acting Director, while the Board of Trustees coordinated the curatorial and administrative responsibilities. As the Museum's second Director, George Culler served to transition the SFMA from what was essentially Grace Morley's museum into an institution more recognizable as related to today's SFMOMA, seeding programs along the way that helped to establish the Museum as a force in education, design, and collecting.

ARRANGEMENT NOTE

Arrangement is relatively consistent with arrangement of the *Office of the Director Records, 1935-1958*: divided by calendar year and arranged alphabetically within each year. The majority of records within each folder are arranged in reverse-chronological order. Outgoing Correspondence is filed at the end of the alphabetical series and arranged chronologically.

The consistency in filing through the Museum's early years is due largely to the secretarial practices of Administrator Katherine Baker. Baker left the Museum in 1963 and the filing system changed dramatically. Records from 1964 and 1965, after the filing system changed, are arranged together but with the same alphabetical sequence of files as in previous years.

PROCESSING NOTE

The Office of the Director Records, 1959-1965 collection was minimally processed, at a carton-level, though select parts of the collection were more thoroughly processed at a folder-level. Though the records were minimally processed and only modest preservation treatments were applied, paper clips and two-prong fasteners were removed. Staples were removed only when they were excessively corroded, when several items had been stapled together multiple times causing significant added bulk, or to access individual items in need of interleaving.

Some records of the governing body (the Board of Trustees and the Women's Board) were separated from the administrative records. Other materials related to the Boards were retained with the administrative records, including correspondence with Board members, events organized by the Boards, and other records concerned more with the administration of the Museum and less with the administration of the Board. Records related to the Society for the Encouragement of Art (SECA) were separated; in conjunction with other SECA records, the files comprise their own collection.

In addition to the general processing guidelines applied to the collection of records from the Office of the Director, 1959-1965, variations occurred within several of the years that affected processing and consistency within the collection, as noted below:

1959

Folder title and content changes from Administrative Records of previous years

- "Museum Administration: Correspondence – Inquiries" contains materials previously found in "Material Available/Refused" and "Museum Administration: Correspondence – General."
- "General: A-Z" consists of two folders of alphabetically filed correspondence from museums, companies, donors, etc.
- "Educational Programs: Education" contains largely the same material previously filed as "Universities" and "Schools and Colleges."
- "Artists' Correspondence" – This group of documents was already assembled in a file labeled "Artists – Letter, Visitors." Previous years' "Artists' Correspondence" files had been collected from other files in the records.
- "Contributions and Gifts" was assembled from various smaller files, all relating to donations to the Museum.

1960

"Artists' Correspondence" – this was an existing folder titled "Artists" and appears to be correspondence with aspiring artists, in contrast with the artificially assembled "Artists' Correspondence" in previous years.

The "Associations" file was previously called Arts Groups and/or Institutions and includes materials from the American Institute of Architects, Artists Equity Association, and the Western Association of Art Museums.

1961

Outgoing Correspondence is missing. Files are thin, but relatively complete.

1962

Outgoing Correspondence and Culler files are missing. All files related to the Board of Trustees and Women's Board are missing. Files are thin but otherwise relatively complete.

A new filing system for correspondence emerged in 1962 called “Miscellaneous.” This appears to be similar in content to Inquiries and General correspondence used in previous years, and is filed as “Museum Administration: Correspondence – Miscellaneous.”

1963

Outgoing Correspondence from January and February is missing; March-December appears intermittently thin, but it’s unclear whether there is correspondence missing or if it never existed. Most of the Culler files are missing, except for Activities and General (Correspondence).

1964-1965

The 1964-1965 records were processed together because of the overlap in document dates for the majority of the records. Some of the materials, such as Outgoing Correspondence and Applicants, were neatly divided by year, but the bulk of the Culler and Museum Administration records spanned two or more years. Some folders range in date from 1958, when Culler started at the Museum, to 1965, when he left. There appears to have been a “closing” of his files upon his departure, some of which looked as if they had been used during his entire seven year tenure.

With Katherine Baker’s departure in 1963, the filing system changed radically. A numbering system was used to mark files, presumably to file like materials together rather than alphabetically. There was no index to the numbering system in the records, but some numbering was deciphered based on the obvious contents of the folders. Where file titles were written in the top left or right corners of documents in previous years, file numbers were written in the top right corner starting in 1964. A list of file numbers and file titles is included in the *Office of the Director Records, 1966-1972*.

