The Frick Collection: A Case Study

An important collaborative agreement with the Helen Clay Frick Foundation, The Frick Collection, and the University of Pittsburgh has brought Frick family papers on deposit to New York. These, together with the Institutional Archives of The Frick Collection, illuminate how Henry Clay Frick was intent on forming a collection whose aesthetic worth would be appreciated well beyond the immediate family. Observing what others had done, at the Wallace Collection and elsewhere in Europe, Frick and his daughter Helen (always her collector-father’s alter ego) kept meticulous records of their travels abroad with the family and saw how a personal legacy could be melded by establishing a house museum. Following Mr. Frick’s death, the Trustees continued to acquire art as they also saw to radical changes in the physical plant of the newly minted Frick Collection. These included razing and rebuilding the Frick Art Reference Library, creating the Garden Court, Oval Room, Music Room, and East Gallery, and moving works such as François Boucher’s Art and Sciences series from the family rooms of the second floor to new galleries below. In 1977, the needs of a growing public led to the construction of a new wing and the 70th Street Garden, designed by Russell Page. Then, as will doubtless be true in the future, the goal was always to remain true to the ethos of the founder, thereby maintaining a connection with a collector of the past, even as we appreciate his character in a twenty-first-century context. -Inge Reist

The Frick Collection façade, c. 1936

The Garden Court, construction, The Frick Collection, 1913

The Garden Court, The Frick Collection

Gallery during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933

West Gallery, The Frick Collection

Library during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933

Library, The Frick Collection

Living Hall during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933

Living Hall, The Frick Collection

Dining Room during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933

Dining Room, The Frick Collection


Last Will and Testament of Henry Clay Frick. Article IV, Section 4, June, 1915.


Cover:

Construction of Frick mansion, 1913

The Frick Collection, façade c. 1936

The Frick Collection, West Gallery

Third Floor Panel

1 The Frick Collection façade, c. 1936
2 The Garden Court, construction, The Frick Collection, 1913
3 The Garden Court, The Frick Collection
4 Gallery during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933
5 West Gallery, The Frick Collection
6 Library during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933
7 Library, The Frick Collection
8 Living Hall during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933
9 Living Hall, The Frick Collection
10 Dining Room during renovation to museum, Henry Clay Frick Residence, 1933
11 Dining Room, The Frick Collection

Third Floor Case

Mr. Vanderbilt’s House and Collection, Boston, 1884. Frontispiece of volume 4: View in Picture-Gallery with Fifty-First Street Vestibule

Invoice, Cottier & Co. to H.C. Frick, 4 September 1906

Journal of Helen Clay Frick. Entries of 27 and 28 January 1909 describing the Wallace Collection and Westminster Abbey

Letter, H.C. Frick to Roger Fry, 31 July 1911


Loan Exhibition of Pictures from the Collection of Henry Clay Frick, 1910, held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston


Report, Knoedler & Co. to H.C. Frick confirming removal of paintings from Vanderbilt residence to 1 East 70 Street, 11 June 1914

Photograph – The Frick Collection West Gallery, pre-1935

Letter, Bradley Stoughton, secretary of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, to H.C. Frick, 17 November 1917, requesting permission to view art collection

Letter, Sara Ely Parsons, educator at the Ely School, Greenwich, Connecticut, to H.C. Frick, 11 April 1918, requesting permission to view art collection

Letter, Esther Keagey, teacher at Hunter College, New York, to H.C. Frick, 6 October 1919, requesting permission to view art collection


Last Will and Testament of Henry Clay Frick. Article IV, Section 4, June, 1915.


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As institutions that open a door to the private lives and thoughts of art collectors, house museums offer unique visual and intellectual experiences to their visitors. Most are universally adored, in part because of their intimate settings and non-didactic display of works of art, and, also in part, because they foster a vicarious experience of art collecting in a time gone by. Not all house museums are created equal, however, nor are they intended to be. Any patron of the Frick Art Reference Library who has examined its extensive holdings of catalogues and chronicles of house museums in America and Europe well knows the vast range of possibilities in defining the museum’s mission, its philosophy of display, and its fidelity to the founder’s time and taste. Now that the Frick Art Reference Library is formalizing its position as a Center for the History of Collecting in America, an examination of the role house museums have and will play in this growing field of study is invaluable.