



## THE FREER HOUSE

*An International Landmark . . . A World Class Lecture Series*

71 East Ferry, Detroit, Michigan 48202 | 313-664-2500



# Hecker Mansion Joins Freer House as Wayne State Treasure



*Col. Frank J. Hecker was president and Charles L. Freer vice president of the Michigan Peninsular Car Company, a railroad freight car manufacturer. Hecker and Freer built their remarkable homes next door to each other in 1890-92. Wayne State purchased the Hecker Mansion in April and will take occupancy this fall.*

## *A Collaboration of Artists and Friends: the Hecker Triptych*

The Hecker triptych is a recent addition to the DIA's InsideOut program, on display between the Hecker and Freer Houses on E. Ferry, from April through July 2015.

The triptych commissioned in 1893 by Col. Frank J. Hecker (1846-1927) for his

home on Woodward Avenue was the result of Hecker's close friendship with his business partner and next-door neighbor Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919), and the artistic collaboration of painters Thomas W. Dewing and Dwight W. Tryon. Hecker desired paintings similar to works being

created by Dewing and Tryon for Freer's home. The result, *Spring, Summer, Autumn* (1893), originally graced the walls of the Hecker's music room and today is a highlight of the DIA's American art collection.



DIA INSIDE OUT Brings reproductions of great treasures from the Detroit Institute of Arts into your community. Discover them all around town.

Standing next to the DIA's InsideOut of the Hecker Triptych are (left to right): Freer House Director William Colburn, Attorney and Hecker scholar J. Douglas Peters, Senior Project Administrator at Wayne State's Office of Economic Development Jeri Stroupe, Freer House intern Buddy Engelhart, Freer House research assistant Meghan Urisko, and Freer House intern James K. Miller.

*Faculty and staff of MPSI have their offices in the former home of Detroit industrialist and art collector, Charles Lang Freer. The 22-room, Shingle-style home was built in 1892 and designed by architect Wilson Eyre, Jr.. Freer displayed his large collection of paintings and porcelain in the light-filled rooms.*



# A Quarter Century Labor of Love: Hecker Mansion Restoration

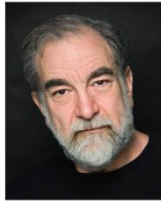
by William Colburn, Director, The Freer House

The Freer House on E. Ferry St. and the adjacent Hecker House on Woodward Ave. have a long history in common.

The homes were built between 1890-92 by Charles Lang Freer and Col. Frank Hecker who were close friends, business partners and next door neighbors. Freer and Hecker bought their lots on the same day in 1888 (Hecker's lot on Woodward cost an astounding \$30,000).

Freer assisted Hecker with the design of his home by selecting the architect Louis Kamper, who created a limestone mansion in the French Chateau-esque style. Freer began construction of his own house soon thereafter and had it designed in the simpler, yet sophisticated Shingle style, by architect Wilson Eyre, Jr. of Philadelphia.

The Hecker and Freer houses were two of the finest private residences in Michigan. Following Freer's death in 1919 and Hecker's in 1927, the homes took different paths. The Freer House was sold to the Merrill Palmer School in 1920/21 and continues to be used for educational purposes as MPSI. The Freer House membership or-



Doug Peters, former co-owner of the Hecker House, above, and left at work hand-framing a giclee painting that now hangs in the Freer House.

ganization of MPSI raises public awareness of the significance of this historic building and works to support its maintenance and restoration.

The Hecker family continued to own the Hecker House until 1947, engaging a young couple, the Andersons, to operate the building as a high-end boarding house. The building was then sold to the Smiley Brothers Music Company and functioned as a splendid showroom for piano and organ retail sales. In 1991, the Hecker House was purchased by Charfoos and Christensen P.C. law firm which invested considerable effort, under the direction of principal attorney J. Douglas Peters, to beautifully restore

this magnificent structure. In late 2014, WSU bought the Hecker House and will move staff into the building this fall.

The Freer House salutes Doug Peters for his outstanding role, together with David Christensen, in leading the exceptional restoration of the historic Hecker House. Doug has served for many years on the Freer House board and played a leading role with many successful projects, including the installation of 11 'giclee' reproductions of paintings originally commissioned by Freer for the interior of the house. Doug also has been instrumental in guiding and advising multiple maintenance and restoration projects at the Freer House. We are indebted to



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him for his extraordinary vision and support and look forward to his continued participation as he retires from a distinguished law career and continues his second career as an accomplished painter and artist.

