



THE LEGACY

Exploring the history of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion

2020

GARRETT-JACOBS MANSION ENDOWMENT FUND, INC.

Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs, Her Art Collecting, and the BMA

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In 1904, the Great Baltimore Fire devastated large swaths of the city. From its ashes, however, emerged a physical and cultural renaissance. That renaissance was led by two groups, both linked to Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs. The first, The Engineers Club of Baltimore, formed to plan the reconstruction of the city's infrastructure. This organization—now called The Engineers Club—has been the devoted stewards of Mary Frick's former home since purchasing the mansion in 1962.

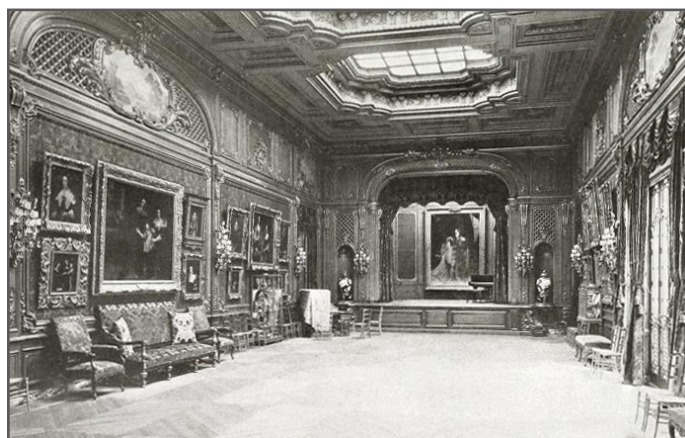
While The Engineers Club of Baltimore attended to the built environment, another post-fire group focused on renewing the cultural life of Baltimore. This commission, headed by Dr. A.R.L. Dohme, included Mrs. Henry Barton Jacobs (as Mary Frick was known after marrying Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs in 1902). This group was determined to create an art museum, which today is the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA). Mrs. Jacobs was instrumental in its planning, design, and funding.

The efforts of women were significant to the development of the BMA. In addition to Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs, benefactors included Bernice Adler, Sadie A. May, the Cone sisters, and Mary Elizabeth Garrett. The museum's first two directors, Florence Levy and Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, and early curators Gertrude Rosenthal and Brenda Richardson provided crucial leadership. Patron Virginia White helped launch the American wing. Also of note, which BMA curator Oliver Schnell observed, is that Mary Frick's collection included disproportionate number of women artists.

Ten years after the fire, the BMA was incorporated. In 1917, Johns Hopkins University promised the museum's planning committee a parcel of land next to Wyman Park for the structure. The collection itself was temporarily placed in the former home of Mary Elizabeth Garrett, Mrs. Jacobs' sister-in-law. In the meantime, the committee began its search for funding and an architect. Mrs. Jacobs was familiar with the work of John Russell Pope, the neo-classical architect who designed the Jacobs' cottage in Newport, R.I., and the most recent additions to their Mount Vernon Place mansion, and so the influential Mrs. Jacobs insisted on his selection (*Baltimore Sun*, 1.21.2007). The permanent museum, reflecting John Russell Pope's vision, opened on February 21, 1922.

A Passion for Art

Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs not only appreciated fine architecture—as demonstrated by the 30 years and \$2 million she spent transforming her own rowhouse into a mansion—but she also had an abiding passion for art. Her Mount Vernon Place



Artworks are displayed at the Pope-designed theater of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion. *The Architectural Record*, 1911.



Alexandre Cabanel. Mary Frick Garrett, later Mrs. Henry Barton Jacobs. c. 1885. *The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection*.

home was resplendent with tapestries, paintings, and art objects. She began collecting as early as 1889 when, while traveling abroad, she and first husband, Robert Garrett, purchased a “Nell Gwyn” portrait by Sir Peter Lely (Garrett Papers, Maryland Historical Society). In 1892, they celebrated the arrival of a Peter Paul Rubens painting for which they paid \$15,329.48 (*News American* 1.25.1892). She particularly admired French paintings, so in 1885 she commissioned the renowned French painter Alexandre Cabanel to paint her portrait. This painting now graces one of the galleries she donated to the BMA.

