New York City Museums and
Cultural Leadership, 1917-1940

By Dorothy M. Browne

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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by

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Many New York City museums were regarded as bastions of conservatism and elitism at the threshold of the twentieth century. This was particularly true of the New-York Historical Society, where the largest exhibit attracted a mere 2,000 viewers in 1909, and the annual attendance plateaued at 15,000 by decade's end. However, the city's repositories would begin to play an increasingly active role in New York's cultural life after World War I, aided by fresh infusions of ideas and funds from an increasingly varied portfolio of donors. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Historical Society, the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of the City of New York all expanded their services for visitors, significantly enhancing their popularity. Women, corporations,

foundations and local and national governments all played a role in funding and democratizing museum fare.

This study traces the changes wrought by these actors in four New York repositories: the New-York Historical Society (NYHS), the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY), the Metropolitan Museum (MMA) and the Brooklyn Museum (BMA). Taken together, their collective histories highlight the cultural transformations that colored the city's museological landscape during the first four decades of the twentieth century, as well as the flashpoints of disagreement that these changes entailed.

Many important changes had taken place by the onset of World War II in determining what a museum should be and whom it should serve. Rare or nonexistent during the early part of the century, education departments with staff docents, evening hours, classes for students of industrial design and artisans, coordination with public school curricula, and outreach to publicize museum programs were regularly offered at all these museums by 1940, reflecting more ecumenical visions of museum missions and mandates under the guidance of an array of new donors.

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.
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Introduction

Many New York City museums were regarded as bastions of conservatism and elitism at the threshold of the twentieth century. This was particularly true of the New-York Historical Society, where the largest exhibit attracted a mere 2,000 viewers in 1909, and the annual attendance plateaud at 15,000 by decade's end. However, the city's repositories would begin to play an increasingly active role in New York's cultural life after World War I, aided by fresh infusions of ideas and funds from an increasingly varied portfolio of donors. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Historical Society, the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of the City of New York all expanded their services for visitors, significantly enhancing their popularity. Women, corporations, foundations and local and national governments all played a role in funding and democratizing museum fare.

This study traces the changes wrought by these actors in four New York repositories: the New-York Historical Society (NYHS), the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY), the Metropolitan Museum (MMA) and the Brooklyn Museum (BMA). Taken together, their collective histories highlight the cultural transformations that colored the city's museological landscape during the first four decades of the twentieth century, as well as the flashpoints of disagreement that these changes entailed.

The oldest and most conservative of the four, New-York Historical Society, embodied traditional elites' efforts to cleave to the old ways and to their perceived position of authority, attitudes counterpointed by the programs at the newly-created

Museum of the City of New York. Comparisons between the Metropolitan and Brooklyn Museums also reveal philosophical differences, contrasting MMA's adherence to the traditional artistic canon with the more modernistic approach of the Brooklyn Museum.

This story constitutes a chapter in the evolution of high and mass culture in America's largest city between 1900 and 1940. Museum administrators felt that the country was experiencing a cultural malaise due to immigration, migration, and shifting attitudes about leisure. They responded by searching for ways to unify New Yorkers and entice them through their doors. The extent to which women, governmental donors, foundations and corporations helped them to succeed in creating a welcoming place of cultural display and discussion is examined in the pages that follow. Each of these backers provided prescriptions for revising the dialectic between "high" and "popular" culture in New York's leading repositories, blurring the boundaries between mass consumption and high culture.

In the process, the museums embraced new subjects and styles of art, new types of media (such as photography), novel display techniques, and in various other ways widened their parameters. They formed departments for advertising, public relations, and education. They developed closer ties to the public schools, courses and curricular development, and expanded their outreach programs. Partnerships were forged with business leaders and manufacturers, tightening their relationships to the city's commercial sector, encouraging them to exploit market research and surveys that gave the public a voice in shaping museum exhibits, policies, and programs. Media coverage,

attendance figures and market surveys increasingly served as yardsticks for museum performance.

Many of these shifts have eluded scholarly attention. Although several significant articles, books and dissertations (some of which were published after the research for this study was completed[1]) appeared on museums and cultural leadership beginning in the 1980s, the bulk of this literature focuses on the elite nature of these enterprises in the early stages of museum development.

Perhaps the leading interpretation is that of Lawrence Levine, who traces the process of cultural "sacralization" in *Highbrow, Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America.* As he explains:

> … a shared public culture did not disappear with the nineteenth century. Twentieth century Americans, especially in the palaces they built to the movies and in their sporting arenas, continued to share public space and public culture. But with a difference. Cultural space became more sharply defined, more circumscribed, and less flexible than it had been. Americans might sit together to watch the same films and athletic contests, but those who also desired to experience 'legitimate' theater or hear 'serious' music went to segregated temples devoted to 'high' or 'classical' art.[2]

While Levine concentrates on "sacralization," Max Page's study of MCNY argues that the city's historical repositories were used to keep building artifacts intact amid the relentless demolition and reconstruction of Manhattan, indirectly aiding in the

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[1] See, among others, Jeffrey Lee Trask, "'American Things:'" The Cultural Value of the Decorative Arts in the Modern Museum, 1905-1931." (Ph.D., diss., 2006, Columbia University). See also, Larry E. Sullivan, *The New-York Historical Society: A Bicentennial History*, 1804-2004 (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 2004).

[2] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988): 234. See also, Steven Conn*, Museums and American Intellectual Live, 1876-1925* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

process of destruction.[3] Page also argues that preserving elite family heirlooms "enshrined the notion that New York's growth and development benefited all."[4] However, as this study points out, MCNY's exhibits and programs, as well as those of other New York museums, went beyond traditional Old New York exhibits tell to the stories of other groups, to find new audiences and explore new media.[5]

Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory* also deals with cultural developments.[6] Kammen notes that the democratization of culture was aided by museums during the interwar years, but fails to examine this trend in detail. While Neil Harris contends that even in the late nineteenth century a blending of cultural levels occurred in many outposts of supposedly "high" culture such as the Chicago Art Institute, Kammen points out that several factors led to a further democratization of public culture, particularly in industrial and folk art museums.[7] Some of these repositories "became boldly innovative and transformed themselves – invariably in the *name* of education and

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[3] Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 145-175.

[4] Ibid., 150.

[5] Michael Wallace also emphasizes the family heirlooms as dominating the displays of MCNY and the NYHS in "Razor Ribbons, History Museums and Civic Salvation," in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays in American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 33-54.

[6] Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

[7] Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 85.

'authenticity' even if not consistently in their spirit."[8] Kammen's later work also mentions industrial art exhibits and programs at MMA as an example of blurring boundaries of taste, but fails to address this issue in sufficient depth.[9] The Metropolitan's founders' original emphasis on industrial art is often overlooked as well.

Some studies point to the growing influence of new groups in museum development from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century. For example, the recent literature on women as "keepers of culture," by Kathleen McCarthy and others, suggests that women played a significant role in promoting avant-garde and undervalued art, and in creating outreach programs for the visual arts and music.[10] However, women's roles in historical museums have been far less studied.

While women's contributions as cultural patrons have begun to receive increasing attention in the visual and decorative arts and music, the literature on public cultural patronage has concentrated primarily on the New Deal and NEA programs, giving short shrift to other types of government involvement. The notion that public support for the arts was only indirect (tax legislation, for example) until the New Deal is extremely common, and fairly accurate. Yet, it is important to note the ways in which indirect

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[8] Ibid., 342.

[9] Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 110.

[10] On the visual arts, see Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). On music, see Carol J. Oja, "Women Patrons and Crusaders for Modernist Music: New York in the 1920s," in Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr, eds., *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists since 1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 237-261; and in the same volume, for a general overview of female patronage of music which supported a democratization of culture, see Linda Whitest, "Women as 'Keepers of Culture,' Music Clubs, Community Concert Series, and Symphony Orchestras," 65-86.

support contributed to the development of museums, an issue that has tended to be neglected in much of the literature. An important exception is Roy Rosenzweig's and Elizabeth Blackmar's *The Park and the People*: *A History of Central Park*, which chronicles the ways in which the trustees of the Metropolitan Museum and the American Museum of Natural History resisted government pressure to serve wider audiences in Central Park during the late 19th century. [11]

Other authors have used the word "government" as a synonym for federal interventions. Thus, Gary Larson discusses the importance of federal support for the arts from the New Deal onwards. [12] Similarly, Lawrence Mankin concentrates solely on the New Deal federal programs while supporting the notion that government only provided indirect aid before the 1930s, ideas echoed in the work of Andrew Buchwalter and Dick Netzer as well. [13]

I do not take issue with the validity of these scholars' conclusions in the main. Clearly, since they focus on federal aid, it makes sense that their analyses would begin with Franklin Roosevelt's administration. And they are correct that federal subsidies to the arts began with the New Deal. Nor do they deny that municipal aid to cultural organizations existed; they simply do not analyze it. This study seeks to remedy that gap.

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[11] Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[12] Gary O. Larson, *The Reluctant Patron: The United States Government and the Arts, 1943-1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

[13] Lawrence D. Mankin, "Federal Arts Patronage in the New Deal," in Kevin V. Mulcahy and Margaret Jane Wyszomirski, eds. *America's Commitment to Culture: Government and the Arts* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Andrew Buchwalter, ed., *Culture and Democracy: Social and Ethical Issues in Public Support for the Arts and Humanities* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992); Dick Netzer, *The Subsidized Muse: Public Support for the Arts in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Like women and government, corporations played in increasingly important role as cultural patrons during the interwar years. Shortly before World War I, companies began to use the museums to promote their own visibility and status, efforts that increased the museums' public profiles. Following the example of the celebrated South Kensington Museum in England, some American repositories sought to improve the quality of design by offering businesses study rooms and exhibition space for their goods. They also encouraged museums to use commercial marketing and display techniques to attract and entertain visitors, an approach that promised to attract a wide variety of viewers who might not otherwise be familiar with the fine arts, while simultaneously promoting and selling American design.

Foundations played a limited, but important role as well. By the late 1920s two of the country's largest grant makers, the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation, began to support educational and other public service initiatives in New York museums. Their patronage did not merely provide funding for these initiatives – leaders such as Carnegie's President, Frederick Keppel, provided leadership and vision, and encouraged museums to create programs that were designed to be of wide-ranging and lasting benefit to the public. Foundations and other groups in this study also played key roles in encouraging repositories to adopt new methods and expand the scope of their programming.

All of these partnerships further closed the gap between visitor and institution. While most were beneficial, they also forced museum administrators to mediate between funders' competing interests, and occasionally raised questions of institutional

independence. Nonetheless, by 1940, the city's museums were no longer regarded as mysterious and private, "sacralized" temples serving the fortunate few. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the development of New York's art and history museums was shaped by an array of competing factions, each trying to initiate changes in their own way. The pages that follow examine the impact of community advocates, business leaders, government representatives, staff members, volunteers, and donors in swaying museum officials to embrace their point of view. By the end of the 1930s, shared public cultural spaces that celebrated New York's diverse peoples and histories were now imaginable, heralding a new chapter in the history of New York's museums.

Chapter One

New York City Museums: 1900-1920

The Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New-York Historical Society had all established sizable collections by the turn of the century. By contrast, their educational components were often underdeveloped and scant attention was paid to increasing public access to use and view these collections. Historian Lawrence Levine described the development of museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of "the sacralization of culture," when boundaries between high culture and low culture were defined and the gap between them increasingly widened.[14] This chapter explores how these three museums sought to broach these shifting boundaries with their collections, exhibit content, membership policies, public accessibility and education or entertainment programs, and outreach strategies.

Brooklyn Museum of Art

The Brooklyn Institute of the Arts and Sciences (later renamed the Brooklyn Museum of Art, or BMA) had an educational focus from its inception. Founded in the small but rapidly growing town of 8,000 in1823 by a group of citizens led by William Wood, it was initially called the Brooklyn Apprentices' Library Association, and designed to provide education and moral uplift to workers.[15] A number of luminaries

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[14] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 146-158, 167.

[15] Brooklyn Museum Library and Archives, "A Chronology from 1823 to 2004," Brooklyn Museum of Art Library (hereafter, BMA), New York, 2.

graced the Association's early history, including General Lafayette, who laid the cornerstone for what would be the first free lending library on Independence Day in 1825, and the celebrated poet, Walt Whitman, who served as the librarian in the 1830s. The Association began to collect art as early as 1831, revising its charter in the 1840s as the Brooklyn Institute to incorporate the widening scope of the educational programs that the public had requested. Even in its first several decades, the Institute was an important force in Brooklyn's cultural life.[16]

When its popularity and strength lapsed in the 1880s, the trustees broadened its mission and hired the firm of McKim, Mead and White to create a building designed to house a "broad and comprehensive institution for the advancement of science and art . . ." befitting Brooklyn's bustling economy and culture.[1718] On the one hand, the plans for the building exemplified the "sacralization of art," with its resemblance to an enormous temple on a hill. However, the institution's emphasis on public service also enabled the planned museum to net municipal support as a nod to its educational potential. In 1888, the New York State Legislature passed a bill to lease public land for all the Institute's growing functions (library, museum of art and science, children's museum, and botanic garden) at a rate of a dollar per year. Two years later the Legislature appropriated $50,000 to grade the land and $300,000 for construction of the museum buidling, and Brooklyn Mayor Charles A. Schieren (and past trustee of the Institute) agreed to issue

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[16] Dierdre E. Lawrence, "The Evolution of a Library: The Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries and Archives," in *Art Documentation* 18 (1999), 10.

[17] Quoted in Lawrence, "The Evolution of a Library," 11.

bonds of $300,000 in 1895, despite the museum's considerable debts.[19] Backed by both public and private funds, BMA's grand beaux-arts building opened to the public in 1897 on Eastern Parkway, near Prospect Park, in an area dubbed Brooklyn's "Gold Coast." That same year the Legislature awarded the Institute a $10,000 maintenance fund, with an agreement to double it the following year.

Brooklyn was having trouble financing the building, but its consolidation with Manhattan in 1898 meant that it could use the larger pool of New York City money to help. As historian Steve Levine points out, consolidation had both positive and negative effects on the Brooklyn Institute. The trustees would now be competing for funds, members, and publicity with the Manhattan museums, often at a distinct disadvantage. Nonetheless, New York's appropriations for the Institute's maintenance continued to increase, though the funds for construction lagged behind those given to Manhattan museums. In addition, as Brooklyn's population became more heterogeneous with the arrival of new immigrants, the Institute's leaders became increasingly concerned about their ability to attract members and donors, and the potential impact on its public programs.[20] Director Franklin Hooper complained that the museum's intellectual programs were threatened due to "'an immense influx of people representing a lower grade of civilization.'"[21] Yet despite Hooper's xenophobia, thousands of Brooklynites passed through the museum's doors.

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[19] Steve A. Levine, "In Gotham's Shadow: Brooklyn and the Consolidation of Greater New York." (Ph.D. diss. Graduate Center, CUNY, 2002), 238.

[20] Ibid., chapter seven.

[21] As quoted in Levine, "In Gotham's Shadow," 246.

By 1900 the Brooklyn Institute's Central Museum boasted 190,000 visitors annually, and its *Yearbook*'s flyleaf was inscribed, "For the People, by the People."[22] The Central Museum was free to the public Wednesday through Saturday all day, Thursday and Friday evenings, and Sunday afternoons. This was a generous interpretation of the terms of the lease, which specified that the Institute shall "at all reasonable times be free, open and accessible to the public and private schools . . . and open and accessible to the general public."[23] Pay days, with an admission fee of 25 cents, were significantly less popular. That year the Brooklyn Institute was represented at the municipal Brooklyn Budget Exhibit, with statistics on growing attendance and collections to attest to its value to the community. Further strengthening ties to city government, the Mayor of New York and the Parks Commissioner became ex-officio members of the Institute's Board of Directors.

The Institute's 29 departments offered the public a wide variety of exhibits and lectures on topics as diverse as domestic science, zoology, psychology, and art, as well as more controversial issues such as "the Negro Problem in the South," or "Trade Unions." However, though it provided lectures on art education at the Brooklyn Art Association, with which it was affiliated, the Institute did not yet have a separate department of education.

By 1905 the Central Museum's growing interest in education led its directors to send its publications to the schools and libraries of Brooklyn to encourage teachers to visit with their classes, and began to publish a separate section on "Educational Work."

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[22] Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (hereafter, BIAS), *Yearbook,* (1900), BMA, flyleaf.

[23] "Leased Lands in Prospect Park," reprinted in *BIAS Annual Reports,* 1904-7, 90.

The staff of the Central Museum remarked that over 1,300 children visited that year, and noted that they hoped to see more school children in the future.

