



Documenting an Art-filled Life

By William Colburn, Director, The Freer House

The Freer House undertook an exciting project this year to document a rare and remarkable collection of personal objects that once belonged to Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919). The more than 100 objects, ranging from furniture to textiles, tableware to opera glasses, now reside in

the personal collection of Freer House scholar and board member, Dr. Thomas W. Brunk.

In the 1990's, Dr. Brunk was researching the genealogy of Freer's live-in caretaker and curator, Joseph Stephens Warring. He learned that Warring's surviving child, Grace, was in her 90's and living near his own home in Indian Village. Grace was born and raised in the Freer House. Her family worked for Freer during nearly all the 27 years he resided on E. Ferry Avenue in Detroit.

Freer willed his art collection to the Smithsonian Institution for the Freer Gallery of Art. He also bequeathed many art objects not destined for the Smithsonian to various universities and museums, and gave some art, as well as personal objects, to family and friends. As Freer was single and childless, the Warrings became a favored recipient.

The existence of these rare objects

remained largely unknown outside the Warring family until Dr. Brunk's visit to Grace. She possessed many of the Freer objects given to her family and was so impressed with Dr. Brunk's scholarship on Freer, she willed most of these objects to him. Since her death in 1995, Dr. Brunk has been the

been inventoried, examined, measured, and photographed from multiple angles. Details about the objects' origins and provenance have been recorded based on Dr. Brunk's recollections from Grace, his own knowledge, and team research. The result is a remarkable and comprehensive database.

The objects reflect Freer's exceptional taste and aesthetics. Origins range from American custom made furniture to Asian and Islamic ceramics and art. Especially notable is Freer's ivory and gold porcelain dinnerware, described in Aline Saarinen's 1958 book, *The Proud Possessors*: "His (Freer's) finicky scrutiny missed no detail, from the flat silver and the ivory dishes with gold edges on his table . . ." Another rare piece is a yellow ceramic vase decorated with blue peacocks that Mary Chase Perry,

founder of Pewabic Pottery, created for Freer to celebrate his 1904 acquisition of James McNeill Whistler's famous Peacock Room.

These singular pieces also provide a priceless view into Freer's personal and domestic life and his Ferry Avenue home.

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owner and custodian of Freer's surviving belongings. Until this project began, these items had never been inventoried, photographed or documented, and rarely seen outside of private viewings.

After four months of hard work by Dr. Brunk and an extraordinary team of volunteers and professionals, each item has now

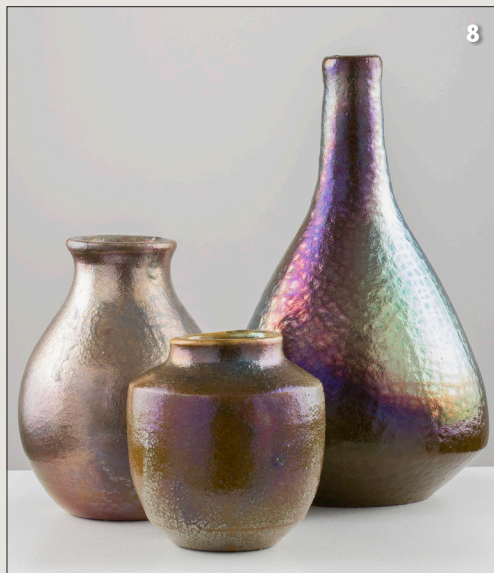
Photo at top: Freer's 1910 Crane's stationery with logo, Rookwood inkwell with floral motif, and writing stylus

Bottom photo: Buddy Englehart, Dr. Brunk and Freer assistant Meg Urisko meticulously examine and record Freer's silverware from Brunk's collection



His bed was custom built for the house. His beautiful Rookwood inkwell is accompanied by several exquisite handmade writing pens. A silver candlestick bears his monogram as does a silver-plated soap case likely used on his travels to Asia to buy art. Inscriptions and dedications to Freer in several books provide clues to his close friendships and social circle.

The Freer House now has a permanent digital database of each Freer object, to better inform researchers, scholars and the general public about Freer's personal life and his home's furnishings and decoration. Sincere thanks to Dr. Brunk and project team members Rachel Bertolini, Matthew Coleman, Michael Coleman, Buddy Englehart, James K. Miller, Justin Trupiano, and Meghan Urisko.



1) A portrait of the Warring family with Grace Warring, center **2)** Small black iridescent bowl by Pewabic Pottery **3)** Silver candlestick with "F" monogram **4)** White porcelain dinner plate by Copelands China, England **5)** Photographer Justin Trupiano sets up a shoot in Brunk's foyer while his assistant Rachel Bertolini prepares to title the images. **6)** Soap case with "CLF" monogram **7)** Folding opera glasses with leather case by Archimede **8)** Three early iridescent Pewabic Pottery vases **9)** Scarab Box made by William Stratton for Pewabic Pottery **10)** Set of two silver seasoning shakers by Fisher Silversmiths, Inc.