Even though she loved French art, she valued all art that suited her tastes. At the suggestion of Stanford White, the first of two architects who would renovate her mansion (the second being John Russell Pope), Mary Frick commissioned a frieze of children playing by American artist Thomas W. Dewing for \$2,900 (Garrett Papers, Maryland Historical Society). It hung in the drawing room until after the second stage of renovation, when she relocated it to her new Pope-designed theater (which also served as a ballroom), where she entertained guests with performances from artists

such as opera star Rosa Ponsell and displayed most of her paintings. Following Robert Garrett’s death in 1896, she relied primarily on three New York City gallery owners and dealers for purchasing advice: Eugene Fishoff, Theron Blakeslee, and Joseph Duveen of the Duveen Brothers. By 1914, she had accumulated enough paintings that she was prompted to transform the mansion’s unused stables into an art gallery.



Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin. *The Game of Knucklebones*. c. 1734. *The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection*.

Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs left her Mount Vernon Place home to her husband, Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs. After his death, an auction was held at the mansion to dispose of the hundreds of beautiful items Mary Frick had collected during her life. The portrait of Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, from the studio of Sir Anthony van Dyck, was sold to Jane Cook for \$700. Cook later donated it to the Maryland Historical Society. Philip B. Perlman, purchasing for the BMA and Walters Art Museum, paid \$440 for a 15th century folding screen portraying the Madonna and Child and a terra-cotta statue of Venus.

Help From an Expert

In 1915, Mrs. Jacobs contacted renowned art historian René Gimpel for help with certifying her collection. Her hope was to one day leave her collection to Baltimore City. Gimpel’s expert analysis led to a horrifying discovery: Many of her prized pieces were fakes.

In an era of replicas, painters skilled at copying the masters found they could dupe rich Americans into paying for authentic-looking copies. Paralyzed by this news about her collection, Mrs. Jacobs felt unable

to consider buying another painting for a year. World War I further delayed her investment in art. According to Gimpel’s memoir, *Diary of an Art Dealer* (Paris, 1963), during the war, Mrs. Jacobs chose to spend the money she would have spent on art to support the French people.

After the war she began correcting her collection and purchasing works through or suggested by Gimpel. Mrs. Jacobs liked to live with a painting before deciding to purchase it, so her choices reflected her careful thought and appreciation of each piece. Under Gimpel’s influence, she acquired some of the most spectacular works in her collection, including Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s “The Game of Knucklebones” (1734), Élisabeth



Portrait of René Gimpel, ca. 1914. René Gimpel papers, circa 1890-1966. *Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution*.

Vigée Le Brun's "Princess Anna Alexandrovna Galitzin" (1797), and Jean-Honoré Fragonard's "Rest on the Flight Into Egypt" (1777).

Plans for Collection Now Include the BMA

The 1929 economic crisis forced Mrs. Jacobs to curtail her spending; by 1934, she decided to, upon her death, donate her collection of paintings, tapestries, and other art objects to the BMA. This donation came with the stipulation that the works be exhibited in galleries located in a new museum wing to be designed by Pope. In



Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs (far right) at the opening of the Baltimore Museum of Art's Mary Jacobs Wing. *The Baltimore Sun* 5.8.1938.

Memorializing her in 1936, *The Baltimore Sun* wrote that "Mrs. Jacobs was an undisputed leader in the social, cultural and philanthropic side of Baltimore life." After the opening of the BMA's new wing in 1938, the paper reported that the city "has gained a new reason for pride and a new source of pleasure."

accordance to her wishes, Pope's gallery plans carefully considered the placement of each work of art and included an entire room intended for "The Blue Madonna," a 15th century painting Mrs. Jacobs purchased from Gimpel that she considered the star of her collection. It also featured an auditorium furnished with padded seats for 400. In 1938, the first Mary Jacobs Memorial Lecture was delivered there by Dr. George Edgell, director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (*The Baltimore Sun* 11.17.1939).