They also expressed the hope also that they could find the funds to expand their building to create a lecture hall and auditorium for classes and meetings. Toward this end, the museum's spokesmen tried to convince the Legislature of the Institute's importance to the public, especially since it was "now open more hours than any other museum in the world. . . ."[24] Comparing themselves to the museums of Europe, which were largely run by public funds, they requested ongoing support, with notable success. Although their request was not immediately granted, the City did appropriate $85,000 to create the new steps and entrance to the museum, and the City's annual maintenance was continually increased, reaching $67,000 in 1906, towards an operating budget of approximately $218,000. This was an impressive percentage of City support, given that the Brooklyn Institute also had considerable private support and had raised an endowment of almost $450,000. So, while not as wealthy as the museums across the river, the Institute's private support had not disappeared as a result of City funding or the borough's changing demographics.

Throughout this decade the Institute under Franklin Hooper displayed a broad range of interests, including a marked concern for the preservation of American culture amid growing cadres of first and second generation immigrants in Brooklyn. A wide variety of lecture topics was offered, including issues of immigration and Americanization. For example, the museum hosted a lecture entitled "A Problem of

[24] BIAS, *Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums* (1905), 17.

Assimilation: The World in America, or 'The Coming of the Peoples.'" in 1910. [25] Also reflecting the increasing diversity of Brooklyn's population and of the Institute's audience, a German reading club was inaugurated in 1909, and a series of lectures on "The American People" was offered, including presentations on the "American Stock," Irish, Germans, Jews, and Southern and Eastern Europeans, and "The American People of the Future."[26] Like their lectures, the Institute's collection strategy incorporated examples from many cultures in addition to highlighting American culture.

American art, including modern examples, was well-represented at the Central Museum of the Brooklyn Institute. The catalogue of the Picture Gallery in 1906 reported a range of European works, plus 52 contemporary or recent American works, the most of any category on display. The Institute exhibited not only the most highly regarded examples of art, but a selection representing a broader appeal and origin. "In educational museums the maintenance of a certain perspective is highly desirable, and this is physically attained by a balance of quantity as between classes represented."[27] The leaders of the Institute agreed that reducing some of the barriers between classes was an important part of their mission:

> It is sometimes said that a Museum is a luxury, but it is really a most democratic Institution, the true people's palace, where the treasures of the world are placed at the disposition of all, where the very crowns and scepters of ancient kings are separated from the laborer by only the thickness of a plate in class.[28]

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[25] BIAS, Weekly Tickets, (November and December 1908), BMA.

[26] Ibid.

[27] BIAS, *Museum News* 1 (February 1906), BMA, 94.

In a true democracy, access to the art previously only seen by the wealthy should be as unrestricted as possible. This desire to reduce the barriers between diverse groups of people and art mirrored the museum's willingness to display different types of art alongside one another. This attitude also attracted increasing numbers of visitors and the public money to serve them (since the City often tied their support to greater use of the institutions, whether facilitated by increased visitor hours, or expanded public programs).

By 1910 over 206,000 visitors flocked to the Central Museum, doubling the attendance figures at the turn-of-the-century. The combined maintenance appropriation for the Children's and Central Museums that year had climbed up to $105,905, but the Institute continued to ask for more public money as well, arguing that "while the support given by the City has been most liberal, the growth of the Institute has been rapid . . ."[29]

The museum's leaders also turned their attention to educating children, using a new tool: the survey. In order to determine what most school teachers and children knew about the Museum, they sent out 300 postcards to schools in Brooklyn and Queens to be filled out by teachers. Of the 98 who replied, almost half had visited with students, and 10 teachers knew of students who had visited with their families. As the new Director, William Fox, pointed out, "the development of the relations between the schools and the museums has been the constant preoccupation of the administration."[30] Not just his own, but other administrations around the country, he felt, were increasingly focused on

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[28] BIAS, *Museum News* 3 (January, 1908), BMA, 57.

[29] BIAS, *Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums* (1910), 11.

[30] BIAS, *Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums* (1913), 10.

working with schools, and he enthusiastically reported that the attendance of classes had increased substantially in recent years.

In 1914, the museum's cooperation with schools was taken a step further: a docent was hired to work with schools and other groups. At year's end, the Institute reported:

> [t]here can be no doubt of its benefit in the awakening of the desire for knowledge, and in the refining of the taste of those who frequent the Museum.[31]

The hiring of the docent was not their only improvement to report: the museum introduced motion picture programs in the education department, which made the lectures more popular "in no small measure".[32] Motion pictures were already used in many science museums, and were slowly making their way into art and history museums as "an important part" of educational programming.[33] Museum spokesmen reported that their efforts to reach out to the public schools were so effective that teachers were now reaching out to them: where in past years they contacted schools, in 1914 the initiative for school visits "has come from the schools."[34] As a result, the museum's relationship with the City continued to flourish, and the City finally appropriated $400,000 to finish construction on Sections F and G of the Central Museum building.

In addition to attracting schools and teachers with new techniques and new media, the Brooklyn Institute also reached out to the general public, via print media. In several

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[31] BIAS, *Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums*, (1914), 8.

[32] Ibid., 7.

[33] Ibid., 29.

[34] Ibid.

reports during this decade the newspapers were thanked profusely for "generous" publicity for the museum. Attendance rates rose as well, reaching almost 450,000 in 1916, a jump of almost 100,000 visitors over the year before.[35]

In addition to enhancing their education and outreach work, the popularity of the Central Museum was increased through special loan exhibitions held throughout the year, which enabled it t highlight almost any type of art or culture by gathering materials by loan. Some of these exhibits drew huge crowds and heightened the institution's profile. For example, the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1916 drew over 141,000 people.[36] The policy of holding special exhibitions, "far from distracting the attention of the visitor from that which is permanently on view, has attracted new friends who have acquired the habit of frequent visits . . ."[37] In addition to creating special exhibits using objects borrowed from others, the Institute also loaned objects for exhibits held outside its walls. To further extend its influence, the museum lent objects for the People's Institute shows at public high schools and libraries, including valuable works by artists such as Daumier, Arthur B. Davies and John LaFarge.

The First World War made a substantial impact on the Brooklyn Institute, in several ways. Attendance and memberships had declined by 1917, in part because "it was thought patriotic and advisable to cease campaigning for its increase" so as not to compete with war appeals.[38] The Institute's leaders did not reach out to the public for

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[35] BIAS, *Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums* (1916).

[36] BIAS, *Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums*, (1915), 8.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

money, but they continued to seek media coverage in the belief that "publicity is essential….The press . . . has been a powerful aid to us in the effort to interest the public." [39] They also continued to work extensively with schools, since "if ever the work of public education and entertainment should be persisted in it is in these trying times."[40] More loans were made to high school exhibits (six were held in 1918), and arranged with the Department of Parks, which held two special exhibits for children using motion pictures, drawing 2,000 students.[41]

The war became the subject of lectures and exhibits as well. Lithographs of war work and posters were displayed in 1917. The Library set aside a table for government-issued war publications, and the Librarian presented a paper on "The War Work of a Museum" at the NY Library Club. The Naval branch of the YMCA requested tours for servicemen on Saturdays, and the Brooklyn Institute gladly obliged. Between March and December 1918 over 700 servicemen toured the museum, and were given lunches hosted by the wives of trustees as well as the trustees themselves and various staff members. In another vein, wartime economic demands halted progress on the subway extension, leaving a mess of construction debris in front of the entrance that slowed attendance considerably.[42]

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 9.

Some wartime influences remained well after the troops came home. For example, work with industries accelerated greatly at this point, both by the Brooklyn Institute and other museums. The Institute reported:

> [t]here is a movement throughout the country to make the Museum actively useful to the decorative art industries and the Brooklyn Museum is in the forefront of that movement. Almost daily the designers from important textile manufacturers and from the department stores are in the Museum studying the collections.[43]

A heightened awareness of the importance of preserving American cultural unity and a healthy economy paved the way for more partnerships between museums and industrial designers and manufacturers. In fact, unprecedented numbers of students of design visited the library during the war to study the collections. Their topics varied widely, as silk manufacturers from Paterson, New Jersey examined early European brocades and silks; high school metal shop students from New York City surveyed Japanese locks and colonial chests; and Theatre Guild designers used the Oriental collection to create costumes for a play. The museum was thanked profusely for this work, and favors were exchanged both ways.[44] For example, the Needle and Bobbin Club, aiming to stimulate lace-making in this country, lent items for the museum's lace exhibit. This policy of working with decorative arts groups and industries would continue following the war.

Another legacy of the war and continuing immigration was an increased interest in Americanization. Museums were considered appropriate crucibles for forging patriotic citizens, and the Brooklyn Institute was no exception:

> . . . various groups from Americanization clubs have visited the Museum

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

> from time to time and have displayed an interest and appreciation that were very gratifying. One special group of Italian women from East New York were particularly happy in discovering in the lace cases . . .designs they had been familiar with in their childhood, while another group shared special interest in the colonial furniture.[45]

As this report stressed, one group was most pleased with the familiar pieces from their country of origin, while other immigrants were more interested in the artifacts of their adopted country. Americanization efforts were not always aimed at teaching immigrants about America, but could also be aimed at finding areas of common cultural ground. The twentieth century Brooklyn Institute was beginning to show interest in doing just that, by displaying art from America and other countries under the same roof, and holding lectures on how to cope with increasing diversity in America.

By 1920 the war was over, the subway extension was finally completed, and the Brooklyn Institute prepared for visitors to flock to them once again. They expanded their lecture series to their pre-war levels, and held an Exhibition of Contemporary American Paintings, which received great critical reviews. As noted earlier, the Institute already displayed modern American paintings from their permanent collection, but this show put a strong spotlight on these and other works, and excerpts were reprinted in the Brooklyn Museum *Quarterly*. The show featured 109 works, 44 of which had never been displayed in the New York area.[46] The intention of the Institute was to showcase unknown and relatively unknown artists alongside those who had gained recent acclaim such as Arthur B. Davies, and well-established artists such as William Merritt Chase and Mary Cassatt, The result was a "harmonious ensemble" that represented different schools

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[45] BIAS, *Report on the Condition and Progress of the Museums* (1919), 8.

[46] BIAS, "The Exhibition of Contemporary Paintings at the Brooklyn Museum," in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 2 (April 15, 1920), 245.

and styles in American work.[47] Several critics noted its significance and expressed the hope that it would lead to annual contemporary American shows, applauding an approach that was "unprecedented in the history of the Museum."[48] The *Brooklyn Eagle* was fulsome in its praise:

> [t]he Brooklyn Institute is paving a new road for artistic appreciation in Brooklyn. . . . it is so well planned that it must appeal not only to the connoisseurs of pictures but also to the general public. . . . No one can overestimate the benefit that would come to greater Brooklyn by the regular occurrence of exhibitions of this kind.[49]

This exhibit exemplified the museum's quest to make art attractive and comprehensible to the general public. Though critics hoped that it would be an annual event, the museum's leaders were still somewhat ambivalent about modern art and waited until Katherine Dreier (whose family were Brooklyn Institute donors) approached them in 1926 to stage another exhibit of contemporary paintings, a collaboration examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

Brooklyn women such as Dreier had been supporting the Institute for several generations, efforts reflected in the museum's programs. As of the turn-of-the-century a Women's Auxiliary had been created and was organizing events such as youth orchestral concerts.[50] Other departments promoted activities for women themselves. For example,

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[47] Henry McBride, *New York Sun*, April 4, 1920, reprinted in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 2 (April 15, 1920), 255.

[48] Forbes Watson, *New York Evening Post*, April 3, 1920, reprinted in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 2 (April 15, 1920), 255.

[49] Editorial, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 5, 1920, reprinted in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 2 (April 15, 1920), 255.

[50] BIAS, Weekly Tickets, (March 1900), NYPL. For an overview on female patronage of music that supported democratization of culture, see, Linda Whitest, "Women as 'Keepers of Culture,' Music Clubs, Community Concert Series, and Symphony Orchestras," in Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr, eds.,

the American Institute of Civics offered lectures at the Institute on topics such as "Women's Part in the Promotion of Good Citizenship" and "Benefits and Disadvantages of Woman's Entrance upon Man's Occupations."[51] The Domestic Science department offered programs on cooking, hygiene, and other topics of interest to housewives. The Pedagogy department offered child development and psychiatry lectures. Not content to focus on the intellectual development of women and children, physical training courses were given specifically for them. And one female donor gave permanent funds for the Institute to provide law lectures for women each year.

In 1900 women accounted for none of the patrons (people who gave at least $10,000) of the Brooklyn Institute, but 22 percent of the permanent members (who gave at least $1,000).[52] By 1910 they comprised 20 percent of the patrons (four women) and 32 percent of the permanent members. A decade later, they accounted for four of 8 patrons (50 percent) and almost 50 percent of the permanent members, representing a clear and steady progression in their financial participation, and some of their gifts were substantial. [53] For example, in 1909 the Institute received a bequest from Miss Freda Brunn of $10,000 to maintain and expand the collection of shells her father had donated to the natural history division. While all donations were acknowledged by the Institute, *The Museum News* declared of Brunn's cash gift:

Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists since 1860 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 65-86.

[51] BIAS, Weekly Tickets (March 1900), NYPL.

[52] BIAS, *Yearbook,* (1899-1900), 261.

[53] BIAS, *Report upon the Condition and Progress of the* Museums (1910, 9). See also, BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1920), 79.

> There is nothing that the Director of a Museum more appreciates, nothing he can use to better advantage, than money, and he can use any amount, from one dollar to a million or more.[54]

In spite of the success of Brooklyn women in securing programs of interest to them at the Institute, and despite their generosity, none had yet been elected to the board of directors (a pattern common to other major museums at this time). Women were also better represented on the donor rolls than on the staffs, particularly when it came to the top positions of directors and curators.

This is not surprising, given that women at this time in the general New York job market were dominant in clerical, librarian and teaching positions, and under-represented elsewhere. For example, the author of an article on teachers in the Brooklyn Institute *Museum News* defended their use of the female pronoun by saying it covered "the great majority of teachers. …"[55] In terms of leadership roles, the Institute had only one female heading the Children's Museum and the Library by 1900, plus lecturers who worked in or headed the Domestic Science or Pedagogy departments. Ten other women held clerical positions. In all, females accounted for less than twenty percent of their staff. By 1910 that figure had risen to 26 percent, but most of these additional jobs were in clerical positions or in the departments mentioned above. A decade later, in addition to the earlier hires, a woman was named Associate Curator of Mollusks, which was definitely not a female-dominated department (the Brooklyn Institute would still have a natural history division until the next decade). So, there was some progress in terms of job

[54] BIAS, *Museum News*, 5 (Dec. 1909).

[55] BIAS, *Museum News*, 1 (Dec. 1905), 61.

opportunities for women at the Brooklyn Institute, but mostly in certain female-dominated areas such as the decorative arts and education.

The Brooklyn Institute's trustees faced the interwar years with some optimism. Despite a reduction in the grandiose plans they made prior to consolidation (their 1880's plan would have made the Institute the largest museum in the world), they had expanded their building, and their member rolls, staff, collections, public relations, and public programs in the areas of industrial arts and education. Nonetheless, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences was still viewed as a poor country cousin to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) was founded in 1870 at a meeting at the Union Club by businessmen and lawyers such as George Putnam and Joseph Choate, and artists such as John Kensett and Eastman Johns. Like its Brooklyn counterpart, from the beginning its mission had an educational component and City support. The Trustees' mission was described as follows:

> they desire, in the first place, to collect and publicly exhibit adequate examples of the ancient and modern schools of painting and sculpture, and, secondly, to provide as large and complete a collection as possible of objects which . . . derive their chief value from the application of fine art to their production – in short, a representative Museum of Fine Art applied to industry.[56]

The Museum's educational component was limited at this point primarily to industrial art, but it was enough to warrant municipal support. In 1871 the Legislature passed a law

[56] Metropolitan Museum of Art (hereafter, MMA) *Annual Report* (1871), Metropolitan Museum of Art Watson Library, New York.

appropriating $500,000 to erect a building on Central Park land, and in 1879 MMA moved in to its new quarters.

In its first few years MMA paid heed to its mission to be useful to the public, ever mindful of its responsibilities to the taxpayers who supported it. Museum spokesmen noted that European repositories such as the British South Kensington received annual maintenance funds from their governments in recognition of their public usefulness and hoped New York would follow this example. They opened with one free day per week, which had "large and constant" attendance. The Metropolitan Museum's leaders were delighted to discover the

> careful examination and study with which visitors on the free days inspect the works of ancient and modern mechanics and artizans of their own guilds. Nothing could better illustrate the importance for educational purposes of a museum of art.[57]

Their policy of welcoming industrial workers with free days and study areas was expanded as the City began to give them annual support in 1873 ($15,000 approximately each year). In 1875 they wrote:

> [the City having made an arrangement with the Trustees to assume part of annual expenses it has been thought proper to increase the facilities of the general public in visiting the Museum, and hereafter the Galleries will be opened free to visitors, on two days each week.[58]

This is a clear example of the effect that the City's support had on public programs and accessibility at the Museum. By 1881 Museum officials expanded the free days to four, under an agreement with the Parks department. In addition to free days, MMA provided

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[57] MMA, *Annual Report* (1874), 52.

