



## THE FREER HOUSE

### The House We Call Home

One of Detroit's most important historic buildings, the Freer House, was built in 1892 as the home of industrialist and renowned art collector Charles Lang Freer, who founded the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Designed by Philadelphia architect Wilson Eyre, Jr., in the Shingle style, the Freer House was purchased by the Merrill Palmer School in 1920 and today holds the offices of Wayne State's Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

Key principles of Freer's cultural legacy and philosophy as a collector were the discovery of "points of contact" between Asia and American and encouraging cultural understanding through art. The Freer House explores these themes through an outstanding lecture series featuring top experts and attracting large, diverse audiences. Dedicated volunteers and docents assist at every event to welcome guests, lead tours and help with event preparation. Lectures are held in partnership with the Associates of the American Wing and the Friends of Asian Arts and Cultures, Detroit Institute of Arts. Lecture co-sponsors include the Japan America Society; the Center for Japanese Studies/University of Michigan, and the Matthaei Botanical Gardens at U-M.

#### Fascinating Topics, Varied Visitors & National Publicity

In *The Business of Asian Art* lecture, New York journalist and author, Yuri Kuchiki, spoke of Freer's close client relationship with prominent Asian antiquities dealer, Yamanaka & Company. Dr. Cathy Selvius De Roo presented, *Beneath the Surface: A Scientific Investigation of*



*Freer House's Original Decorative Paint Treatments.* Dr. De Roo is a DIA conservation scientist whose research and analysis over the past five years has uncovered secrets of the original decorative paint treatments throughout the Freer House.

A special reception and lecture marked Japan Culture Day in November 2015 and welcomed the new Consul General of Japan and his wife to Detroit, Mr. and Mrs. Mitsuhiro Wada. Ann Nishimura Morse, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, spoke on *The Introduction of Japanese Art to America, Boston and Detroit.*

The Freer House received its first national publicity with a feature article in the prestigious *Fine Art Connoisseur* magazine (January/February 2015). Visitors toured the house from Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Detroit, and students came from WSU, College for Creative Studies (CCS) and U-M. Visitors also hailed from several national conferences including the American Association for State and Local History, DCOMOMO, and Preservation in America's Legacy Cities. The Freer/Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., sent several members and docents to Detroit for the first time to learn the history of the Freer

House as "the original Freer Gallery of Art."

Freer House engaged Detroit's Korean American community with a lecture by the curator of ceramics at the Freer/Sackler Gallery, Louise Cort, on *Charles Lang Freer and the Discovery of Korean Ceramics*. A special Korean luncheon honored the Consulate of Korea in Chicago, the Honorary Consul General of Korea in Michigan, and leaders of Talmer Bank and Trust.

#### Documenting and Digging: Many Hands to Help

Research and documentation are vital at the Freer House. Students from WSU, U-M and the CCS joined a team of professionals to research, document and photograph 125 rare personal objects once owned by Freer and currently held in a private collection in Detroit. Other student volunteers from the WSU School of Library and Information Science spent a semester researching the original craftsmen and contractors who built the Freer House and Hecker House (now Tierney House) next door. The U-M Museum Studies Program also assigned several doctoral students to help design a

## Freer House Director Honored with Lifetime Achievement Award

William Colburn, executive director of the Freer House, received the 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network. The award recognizes those who, through personal effort and involvement in historic preservation, have contributed significantly to preserving Michigan's heritage. The Freer House, built in 1892 is ranked as one of the most important historic buildings in Michigan.

"I am humbled and honored," William said. "I am just one of many people who worked to lay the groundwork for the revitalization of Midtown through historic preservation activism."

William first worked in historic preservation as a 21-year-old building surveyor with the Detroit Urban Conservation Project. He joined Preservation Wayne and soon rose to a leadership role as chairman and then founding executive director. During his 20 years with Preservation Wayne (now Preservation Detroit), William transformed the WSU student organization into Detroit's first full-time, citywide, nonprofit preservation organization.

"The 1970s to 1990s was an era when many older and historic buildings at Wayne State and in surrounding neighborhoods were threatened with demolition and neglect," William said. "The work of Preservation Wayne, together with other key individuals and organizations, helped to shift the WSU and Midtown area from clearance to preservation and restoration."

Under William's leadership, Preservation Wayne halted the demolition of and restored the Mackenzie House, home of WSU's founder and first dean; spearheaded a 30-year effort to preserve and revitalize the E. Ferry Avenue Historic District; and completed the first comprehensive surveys of historic buildings on Wayne State's campus and surrounding neighborhoods. These surveys culminated in more than 20 buildings and three historic districts being included on the National Register of Historic Places. Preservation Wayne was the first organization in Detroit to receive a Preservation Honor award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



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**– William Colburn**

future visitors welcome center and exhibit room in the Freer carriage house.

Freer's original gardens inspired the final lecture of 2016. Members of the garden project team, including Fred Knight of KC Runciman Landscape who designed the garden plan, "dug" into the history of Freer's original courtyard gardens and outlined the current project to restore them. Theory met practice as the Garden Revitalization Project began clearance, grading and paving of the Freer courtyard to be redesigned with plantings, fencing and seating. On a more prosaic note, the failing and outdated heating and cooling units throughout the Freer House were replaced or repaired.

Support for Freer House programs, projects and operations continues to expand with continued operating support from the Americana Foundation and new funding from the Kresge and Erb Foundations. Support also comes from more than 300 active Freer House members and donors. Partner organizations and event co-sponsors provide additional contributions.



PHOTOS  
BY  
ALEXANDER  
VERTIKOFF



To become a member or volunteer for the Freer House contact Rose Foster, 313-664-2509 or [rmfoster@wayne.edu](mailto:rmfoster@wayne.edu)



## Freer House Docents & Volunteers

The Freer House recognizes and thanks its dedicated group of docents and volunteers who make our outstanding programs possible.

Rachel Bertolini  
Darren Brim  
Gail Brummitt  
Thomas W. Brunk

Carol Edwards  
Sandi Combs  
Michael D. Coleman  
Chuck Demske

Amelia Ann Gail  
Amy E. Graham  
Molly Ann James  
Hiroko Lancour

Kathleen Marcaccio  
Gail Powell  
Rebecca Savage  
Walter J. Szymborski

## Why we volunteer . . .



**Michael Coleman:** *"Being a docent at the Freer House is wonderful as it is more than simply telling the story of a man who built a magnificent house and art collection. Mr. Freer's story is a global one that stretches from Detroit, to New York, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and finally to Washington, D.C."*



**Rebecca Savage:** *"The compelling history of Charles Lang Freer and the Freer House is a significant part of Detroit's history that is exciting to share with people. I am fortunate to have learned about the Freer House from some of the nation's experts and I am always learning more, from different perspectives."*



**Darren Brim:** *"So much of Detroit's history has disappeared which is why I am very fortunate to be involved with the Freer House. Its history and significance are an integral part of the Detroit story... and there is always more to discover."*



**Hiroko Lancour:** *"The moment I stepped into the Freer House I was fascinated by the architecture and rich history. It is a privilege to be a volunteer because it allows me to assist in cultural exchange to promote a better understanding of the U.S. and Japan."*



**Walter Szymborski:** *"I'm fascinated with the history of Detroit. Volunteering at the Freer House lets me connect with that history. If I can help others embrace and celebrate Detroit's past, then I can help them realize Detroit's bright future as well."*

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