



The historic 1892 Freer House has proudly served as home to Merrill-Palmer faculty, administrative offices and meeting rooms since 1921.

Remembering a “Force of Nature”



**Phebe
Vandervort
Goldstein
(1930-2020)**

Phebe Goldstein passed away peacefully on January 4, a few days after she and husband Sidney returned from an extended family holiday in New York. She co-founded the Friends of Freer House and was an avid champion and board member of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

She first learned about the Institute from her mother, who spent a semester training at Merrill-Palmer in 1925, while a senior at Cornell University. Phebe also attended Cornell, spending a senior semester at Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1951.

“My favorite memory of momma was that she was always raising lots of money for important projects,” Phebe said in a 2016 interview. “She was helpful and friendly to everybody. I try to follow in those footsteps.”

The more than 150 relatives, friends, colleagues, volunteers and community activists who attended Phebe’s memorial at the Freer House, attested to Phebe’s legacy of generosity and tenacity. Freer House Director William Colburn recalled how in the 1990s, Phebe “saw how badly the Freer House, like many historic landmarks in Detroit, had deteriorated. She was moved to take action.” She teamed with Detroit historian Dr. Thomas W. Brunk and

together they helped to secure \$2.5 million for renovations and a preservation architect to insure it was done right.

Phebe loved the arts and architecture. Her children Carolyn and David spoke of trips with their mom to see special buildings she loved. “She had an eye for beauty,” Carolyn said. She wanted to celebrate and preserve the creativity of others and share those experiences.

A serious and committed board member to MPSI since 1996, Phebe advocated for a quality education for all children from preschool onward. She began her career as a kindergarten teacher, though she never went to kindergarten herself. “I went to preschool for three years and then right to first grade,” she said, attesting to the value of a quality preschool education.

As MPSI’s director, Dr. Lichtenberg had the pleasure of working with Phebe for a decade. “She was a force of nature,” he said. “Her intelligence, desire for progress, expectation of excellence and attention to detail could be intimidating. But she exuded such warmth, graciousness and charm that we felt extra special to be involved in her noble undertakings.”

Myriad tributes highlighted Phebe’s long life of meaning and purpose – she will be deeply missed. “The best advice I can offer is to keep smiling and remember to help other people,” she said at her recognition luncheon a few years ago. “Be good helpers in the world and the world will be better for it.”

The family has kindly requested that gifts in Phebe’s memory go to the Freer House.



L-R: Sarah Burger, DIA; Alicia McCullough, DIA; Barbara Heller, DIA; Doug Peters, Freer House member; Davin Brainard, DIA; Steve Shaw, DIA.

Whistler Painting Replica Installed

A full-scale *giclee* reproduction of artist James McNeill Whistler’s famous painting, *The Princess from the Land of Porcelain*, has been beautifully installed in its original location in the former Peacock Room. The original painting was purchased by Freer in 1903 and hangs today in the Peacock Room at the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian. The replica is made possible by a generous contribution from Freer House member Dr. David Weinberg, with in-kind support from Doug Peters and permission from the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian. The DIA generously provided the services of its expert art installation team, led by Davin Brainard, to properly secure the large work to the wall.

For more information and history of the Peacock Room, visit: www.peacockroom.wayne.edu



Phebe reviews technical renderings of original furnishings and house blueprints. Her keen eye and high standards helped drive the renovations that restored Freer House to its present stature.