In addition to the reorganization of files, many of the files that had been maintained in previous years were not found – whether they were destroyed or are missing is unknown. Some files not in the 1964-1965 records include “Material Available/Refused,” “Museums,” “Galleries,” “Staff,” “Museum Administration: Correspondence,” “Publicity,” “Reproductions,” and others.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The *Office of the Director Records, 1959-1965* collection consists of administrative records from the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMA) created during the tenure of the Museum's second director George Culler. Materials include incoming and outgoing correspondence, financial records, reports, and employment applications. Records document administrative activities related to Museum operations and maintenance, educational programming, publicity, events, fundraising and membership, and Culler's personal and professional activities.

The records date from Culler's tenure, but do not contain all the records generated while he was Director. Records from his first few months at the Museum in 1958 are found in *Office of the Director Records, 1935-1958*. Additional records generated during Culler's tenure are found in *Office of the Director Records, 1966-1972* in files whose date ranges precede Gerald Nordland's 1966 start date as Director.

Each year's worth of records were processed separately, except for 1964 and 1965 which were processed together. Summaries of each year's records are included below, highlighting some of the materials of interest, and relevant staffing changes and events.

1959

1.2 cartons (1.5 linear feet)

Though George Culler had been the Associate Director since August 1958, 1959 marks his first full year as the acting director of the Museum. Early in the year, Culler proposed changes to the Board of Trustees for modifying the exhibition schedule and priorities, partially in an attempt to balance the budget. Significant 1959 staffing changes include the departure of John Baxter, Curator of Education, to "devote his time to his own sculpture and independent teaching."

In addition to regular museum activities, the SFMA acted as an art collection center for submissions to the Ford Foundation Program for Visual Artists. Region 9 (Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington) artists submitted works at the Museum for one of the ten \$10,000 awards from the Ford Foundation to "enable them to concentrate wholly upon their creative work."

The Museum was also involved in the Pacific Festival, a weeklong (September 18-27) city-wide celebration to "focus attention on the growth and development of the cities, states and nations of the Pacific Ocean area." The Museum put together an exhibition of work by Asian artists and Western artists whose work had an Asian influence.

Culler additionally made efforts to work with the San Francisco Film Society (not the same Film Society that now presents the San Francisco International Film Festival) to reactivate the Art in Cinema film program. There had been interest in starting a new series under the same name since founder Frank Stauffacher had died in 1955.

1960

1.1 cartons (1.4 linear feet)

Culler's own professional and educational activities increased in 1960, after having devoted over a year to transitioning the Museum from Morley's tenure to the new exhibition and financial routines. The Board of Trustees, and its newly elected President Jaquelin Hume, also started taking a more active role in the direction of the Museum and its exhibition schedule. Culler made several reports to the Board on the state of the Museum and his vision for its growth and direction, found in the

“Board of Trustees: Correspondence and Reports” and “Museum Administration: Correspondence – Internal” files.

The transcript of a talk Culler gave at the Western Arts Conference in Dallas entitled “The Dimensions of Visual Communications” is included in the “Culler, GD: Activities” folder. Transcripts and other correspondence related to a live eight-part television series shown on KQED, written by and starring Culler discussing American art and artists, can be found in the “Publicity: Television” file.

Culler acted as the Program Chairman for the 1960 International Design Conference in Aspen, responsible for securing speakers and setting the conference’s program. From June 19-25, designers, architects, artists, philosophers, economists, psychologists, and representatives from corporations, government and cultural foundations, gathered to discuss the year’s topic: “The Corporation and the Designer.” Records include documentation of Culler’s role as a member of the Executive Committee, correspondence with speakers and potential speakers, and transcripts of some of the talks. The materials offer a snapshot of trends and personalities in design in 1960, and are arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

Included in the Membership files are correspondence and final reports related to a Coro Foundation sponsored study of Community Group Participation in Museum Membership and Activities.

1961

0.9 cartons (1.1 linear feet)

Culler officially assumed the title of Director of the Museum on January 1, 1961, over two years after taking over the role from Morley. In this capacity, he made several trips during the year to the East and Midwest, attending and speaking at professional conferences. During his absences, Culler grew to rely more heavily on curators John Humphrey and Anneliese Hoyer.