In March, the Freer House commissioned renowned architectural photographer, Alex Vertikoff, who previously photographed the Freer House, to document the interior of the Hecker House to record the superb restoration work during Charfoos and Christensen's 24 years of ownership. A selection of these beautiful photos is shown here.

WAYNE STATE  
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## Visitors Connect with Freer House Past, Present and Future

Freer House hosts hundreds of visitors a year. Its 350 members account for many of the visits, often at the post-reception of a guest lecture at the Detroit Institute of Arts. But throughout the year, a few dozen other interested folks also drop by. These unique visitors include alums of the Merrill Palmer nursery school, former Ferry Street neighbors curious about changes to the area, and community leaders interested in Freer's contributions to Asian and Islamic art. A few of our recent guests:

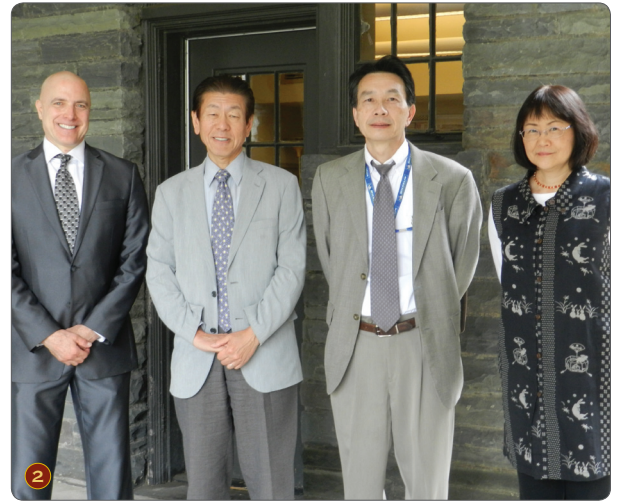
➊ **Alan Fern** is doubly connected to Freer House. He attended the Merrill Palmer Institute nursery school in the 1930s. "I even remember where I used to hang up my coat," he said, "and sitting in window seats." He later became director of the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution, where the Peacock Room (formerly owned by Charles Freer) is now housed. He and his wife Lois flew from Maryland in June to attend a Detroit conference of art museum directors and spent an afternoon at Freer House. "When we visit the Freer Gallery at the Smithsonian, Alan reminds me that he finger-painted in the space that had housed the Peacock Room," his wife Lois said. They both "loved" reminiscing and seeing how the house is gradually being restored to a community treasure.

➋ The Freer House was honored with a visit in early June by **Takashi Omitsu**, president, IMRA America, Inc. and his administration coordinator and assistant, Kazuo Ishikawa. In his role as an executive advisor to the Japan Business Society of Detroit, Takashi was interested in seeing the Freer House and learning more about its significant historical connections to Freer, Detroit, and the art and culture of Japan. The tour was aided by Freer House member and volunteer, Hiroko Lancour, who has done

Below: Alan Fern seated in Freer House courtyard where he played as a preschooler.



Below L-R: William Colburn, Takashi Omitsu, Kazuo Ishikawa, Hiroko Lancour.



Above L-R: From the Historic Ford Estates: Mark Heppner, VP historic resources; Kathleen Mullins, president and CEO; Megan Wood, assoc. VP education and visitor experience



Above: Lydia Easley seated in Freer House drawing room.

considerable research on Freer's important connections to Japan.

➌ Executive staff members, including President and CEO Kathleen Mullins, of the **Historic Ford Estates** (Eleanor and Edsel Ford House and Henry Ford Fairlane Estate), recently toured the Freer and Hecker houses to learn more about these important historic landmarks in Detroit and to share ideas and resources for preservation and restoration. The group saw archival photos and documentation of the significant role of Eleanor Ford in the development of the Merrill-Palmer Institute during her 50 years of service and leadership on the board from 1926 to 1976.

➍ **Lydia Easley** spent her first 12 years in the Hecker House, the turreted mansion next door to Freer House that was a boarding house run by her parents at the time. She was an only child but shared the house with 65 boarders. She attended MPI's nursery school, not just because it was convenient. "My mother knew it was very highly thought of," Lydia said when she visited from Washington in March. "The school was involved with mother and daddy right from when I was born." Her development at MPI was immortalized as a case study in a 1959 book chapter on General Principles of Development.