[58] MMA, *Annual Report*, 1875, 63.

an industrial art collection room that was staffed by a volunteer patron; artisans, teachers and students, especially young women, were "frequent visitors," to the areas set aside for studying the collections.[59] On a condescending note, MMA spokesmen reported that no unpleasant incidents occurred in the Museum on free days, suggesting that the refining influence of art was partly responsible for the lack of offensive behavior. The choice to seek public funds and to provide educational services was not a simple one. Some insisted that more private donations would be forthcoming if the Museum received no public assistance. In a defensive posture, in his annual report of 1883, President John Taylor Johnston provided a lengthy explanation of the reasoning behind this decision to accept municipal funds:

> It has been forcibly argued that the Museum would rest on a more solid foundation if it were located in its own private building, and its revenues to some extent augmented by a charge at its door. . . . But while the contributions of the city to its support form but a part of the expenses of keeping it open as a free museum to the people, it must not be forgotten that a regular charge of admission would be a final abandoning of that one desire, which has always animated the members, of making our instruction a free gift to all classes of people.[60]

This message clearly highlights instruction and service to all New Yorkers as a goal of MMA leaders, particularly since the Museum had no permanent funds to rely upon, though the trustees' level of commitment to it would vary.[61] That would change, however. As historian Calvin Tomkins noted of the 1880s, acquisition and expansion

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[59] Ibid., 67.

[60] MMA, *Annual Report* (1883), 18.

[61] See, Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*, 340-369, for a discussion of the trustee's other motivations and priorities that at times took their focus away from education.

would take precedence over education as "a golden shower of gifts was descending upon the museum, and threatening at any moment to become a downpour."[62] Though acquisition and expansion overshadowed public programs, they did not reduce or eliminate them, however.

By the turn-of-the-century MMA received over 500,000 New Yorkers and other visitors annually, and in particular attendance by students and scholars from public and private schools at every level was increasing. The City contributed $95,000 in maintenance (toward an operating budget of $129,000 approximately), so the Museum was even able to show a small surplus. The Mayor and Parks Commissioner were named ex-officio members of the board of MMA in 1905 "in view of the greater interest evidenced by the city authorities in museum affairs."[63] By now the Museum had accumulated several permanent funds from prominent donor families such as the Vanderbilts and Astors, but the trustees made it clear that "they would not forget" that the primary purpose of MMA was educational.[64]

Many of these donors of money, time and artifacts were female, though none sat on the Board of Directors. For example, in 1900 of the 222 people named as Patrons for their gifts of $5,000 or more in MMA history, 57 were women accounting for approximately 25 percent of all Patrons, a ratio that held steady throughout the next 15 years, increasing to 30 percent by 1920.[65] Although their gifts were important and very

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[62] Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970 and 1989), 69.

[63] MMA, *Annual Report* (1905), 11.

[64] Ibid.

[65] MMA, *Annual Report* (1920), 4.

welcome, MMA did not follow suit by offering the programs directly or indirectly geared toward women that the Brooklyn Institute did. In part, this may be due to the relative desperation in Brooklyn to attract and keep what donors they could, and also to the fact that their original mission had always been broader and more inclusive. MMA had a larger pool of affluent male donors from which to draw. Also, the mission at MMA was narrower -- MMA did give lectures, but their scope of subjects was far smaller, limited to art. On the other hand, like their counterparts on Eastern Parkway, the Metropolitan did begin to hire women.

By 1900 two women had been hired as assistants, and by 1910 there were six on staff. As at the Brooklyn Institute, women at the Metropolitan Museum were usually assistants, educators and librarians, but there were a couple of exceptions. By 1920 eleven women were working there out of a staff of thirty-six, in a variety of departments (Painting, Greek and Roman, Decorative Arts, Industrial Relations, etc.) as assistants, docents, librarians, cataloguers, and two assistant curators (who had been assistants and received promotions).[66] In most cases, they were not donors or related to donors; it seems they were hired and promoted on their merits. So, there was a clear progression in terms of job opportunities for women, though they remained locked out of the top positions in most areas.

In 1905 Sir Jaspar Purdon Clark from the South Kensington Museum was hired as director, and since that institution specialized in industrial arts, the leadership proclaimed that the hire provided a "guarantee" that industrial arts would continue to be promoted at

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[66] Ibid.

MMA.[67] The Board issued a resolution that year giving free admission to public school teachers and students on all operating days. Secretary Henry Kent encouraged greater cooperation with city schools, such as making better connections between their curricula and the collections of the Museum, and bolstered his case by issuing a special circular describing the collections to the schools.

The collection continued to increase rapidly, pushing the Museum to expand its building and operating expenses. By 1909 the budget had topped $324,000, and the City had upped their contribution to $200,000, more than doubling its 1905 appropriation. The Museum's budget for acquisitions was over $500,000 two years later, setting a new high.[68] MMA leaders' focus on the collections began to compete with their educational aspirations, although education remained an important part of their mission. In 1911 they opened a lecture hall for use by the public schools and inaugurated talks on art to teachers of history, English, classics and drawing. In 1914 they held a loan exhibit at Washington Irving High School of modern oils and watercolors that drew 20,000 visitors, and two years later published a 46 page pamphlet on Art Education for industrial art workers.

There was a great deal of expansion as well. Between 1905 and 1915 MMA's floor space had increased from 151,500 feet to 266,800 feet and their staff had more than doubled. Surveying thee growth of the collections, building, staff and memberships since its inception, MMA's trustee report in 1911 concluded on a positive note:

> [f]irst and foremost, our Museum no longer appeals merely to 'the upper classes,' the educated, the cultured, the rich. It has entered

[67] MMA, *Annual Report* (1905), 11.

[68] MMA, Annual Report (1911).

> the life of the people. . . . We are not depending on any single man, or indeed any small group of men, for our continued growth.[69]

Allowing some leeway for optimism, this conclusion is supported by several factors, such as growing attendance (700,000 annual visitors by 1915), the Museum's work with the public schools and industrial arts workers, and its large roll of donors, some of whom lived in other states. Though MMA leaders would later express some interest in Americanization with the opening of their American Wing in the 1920s, in this period it showed only a moderate amount of attention to American art, and immigrants and Americanization. Conversely, Museum officials did continue to express their appreciation for the growing numbers of people who came for specific educational purposes. "In earlier years its [MMA's] visitors were largely composed of those who came to see. In later years . . . the Museum has been visited by those who came to learn."[70] By decade's end the City contributed over $312,000 to the Museum's budget, which had grown to upwards of $797,000.[71] It was now running a deficit, which spokesmen called optimistically "an expression of growth," but showed no signs of slowing the expansion of either its collections or its programs.[72]

The New-York Historical Society

The New-York Historical Society (NYHS) hewed a very different and much more conservative path during the first two decades of the new century than either the

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[69] Ibid.

[70] MMA, *Annual Report* (1916), 26.

[71] MMA, *Annual Report* (1920), 9.

[72] Ibid.

Brooklyn Institute or the Metropolitan. To understand why, it is important to examine its origins. Founded in 1804, the Society's mission was less pedagogical than that of the other two museums:

> The object of the Society is to discover, procure, and preserve whatever may relate to the natural, civil, literary, and ecclesiastical history of the United States in general, and of the State of New York in particular. Also to establish and maintain collections in art and archeology.[73]

Its mission was entirely centered on the material collection, rather than education or public service. By the early twentieth century, the Society had amassed a rich collection: the library had 100,000 volumes, and the gallery had 987 paintings.[74] It continued to pay scant attention to programs for the public, in part because it did sought neither government support nor large audiences.

The Society's trustees boasted that with the exception of a grant from the Legislature in 1827, they had never requested public funding, relying only on private contributions and membership fees to finance their operations. As a result, they could be exclusive in their membership and admissions policies: in addition to the fees, membership required nomination by an existing member and a vote by the current members. Membership was very important to the Society financially, and they repeatedly appealed to current members to nominate new candidates.

Each annual report reminded the members of the need to add to the roll of members "which is constantly diminished by the decrease of many of our oldest and best

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[73] By-Laws, reprinted in New-York Historical Society (hereafter, NYHS), *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1906), NYHS Library, 27.

[74] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1900), 16.

citizens . . ."[75] In fact, their annual report's "necrology" section recorded heavy losses to the rolls each year: in 1900 34 members died, and 43 new members were elected. At this rate it was difficult to significantly expand the membership.[76] The appeals could be even more specific in identifying the select group the Society served: "[n]ot a single Patriotic Society exists in New York whose members have not directly or indirectly called upon us for information obtainable nowhere else."[77] Patriotic societies were even more exclusive than NYHS -- they had specific hereditary requirements for membership. It was not enough to know a member; you had to be descended from the same wealthy group of families from either England or Holland.

These elitist appeals successfully attracted enough gifts and member dues to help the Society achieve financial stability. By 1900 its rosters included over 1,000 members (almost half of them life members), many of whom were female, as were many of the more generous donors. In 1902 the Building Committee reported 80 gifts, 30% from women, 16 of whom gave over $1,000. By 1910 22 percent of the fellows were female.[78] Of 14 life members elected in 1919, 21 percent were female, numbers that failed to reveal any progression in female participation. As for staffing, the only woman listed in museum publications on staff was Caroline Ransom, Ph.D., who headed the prestigious Egyptian collection. No women served on the board as of 1920.[79]

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[75] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1900-1920).

[76] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1900), 19.

[77] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1907), 41.

[78] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1902), 17-20.

[79] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1919-1920).

The Society had permanent funds in excess of $49,000, and spokesmen boasted that it was their policy not to engage in deficit-spending for any reason. NYHS spent under $7,000 on expenses that year and still had a little left over. Moreover, the new building campaign brought in enough large and small gifts that the Society could continue to avoid asking for government funds.

Begun in the 1880s, the building drive was a long and patient campaign, but a successful one. It garnered gifts of all sizes from both men and women. For example, early on Mrs. Robert Stuart offered $100,000 if $300,000 could be raised by others. When this proved to be difficult, she lowered the match figure, extended the deadline, and gave the $100,000. It was by far the largest gift in the campaign during the nineteenth century – the next closest donation was George Vanderbilt's pledge of $15,000. Other than the match, there was no other requirement attached to Stuart's gift. Though the campaign was now many years old and the building still had not begun construction by the twentieth century, the Society still avoided asking for public funding. Thanks to a generous $250,000 gift from Henry Dexter which allowed the Society to begin construction, the new building was complete up to the first story by 1906, and the NYHS still ran in the black[80] Its collections were slightly larger by that date as well, with 115,000 volumes in the library and 905 paintings in the gallery, bolstered by continuing gifts of old New York artifacts from the attics or collecting trips of New York's aristocrats.[81]

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[80] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee,* (1880-1905).

[81] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1901,1906,1909, 1920).

The Society gave lectures primarily on subjects of colonial history, such as Ben Franklin, or "Signers of the Declaration of Independence."[82] In rarer cases, the subjects were more current, such as "The Americanization of Panama," demonstrating that the topics of imperialism and Americanization were popular both in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

NYHS finally occupied the new building on Central Park West near the American Museum of Natural History in 1908. Since the building had not received any public funds, there was no need to change its admission hours or policies for greater accessibility. Society offcials, led by Librarian Robert Kelby, refused to open on Sunday or in the evenings, which meant that many workers could not attend. Although annual attendance figures were not published until 1919, the Society did publish statistics for some of its exhibits or events. These figures suggest that these events could attract a decent loyal following, but the numbers do not indicate widespread growing interest from the general public. For instance, a reception held by the Ladies Committee in 1901 attracted 1,000 guests, and the 1909 Hudson-Fulton celebration loan exhibit (held in conjunction with the Colonial Dames of America society) attracted a scant 2,000 visitors. By decade's end only 15,000 people visited the Society, while the Brooklyn Institute's Central Museum attracted over 300,000.

Nevertheless, the NYHS continued to receive generous private gifts from both men and women. For example, Kate Warner bequeathed $100,000 in 1915 in memory of her father, who had been the Society's recording secretary. That same year the treasurer reported over $318,000 in permanent funds, not including a bequest of real estate by

[82] Ibid.

Cornelia and Catharine DePeyster estimated at over $100,000 in resale value. These gifts allowed NYHS to maintain its exclusivity and keep the government at arm's length. When representatives did communicate with the City, their relations could be rather frosty.

For example, in 1915 the City designed a new flag based on colonial designs and invited the NYHS to a meeting of the Committee of the Art Commission to vote on its adoption. The Society declined to send anyone to the meeting and the flag was adopted. When the members realized the flag was an inaccurate representation (of the Netherlands flag of 1582) they formed a special committee and asked to meet the Mayor to discuss the matter. He declined and offered to set up a meeting with his Secretary. The committee refused to see anyone but the Mayor, so no meeting was held and the flag was adopted. In response, NYHS printed a resolution that stated that the Society "accepts the new flag as an historical fact, but at the same time the Society does not and cannot change its historical conclusion founded on its data."[83] This haughtiness was not the type of behavior likely to endear it to anyone in the city or state government.

However, things improved during World War I as public displays of patriotism took center stage and the Society was well-positioned to join in. NYHS approached the Mayor regarding putting a Liberty pole in City Hall park to commemorate the Sons of Liberty, but more importantly, as a memorial to "the unflagging patriotism of the New York troops, their valor and unparalleled success on the Battlefields of Europe."[84] The

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[83] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee* (1915), 58.

[84] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee* (1919), 23.

Mayor was receptive to this wartime appeal, and the pole was approved by the Park Commissioner's architects the following year.

NYHS did not relax its admission policies or seek public funding, but it did begin to show an interest in education, and not just for its members' genealogy studies. In 1917 it was shaken up by a reform campaign led by member May Van Rensselaer, which led to more education programs, a story that will be discussed in chapter two. In 1917 all the public and private schools in the area received posters announcing free lectures. Nine were held for a total of 1319 students and teachers that year, with the largest audience for the presentation on "War Activities of the United States." Some of these lectures were illustrated by moving pictures, further demonstrating the Society's willingness to experiment and bring in more people, goaded by members like Van Rensselaer.[85]

Conclusion

Each museum followed its own trajectory from founding to the 1920s, but all entered the interwar years with a better appreciation for public programs and accessibility than they had at the onset of the twentieth century. The Brooklyn Institute began with an educational mission, one that expanded during this period to encompass a small department of its own, with its own annual report. The Metropolitan's educational mission was not as central to its overall mission, but from that initial impulse it also began to hire its own staff to achieve its goals. Administrators at both repositories also felt strongly that industrial art education played an important role in museum activities and in the American economic system, and initiated industrial arts study rooms and exhibits. The availability of public programs and accessibility were strongly influenced

[85] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee* (1917).

by City support during this period, a trend that would continue. NYHS, neither seeking nor receiving such support, lagged behind in programs, accessibility, and popularity as a result.

All three institutions began with a relatively small degree of female participation (as donors and staff) that increased to varying degrees in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Women would become solid supporters of each institution in terms of yearly memberships and many modest donations of artifacts, documents, and art, and a few made large gifts. Yet they wielded little influence over most museum collection strategies or programs, with a couple of notable exceptions. By 1910, the Brooklyn offered a variety of programs aimed at female audiences, a policy its officials would continue. At the New-York Historical Society May Van Rensselaer attempted to create new programs for the public, which will be discussed in the following chapter. No women were elected to the board of directors at any of these museums yet, and only a few held staff positions. Commonly, those early positions were clerical, in the library, or as educators, mirroring the heavy female presence in these fields in the job market as a whole.

To varying degrees, leaders of the major museums increasingly concerned themselves with issues of educating the public in order to create a more culturally united city. At this stage, they were primarily discussing these issues in professional meetings and lectures, rather than creating programs to address them. World War I created a host of problems, but it stimulated interest in serving the public more effectively. Perhaps this is partly due to the fears of cultural disunity that World War I generated. Certainly, museum trustees often stated that New Yorkers during and directly after the War were

now crossing their thresholds in greater numbers with a more serious purpose than before (based on attendance at education programs or on survey responses), and public programming was looming larger in importance. Even trustees at the Historical Society felt pressured to create public programs. By the start of the heady 1920s, these museum officials were just beginning to take a more active role in cultural leadership, whether the impetus came from their leaders or from outside influences. The next two decades would bring many new ideas and new voices to cultural institutions, reflecting the significant and lasting changes taking place in the larger community. Concerns about immigration and Americanization grew in importance following World War I as well, as we will see in the following chapter. The efforts of May Van Rensselaer and female volunteers would exemplify women's expanding roles in promoting public culture within a city of myriad cultures.