The Publicity files are an anomaly within the collection, and consist of correspondence, press releases, announcements, and lists related to the Museum’s publicity program. The files all appear to have been created by recently hired Publicity Director Barbara Atkisson.

1962

0.8 cartons (1.0 linear foot)

Along with its first Membership Drive since 1948, the Museum expanded its hours in 1962 to Tuesday-Friday 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Though not as directly involved in the Century 21 Exposition in Seattle as in previous world’s fairs, the SFMA loaned artworks and Culler acted in an advisory capacity. The Century 21 Exposition records document the selection of artworks for the fine arts section of the fair from 1960 through 1962.

The “Museum Administration: Insurance Reports, 1954-1962” file consists of copies of insurance reports maintained by Katherine Baker. The “Foundation Grants: Ford Foundation – Purchase of Works by American Artists” file contains materials related to the Ford Foundation-funded purchases from the San Francisco Art Institute annuals.

1963

1.1 cartons (1.4 linear feet)

Culler was asked to organize a ten-day Seminar on Museum Education Methods and Techniques for a group of foreign museum professionals. The Seminar, held at the SFMA, was part of a national tour for fifteen foreign museum professionals organized by the American Association of Museums, ending in Seattle at the AAM's 58th Annual Meeting. Records related to the Seminar include correspondence, brief biographies of the tour participants, and detailed schedules of the seminar and corresponding local tours of Bay Area arts organizations.

Though the Museum had been organizing international art-trips for a few years, the Women's Board took on the task in 1963 by arranging a three-week trip to Japan, advertised to members with the slogan "It's not just where you travel, but how, and with whom." The Women's Board organized "Know Your Museum Tours" for new Board members to give an overview of the Museum and how it functions; the "Know Your Museum" file contains interesting descriptions of Museum departments and staff duties.

1964-1965

2.2 cartons, 1 oversize box (2.8 linear feet)

The records from 1964-1965 document the final stages of Culler's tenure as Director. Culler left the Museum in early June 1965 for a position at the Philadelphia College of Art, where he would enjoy work with a more educational focus. Upon Culler's departure, and until the next Director, Gerald Nordland, started in the summer of 1966, Clifford Peterson assumed the role of Acting Director. Peterson, longtime Controller of the Museum, functioned largely as a manager of operations during his term as Acting Director, while the Board of Trustees coordinated the curatorial and administrative responsibilities.

During his time in San Francisco, Culler had consistently been active on various juries of art competitions. In 1963 he got involved with the Mead Corporation (of later Trapper-Keeper fame) and their "Painting of the Year" award, where a Mead-invited jury selected one painting per year, making high-quality reproductions and mailing them to Mead's "friends throughout the world." The Painting of the Year award expanded in 1964 to a special "Art Across America" competition, where four regional juries selected artworks for exhibition. The best of the regional winners were then invited (by lone-judge Peter Selz of the Museum of Modern Art in New York) to a national exhibition of the works. Mead also pledged \$25,000 towards purchases of artworks from competition winners. The Museum hosted the 1964/1965 Western Regional Art Across America competition, to which 698 works were submitted and 58 chosen by the jury for exhibition.

The Mead competition records ("Culler, GD: Activities – Mead Packaging") reflect Culler's role as juror of the 1963 Painting of the Year, as juror of the 1964/1965 regional Art Across America competition, and the Museum's role as host to the competition. Records related to the Art Across America exhibition can be found in *Exhibition Records, 1935-ongoing*.

Culler was professionally active, as was his predecessor Grace Morley, in the Western Association of Art Museums (WAAM), acting as President of the organization during 1963-1964. The WAAM files document the annual meeting held in San Francisco in 1964, hosted by San Francisco museums.

The 1964-1965 records also include correspondence with curator Katherine Kuh. Kuh, an old friend of Culler's from the Art Institute of Chicago, was hired as a curatorial consultant in 1962 and advised Culler and the Board of Trustees on important artworks for purchase and exhibition. For earlier correspondence between Culler and Kuh, see the 1960 file "Museum Administration: Correspondence – Internal" and the 1959 file "Culler: New York Trip."

