



# THE LEGACY

Exploring the history of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion

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GARRETT-JACOBS MANSION ENDOWMENT FUND, INC.

## Becoming Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs

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### The Frick Family and Victorian Era Values

Mary Sloan Frick was born in 1851 and grew up in a privileged position as one of the prominent Frick family of Baltimore. Mary's father, William Frederick Frick, descended from John Frick, an immigrant from Holland who helped establish Germantown, Pennsylvania. John's son, Peter Frick, settled in Baltimore, where his own son, William Frick, became an esteemed judge and community leader. William had several children, including William Frederick, Mary's father. Like his father, William Frederick studied law and graduated from Harvard Law School. Returning to Baltimore, he became one of the first four members of the Baltimore Bar.

Mary, appreciative of her heritage, also traced the ancestry of her mother, Ann Elizabeth Swan, to Sir George Yeardley, the first governor of Virginia, and General John Swan, a Scottish immigrant who served in the Revolutionary War and was promoted by General George Washington. After the war, Swan was honored with a parcel of land by a grateful nation. There he built an estate near Catonsville, Maryland, that would later be named Uplands. (William Frederick and Ann would gift Uplands to Mary and her first husband, Robert Garrett, upon their marriage.)

The Garretts never traveled overseas without their Saint Bernard dogs. However, at least once, they neglected to bring their dogs back home with them. Their dog caretaker in Italy, Giuseppe, once wrote to the Garretts months after they returned home from Italy, pleading with them to "please send for the dogs." Years later, feeling entitled to special consideration, Mary called the Baltimore police to come and find their two lost dogs. A member of the Baltimore police department found one dog and dutifully completed a 17-page report for his department.

The Frick family rooted themselves in the values of the Victorian era. Like other Victorians, they valued family and religion, and were committed to civic responsibility, generosity, and decorous behavior. Mary's father served as president of the Baltimore Public School System and contributed to the growth and success of the B&O Railroad as a director.

Her parents acted on their ideals of behavior and believed in the delineated roles of men and women. To that end, the Fricks employed tutors and a governess to educate Mary and her sister in music, art, literature, and handiwork. Social graces were emphasized: inviting guests to tea was a treasured tradition. Out of affection and respect for her parents, Mary modeled her values on theirs—values that she held her entire life.



Mary Frick Garrett Jacobs.



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

## The Garrett Family and Gilded Age Values

When Mary wed the influential and wealthy Robert Garrett in 1872 at the age of 21, her position in society expanded hundredfold. Besides entering marriage, she entered a new era: the Gilded Age, a period of ostentatious spending by the wealthy that included building and decorating mansions, entertaining, and collecting beautiful objects. Both Robert and his father, John Work Garrett, became wealthy and socially influential through their tenures as president of the B&O Railroad. Railroad leaders and influential statesmen soon became guests of the young couple in their beautiful row home, 11 West Mount Vernon Place, a wedding gift from Robert's father. Their new railroad contacts included many New Yorkers, such as the trendsetting Astors and Vanderbilts, who would influence their tastes and behaviors.

To accommodate more guests and display their wealth, the Garretts acquired the row home next door, No. 9, in 1884 to expand their mansion and chose rising star Stanford White as their architect. While White and Mary shared a similar aesthetic, the expansion effort was complex, with Mary frequently insisting on revisions. These caused the architect and contractors extra effort and frustrated Mary.

She worried that the new room installation by the interior decorating firm Herter Brothers would not be finished in time for her New Year's Eve party. She fretted about costs. As she supervised, she manifested a haughty Gilded Age sense of entitlement. She wanted everything to be extraordinary, completed on her schedule, and have no overrunning costs. Railing against charges above original estimates, she insisted that White verify every invoice and demanded that he and Herter Brothers lower their costs. She scrutinized bills for months, even years, requiring Bartlett and Haywood, a Baltimore metalworking foundry, to account for every screw and nail.



*Lithograph of Robert Garrett.  
Library of Congress.*



*Photo courtesy of the Preservation  
Society of Newport County.*

The powerful socialite Alva Vanderbilt inspired Mary's choice of Alexandre Cabanel to paint her portrait, and her staircase built from Caen stone inspired Mary's supper room stairway. But Mary didn't always follow Alva's lead. For example, while Alva advocated for the vote for women, Mary never supported women's suffrage. Mary believed that women had a specific role in life, one that did not include voting or higher education.

### Daily Life

Being incredibly wealthy in a responsible way was a demanding job, but Mary was up to the task. Her days were filled with overseeing properties, initiating community projects, organizing parties, and planning travel. Having developed a taste for fine art during her travels with Robert, she avidly collected works by European masters. In addition to the Mount Vernon Place mansion, Mary managed the property of Uplands, where experts cared for her prizewinning flowers, chickens, and dairy cows. Using the latest technology, she filled a recording cylinder with letters and instructions for her secretary. Travel arrangements, via ocean liner or rail, were constant and included packing more than 100 trunks; planning for staff, guests, and their chef; and finding caretakers for their dogs, who often traveled with them.