Chapter Two

"Making Scenes:" Women and New York Museums during the 1920s

Museums in America entered the twentieth century with far more hope, prosperity, and distinction than their trustees could have imagined a few decades earlier. From sleepy anatheums and tawdry Barnum spectacles, museums had evolved into established educational institutions with fine collections of art and artifacts, backed by powerful and respected citizens. This was especially true in New York, which boasted several great collections in art and science. Yet despite a growing female presence in other educational institutions such as libraries and schools, prior to World War I it was rare for a woman to hold an influential position in an American museum. Women served as volunteers and donors, and a few worked as curatorial or education assistants. New York City was no exception to this pattern. Historian Kathleen McCarthy has observed that "the more munificently funded these institutions were, the less responsive they were to female ministrations or to the claims of the community as a whole."[86] Newspapers, correspondence, annual reports, and published accounts demonstrate that women in the first decades of the twentieth century struggled to gain positions of power in the country's major multi-purpose museums. They fared better in smaller and newer institutions that offered less established forms of art and culture (such as the decorative arts or contemporary painting).

[86] McCarthy, *Women's Culture*, 143. For more on women's roles and opportunities as volunteers and staff members, see also, Abigail Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), and Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr, eds., *Cultivating Music in America*.

This chapter examines the impact of May Van Rensselaer on public service at the New-York Historical Society (NYHS) and her role in establishing the Museum of the City of New York, (MCNY), and Katherine Dreier's role in introducing modern art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art (BMA). Van Rensselear and Dreier held widely different views on most issues, but both strongly believed that both women and museums should take a more active role in public culture. These and other women ensured that cultural leadership would no longer be limited to a small group of men, and more importantly, they modernized these institutions by supporting outreach and educational programs, lectures, and concerts, as well as pioneering in the popularization of neglected art forms.

Women's roles as educators and patrons for outreach programs often grew out of their volunteer work. The 1920's "New Woman" ideal celebrated women's roles outside the home, and expanded the acceptable roles for women to include patronage, voluntarism, and professional employment.[87] Though women had been engaged in patronage and voluntarism in the arts previously, their numbers and impact rose significantly during the 1920s.[88] For those who could not afford servants, technological advances in housework such as the availability of running water gave them more time.[89]

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[87] The term "New Woman" originated in the nineteenth century, but became more commonly used in the first and second decade of the twentieth century. It referred to a large variety of modern behaviors that had previously been considered unacceptable, from looser sexual mores, bobbed hair and smoking, to activism and wage work. For an overview, see, Carol Smith-Rosenberg's "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985). On politics, see, chapter ten, "The 'New Woman': Suffrage and Social Reform," in *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 1996), Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, eds., which encompasses activism between 1900 and 1920. Christine Stansell notes several images of the New Woman were commissioned by Godey's and other magazines as early as the 1890s. See, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), notes, 347.

[88] Ibid., xxii-xiii.

Moreover, following the Civil War and the expansion of the economy, women increasingly inherited money they controlled and used for philanthropic purposes.

At the threshold of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of middle class women were venturing outside the home to get an education, volunteer, and join the work force. Between 1900 and 1920 the number of females attending college jumped from 85,000 to over 280,000.[90] The rate of employment for women soared as well, so that when the 1920s began, approximately half of all women had experienced working for pay.[91] Many of them took clerical or sales jobs, but a great number used their schooling to become educators. During the 1920s over 80 percent of teachers were female, and over 90 percent of librarians.[92] As museums expanded their collections and staff, they turned their attention to public educational functions, and women were prepared to take on this work.[93] Public education became increasingly important following World War I, as museum leaders were galvanized to take a more active role as leaders in what they felt was a cultural crisis.

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[89] Technological improvements such as the availability of running water, electricity, and coal versus wood fires freed early twentieth century women from the arduous housework duties that preoccupied their predecessors. See, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 217-249.

[90] Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting A Course: American Women in the 1920s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 137.

[91] John J. Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 93. See also, *Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

[92] Brown, *Setting a Course*, 129.

[93] On working women, see, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 217-249. According to William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff, women in the 1920s began for the first time to comprise about half of college students. Scott and Rutkoff, *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 117.

In 1920, the Paul M. Rea, President of the American Association of Museums (AAM) spoke at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the AAM, deeply troubled by the "social discontent" that he felt plagued America. He characterized this malaise as crass commercialism and intellectual apathy, not only threatened institutions like museums, but "our national sanity and vigor."[94] He further declared that

> [I]n no previous period has the direction of social evolution trembled more uncertainly in the balance. We must mobilize every force that makes for good in the struggles of peace as we did in those of war.[95]

He was not alone in this view. Frederic Allen Whiting, Director of the Cleveland Museum, echoed this theme in 1923: "Never in the long history of museums has the opportunity been so immense as it is today; and nowhere in the world, I believe, is the opportunity so great or so urgent as it is in our own country."[96] Yet, museums at this time needed to reinvent themselves if they were to use this opportunity.

For Rea, most Americans pictured a museum as ". . . a storehouse of curious dead things, interesting chiefly to specialists. . . ."[97] Rea pointed out that as of 1910, over seventy percent of the art museums in America were run by colleges, universities, or societies, rather than by museum professionals, with miniscule budgets that could not support a significant public role. Museums of history were not any better, as their leadership was "composed chiefly of antiquarians whose temperament makes them live

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[94] Paul M. Rea, "The Future of Museums in the Life of the People," in *Museum News*, AAM, 6 (November 1920) 48.

[95] Ibid., 56.

[96] Frederick Allen Whiting, "The Great Task," in *Museum News*, AAM, 9 (March-April 1923), 187.

[97] Rea, *Museum News,* AAM, 6 (November 1920), 49.

in memories of the past rather than in the activities of the present . . ."[98] However, there was cause for optimism; he believed a quarter of these repositories represented a "a fundamentally new type rich with possibilities of service to humanity . . . . .a new and better species arising out of a declining species."[99]

What distinguished the museums of the future from their ancestors was a commitment to public service.[100] How was this achieved? Rea offered several suggestions to draw and educate more people: a better relationship with the public schools, industrial exhibits to exemplify the practical side of beautiful design, and increasing use of publicity. Frederick Whiting also emphasized the changes taking place in museum culture: "It is a time of experiment and of imaginative thinking and planning."[101] Stressing the importance of better training of museum workers and better coordination, he explained, "it means increased facilities for inter-communication in order that successful experiments and new ideas can carry from place to place. . ."[102] Another AAM member cautioned that despite the improvements, much work remained to be done to add enlightenment to the museum visitor's experience. People were attending as never before, but what was the result? All too often, due to lack of good labels and education programs, museum visitors faced confusion, boredom, and fatigue in the

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[98] Ibid., 50.

[99] Ibid., 49.

[100] Ibid., 50.

[101] Whiting, "The Great Task," *Museum News*, 187.

[102] Ibid., 188.

temples of culture. ". . .[I]f we have the courage to say so we would admit that we get more pleasure out of the movies."[103]

Museum professionals nationwide felt that repositories must do two things: first, dedicate themselves to education and outreach, and second, improve the profession as a whole through better training, organization, and communication. Though women became increasingly active participants in mainstream museums during the 1920s, they were not well-positioned for the increasing emphasis on professional training and advanced degrees that swept the field. They were, however, well-positioned to promote public education, an area that had long been considered an extension of women's maternal roles in molding the next generation.

The recent literature on women as "keepers of culture" suggests that women in the twentieth century played a significant role in creating outreach and education programs for the arts promoting avant-garde and undervalued art. The fact that they often faced substantial obstacles to holding positions of influence in established fields of art and culture, may have encouraged them find their own niche by promoting new art forms and seeking new audiences.[104] This chapter looks at the experiences of two women who attempted to promote outreach and unestablished art within three different types of mainstream institutions.

A conservative, established institution, the New-York Historical Society strenuously resisted Van Rensselaer's ideas on public service and change. Frustrated by

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[103] Erwin O. Christensen, "Art Museums for the Public," in *Museum News*, AAM, 8 (July-August, 1922), 36.

[104] On the visual arts, see, McCarthy, *Women's Culture*.

her lack of influence at NYHS, she laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Museum of the City of New York. The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, as it was then called (the name was changed to the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1934, hereafter, BMA), was not as conservative or wealthy as NYHS.[105] BMA has never been as successful at attracting donors as the large museums in Manhattan which had greater access to local wealth, but it proved to be open to Dreier's ideas on art and public service. While Van Rensselaer and Dreier had a real impact on NYHS, MCNY, and BMA, both women had great difficulty in building lasting institutions of their own under their control. These stories reflect the challenges women faced in the 1920s when they attempted to be influential in institutions dominated by men.

Women did found three lasting museums in New York City, so I will just mention a few points about them. Founded in 1897 by the granddaughters of Peter Cooper, the Cooper-Hewitt Museum formed a part of his beloved Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. However, once the museum grew, the subsequent female directors and their volunteers ceded much control in the 1930s to a professionally and academically trained assistant curator named Calvin Hathaway, as well as other professionals he hired.[106] The Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) original founders Lillie Bliss, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and Mary Sullivan had a significant influence on the early history of the museum, but they and the board of directors handed the

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[105] BMA, Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives: A Chronology from 1823 to 2004, BMA Archives, 2004, 1. Founded as the Brooklyn Apprentices Library Association in 1823, its name became the Brooklyn Institute between 1843 and 1891, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in 1892, and finally, the Brooklyn Museum of Art through the present day. For the purposes of this dissertation, it will often be called BMA for simplicity despite the periodization.

[106] Russell Lynes, *More than Meets the Eye: The History and Collections of Cooper-Hewitt Museum* (Eastern Press, Inc., 1991), 37

directorship and curatorial positions to men such as Alfred Barr.[107] Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney founded the Whitney Museum in 1930. After her death and the death of the first director Juliana Force, Whitney's vision of supporting living artists was less evident in curatorial policy. [108] As the museums became more established and successful, women's influence receded.

May King Van Rensselaer promoted public service in two New York history museums, engaging in a well-publicized debate on public service at the New-York Historical Society and playing a significant role in the early development of the Museum of the City of New York, the youngest of the museums under review.

In many ways, May Van Rensselaer was a figure who exemplified the cultural changes between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as a woman and as a member of New York's old elite. She was born in 1848, the same year women met at the Seneca Falls Convention to discuss women's rights. The convention's Declaration of Sentiments listed many grievances, including the fact that married women were considered by law, "civilly dead," and could not control their own property or wealth.[109] By the Civil War, most states had passed property laws that enabled married women to control their property, which greatly aided patronage for women like Van Rensselaer. She faced a period of changing cultural roles for elite families like hers, and changing sex roles for women of all classes.

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[107] Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: The Museum of Modern Art* (New York Anatheum, 1973).

[108]Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1990). See also, McCarthy, *Women's Culture*.

[109] "Declaration of Sentiments," of the Seneca Falls Convention, reprinted in *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 1996), Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, eds., 167.

Born Mary King (she later changed her name to May), daughter of Archibald Gracie King, and Mary Denning Duer, Van Rensselaer was descended on both sides from prominent and old New York families. Her father was descended from Archibald Gracie, and her maternal grandfather, William Duer, was the president of Columbia University in 1830. She married John King Van Rensselaer, whose family name was as equally established locally as her own. She boasted that "[t]he Van Rensselaers of Van Rensselaerswycky, have for over two hundred years held an important position in the history of America."[110]

She was a wife, mother of two (Harold and John), and grandmother, but she believed women could do more than raise families. Van Rensselaer reflected the ambivalent times in which she was raised, poised between the Victorian cult of domesticity and the era of the New Woman. In addition to her museum work, she was a researcher and author, writing and editing eight published books between 1882 and 1924. She wrote on a variety of topics, including crochet lace, her family history, and playing cards (which she titled, tongue-in-cheek, *The Devil's Picture Books*). In 1898 Van Rensselaer published *The Goede Vrouw of Mana-ha-ta*, a history of Dutch women in New York between 1609-1760.[111] Many of her writings illustrate how strongly she believed that women were unheralded and important "keepers of culture," and she carried that vision through her museum work as well. She complained:

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[110] Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, *New Yorkers of the XIX* Century (F. Tennyson Nealy, NY, 1897), 1. Demonstrating her immense capacity to exaggerate her family's importance, although this book's title suggests a broad treatment of New York history, in fact it is merely a set of family trees only including the twenty families to whom she is directly related.

[111] See her obituary, *New York Times*, "Noted Authoress Dies at Home Here:" (May 12, 1925).

> History is generally written by men, who dwell on politics, wars, and the exploits of their sex. Household affairs, women's influence, social customs and manners are seldom chronicled. . . It was customary [in old New York families] to destroy all letters that dealt with family life, particularly anything concerning the women of the family, as if in their lives or daily occupations their was something to be ashamed of.[112]

Van Rensselaer believed that the Dutch descendants brought to the colonies enlightened ideals. She pointed out that Dutch women were educated, often knowledgeable about commerce and politics as well as household manufactures and social graces. "No one in Niew Amsterdam dreamed of insisting that a woman's place was in the home; yet never were homes cared for more scrupulously and systematically."[113] Van Rensselaer felt women should be masters of domestic arts and keepers of those traditions, while still sharing their wisdom and skills with the public. She viewed women as being cultural custodians in ways that were as significant as men, if not more so. "It has often been said that the position of the wife and mother throws the most light on the civilization of a people . . ." and she declared that Dutch women of that era "were more highly educated, better protected by the laws of the country, and held a more prominent position, than any of their contemporaries."[114]

She complained that her fellow elites were neglecting their roles as cultural authorities, either by excluding the rest of society from their cultural activities, or by ceding leadership to them. Van Rensselaer argued that those who had earned social distinction by being born into the right families, or behaving oneself in a refined manner,

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[112] May Van Rensselaer, *The Goede Vrouw of Mana-ha-ta* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1898), vi.

[113] "Van Rensselaer, *The Social Ladder*, 15.

[114] Van Rensselaer, *The Goede Vrouw of Mana-ha-ta*, 10.

should be emulated and kept in the spotlight (much the way screen celebrities are now). She noted that New York newspapers

> devoted more space to the entertainments and ceremonies of its residents whose names are in the Social Register than they do to the proceedings of the Congress of the United States.[115]

And, although she did not lament it, even less space was given to the entertainments and ceremonies of residents whose names failed to make the Social Register.

While her remarks were clearly self-serving, promoting as they did the interests of Dutch descendants like herself, her views reflected the concerns of many of her contemporaries. She felt that the history of high society was significant due to elite leadership roles in culture. She wrote:

> The story of the development of a social organization is something more than the tale of changing fashions and the ruses of the ambitious to gain admission within a sacred circle. Society epitomizes those traits of a people and a history of Society is, to some extent at least, a history of national thought and custom.[116]

Van Rensselaer believed that unity of "national thought and custom" was being threatened on two fronts: by immigrants and by the tremendous fortunes made by some following the Civil War. She was concerned that the high society of the twentieth century was too focused on wealth and the ostentatious display of it. Instead of promoting the pursuit of knowledge and culture, as the revolutionary generation had, the most powerful people in New York were busy showing off their possessions and themselves. To be socially prominent, one did not need breeding, refinement, or

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[115]Ibid., 4.

[116]Ibid., 4-5.

education. She observed ascerbically that social stature only required "wealth and intelligence, or wealth and an astute press agent, or perhaps, in the final analysis, simply wealth."[117] She explained that traditionally, high society promoted culture and learning more than the display of wealth: "[it] has patronized and occasionally allied itself with painters, sculptors, authors, musicians. It will combine with art. It cannot be made to amalgamate with gold."[118] Van Rensselaer felt that the history of the culture of old Dutch New York could perhaps influence immigrants, since it clearly was no longer influencing the new robber barons.

Like her, many historians in the 1920s agreed with Charles and Mary Beard's conclusion that, [t]he history of a civilization, if intelligently conceived, may be an instrument of civilization."[119] The growing popularity of public history was not just a local phenomenon. Across America, patriotic societies preserved historic sites, collectors scoured the countryside for obscure and commonplace bits of Americana, and historical museums proliferated and expanded.[120] In New York, however, these efforts took on unique dimensions due to the city's leading role as a global metropolis.

Since the early nineteenth century, rising numbers of immigrants had swelled the population of America. More than three quarters of a million entered annually between

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[117] Van Rensselaer, *The Social Ladder*, 195.

[118] Ibid., 109.

[119] Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, 1927), vii.

[120] Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 300-423.

1905 and 1914.[121] In New York, by 1890, eighty percent of the city's residents were first or second generation immigrants, who came to dominate both the almshouses and the corridors of power at Tammany Hall.[122] Philanthropic institutions struggled to define their role in this social order of vast wealth and widespread poverty. Tammany Hall finally used its leverage as a funder to pressure the Metropolitan Museum of Art to open on Sundays to welcome workers in the 1890s. And it was in this period that the New-York Historical Society was increasingly characterized as out of touch with the public in the popular press.[123] Intellectuals and cultural philanthropists wondered "whether either culture or democracy could survive the new conditions of metropolitan life in New York City."[124] In the late nineteenth century, the position of Old Guard New Yorkers deteriorated in terms of wealth, influence, and status. Knickerbockers (Dutch descendants) attributed this fall to several factors, but the increasing foreign presence was a favored scapegoat.[125]

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[121] Robert A. Carlson, "Americanization as an Early Twentieth-Century Adult Education Movement," in *Americanization, Social Control, and Philanthropy*, ed. George Pozzetta (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 69.

