



MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE  
for Child & Family Development

2019/2020

# MPSI REPORT

FREER HOUSE

Home to MPSI Faculty and Staff

## 2020 Freer House Highlights

by William Colburn  
Freer House, Director

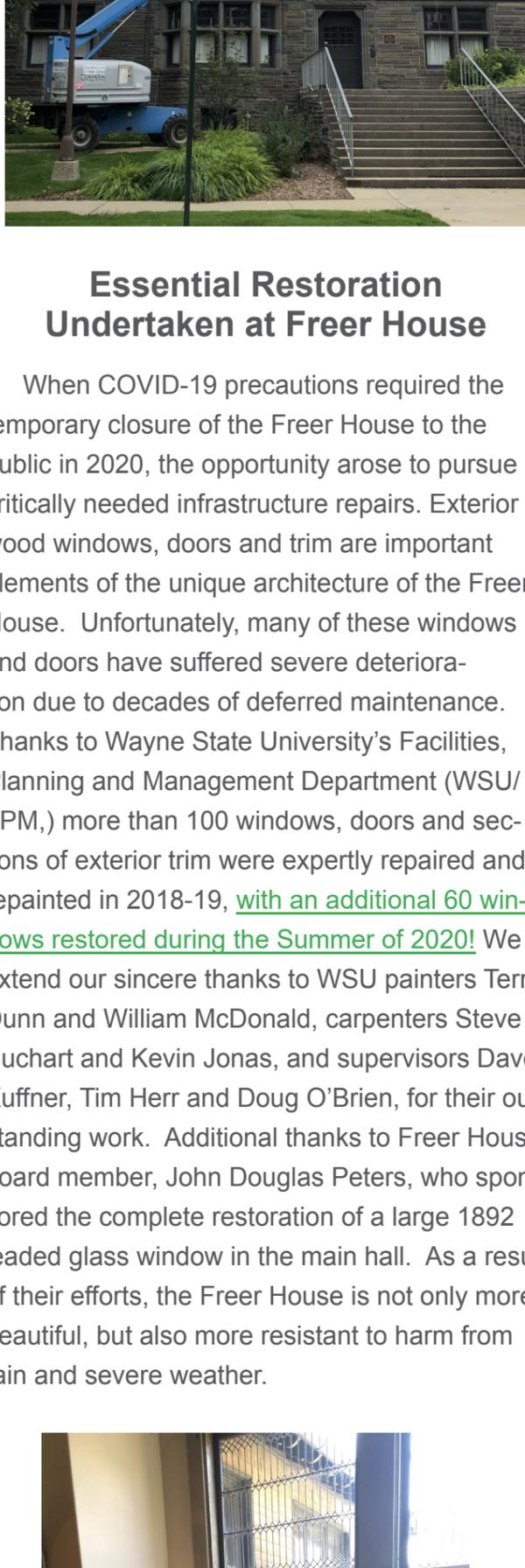


### New Books Highlight Legacy of Charles Lang Freer and Freer House

The first full biography of the life of Freer, *West Meets East: Charles L. Freer, Trailblazing Asian Art Collector*, was released by Mascot Books in November 2019. The author, Helen Nebeker Tomlinson, PhD, based the book on her early (1979) PhD thesis about Freer as a collector of Asian art. Dr. Tomlinson undertook extensive new research to document Freer's extraordinary life, devoting several chapters to Freer's Detroit business, civic and cultural lives, while highlighting his pioneering efforts to raise Americans' understanding and appreciation of Asian arts and cultures. The Freer House hosted a sold-out book talk by Dr. Tomlinson in November 2019. The biography is available at the author's website: [charlesfreer.com](http://charlesfreer.com)