The "Museum Administration: Building – City and County of San Francisco" file contains correspondence about and descriptions of the proposed expansion of the Museum within the

Veterans Building. Records in the file reference the 1961 Moses Lasky report “History of the San Francisco Museum of Art and analysis of its relation to the City and County of San Francisco” which can be found in the library collection (N 740.5 .L37 1961).

Records related to the establishment of the Education Department can be found in the “Foundation Grants: Rosenberg Foundation” files, as well as the 1963 file “Foundation Grants: Rosenberg Foundation - Annual Report.”

The “Foundation Grants: Publication Program - Howard Jacobs” file contains materials about a publication series conceived of by Howard Jacobs. Jacobs proposed that a publications program be funded – in part by foundation grant support and in part by Museum fundraising and membership dues – that would include monographs about artists and expand the Museum’s publication of catalogs, additionally establishing a new position of Director of Publications.

CONTAINER LIST

RECORDS FROM 1959 (Cartons 1, 8)

Container	Folder	Contents
Carton 1	1	Accessions Committee
Carton 1	1	Acquisitions Fund
Carton 1	2	Air France Tour - Claire Falkenstein [Art Today in France]
Carton 1	3	American Federation of Arts
Carton 1	4-5	Applicants
Carton 1	6	Art in Cinema
Carton 1	7	Artists' Correspondence
Carton 1	8	Board of Trustees: Correspondence - Haas, Elise
Carton 1	8	Board of Trustees: Correspondence - Russell, Helen Crocker
Carton 1	9	Board of Trustees: Reports and General Info from GD Culler
Carton 1	10	Contributions and Gifts: Ackerman, Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd - Lloyd Ackerman, Jr. Fund
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Carton 1	12	Culler, GD: Articles and Lectures
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Carton 1	14	Culler, GD: Invitations
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Carton 1	19	Educational Programs: Activities Cancelled After Scheduled
Carton 1	19	Educational Programs: Activities Refused
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Carton 1	21	Educational Programs: Education
Carton 1	21	Educational Programs: Flower Arranging Course
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Carton 1	25	Galleries
Carton 1	26-27	General: A-Z
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Container	Folder	Contents
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Carton 1	30	Material Available and Refused
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Carton 1	32	Museum Administration: Attendance Reports
Carton 1	33	Museum Administration: Bookshop
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Carton 1	40	Museums
Carton 1	41	National Committee to Liberalize the Tariff Laws for Art
Carton 1	42	Pacific Festival
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Carton 1	47	Reproductions: Slides
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Carton 1	50	Staff: Baxter, John
Carton 1	51	Staff: Humphrey, John
Carton 1	52	Staff: Memos
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Carton 1	54	Visitors
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Carton 8	3	Outgoing Correspondence, October 1959
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Carton 8	5	Outgoing Correspondence, August 1959
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RECORDS FROM 1960 (Cartons 2, 8)

Container	Folder	Contents
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Container	Folder	Contents
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Carton 2	4	Artists' Correspondence
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Carton 2	7	Collector's Club, 1957-1960
Carton 2	8	Contributions and Gifts: Financial Contributions, 1959-1960
Carton 2	8	Contributions and Gifts: Miscellaneous Gifts
Carton 2	9	Culler, GD: Activities
Carton 2	10	Culler, GD: Correspondence
Carton 2	11	Culler, GD: Invitations
Carton 2	12	Culler, GD: Personal
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Carton 2	13	Culler, GD: Trips
Carton 2	14	Culler, GD: Writings
Carton 2	15	Educational Programs: Activities
Carton 2	16	Educational Programs: Activities Available
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Carton 2	20	Galleries
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Carton 2	29	Membership
Carton 2	29	Membership: Club Membership
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Container	Folder	Contents
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Carton 8	20	Outgoing Correspondence, March 1960
Carton 8	21	Outgoing Correspondence, February 1960
Carton 8	22	Outgoing Correspondence, January 1960

RECORDS FROM 1961 (Carton 3)

Carton 3	1	Art in Cinema
Carton 3	2	Artists' Correspondence
Carton 3	3	Board of Trustees: Correspondence, 1960-1961
Carton 3	4	Contributions and Gifts: Financial Contributions
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Carton 3	10	Culler, GD: Personal
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Carton 3	11	Culler, GD: Trip to Germany
Carton 3	12	Culler, GD: Trips
Carton 3	13	Educational Programs: Activities
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Carton 3	14	Educational Programs: Activities Completed
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