[122] Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 48. See also, Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), chapter 5.

[123] Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 50.

[124] Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 171.

[125] Old New Yorkers viewed both immigrants and new industrialists as threats to their cultural authority. See, Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 275-281. The name Knickerbocker is derived from Washington Irving's "A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of a Dutch Dynasty" published in 1809. His fictional essay features a pompous and xenophobic amateur historian named Diedrich Knickerbocker. See, *New York Daily News*, "From Washington Irving . . . Diedrich Knickerbocker" (December 16, 2002).

For those Americans who saw immigrants as a problem, views on how to handle the "foreign presence" varied widely. The museums and patriotic societies that favored Americanization via museum education often fell on the more progressive end of that spectrum. In the late teens, momentum was building toward immigration restriction laws. A 1920 *New York Times* editorial favored the creation of a plan which would distribute immigrants to areas of the country where they were needed (presumably for labor shortages), instead of "piling up in our cities."[126] Laws passed in 1921 and 1924 shut the Golden Door for the most part, but that did not stem the desire for Americanization programs to deal with the immigrants already here.[127] Although a wide range of views concerning the goals and methods of Americanization persisted throughout the early twentieth century, the themes of education in and conformity to American values, however defined, were commonly expressed. In his 1923 State of the Union Message, Calvin Coolidge sternly insisted: "America must be kept American."[128] This message was warmly received in many quarters of New York, where many of the immigrants entered the United States. Like May Van Rensselaer, other New Yorkers of Dutch descent also strongly supported teaching colonial history, hoping it would stem the "deluge of poverty, ignorance, disease, and crime threatening to engulf our good city."[129] In order for the general public to benefit from the teaching of history at historical

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[126] Editorial, *New York Times* (December 20, 1920).

[127] Lawrence Levine, *Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture and History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 105-127.

[128] Quoted in Carlson, in *Americanization, Social Control, and Philanthropy*, 77.

[129] Quoted in Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 277.

institutions like NYHS, however, the public had to want to visit. Not many did, so new enticements became necessary.

As World War I opened, the New-York Historical Society seemed like the last place to find new ideas or innovative approaches to public enlightenment, despite its many stored treasures. Founded in 1804, it contained valuable and fascinating ephemera touching many aspects of New York history within its massive collection, such as paintings and prints of old New York, a key from the Brideswell prison used by the British during the Revolution, and the furniture which the first Congress had used in the old City Hall. In addition to New York artifacts, many display objects had no connnection to New York history, such as the large Egyptian collection.[130] Historian Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes complained that the catalogue system was cumbersome and inefficient, and the library was understaffed. Despite the fact that the board approved the hiring of new cataloguers, none were hired. As a result, the City of New York did not have a historical museum to rival its art museums in cultural leadership and public service. New York had a growing number of stories to tell which were not being told.

NYHS was open to the public, but few were aware of it. The librarian Robert Kelby "had little interest in the public service aspects of librarianship."[131] In response to those who wished the Society open to serve the public on Sunday, Kelby declared, "No. We go to church on Sundays."[132] NYHS faced the interwar years as a bastion of old New

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[130] *New York Times* (January 14, 1917).

[131] Pamela Spence Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen: The Library of the New York Historical Society, 1804-1982* (Hampden, Conn.: Ardon Books, 1984), 58.

[132] Ibid.

Yorkers, not a vital institution for the education of the public. Finally, May Van Rensselaer stirred the Society into action.

As a member of the Society, she had taken note of all of the problems with the facilities and exhibits, and attended the annual meetings since 1915. Van Rensselaer deplored the fact that a suggested merger between the Historical Society and the Metropolitan Museum of Art had been aborted in the nineteenth century because the Historical Society elites viewed the Metropolitan's elites to be beneath them socially. And while the Historical Society was struggling to appear relevant to the populace, the Met went on to heights of fame, popularity, and artistic riches, and continues today to dominate New York's cultural landscape. In short, despite a treasure trove of artifacts in its collections, NYHS had failed to captivate the public at large, while institutions like the New York Public Library and the Met established cultural leadership and did not relinquish it.

In 1917, Van Rensselaer stunned the assembled members at the annual meeting by standing up and blasting Kelby for making the Society into "an Old man's club."[133] She also contended that the Society was considered "dead and moribund" by much of the public.[134] She criticized the lack of accessibility of resources and exhibits to the public, and the jumbled and confusing display of artifacts. By all descriptions, she made quite an impression, and her remarks were met by a resounding silence. Eventually, President

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[133] Richards, *Scholars and Gentleman*, 59.

[134] Ibid.

Weeks gratefully accepted a motion to refer the matter to the Executive Committee for further review.[135]

However, this was not the end of it. Five reporters attended the meeting, presumably having been tipped off that it promised to be an interesting story. Satisfied that they got what they came for, they printed the developments in their papers the following day and in a series of subsequent installments. The *Times* quoted former treasurer Charles Sherman blaming the staff for the inertia:

> [t]here has been, unfortunately, a lack of efficient officers. In its new building there has been no progress, no forward move. It has plenty of money to pay salaries, and when that is done the Executive Committee seems to feel satisfied.[136]

The *Times* also printed an editorial in which they chided the Society for its lack of initiative. They noted that only twenty-five of its 880 members bothered to attend the annual meeting, probably because the Society seemed to be humming along so smoothly financially. And they concurred with Van Rensselaer's characterization of NYHS as a club for old men, and her notion that women could change it for the better.

> It is their pleasure to look backward, which is the pose of age, not of youth. Even in this, however, there might be energy. When the new woman shall have dusted off all our historical societies, the number of restful places open to men is going to be materially reduced.[137]

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[135] Ibid., 63.

[136] *New York Times* (January 4, 1917).

[137] Ibid.

These editorials viewed the New Woman as an agent of cultural change. Another *Times* editorial praised Van Rensselaer's campaign, and focused on her gender as a significant factor in activism.

> It is only women who dare to make 'scenes,' men have a deadly fear of . . . exciting the amused or reprehensive comment of an irreverant populace. . . . Her assault on this venerable institution will have good results . . . it will be stirred into life and activity.[138]

The *World*'s headline read "Mrs. Van Rensselaer shakes up dry bones."[139] Clearly, the newspapers sympathized with the criticism leveled at the Society.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer spoke to the reporters regarding her concerns about the civic duty of historical associations in New York. Her remarks speak largely of nativist fears that immigrants who had arrived in the United States following the World War would change America's culture and politics.

> It is our duty, if we should hope to assimilate these new peoples without danger to our society and civilization, to make them over anew. We must teach them the background of history of our country. The New York Historical Society can supply the straw to make bricks from the foreign mud and water.[140]

She felt that immigrants would not have a proper understanding of the valuable heritage of her ancestors (and therefore the proper understanding of the value of elites like herself). Worse still, the leadership of New York's business, social and political circles failed to demonstrate enough interest in the Americanization of immigrants.

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[138] Quoted in R.W.G. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday: A Sesqui-Centennial History of the New-York Historical Society, 1804-1954* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1954), 209.

[139] Quoted in Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 209.

[140] Ibid.

Van Rensselaer felt that social distinction had its place, but it should not overwhelm efforts to educate the city's public, many of whom were immigrants or children of immigrants. To encourage immigrants to visit, the Society should be open on weekends, collections accessible, and displays informative and attractive. May King Van Rensselaer criticized the Society for being both too exclusive in its public services. She wanted the Society to focus on the achievements and heirlooms of old Dutch families, while opening up the facilities to New York's immigrant families to view these heirlooms.[141]

Her crusade sparked immediate debate at NYHS about the museum's mission, leadership, and who the Society should serve. The membership was dominated by Knickerbockers and other New York elites. The "society" aspect of NYHS overshadowed its other functions at times. This undermined the Society's efforts to be taken seriously as a place of modern scholarship and public service. For example, in 1922, a "Mutt and Jeff" cartoon poked fun at the exclusivity of the old institution, highlighting the notion that only Mayflower descendants were welcome at its soirees. Mutt boasts that he has been invited to the Historical Society, since his ancestors arrived in America on the Mayflower. Playing with the fact that pronouncing sixty-second street sounds like the time of a minute rather than the number sixty two, Jeff counters that his ancestor was a "minute man," because he lived on Sixty-Second Street.[142] On the one hand, Van Rensselaer exemplified the elitism that the Mutt and Jeff cartoon ridiculed, and on the other, she represented the forces of change with her quest to increase the

[141] Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 206.

[142] "Mutt and Jeff," in *The New York World* (May 24, 1922).

profile and accessibility of the Society. She wanted the library to serve the public by teaching immigrants and other New Yorkers about the city's history.

A special committee was formed to answer Van Rensselaer's charges. The by-laws were revised to allow the organization to run more efficiently, but members alone could no longer change policy without the consent of the Executive Committee. Van Rensselaer also circulated a petition calling for a vote of new officers, followed by a counter-letter issued by the Committee, followed by another letter by Van Rensselaer. At the raucous annual meeting in January the regular ticket was elected to the Board and she was defeated.[143] Splashed across the newspapers, this series of incidents publicized the conservative and club-like atmosphere of the Society. Yet, although spurred by Van Rensselaer's campaign, NYHS did act to keep pace with other institutions, however belatedly.

The Society's leaders requested guidance from several scholars, such as Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University Teacher's College, who recommended the Society heed Van Rensselaer's call for more education programs. They issued a *Special Report* in response to her charges, which called for a new children's course (a first for them) and an expanded lecture series, among other things. In addition, several months later, the first NYHS *Quarterly Bulletin* was published, which provided a forum for discussion of historical issues, organizational matters, and the publication of annual reports. After Alexander J. Wall took over as librarian of the Society in 1921 (he became Director in 1938), more changes were forthcoming. He preferred professional societies to hereditary clubs, and began to stress educational programs. A child of German immigrants himself,

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[143] Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 213.

he demonstrated sensitivity to issues of Americanization and education. When he was a young assistant librarian, President Weeks and Librarian Kelby pressured him into anglicizing his name from Wohlhagen to Wall.[144] Wall would continue to increase public service and expand the number of visitors of NYHS.

In the meantime, Van Rensselaer's campaign to reform NYHS had served to express the fears of old and new elites outside the Society. One way they were expressed was through membership in ancestral societies, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), of which Van Rensselaer was a member. The DAR had over 150,000 members during the 1920s, and other exclusive hereditary organizations proliferated throughout America as well.[145] Many of the Society's members participated. The Society's director and librarian Robert Kelby enjoyed meeting with hereditary patriotic societies, and founded the Sons of Revolution in the State of New York.

Frustrated by the progress of public service at NYHS, in 1920 Van Rensselaer held a meeting under the auspices of the Daughters of the American Revolution at her home, in which she proposed her own plan for educating immigrants. At that meeting, her plan was agreed upon and formalized, and soon after, Van Rensselaer founded the Society for Patriotic New Yorkers. Working primarily with "twenty society women, representatives of the oldest families in New York," Van Rensselaer proposed that Gracie mansion be opened as a historical museum.[146] It is striking that she chose only women to run her museum, while the scope of the exhibits were to be more than just domestic

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[144] Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 67.

[145] Francesca Constance Morgan, "'Home and Country': Women, Nation, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1890-1939" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1998), abstract.

[146] *New York Times* (October 31, 1920).

scenes. May Van Rensselaer's vision revolved around her reverence for her ancestors and their style of living, but she extended it to encompass business and political history. She remarked,

> What we want to do, is to introduce New Yorkers to our New York heroes -- men of great names who have aided in making New York what it is.[147]

Of course, the "great names" she refers to included her own.

The choice of Gracie mansion, on Manhattan's East Side, served these purposes nicely, since she was Archibald Gracie's great-granddaughter. She stressed the historical significance of the site by explaining how the mansion and the surrounding neighborhood had been visited by dignitaries such as General Lafayette, Alexander Hamilton and King Louis Philipe of France. The elite nature of the enterprise was further underscored by the listing in news accounts of the prominent citizens on the museum committee such as George Plimpton, Mrs. Rufus King, and Stuyvesant Fish.[148]

In order to become a member of the Society of Patriotic New Yorkers, the rules stated that a candidate had to present proper ancestral credentials. Among other criteria, it was necessary to demonstrate that the candidate be descended from certain New Yorkers of the Revolutionary generation or earlier. This reflected Van Rensselaer's wish that membership in Society should be determined by birth and behavior rather than wealth. For those applicants with special knowledge and expertise to impart, but lacking the proper ancestry, a small class of membership was created. Mrs. Van Rensselaer

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[147] *New York Times* (December 2, 1920).

[148] *New York Times* (April 2, 1922).

wished the museum to show “early New York household conditions.”[149] Her fellow Knickerbocker descendants would presumably be knowledgable in these matters, and moreover, they were expected to lend or donate artifacts from their own attics, as well as solicit contributions from their friends. However, their leadership became less crucial since their group failed to get the charter for the mansion.

The New York State Legislature passed a bill in 1923 authorizing the city to turn the property over to an historical association. Two earlier bills which included the Society for Patriotic New Yorkers as custodians of the property were not passed. The charter application for the Society for Patriotic New Yorkers was passed over by the city in favor of the Museum of the City of New York, headed by publisher Henry Collins Brown.[150] After internecine squabbling over the rights to the mansion, many members of Van Rensselaer’s group elected to volunteer for the new museum under Brown’s leadership.

Unfortunately, it is unclear why Van Rensselaer’s organization was rejected, since they seem to have been the first proponents of a historical museum at Gracie Mansion. It may be that her scope was considered too narrow, or that her personality, characterized by many as bombastic, was a stumbling block to her application. Certainly her publications on the history of playing cards and fortune telling probably did not help her project an image of a serious historian. The Museum’s leadership began to slowly move beyond her focus on genealogy while keeping her stress on education.

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[149] Ibid.

[150] *New York Times* (June 1, 1923).

Unlike the Society for Patriotic New Yorkers, the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY) was less restrictive on the basis of ancestry. Although membership was limited to those invited to join, and those who could afford the fees, many prominent New Yorkers with wealth but not Dutch colonial blood lines, became members and trustees of MCNY. These New Yorkers probably did not share the same type of exclusive filopietism of Van Rensselaer's group. For example, William K. Vanderbilt became a founding member of MCNY, while the Vanderbilts were scored by Mrs. Van Rensselaer as socially inferior, due to the Vanderbilt family's roots in Staten Island rather than Manhattan.[151] While MCNY did not have the exclusive membership rules which Van Rensselaer preferred, they did follow her visions to some extent. At its inception, MCNY stressed Knickerbocker history more than it would in later decades. After May Van Rensselaer's death in 1925, some of her former female associates formed a committee to pay homage to her role in creating the museum. On April 4, 1927, at a formal dedication ceremony and tea social, they opened the Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer Memorial Room on the second floor of the museum, which displayed artifacts from her collection (although Van Rensselaer was not memorialized in the next building on Fifth Avenue).[152]

These women and others formed the core of various committees, and in recognition of their services, a permanent Women's Committee was formed in 1928. It listed eighty-one members, many with recognizable names such as Belmont, De Forest, or du Pont. They served alongside the oddly named Women's Auxiliary Committee,

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[151] Van Rensselaer, *The Social Ladder*, 170-172.

[152] Invitation, April 4, 1927, The Museum of the City of New York, (hereafter, MCNY) Archives, New York.

which was actually comprised of men. The Women's Committee worked primarily as patronesses for social functions accompanying exhibitions. They hosted receptions, teas, and gallery openings. At other times, however, women were able to contribute more substantially to the content or planning of exhibits. Although there were no female trustees or officers, Mrs. Barton Hepburn, honorary Vice- President of MCNY and the President of the City History Club of New York had an office at MCNY. The assistant on staff in charge of the Costume Collection was V. Isabelle Miller, and the assistant supervising the Theatre Collection as May Davenport Seymour.

In addition, women volunteered on a highly successful temporary loan exhibition titled "Old New York," held in 1926 at West 57th Street to publicize the museum. Open little more than a week, it attracted almost 19,000 visitors. In addition to portraits of famous figures such as the ubiquitous George Washington by Gilbert Stuart, the exhibition displayed coats of arms, natural history specimens, ship models, Indian artifacts, New York silver, and period rooms highlighting "the various aspects of New York manners."[153] A committee of Patronesses worked on several aspects of the exhibit including the social functions. To some extent, the level of success female volunteers achieved in influencing museum policies mirrored that of female museum professionals in that there was marked improvement but clear limits in attaining top positions. As stated before, the numbers of female museum workers rose significantly in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but their presence was still new, their numbers small relative to the staff of most institutions, and their presence much discussed and debated.