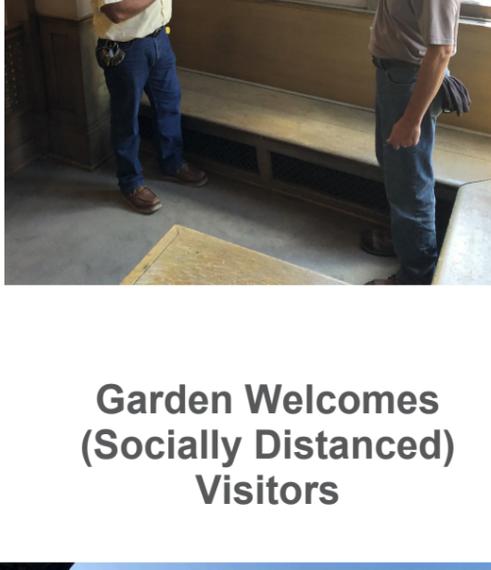
A fascinating new book, *Aesthetic Painting in Britain and America: Collectors, Art Worlds and Networks*, Yale University Press, 2020, devotes a major chapter to Freer's role as an exceptional collector of American aesthetic movement art, including the works of Tryon, Dewing, Thayer and Whistler. The author, Melody Barnett Duesner, PhD, highlights the Freer House and the paintings Freer commissioned for the home's main hall and parlor in her chapter entitled, "Harmonious Systems: Expansion and Standardized Production in Detroit and Beyond." Dr. Duesner views Freer's American art collection as more than an aesthetic retreat from the turmoil of the industrial world. She instead presents his collection as a vital means for Freer to connect and interface with a harmonious network of business, social and cultural relationships in his personal and professional life. The Freer House partnered with the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art in promoting an online presentation by Dr. Duesner on Nov. 17, 2020. The program was recorded and is available on [the Freer and Sackler/Smithsonian YouTube channel](#).

The new books by Dr. Tomlinson and Dr. Duesner underscore the growing significance of the Freer House and Freer's Detroit legacy for scholars and researchers in American and Asian art history, worldwide.

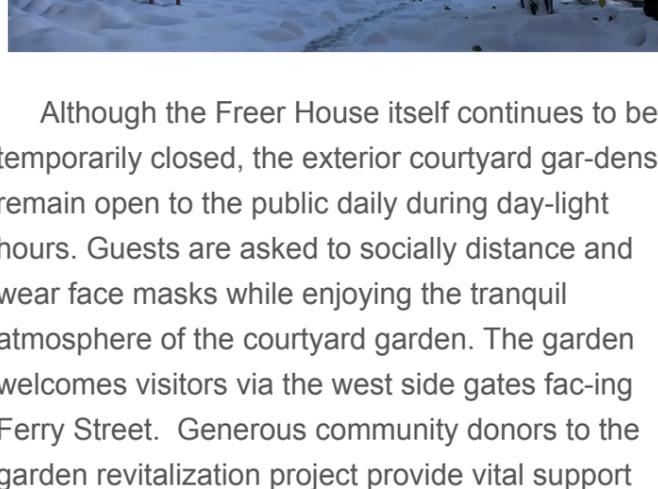


### Essential Restoration Undertaken at Freer House

When COVID-19 precautions required the temporary closure of the Freer House to the public in 2020, the opportunity arose to pursue critically needed infrastructure repairs. Exterior wood windows, doors and trim are important elements of the unique architecture of the Freer House. Unfortunately, many of these windows and doors have suffered severe deterioration due to decades of deferred maintenance. Thanks to Wayne State University's Facilities, Planning and Management Department (WSU/FPM,) more than 100 windows, doors and sections of exterior trim were expertly repaired and repainted in 2018-19, [with an additional 60 windows restored during the Summer of 2020!](#) We extend our sincere thanks to WSU painters Terry Dunn and William McDonald, carpenters Steve Buchart and Kevin Jonas, and supervisors Dave Kuffner, Tim Herr and Doug O'Brien, for their outstanding work. Additional thanks to Freer House board member, John Douglas Peters, who sponsored the complete restoration of a large 1892 leaded glass window in the main hall. As a result of their efforts, the Freer House is not only more beautiful, but also more resistant to harm from rain and severe weather.



### Garden Welcomes (Socially Distanced) Visitors



Although the Freer House itself continues to be temporarily closed, the exterior courtyard gardens remain open to the public daily during daylight hours. Guests are asked to socially distance and wear face masks while enjoying the tranquil atmosphere of the courtyard garden. The garden welcomes visitors via the west side gates facing Ferry Street. Generous community donors to the garden revitalization project provide vital support for the ongoing garden maintenance by K. C. Runciman Landscapes, in cooperation with the WSU Grounds Department, headed by Mike Bernal. Donations to the Freer House Garden Maintenance Fund are gratefully received online [HERE](#). Choose Freer House as your designation.



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