The gardens and landscape surrounding Charles Lang Freer’s residence were unique and notable in their day. Installed in 1892 and redesigned in 1906 after a major addition to his house, the gardens received the same careful attention to detail as his home. Freer consulted with his architect, Wilson Eyre, Jr. and his “New York artist friends,” especially Thomas W. Dewing, and Maria Oakey Dewing, in devising the quiet beauty and harmonious character of his gardens.

A blend of Asian and Western plants reflected Freer’s interests in ‘points of contact’ between American and Asian art. A Japanese stone lantern—a gift from S. Yamanaka—served as a focal point for the courtyard. The gardens, visible from the windows of Freer’s home, served as a visual repose, in harmony with the shimmering surfaces and extraordinary art displayed therein.

In 1920, a year after Freer’s death, the Merrill Palmer School purchased the home. The courtyard became an outdoor play area for the nursery school children enrolled in its progressive education program. Plants and shrubs were replaced with swing sets and sandboxes as ‘fresh air and exercise’ were seen as integral to healthy growth. After construction of a new building in 1958, the play space was relocated and the courtyard lay vacant.

In 1965, Eleanor L. Roche designed a minimalist green garden in the yard. In the decades since however, the courtyard garden and landscape deteriorated to a state far distant from the glories of Mr. Freer’s garden.

For more information or to join the Freer House as a member, contact Rose Foster at 313-664-2509

“Mr. Freer’s garden and grounds are those of a man who has traveled far and seen much.”

Detroit Sunday News Tribune
September 5, 1897

The Freer House Garden Project

Our Vision for the Historic Freer House Courtyard Garden: Restoring a Harmonious Environment

Supported by:
Americana Foundation & Kresge Foundation
Help Cultivate History

We envision the garden as both a place for quiet contemplation and an inviting setting for outdoor events hosted by the Freer House, Wayne State, and the community.

The new plan will reintroduce the gentle arc of Freer’s original carriage path as a walkway from Ferry Street and revitalize the garden with trees and plants authentic to Freer’s original vision but updating it as an accessible and sustainable environment.

Replication of the original Peacock Room porch railings and a newly designed garden fence will complement and enclose the courtyard.

How You Can Help

We offer various ways to help support the garden revitalization, from sponsoring individual plants to entire garden sections. Financial contributions and in-kind donations are also welcome. For more information contact William Colburn, director of the Freer House, at william.colburn@wayne.edu or 313-664-2500.

This fundraising campaign is dedicated in memory of Denise Little, whose vision and passion inspired the development of the Freer Garden Project.

The Freer House Garden Restoration Committee: Thomas W. Brunk, PhD, Carolyn Cardoza, Carol Edwards, Mark Gibbons, Liseann Gouin, Carol Gove, Barbara Heller, Marc Herrick, Thomas Holleman, Chuck Little, David Michener, PhD

Project Consultants: Fred Knight, K.C. Runciman Landscapes James Viste, Edgewise Forge

Historically appropriate plantings have been identified with advice from David Michener, PhD, Curator of Matthaei Botanical Gardens, UoM, based on research by Thomas W. Brunk, PhD. A detailed garden plan funded by the Americana Foundation and created by K.C. Runciman Landscapes will guide the project.

YES! I want to help restore Freer’s gardens
Please accept my donation of:

- $75 (1 plant)
- $150 (2 plants)
- $300 (4 plants)
- $500 (1 tree)
- $1,000 (2 trees)
- $2,500 (iron fence section)
- $5,000 (masonry column)
- General donation of $

Donors of $500 and above will be acknowledged on a donor recognition plaque.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE/ZIP

PHONE

EMAIL

My check is made payable to: The Freer House, WSU
OR
Please charge my gift of $ to:

Visa

MasterCard

ACCT #: EXP DATE

SIGNATURE (REQUIRED)

NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CARD

Mail form with payment to:
The Freer House Garden Project
71 E. Ferry Street
Detroit, MI 48202

Donate by Phone
with credit card, call Rose Foster at 313-664-2509