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[153] Photograph, 1926, MNCY Archives.

For example, although a newspaper article on MCNY astutely pointed out that the museum was unusual for the relatively large presence of female curators and staff members, MCNY administrators still harbored doubts about women's abilities to run a museum.[154] A pamphlet detailing plans for MCNY Education Department stated these concerns while they considered a female applicant for Assistant Director:

> While Miss Gallup in Brooklyn and Miss Titcomb at Hagerstown are women who have achieved marked success in developing their own institutions, it seems to the Committee that in such a large field as the one presented by the whole of New York City it would be preferable to have a man at the head of this work.[155]

Anna Gallup was the curator in charge of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, affiliated at that time with the Brooklyn Museum of Art. In praising the two women at other museums the Committee conceded the fact that women possessed organizational and promotional skills, but offered no particular reasons why they could not handle a large job.

Women seeking positions at American museums were often segregated in particular fields and jobs during this decade. By the 1920s, women had gained some staff positions in museums across the country, but chiefly in areas such as costumes or decorative arts that were considered more traditionally female areas of occupation.[156] The American Association of Museums commonly advertised the gender of the applicant in the personnel section of *The Museum News*. The section was divided into "Women

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[154] Newspaper Clipping, Peter Kinss, "These Other Showmen," in *New York World and Telegram*, 1941, MCNY Archives.

[155] Special Bulletin, "Study of Educational Work Proposed," MCNY Archives.

[156] Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture,* 111-148.

Seeking Positions," and "Men Seeking Positions." The dominance of male museum workers was reflected in the number of applicants -- the section for men contained three times as many applicants as the women's section.[157] One museum advertised a position with the following criteria for applicants: "Woman with administrative ability, good taste, and personality . . . there is good opportunity for advancement."[158] Advancement often meant rising from clerical to curatorial positions, but it rarely meant being offered a directorship or deputy directorship. By 1930, many women who were hired by NYHS, MCNY, BMA and the MMA in the 1920s had advanced.[159] Women continued to offer their services as volunteers, donors, and staff members whenever possible, despite the limits of the glass ceiling that prevailed in museums and elsewhere.

Museums in this 1920s often followed MCNY's pattern. They accepted donations, volunteer work and advice from women, hired a few for mid-level staff positions, but retained the positions of greatest influence for men. Indeed, as the development of MCNY from Van Rensselaer's twenty society women progressed to a large endowed institution with trustees, women continued to serve as volunteers, but became markedly less influential overall. Certain legacies of the Society of Patriotic New Yorkers remained, however.

In its first permanent space at Gracie mansion, MCNY's displays embodied Van Rensselaer's wishes by celebrating the manners and contributions of a relatively small cross-section of seventeenth and eighteenth century New Yorkers. The displays

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[157] AAM, *Museum News*, 1 (January 1, 1924) 3.

[158] AAM, *Museum News*, 6 (January 15, 1929), 3.

[159] See my chapter five for an analysis of advancement for female staff (Annual Reports, 1920-1040, MCNY, BMA, MMA).

emphasized elite material culture with exhibits such as silk gowns, models of sleek sloops, and elegant period rooms. MCNY leaders also embraced her goal of public service and educating the greatest number of visitors possible. In a letter to a prospective member, Director Henry C. Brown echoed Van Rensselaer's concerns about immigrants:

> There are hundreds of thousands of people living in New York who have come here from other parts of the country and abroad. . . . It seems to us particularly important to give to these newcomers and to their children, some knowledge of and pride in the history of New York, to stimulate love for our City and help make good citizens.[160]

Toward this end, the staff wanted the museum to be open to both school children during the week and to adults on weekends.

The city charter required the Museum to be open to the public free of charge on weekends, and on some weekday evenings as well, unlike NYHS, which was closed on weekends. As a result, attendance at the two museums differed dramatically. The New York Historical Society recorded a meager 23,277 visitors for 1937 (the first year they published attendance figures). It was also the first year in its new building. In 1932, the upstart Museum of the City of New York logged 312, 320 visitors for the first year in its new building. Even in its opening year (1927), MCNY welcomed 92,000 visitors through its doors. In addition to expanded hours, MCNY did not shoulder the burden of a dual purpose. While NYHS divided its attention between the library and the museum, MCNY devoted itself fully to its vision of a city museum to rival those of London or Paris. Its management and vision were more streamlined, and so were its collection

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[160] Henry Collins Brown, New York, to Edith Tieman, New York, January 29, 1926, Financial and Membership Files, MCNY Archives.

strategies. MCNY staff did not have to contend with Old World Paintings or Egyptian sarcophogi.

Like NYHS, MCNY displayed many Old New York relics, but it also depicted more popular subjects like the rise of manufactures, theatre, transportation, mass media, and immigrant cultures. As historian Max Page puts it, rather than merely show off old artifacts to new immigrants, MCNY's leaders "were hoping to create a 'common' history at the same time they were teaching it."[161] Both NYHS and MCNY played an important role in projecting a portrait of New York to its residents. By the late 1920s, even historical museums had begun to question the leadership of the male Dutch descendents. No longer were the wealthy descendants of colonists the primary source of artifacts and ideas for the city's public identity. They had to share the display cases with the rise of industry, popular amusements, immigrant cultures, and the growth of the metropolis. So, although Van Rensselaer did not reform NYHS as much as she had hoped, or get the charter for her museum, she certainly helped transform how New York history was displayed, and encouraged a wider audience to view these displays.

At another established institution, the Brooklyn Institute, Katherine Dreier played an important role in ushering in a new type of exhibit in the latter half of the 1920s. Dreier's Société Anonyme held an exhibit of modern art at the Brooklyn Institute's Central Museum in 1926. She spearheaded and developed this and another two exhibitions. Each was pioneering in its way -- due to its avant-garde forms and display techniques. Dreier had clear educational and outreach plans for the 1926 exhibit, as she intended it to spread the appreciation and understanding of modern art in America. She

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[161] Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 173.

was conscious of her role as missionary of a new form of art, and promoting new ideas was something she had been doing for years as a supporter of workers and female suffrage. She came from a family who nurtured this pioneering spirit in her, and she had plenty of role models along the way.

Katherine Sophie Dreier was born on September 10, 1877 to Johann and Dorothea Dreier, immigrants from Germany. Her father was a partner in a successful iron products business, and he provided a comfortable home for his family in Brooklyn. One family friend described the atmosphere at the Dreier residence as

> containing more spiritual freedom than one generally believes to exist in such a spacious mansion. . . . It was the scene of many a congenial gathering, in which there was never the least hint of snobbism or class consciousness. All were on the basis of wholesome equality.[162]

She and her three sisters were raised with the same rights and rules as her brother, and brought up to cherish the principles of equality and justice among all people. Her family had a long tradition of active philanthropic work and activism for causes ranging from prison reform to women's rights. As an adult, she engaged in many charity and reform efforts. In her twenties, Dreier helped establish one of the first settlement houses in Brooklyn and went on with her sisters to join the Women's Trade Union League and promote woman suffrage.[163] In 1920, in a book she published describing her travels in Argentina, she consciously describes her experiences from the female perspective.

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[162] Draft of "Dr. Brinden's Forward" to Dorothea Dreier exhibit catalog, n.d., Katherine S. Dreier Papers/ The Société Anonyme Archive. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, box 6, folder 152 (hereafter cited as Katherine Dreier Papers).

[163] Ruth L. Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 1-3.

She recalled how scandalized people were that she was traveling alone and that she was not planning to marry. She was shocked at their insistence that all women should marry. She thought that notion "inconceivable" in her day and age. By this point, she had already been a suffragist, and so she detailed how she decided to support that cause. She had initially believed that men in politics did a reasonable job of representing women's interests. However, as she matured and worked in reform and charitable organizations, she met many men who did not believe women should be involved in public affairs. Dreier felt that her abilities and points of view were not given a fair hearing, "simply because one was a mind ending in petticoats instead of trousers. It was this reaction which turned me into a suffragist."[164] She firmly believed in her own leadership abilities, so it is not surprising that she should elect to found her own organization.

Dreier believed that women should not be judged based on their appearances (the fact that they wore petticoats instead of pants). Likewise, Dreier did not feel that art should be judged according to superficial categories. "It is here where many people are led astray; they see only the outer form or dress and miss the essentials which it clothes."[165] She argued that modern art did not copy the outer forms of things exactly, but rather expressed the essence or "spirit of the subject."[166] Modern art distilled an idea, feeling, or experience. Thus, art such as Cubism or Dadaism was not classified as modern merely because of its forms, but because of its vitality of expression of both new

[164] Katherine S. Dreier, *Five Months in the Argentine: From a Woman's Point of View* (New York: Frederic Fairchild Sherman, 1920), 236.

[165] Katherine S. Dreier, *Western Art and the New Era* (New York: Brentano's, 1923), 74.

[166] Ibid., 106.

ideas and new forms. Dreier believed these new ideas were powerful and transformative, and noted that posters created by Germans in favor of the Revolution of 1918 were far more dynamic and spirited than the posters created by conservatives in the calmer period of reconstruction.[167]

She showed two paintings of her own at the famous Armory Show in New York in 1913, but her main focus was to be a promoter and educator. As a member of the Society of Independent Artists, Dreier met many artists she would later work with, including Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, who joined with her to found the Société Anonyme: Museum of Modern Art in 1920.[168]

The founders of the Société Anonyme attempted to expose the American public to contemporary art, foreign and domestic. Historian Ruth Bohan points out the spirit of Dreier's organization "kept alive the questing spirit of the international avant-garde during the turbulent, inward-looking decade of the 1920s."[169] The Société sought to educate a diverse audience. It opened with exhibit rooms and a small library on East 47th Street. The founders planned to have a permanent exhibit as well as creating traveling exhibits. In addition to staging exhibits around the city and East Coast, the organization

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[167] Ibid., 111.

[168] Founding members and officers of the Société Anonyme were: Katherine Dreier, Andrew McLaren, Paul Gross, Marsden Hartley, Marcel Duchamp, Dr. Christian Binton, Mrs. Charles Knoblauch, Mrs. Daniel O'Day, Mrs. John Bishop Butnam, Man Ray, Joseph Stella and Franklin J. Walls. See, "Certificate of Incorporation, Société Anonyme," in *Selected Publications* Société Anonyme *(First Museum of Modern Art, 1920-1944)*, (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 5

[169] Ibid, xvii.

published pamphlets and presented lectures. Dreier wrote to clubs and museums around the city requesting that they post the Societe's bulletins.[170]

Despite the publicity generated by the Armory Show and galleries such as Alfred Steiglitz's 291, modern art was not very popular with most museum leaders in New York by this point.[171] In 1921 the Brooklyn Museum became the first American museum to hold an exhibit of European modernists, choosing primarily French Post-Impressionists such as Edward Degas and Henri Matisse. The following year Brooklyn Museum officials asked Dreier to loan them more contemporary works by Kandinsky and Archipenko for a Group Exhibition of Russian Paintings and Sculptures.[172] In 1924 BMA librarian requested to be put on the mailing list for Société Anonyme events and catalogs.[173] In 1925 the Société put on a contemporary show featuring Fernand Leger which attracted favorable notice from museum directors including BMA director.

That same year, aided by Katherine Dreier, BMA put on an exhibit on the Dutch paintings of her sister Dorothea Dreier. Katherine Dreier was involved in most of the decisions regarding the exhibit, from advertising to placement of the art, and negotiated persistently to get her way. In a letter to Director Fox written a day after meeting with him, she wrote "I hope somehow you will see your way clear to place this exhibition in the small room. . . . [it] is so vitally important for the further success of this special

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[170] In 1920, she wrote to the City Club, Civic Club, and many others. See, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 9, folder 232.

[171] On New York' developing modern art scene and institutions between prior to 1930, see, William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff, *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), chapters three and four. See also, Susan Noyes Platt, *Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), introduction, chapter one and chapter seven.

[172] William H. Fox to Katherine Dreier, November 13, 1922, Katherine Dreier Papers.

[173] Susan Hutchinson to Katherine Dreier, March 15, 1924, Katherine Dreier Papers.

exhibition, that I feel I would not be doing my duty toward my sister without emphasizing this point to you once more."[174] In her very next sentence, she shamelessly tried using her family's patronage of the museum to bribe him: "You know, of course, that the family would be very happy to donate to your museum one or two pictures that you would select from out of this exhibition."[175] Dreier had become very familiar with BMA from a young age. Her parents raised her within walking distance of the museum, and became donors to their neighborhood institution years before the Société was created.[176] "My father was so much interested in the original building, though to what extent he gave, I never knew, as I was little more than a child, but I know how keen he was about it."[177] Furthermore, BMA officials were not averse to female leadership – unlike NYHS or the Metropolitan they were notable for having female trustees (two) as early as 1923.[178] Following the Dorothea Dreier exhibit, Katherine Dreier began to negotiate with the Museum to stage a major show combining European and American modern artists. It did not happen immediately, but they continued to work with her on other projects in the meantime. Even if the leadership of the Brooklyn Museum did not share Dreier's commitment to contemporary art, they gave Dreier free reign to show it and to publicize it. This was true before, during and after the Modern exhibition. BMA opened an exhibit of Dreier's photographs on February 28, 1926, ("Original Views of

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[174] Katherine Dreier to William H. Fox, March 5, 1925, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 6, folder 152.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid., 44.

[177] Ibid.

[178] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1923), 4.

Modern China"), and Dreier presented an accompanying lecture that same day. An article she wrote also appeared in the Museum *Quarterly*.[179] Her photographs were displayed alongside Chinese embroidery and other items in the Print Gallery, and "proved very attractive to Museum visitors."[180] In March of 1926 Dreier secured the cooperation of BMA to stage the Brooklyn Museum Société Anonyme exhibition.[181] BMA promoted her as an artist, educator, author, and curator. This was not the only show that year held at the Brooklyn Museum which featured women artists. Between January 29th and March 23rd BMA staged an exhibit featuring the work of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors. The *New York Times'* reviewer Elizabeth Cary, who commented favorably on the exploration of decoration carried out in this exhibit, noted that the Brooklyn Museum was a natural place to hold this show of living artists, since its "halls are consistently showing themselves hospitable to contemporary effort."[182] In an example of the close world of art at this time, BMA *Quarterly* printed Cary's review just below a paragraph thanking her for her gift of etchings.

The *Quarterly* printed an article by Dreier in the January issue (months before the scheduled opening of the Modern exhibition) called "Regarding Modern Art." The article illustrates Dreier's fervent belief in the power of art to express one's soul. "For one cannot limit art any more than one can limit God. Art belongs to the creative functions of

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[179] Katherine S. Dreier, "What About China," *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly,* 13 (January 1926), 12-15.

[180] *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 13 (January 1926), Museum Notes, 81.

[181] Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition*, 41-42.

[182] Elizabeth L. Cary, review, *New York Times*, April 18, 1926, reprinted in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 13 (January 1926), "Reviews of Two Exhibits," 82.

man -- which is the part akin to God, the Creator."[183] She describes the upcoming exhibition as one of display and education, and hopefully, discussion.

> I hope the public will come with an open mind and an open heart to see the pictures and permit them to give their own message, for art must be received through the senses alone -- not through the intellect -- for these senses are the portals to the soul.[184]

By appealing to the senses rather than the intellect Dreier made art seem more accessible to a wider audience. She stressed that degrees or upbringing were unnecessary for art appreciation.

Through these publicity efforts in the year leading up to the opening, Dreier and BMA had set the stage for an exhibit which would at least attract attention, if not praise, for modern art. Director Fox wrote to Dreier that they also cancelled their watercolor exhibit they had scheduled to appear at the same time, so that "your exhibition will have all the space necessary and will be the sole exhibit. . . . [j]udging from your description, I believe it will be very important indeed."[185]

A year after planning began, the Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Museum's International Exhibition of Modern Art opened in the special exhibitions gallery on November 18, 1926. Bohan correctly characterizes the Brooklyn exhibit as the pinnacle achievement of Dreier's democratic and educational vision.[186] It was the most exclusively contemporary major exhibit to date, the most international in scope, and the

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[183]Ibid., 117.

[184]Ibid., 119.

[185]William H. Fox to Katherine Dreier, May 18, 1926, Katherine Dreier Papers, Box 6, folder 152.