Both Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs and John Russell Pope died before the wing that would house her collection was completed, and the money to finish the project ran out. However, Baltimore Mayor Howard Wilkinson Jackson

was committed to the museum addition and asked citizens to approve funds to conclude the project. When approval was not forthcoming, Mayor Jackson saw an opportunity to secure funding from the federal government as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project (*The Baltimore Sun* 5.7.1938).

The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection opened in the new wing in 1938 with both Mayor Jackson and René Gimpel in attendance. Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs, now Mrs. Jacobs' widower and a BMA trustee, welcomed the many visitors and described her passion for art. In this gift, he said, "It was her hope that many in the city... would derive from [the works of art] the same pleasure she enjoyed." (*The Baltimore Sun* 5.7.1938).

Bernadette Low, Ph.D., is a member of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion Endowment Fund (GJMEF) Board of Trustees and Professor Emerita at Community College of Baltimore County, Dundalk.



Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun. Princess Anna Alexandrovna Galitzin. c. 1797. *The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection.*

The value of the Mary Jacobs collection at the time it was donated to the BMA was set at \$2 million.

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GARRETT FAMILY SITES IN MARYLAND

The Garrett-Jacobs Mansion, along with the institutions mentioned in this article, are not the only places touched by the legacy of the Garrett family and their relations. These Maryland sites were also influenced by the Garrett family:

■ **Garrett County**

The final Maryland county to be established, in 1872, it was named for the highly influential B&O Railroad president (and father of Robert Garrett) John Work Garrett. The county's Deer Park Hotel, built in 1873 by John Work Garrett, was a respite for wealthy Washington and Baltimore residents during sweltering summer months.

■ **Garrett Island (Cecil County)**

This island at the mouth of the Susquehanna River was purchased by the B&O Railroad in the 1880s for a rail bridge and named for John Work Garrett.

■ **Garrett Park (Montgomery County)**

A former B&O Railroad stop, this charming English village-styled town just north of Bethesda was named for Robert Garrett.

■ **Evergreen Museum and Library (Baltimore City)**

The family of Robert Garrett's brother, T. Harrison Garrett, lived in this elegant North Baltimore estate, which is now a museum operated by Johns Hopkins University.

■ **Bryn Mawr School (Baltimore City)**

Robert Garrett's sister, Mary Elizabeth Garrett, was a passionate proponent of women's education and one of the founders of this college-preparatory school for girls in North Baltimore, the first in the United States.

■ **Monocacy National Battlefield (Frederick County)**

John Work Garrett, and the B&O Railroad, played a major role during the Civil War's Battle of the Monocacy. His warnings to the Union of a Confederate attack, and his trains, helped keep Washington, D.C., in Union hands.

■ **B&O Railroad Museum (Baltimore City)**

The Garrett fortune was built on the success of the B&O Railroad. This not-to-miss museum in Southwest Baltimore is the birthplace of American railroading.

■ **Locust Point (Baltimore City)**

Under the leadership of John Work Garrett, the B&O Railroad partnered with a steamship company to bring German immigrants to the United States via Locust Point's Immigration Pier.

■ **Garrett State Forest (Garrett County)**

In 1906, brothers John and Robert Garrett gifted a 1,917 acres of undeveloped land to Maryland on the condition that the state create forest management policies. Thanks to those laws, millions of visitors since then have been able to enjoy these beautiful and inspiring natural resources.

■ **The Robert Garrett Sanitarium for Children (Mount Airy)**

Established in 1888 by Robert and Mary Frick Garrett, this institution offered free treatment and fresh air to Baltimore City children whose families could not afford medical care until its closing in 1922.

■ **The Robert Garrett Hospital (Baltimore City)**

During a trip to London in mid-1880s, Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs was inspired to create a free hospital for children, which she named in honor of her first husband, Robert Garrett.

■ **The Johns Hopkins Hospital (Baltimore City)**

Funds from the will of Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs continue to provide financial support for pediatric surgical programs of The Johns Hopkins University and The Johns Hopkins Hospital through the Robert Garrett Fund for the Surgical Treatment of Children.

STATE OF MARYLAND