Three years after becoming president of the B&O (after John Work Garrett's death), Robert retired due to nervous exhaustion in 1887. Following medical advice, the Garretts spent a year traveling abroad. The trip ended badly when Robert received the devastating news that Thomas Harrison Garrett, his beloved brother, drowned in a yachting accident in the Baltimore Harbor. Robert never recovered and died eight years later. In caring for her husband during his final years, Mary demonstrated her devotion to her spouse, doing everything possible to make Robert's life comfortable and cheerful. She hired a full-time doctor, the Harvard-educated physician Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs. Hoping to delight Robert,



*Mr. and Mrs. Robert Garrett.*



Robert Garrett's 1896 obituary in *The Baltimore Sun* observed that, "Mrs. Garrett was her husband's constant companion, forsaking all social duties during his illness forsaking all pleasures except what he could do."

she purchased a singing parrot and a monkey for the mansion's conservatory. One year (1888), thinking a retreat from society would soothe his spirit, Mary rented a cottage in Ringwood, New York.

Robert's illness strengthened Mary's dedication to promoting the social good. She and Robert had previously established a hospital for children in Mount Airy, Maryland, on the B&O line, a site that provided easy access for children in Baltimore. She later founded and paid for a comprehensive surgical hospital for children in Baltimore, which she named in honor of her husband. This hospital reflected her love for the children she never had, as did her delight in continuing Robert's tradition of treating the city's messenger boys to a festive party every

Christmas. They were entertained, given ice cream and presents, and charmed by their welcoming hostess.

## Acting on Valued Interests

After Robert's death in 1896, Mary resumed her busy life. This included such small acts of generosity as purchasing handiwork from ladies, giving flowers to her friends, buying a car for her secretary, and inviting her church choir to a summer picnic at Uplands. At the same time, she satisfied her longing for beauty and luxury by expanding her art collection and hosting lavish dinners for her friends. She was engaged in collecting and social leadership when romance entered her life. In 1902, dressed in pink silk, she discreetly crossed the street to Grace Church to marry Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs.

The two were highly compatible. Both appreciated their heritage; he traced his ancestry to the *Mayflower*. Both enjoyed socializing, and both were committed to their own hospitals. While Mary supported the Robert Garrett Hospital in Baltimore, Dr. Jacobs, an expert on tuberculous, served as president of Eudowood Sanatorium in nearby Towson. Mary contributed financially to this venture.

They enjoyed entertaining, so much so that, in 1905, they decided to create space for even more guests. For this expansion, they purchased 7 West Mount Vernon Place to add a theater/ballroom, large supper room, and library. To design it, they selected architect John Russell Pope, someone they immediately considered a friend. They filled the new theater with art and delighted guests with a variety of artistic events. Guests dined in the supper room while musicians, situated on an adjoining balcony, filled the room with music. The Jacobs had also commissioned Pope to design a home in Newport, Rhode Island, which was completed in 1904. Equally enthusiastic about the friendship, Pope built a cottage for himself and his wife on the adjoining property. Spearheading plans to create an art museum in Baltimore, the Jacobs saw to commissioning Pope to design the Baltimore Museum of Art's new building, which opened in 1929.

While Mary was never a full advocate for advanced education for women, she understood that some women needed a career. With this in mind, she and the nurses she employed at her children's hospital established an apprenticeship program to train young women in the profession.

Besides compatibility, Jacobs brought a spirit of goodwill to Mary's life. Some of her financial decisions after Robert's death had created tensions with the Thomas Harrison Garrett family, but Jacobs' tact and cordiality smoothed over old tensions. Mary seemed to have become her best self in this period of a mutually enjoyable relationship.

Dr. Jacobs supported Mary's interests and efforts, especially those related to art acquisition. By 1913, she had enlarged her art collection so much that she

transformed the old stables at her Mount Vernon Place mansion into a gallery just for paintings. She delighted in inviting art lovers to visit her gallery.

Mary's health declined, and by 1915, she was confined to a wheelchair. After the stock-market crash of 1929, Mary drew back even more. Having lost a substantial amount of her fortune, she reassessed her priorities. Still living her parents' values, as well as those she had acquired since her first marriage, she appreciated more fully her husband, her beautiful homes, and



Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs.  
National Library of Medicine.



Dr. and Mrs. Henry Barton Jacobs.  
Photo courtesy of the Norwell Historical Society.

her collection of fine art. She valued her work providing medical care for children. Dedicated to her church, she noted that the widows of churchmen were often left without resources. After identifying these most important concerns, she revised her will, leaving her property to Henry Barton Jacobs. Her children's hospital has evolved into today's Johns Hopkins Medical Center for Children, and an endowment she created and named for Robert Garrett continues to fund its Chair of Pediatrics. She left her Uplands estate to her church to provide for "lonely church women." Appreciating the ways art had enriched her life, she donated her collection to the Baltimore Museum of Art. In 1936, she died at the age of 85.

Throughout her life, Mary inhabited and expanded her values. Initially modeling herself on her parents, she enlarged her life by creating a mansion for entertaining the Baltimore elite with Gilded Age flair. She thrived in

Beyond her charities, Mary acted in other ways to improve the lives of those in her community. She and her friends had many ideas for improving community life. For one project, they decided beauty could be produced for everyone with flowers, so each spring they set up and hosted a flower market where they sold inexpensive blossoms.

her quotidian life of appreciating her husband, her friends, and her church. She loved teatime, parties, travel, chickens, and flowers—an ordinary life that reverberated with beauty and luxury. The queen of Baltimore society, Mary was also one of the nation's first philanthropists. Appreciating her good fortune, she delighted in sharing it with others. While being herself, she also became the larger-than-life person remembered today.

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