[186]Ibid., xvii.

outreach and publicity efforts during the exhibit were remarkable. Dreier chose 106 artists from twenty-three different countries, representing many different styles, such as Surrealism (Joan Miro), Cubism (Picasso) and International Constructivism (Kurt Schwitters). American art was well represented by Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, Man Ray, Stuart Davis, and over twenty others.[187] Unlike many other art exhibits, the pieces were not arranged in order of country of origin, by artist, or by school, such as Cubism.[188] The exhibit was open for seven weeks and viewed by over fifty thousand visitors.[189]

Due to the unfamiliar nature of the art, particularly the large number of abstracts, Dreier and BMA made every attempt to make the public comfortable and knowledgeable about modern art. "Ignorance," as she later observed, "breeds fear."[190] One example of their efforts to make modern art more accessible to the public was their creation of modern period rooms to accompany the exhibit. To demonstrate how modern art could be used to enhance an average middle class home, they decorated two rooms with modern art on the walls and with a selection of furniture from the Abraham and Strauss store ("where all the big middle class Brooklynites buy," Dreier noted).[191]

Along with the exhibit, BMA staged both lectures and concerts for adults and school children. Dreier gave fourteen lectures on modern art, and three others spoke as well. Dreier felt that modern music and art, when combined, would reinforce each other,

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[187] Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition*, chapter five.

[188] Ibid.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Katherine Dreier, draft of lecture, "The Difference Between Art and Taste," Nov. 18, 1930, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 45, folder 1341.

[191] Katherine Dreier to Paul Woodward, September 14, 1926, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 6, folder 153.

so she invited the League of Composers to perform two avant-garde music concerts, staged to coincide with the exhibit, and played pieces of Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev, among others. These names are familiar to music audiences now, but they were new and relatively unknown to a typical concert-goer in 1926.[192] In fact, they were also unknown to BMA's Governing Committee. The chair, Walter Crittendon, admitted that he had hesitated to agree to the concerts when they were first proposed because he was totally unfamiliar with the League of Composers.[193] BMA staff also conducted tours for groups of all ages.

A group of elementary school children in an art club were invited to write essays about their experience of viewing the Modern Art Exhibition. A BMA *Quarterly* article written by staff member Catherine Rich described and analyzed the essays. The article illustrates that Dreier's exhibit was well-received by many of these younger viewers. However, the article does highlight a problem caused by Dreier's favoring abstract art over other modern types of work. Rich notes that representational art (depicting familiar things) was most popular with the children, and the author wonders whether abstract art was as difficult for adults as for children to grasp: "Is the love of recognition so deeply rooted in human nature as to be forever a stumbling block to the apostles of abstraction? Or is it there merely because it has been put there by teaching?"[194] Of the four essays, one in particular was won over. Commenting on the painting 'The Red Cat,' the young writer explains, "Though this is a lovely painting the abstractions seemed to win my mind.'"

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[192] Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition*, chapter seven.

[193] Walter Crittendon to Katherine Dreier, October 28, 1926, Katherine Dreier Papers, Box 6, folder 153.

[194] Catherine J. Rich, "Four Children and the Moderns," *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 14 (January 1927), 24.

More typically, however, another child comments: "The picture I love best is the Brooklyn Bridge. This picture shows an exact scene of the Bridge during the night.'"[195] Rich concludes that it is important to consider adding abstract works to art classes.

The fact that the *Quarterly* featured these questions of education in their articles and not just in their departmental notes, indicates that they thought modern art education to be an worthwhile part of their museum work. The Brooklyn Museum supplemented Dreier's show with an unprecedented number of public programs that would attract more visitors and publicity than just the exhibit. While lectures and tours often accompanied BMA exhibits, it usually had far fewer of them, and only rarely included concerts (although Mrs. Edward Blum, who was the wife of the president of the board of trustees and the daughter of Mr. Abraham, founder of Abraham and Strauss, did contribute a pipe organ in 1929 for weekly free public concerts to be held at the museum).[196]

In addition to lectures at the Museum, Dreier wanted to reach a larger audience by going on the radio. She wrote to NBC and suggested she do a lecture regarding the exhibit on the air. She pointed out the high attendance and favorable critic responses, but NBC was not convinced that the subject would interest their audience. Margaret Cuthbert in their programming department replied, "[Y]ou must realize we reach the substantial middle class . . . who read the *Saturday Evening Post*. They are not apt to see a thing like this – only the sophisticated few would be interested."[197] (emphasis hers) Dreier wrote back and assured her that BMA's normal audience, and this exhibit's

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[195] Ibid.

[196] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1929), 5.

[197] Margaret Cuthbert to Katherine Dreier, n.d., Katherine Dreier Papers, box 26, folder 746.

audience, was "substantially made up of the middle class . . . made up of those who read the *Saturday Evening Post*."[198] Cuthbert was convinced, and NBC agreed to put Dreier on the air to promote the Brooklyn Exhibition, and later, to lecture on modern art on a semi-regular basis.[199]

Finally, Dreier's exhibit catalog itself attracted attention for its style and vision. BMA's librarian told Dreier that "you have made a real contribution to the literature of the fine arts in producing this book. All reference libraries must have it…"[200]

How did the critics view the exhibition and its programs? Historian Bohan argues that the negativity expressed by some critics was due to a persistent mistrust and misunderstanding of modern art. She argues that "it was not until the exhibition left New York that these works found an appreciable following in the press.[201]

This overemphasizes the negative reaction, however. Bohan is correct that some critics, such as Lewis Mumford did take aim at modern art. He characterized modern art as merely mechanical in subject, patterns repeated and varied without human content.[202] Elisabeth L. Cary from the *New York Times*, took issue with the preponderance of abstract works in the exhibit as not representative of all types of modern art. Yet, Cary displayed genuine enthusiasm for the quality of the exhibit:

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[198] Katherine Dreier to Margaret Cuthbert, December 20, 1926, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 26, folder 746.

[199] Margaret Cuthbert to Edith Cowles, December 23, 1929. Katherine Dreier Papers, box 26, folder 746.

[200] Susan Hutchinson to Katherine Dreier, February 24, 1927, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 6, folder 154.

[201] Bohan,, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition*, 107.

[202] Lewis Mumford, "The Moderns,"*The New Republic*, 49 (January 12, 1927), 227.

> . . . to ramble through the galleries uninstructed is a vivacious experience . . . It is possible for the least initiated, looking at these works quite simply, to enjoy whatever they offer, to discern characteristics held in common with both older and newer forms of art. The supreme virtue of proportion is neither invented by these schools nor obscured by their formula.[203]

In Cary's opinion, even without educational instruction, abstract art can engage the average viewer. Cary's review was not entirely complimentary, but she did not denigrate modern art as inferior to that of the past. Other critics also praised the modern art at the Brooklyn Museum. Helen Appleton Read wrote, "No one with an atom of artistic sophistication but admits the vitality and significance of modern art."[204] The *Quarterly* printed a review from *American Art News*, and despite a few sour notes, it was favorable. "Think as one may about ultimate values, the Société Anonyme has brought to New York one of the most exciting exhibitions seen here for some time. A trip to the Brooklyn Museum, despite the long subway jaunt, is immensely worthwhile."[205]

William Fox's support of the exhibit has been mentioned previously. As he later recalled, it

> was a surprising display. Far from exciting ridicule by its eccentricities and supposed inability to make an impression of reasonableness, harmony, and grace, it emphasized these very qualities in presenting a dignified exhibition which gained the plaudits of the press. . . .[206]

[203] Elisabeth L. Cary, "'Experimental Art' at Brooklyn Museum," in *New York Times* (November 21, 1926).

[204] Helen Appleton Read, "Modern Art of 22 Nations Shown at Brooklyn Museum," in *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (November 21, 1926).

[205]" Société Anonyme's Exciting Show," Review, *American Art News* of November 27, 1926, reprinted in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 14 (January 1927), 22.

[206] William Fox, "Memoirs," Archives of American Art, Reel BRI, 408.

The director was pleasantly surprised that the exhibition was enjoyable and well-received. Yet, his admiration was limited, and it is remarkable that he was willing to take a risk with the Société Anonyme, given his somewhat lukewarm feelings about modern art:

> I had the feeling that the leaders of the new school (not their often banal followers) were artists of originality, well schooled, skillful in technique, sincere in purpose and by no means committed to sensationalism. So that there shall be no misunderstanding as to my position in opening the door of the museum to the Societe Anonym (sic) and my comments as above, I am not to be classed as a partisan of their movement."[207]

Although Dreier failed to convert Fox into a crusader for contemporary art like herself, her exhibition did convince him to include it in the future museum's canon. For example, BMA's *Quarterly* printed a review of its 1928 Summer Exhibition in which the New York Herald-Tribune highlighted the hospitality of BMA to modern art: "Continuing its ever popular policy of giving special attention to the work of to-day the Brooklyn Museum has opened a summer exhibition ... which runs a broad gamut from conservative to advanced modern work.'"[208]

The International Exhibition created by Katherine Dreier was successful in many ways. It allowed Dreier and the Museum to educate the public about modern art even before it was staged. The exhibition itself introduced new artists, styles, and curatorial techniques to the mainstream museum and to the public. During the exhibit the many concerts and lectures the Museum leaders offered served to stir up enthusiasm and create a better understanding of the art works and the movement they represented. It was a unique partnership between Dreier's very new, very small, grassroots organization and

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[207] Ibid.

[208] *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 15 (April, 1928), 121-122.

the large and well-established museum. Dreier was able to exert a large measure of control over the exhibit, choosing all the artists and the way their work was displayed, partly because she remained outside the museum as head of her own small group, and also because of her family's long history of patronage among a relatively small donor base.

On those occasions when Dreier attempted to make their partnership closer, BMA's leaders declined. When Dreier asked for an office to use while planning and staging the Modern Exhibition, for example, the Governing Committee of BMA gently, but firmly, denied her request, so as "not to establish a precedent."[209] Following the exhibit, Dreier sent a letter to Director Fox complaining about the bill she received for expenses of the exhibit, and enclosed the financial statement of the Société Anonyme to show its large deficit. She further likened BMA footing the bill for extra expenditures beyond her original budget to good old-fashioned hospitality: "having an extra person for dinner does not amount to much, it is a courtesy one extends . . ."[210] Finally, she (again playing the patronage card) reminded Director Fox that she had donated a painting by Walter Shirlaw valued at $10,000, which the museum should have taken into account before billing her. By mentioning her gift, by likening BMA's exhibit of the Société Anonyme's work to that of having guests for dinner, and by trying to gain sympathy by noting their deficit, Dreier was exhibiting the more personal and relational leadership style more common to women than men in cultural philanthropy during the 1920s.[211]

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[209] Walter Crittendon to Katherine Dreier, July 29, 1926, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 6, folder 152.

[210] Katherine Dreier, March 25, 1927, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 6, folder 155.

[211] See, Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street*: *Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1990). See also, McCarthy, *Women's Culture.*

This style of appeal failed utterly in this case. Director Fox was surprised and incensed by the letter.

Fox replied grudgingly that BMA would pay the bill, but that the Museum was not at fault:

> to speak quite frankly I cannot agree for a moment that the Museum has treated you and the exhibition other than generously. The fact that you gave us a painting I did not regard as compensation. Had that been the understanding I should have been obliged to submit the matter first to our Museum Committee who would have passed on its importance as a purchase. . . ."[212]

Dreier's attempt to use her gift of the Shirlaw painting had not only failed to establish her authority at the Museum – it had provoked Fox to insult the gift itself. He concludes by referring to the financial statement she had sent: "The Brooklyn Museum is not and could not be responsible for the Société Anonyme, nor for any other private artistic organization."[213] Dreier sent a somewhat apologetic letter, offering to pay the bill if the Museum could not. It seems to have mollified Fox, because Dreier spent an "agreeable" social evening with Director Fox and his wife later that month.[214] She also continued to donate works of art to BMA. It is safe to assume, however, that Fox would have been wary of working closely with her at the Museum in the future. Nonetheless, BMA officials were more than satisfied with the exhibit.

Pleased with this first foray into contemporary art, and the public and critical reaction they received, BMA went on to show other modern exhibits, and Dreier sent

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[212] William Fox to Katherine Dreier, April 12, 1927, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 6, folder 155.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Katherine Dreier to William Fox, April 26, 1927, Katherine Dreier Papers, box 6, 154.

traveling shows which were even more favorably reviewed than the International Exhibition had been.

Van Rensselaer and Dreier both fervently worked to expand audiences and increase public programs in established New York museums. They shared abrasive personalities and strong dedication to their causes. Both enjoyed the benefits of their elite backgrounds, such as access to influential friends and donors, and the financial means to support their museum work. They published books and articles to disseminate their beliefs, including those on American culture and on women. Their ideas about audiences and exhibit content were widely divergent, however.

Van Rennselaer wanted museum exhibits to teach immigrants and their children about colonial elite culture, hoping a common cultural education would strengthen and unify America. She tried with some success to stimulate NYHS to provide more service and education to a greater audience. Her campaign publicized these issues and set in motion the wheels of reform, even if she did not get to steer. NYHS and MCNY gradually came to terms with modern times by changing the way history was displayed, increasingly embracing new groups and providing new historical lenses in their quest to educate the public. Dreier focused on introducing modern art to the public, but was not concerned about which groups she attracted with her Exhibition, as long as the audience was large.

Both women failed to build institutions that lasted under their control. Van Rensselaer tried and failed to establish a museum run by "society women." She and the Society of Patriotic New Yorkers developed and organized a museum about New York City History, but were unable to get the charter to run it. She died two years later in 1925,

but many of her volunteers joined MCNY and served in a volunteer capacity on the Women's Committee. Comprised in large part of Van Rensselaer's friends and colleagues from the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Society of Patriotic New Yorkers, The Women's Committee was ultimately disbanded in the 1940s. Despite the success of new modern museums such as the Whitney and MoMA, Dreier's Societé Anonyme was dissolved in 1941, and she donated her art collection and papers to Yale University.

During the 1920s, despite the fact that women established a significant presence and created some important changes, museums increasingly sought leadership by wealthy businessmen who could raise large sums to expand their collections and buildings, and sought the expertise of professional museum workers with advanced degrees to supervise these expanded holdings. Many museum leaders still felt women were not as capable as men of running a high-profile institution with a large budget. Dreier and Van Rensselaer fell short of their larger goals of institution-building, but accomplished a great deal towards finding new ways to educate New Yorkers about art and culture. Both women were frustrated by the fact that many contemporaries still challenged their right to take a leadership role in culture or politics, areas in which they felt women could and should make important contributions. Both experimented with working within mainstream cultural institutions and building their own. Dreier and Van Rensselaer created lasting changes, successfully promoted public service and expanded the canon of art in mainstream museums, and many of their ideas were adopted by the male leaders of these institutions in the next decade. Their experiences mirrored those of women at other museums (such as the Cooper-Hewitt) during this period who sought to encourage

museums to take a more proactive role in broadening public culture. Chapter three examines the development of nonprofit and commercial partnerships in this effort. Business leaders such as clothing manufacturers, department store administrators and fashion designers also assumed a leading role in expanding museum fare, promoting public service education and entertainment programs, efforts that muddied the lines between high culture and popular tastes.

Chapter Three

Art and Commerce: Museums and Corporations in the 1920s

One scholar has written that although examples of corporate art patronage existed prior to World War II, "corporate philanthropy is basically a postwar phenomenon.[215]" This chapter explores the origins of corporate sponsorship at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum. Between 1850 and 1900, museums to a large extent established themselves as shrines of fine art, and attempted to create and enforce a strict dichotomy between art and entertainment, between high and mass culture.[216] As discussed earlier, there were important exceptions to this, but this was generally the case. Yet by the interwar years of the twentieth century, museums were striving to keep pace with the evolving mass culture, often in tandem with the commercial sector, embracing "the cult of the new."[217] Since much of their authority was derived from their role in preserving, documenting and displaying traditional material culture, a new vision was required. New York cultural historians such as William Leach note that in the years surrounding World War I museums collaborated with industrial firms and department stores to take a more active role in the cultural leadership of their cities. This was one of the earliest ways in which corporations began to work with museums.

Historians of consumer culture, or mass culture, as Richard Ohmann describes it, disagree on periodization and definitions. However, they generally concur that by the 1920s, an ethic of conspicuous consumption and materialism had redefined traditional American identities and values around brand names, goods, and commercial

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[215] Rosanne Martorella, "Corporate Patronage of the Arts in the United States: A Review of the Research," in *Art and Business: An International Perspective on Sponsorship* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1996), 6.

[216] Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*.

[217] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 8.

entertainments. The growth of mass media such as newspapers, radio and film helped drive the engine of consumerism. Historian Richard Ohmann explains that this was more of a gradual process than an immediate revolution:

> Of course, there never was a bright day in September when some Edison of the marketplace invented all these connections and changed our society from traditional to modern.[218]

Yet by the 1920s communications, advertising, and merchandising were maturing and creating shared cultural spaces for ever larger groups of Americans. The rarified world of cultural philanthropy was transfigured as well, sparking debates on the role art museums ought to play. As noted in chapter two, museum leaders viewed the growing commercialism of the 1920s with some alarm. Yet, they chose to harness it in new ways. Museum leaders began to challenge the dichotomies between fine art and popular arts, between high and mass culture. Mass culture was praised and condemned for its inclusiveness. The issue of class also permeates these discussions by contemporary historians and museum analysts.

Some analysts criticize museums for buttressing what they see as the hegemonic consumer culture, for only including the masses in order to re-educate them around a new set of bourgeois values. For example, Leach writes that consumer society promoted only crass materialism, so that

> it diminished American public life, denying the American people access to insight into other ways of organizing and conceiving life, insight that might have endowed their consent to the dominant culture (if such consent were to be given at all) with real democracy.[219]

The two opposing sides to this debate reflect the contemporary debates earlier in this century, reminding us that the culture wars of today are modified echoes from earlier in

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[218] Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 13.

[219] Leach, *Land of Desire*, xv.

this century.[220] Warren Susman astutely observed that mass culture is not inherently evil or utopian, and that whether or not it fulfilled its promises, many Americans during the interwar years believed them.[221]

However, these other critics of mass culture miss the benefits that mass culture and partnerships with the commercial sector gave to museums and the public they served. This chapter will demonstrate that commercial partnerships influenced the museums' expansion of public programs, outreach, accessibility, and exhibitions. Certainly, commercial culture both then and now overemphasizes our need for objects to improve our lives. However, selling those objects and ideas requires discovering the desires and habits of a broad cross-section of people by actively reaching out and communicating with them. When museum leaders copied business leaders' marketing and customer service techniques, they too began to ask the public what they wanted (more public programs, better accessibility, more attractive and spacious exhibit areas, more entertaining and familiar exhibit subjects). Then they strove to deliver what the public wanted.

To a great extent, the efforts of museums to educate and uplift New Yorkers reveal their attitudes about industrial consumer society as it evolved throughout the heady 1920s. Their programs and goals changed subtly with both the times and changes in personnel.

Museums had collaborated with industry and displayed commercial and industrial art early in the nineteenth century. Fairs and World's Fairs (such as Chicago's in 1893) promoted homegrown industrial art as part of their vision of the future. The changes in the economic and cultural landscape following World War I were massive enough to

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[220] For more insights on the transformation toward a consumer society, see also: Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), and Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

[221] Susman, *Culture as History*, xxviii-xxx.

inspire museums to revisit their earlier commitment to the commercial sector and industrial art and promote it as never before. If they refused, museums would become ignored and irrelevant, dinosaurs of the cultural landscape.

The increasing importance of commercial culture was partly a matter of scale, and partly a matter of the maturation of certain fields, such as advertising. One advertiser predicted in 1926,

> [h]istorians of the future will not have to rely on the meager collections of museums . . . to reconstruct a faithful picture of 1926. Day by day a picture of our time is recorded completely and vividly in the advertising in American newspapers and magazines.[222]

As Roland Marchand points out, advertising has never portrayed American culture comprehensively or accurately, but in the 1920s advertisements became important barometers of values and trends nonetheless. Advertisers studied people's occupations, favorite comics, dime novels, movies, tabloids, and radio shows. It is noteworthy that there is no evidence they usually studied America's museum preferences. Perhaps that is because visiting museums was not as popular a pastime as reading comics, or even listening to the new radio stations (by mid-decade about 20 percent of Americans used radios).

Agencies tested audiences to learn how to better sell merchandise, as well as more intangible things such as the reputation of a company or an industry. They even promoted the war effort during World War I as official advisors to the Committee on Public Information. Advertisers sold more than merchandise in the 1920s, they also sold modernity itself – new products, new habits, new technologies, and new forms of communication. They were remarkably successful. Advertisers in 1919 conducted over $1.4 million in business, and had doubled that by 1929.[223]

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[222] N.W. Ayer and Son, quoted in Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1985), xv.

[223] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xv-24.

Combined with a robust stock market and economic optimism following the gloom of the war, Americans imbued industry and commerce with new importance. What was also new was the reason for their interest in industrial art. It was no longer an attempt merely to improve American design. It was now also an attempt to entice visitors to be comfortable in the palaces of art, and to be entertained. At a time when extremely expensive masterworks were being accumulated at a rapid pace in museums like MMA, museum leaders made a simultaneous move toward exhibiting inexpensive, commonly manufactured pieces. This development signaled a wish to ensure that visitors were not so overawed by the museums that they stayed away. It was the visitor's taste and values that museums wanted to understand. At times, museum officials continued to view industrial art in terms of taste and design uplift, but there was a new interest in incorporating the visitor's tastes and desires, as we will see.

William Leach has highlighted efforts by Stewart Culin, curator of the Brooklyn Museum's Ethnography department, to promote alliances between the worlds of commerce and art during the 1920s. Culin believed in collaborating with department stores, calling them

> the greatest influences for culture and taste that exist today. They make it possible for us all to participate in the creative thought of a new and revolutionary era.[224]

Working with M.D.C. Crawford, editor of *Woman's Wear Daily*, Culin and the Brooklyn Museum established a "center for artistic industries."[225]

The Brooklyn Museum's promotion of the department store ideal and industrial arts was part of a broader movement by museums to democratize the cultural life of the United States. According to Leach, curators believed industrial art was better understood

[224] Quoted in Leach, *Land of Desire*, 167.

[225] Quoted in Leach, *Land of Desire*, 169.

by “the people” than Old Master paintings or sculptures. In the “machine age,” Newark Museum curator John Cotton Dana wrote,

> admiration for the hand-made is largely born of a desire to have something which, being unique in its kind, will impart a little of the old leisure-class exclusiveness to its owner.[226]

Leach persuasively argues that consumer society represented a new vision of democracy. It was based on desire rather than achievement, on overturning the producer ethic in favor of a consumer ethic, on forgetting the past and fostering the “cult of the new.” This culture, according to Leach, was hostile to tradition, hostile to folk culture. In museums, consumerism meant “appropriating folk design and image, reducing custom to mere surface and appearance.”[227] Commodities and artifacts became almost interchangeable in this process.

However, I argue that the commercialism at these museums was not hostile to tradition. Though BMA exhibitions displayed folk designs and images to inspire designers of modern fashions, they also often highlighted peasant customs in their exhibits as well. Museum leaders celebrated traditional designs and hoped they would inspire current fashions because, not in spite of, the fact that they represented traditional cultures. In addition, this emulation of department stores fostered a more open stance toward the public.

At the Brooklyn Museum the influence of commercial culture was evident in their education programs for designers and artisans, and also encouraged Culin and other curators to highlight modern craftsmanship and display techniques. Like the peasant costume exhibition, other exhibitions of clothing and furniture were intended in part to

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[226] Quoted in Leach, *Land of Desire*, 168.

[227] Ibid., 5.

influence modern taste and buying practices. Culin clearly believed that the department store represented the public interests best:

> developed to the limit of its possibilities, [the store] is of practical value as a school for taste transcending every other agency I know. Above all else, of necessity, its wares must function, must satisfy the wants of living people. As vital properties in the drama of life, they have in themselves a dramatic quality. The show window in which they are displayed has become a stage akin to that of the theatre.[228]

Culin wanted to influence as many people as possible, but while improving their tastes, he wanted very much to know their desires. The relationship between consumer and shopkeeper, or performer and theatre-goer, represented to Culin the best type of interdependency. Each influenced the other to varying degrees. The shift in museum development toward commercialism was part of the desire to broaden American civic participation through culture.

In 1924 a lecture series was created that exemplified this effort. Called "How to Arrange House Interiors," it showed pictures of two apartment living rooms, and two town house living rooms, in order to show examples of good and bad design in both moderate and luxury homes. In each case, traditional pieces from the collection were displayed alongside modern goods. The curators aimed to show that "the old and new may exist together in harmony," and that the average visitor's current possessions could be used to beautiful effect despite the fact that they were new and mass-produced.[229] "We feel that the desired sense of personal relationship between the Museum and its visitors has by this means been strengthened."[230]

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[228]Stewart Culin, "Color in Window Displays," Culin Archival Collection, BMA.

[229]Paul Jameson Woodward, "A New Lecture Course," in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 11 (Jan. 1924), 4.

[230] Ibid.

As we saw in Chapter One, while the Institute's focus on education had always been important, these efforts were rather narrow in scope and vision. Throughout the interwar years that mission came to include a wider cross-section of New York's population. The Brooklyn Museum successfully attracted larger numbers of visitors throughout the 1920s; due in part to its expanding educational programs. This development reflected current conflicts over cultural leadership in an industrialized consumer society and changing notions of popular and high culture. The development of industrial arts programs by the Brooklyn Museum embodied this trend toward the promotion of consumerism.

Museum leaders felt called to present their collections as the embodiment of particular American values, specifically, "aesthetics, individualism, and technological progress."[231] Promoting industrial arts satisfied a desire to improve the taste of the public, and improve the items for sale. The combination of traditional values and material progress represented by technological improvements comprised the basic message. According to historian Michael Ettema, "[p]rogress in the industrial arts depended on the wedding of the craft ideal of personal expression with the economic benefits of industrial production."[232] So, while consumer society might have been promoted at times as "the cult of the new," it harnessed the evocative power of traditional symbols as well. In museum exhibits, innovation would be paired with tradition to highlight a history of technological progress, but also a continuity of craftsmanship and aesthetics.

Curator Culin continued to collect with the needs of industrial designers, buyers, students, manufacturers and artisans in mind. He noted that the acquisition of 1920

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[231] Michael J. Ettema, "History Museums and the Culture of Materialism," in *Past Meets Present: Essays about Historic Interpretation,* Jo Blatti, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 67.

[232] Ibid., 69.

greatly expanded the collections that were used with increasing frequency "in furnishing suggestive material to the American clothing and allied industries."[233] Four rooms were set aside and equipped for the study of industrial design.

In 1921 the editor of *Woman's Wear Daily*, M.D.C. Crawford, brokered several exchanges between the museum and businesses. Mr. Beller of Beller & Company wrote to Crawford and recalled that in 1919 he had taken part in the development of an exhibit at the Natural History Museum. Crawford had secured the loan of antique costumes from the Brooklyn Museum for the exhibit. Beller more recently had borrowed documents from the museum which "show a most interesting connection between the artistic achievement of the past and present-day fashions."[234]

In 1929 Crawford proposed that the Brooklyn Museum cooperate with decorative industries to the benefit of both groups. He wished to use the museum collections to teach good taste to professional designers, art students, and department store personnel. Pieces from the Brooklyn Museum would be displayed alongside examples of modern design in exhibits across the country. The modern objects would be sold in department stores simultaneously. Clearly, the modern products would benefit from association with older examples of fine art and design, while the museums would benefit from their association with successful and prominent businessmen.

Many retailers benefited from these exchanges. Curator Stewart Culin invited E.M.A. Steinmetz of Stein & Blaine to view his newest acquisitions from a recent buying trip abroad. Steinmetz was deeply grateful for Culin for continually searching out objects, even shards of pottery or old buttons which would inspire next season's fashions. In fact, Steinmetz resolved to put off developing next season's collections

[233] BIAS *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1920),10.

[234] A. Beller to M.D.C. Crawford, May 3, 1921, Culin Archival Collection.

> until I have seen these old garments. . . . Mr. Culin has . . . helped to make the creation of clothes not a question of locality but more or less a matter of mentality.[235]

The fact that designers would have access to artifacts from all over the world and throughout history meant that designers and consumers would have greater options and a greater awareness of other cultures. This was the promise offered by national retailing, communications industries, and advertising. The Brooklyn Museum's Director William Henry Fox also supported these partnerships. He lent Bamberger's Newark department store several pieces for their "3,000 Years of Art in Modern Rugs and Carpets" during their carpet Exposition. Crawford wrote to Director Fox asking him to notify him of the opening of their American rooms for publicity purposes. He noted that the Wing would "be very useful in forming the taste of the public, and an inspiration to stylers of furniture and home decorators."[236] He thus echoed the feeling of museum professionals like Henry Watson Kent at the Metropolitan Museum, who declared, "let us admit that art is a commodity when properly admixed with manufacturers."[237] The Brooklyn Museum benefited from these partnerships in heightened publicity and access to wealthy businesses. Innumerable small favors were exchanged. For example, in 1929 Director Fox prevailed upon Crawford to find a retailer who would donate hundreds of yards in valuable velvet to use as a backdrop in their new lace collection.

The Brooklyn Museum also offered lecture courses on industrial design at Pratt Institute, the Cooper Union, the YWCA, and the Abraham and Strauss department store. These courses used pieces and illustrations from the costumes and other collections in combination with newer products. Several fashion retailers introduced collections

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[235] Ibid.

[236] M.D.C. Crawford to William Henry Fox, February 1, 1929, Culin Archival Collection.

[237] Henry Watson Kent, "Putting Art into Labor: Responsibilities in Our System." *Good Furniture Magazine* Vol. 17, No. 3 (September 1921), 134.

alongside examples of antique costumes worn by their models. In addition to benefiting the design industries and seeking to improve public taste, the partnerships between the worlds of art and industry signaled a new emphasis on the cultural importance of the museum visitor, whose needs and wants gained importance in crafting museum visions, programs, and policies.

At the same time, it is not surprising that the person most responsible for coordinating these partnerships at the Brooklyn Museum was the head curator of Ethnology, Stewart Culin. He ensured that the traditional designs and techniques used to manufacture the antiques would influence modern design. Culin believed that industrial design needed the examples of the past, especially primitive and peasant designs for variety, color, and vibrancy. He defined ethnology as the study of the races and their cultures. Under his direction, "primitive" art was displayed as the crude beginnings from which modern art springs, both to show how far we have come, and at times, what we have lost. His assumptions about primitive cultures as well as those of his contemporaries reveals much about the conflicted views of elites toward people of color. He took neither a strict ethnological nor aesthetic approach to his work.[238] For example, in 1926, Culin was invited to address the Urban League in the Negro Art Section of his Rainbow House. He named his ethnology department for a Zuni legend, which describes a Rainbow House as a "far-off Summer Land," where birds come during the winter to brighten and freshen their colorful plumage. The primary ingredient was vibrant color, the primary mood, one of escape to a distant place.

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[238] Marianna Torgovnick points out that after the turn of the century, ethnologists no longer placed primitive art in displays which "resembled department stores during clearance sales," without regard to aesthetic design (p.75). This transformation toward viewing African or American Indian material culture as art at this time was not a total revolution, however, as ethnology in museums continued to be an ambiguously defined department. See: Torgovnick, *Going Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 75-84.

Culin related his concerns to Crawford that the Urban League would expect some explanation on the significance of African art from other continents for the black population of America. This passage reveals the ambiguous and complex racial attitudes which informed his work:

> I shall try to tell them that this art has no more definite relation to the negro in America than it has to the white people. Further, it is not primitive as is the art of the American Indian and the New Zealander, but an urban art, not originating with the negro but taken over from advanced cultures; that it illustrates the susceptibility of the negro to acculturization. Negro art has no more practical significance for the negro than for ourselves but by means of it we can retrace our steps to arts that are nascent, a needful step since many of our own arts are in a state where without refreshment they become more and more feeble and unconvincing.[239]

Culin may have underestimated the importance of African art to blacks in America in terms of "practical significance" but its exhibitions at BMA represented a more inclusive approach to art than heretofore. It is also significant that Culin did not have any African American art on display to discuss with the Urban League, in the Rainbow House or anywhere else in the Brooklyn Museum. Despite the fact that New York's African American population had risen dramatically as the result of the Great Migration by the 1920s, museums continued to ignore their recent cultural influence while at the same time disassociating them from their African ancestors' culture. Yet, Culin felt African art could make an important contribution to modern aesthetics and design.

The Rainbow House displayed art of "the more or less primitive and aboriginal" peoples of Africa, America and the South Pacific. He cautioned that environment was much more important than race in determining cultural characteristics. As an example, he found that American Indian art was more primitive than African art, and therefore more cohesive in terms of style and concept. Yet, Culin accorded African artists little

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[239] Stewart Culin to M.D.C. Crawford, 1926, Culin Archival Collection.

originality, stressing that they modified advanced art from other civilizations. He concluded his presentation by highlighting the important African influences on modern painting and sculpture, as well as the fact that M.D.C. Crawford's collection of African textiles was being used by industrial artists to develop patterns in home decoration and fashion.

Many of Culin's contemporaries shared his enthusiasm for the utility of primitive arts to inspire designers and market products. Culin and others felt that modern industrial society had lost some of the vitality of primitive culture, and as a result our modern art suffered. In particular, many agreed with Culin's assessment of American Indian culture as truly primitive and uncorrupted by modern civilizations. Culin saved a clipping from Crawford's magazine *Woman's Wear Daily* which described an Indian exhibit by a major retail firm. It announced:

> Strawbridge & Clothier, Philadelphia, recently held an exhibit of Penobscot Indians in connection with their sporting goods department, the Indians being furnished by a canoe manufacturing concern in Maine.[240]

Note that the Native American performers are being "exhibited" and "furnished" as if they were artifacts on display rather than participants. Now it is not just art objects, but people, who have become commodified. In this era, representations of non-white performers often served to unify white audiences.[241] The article pointed out that the exhibit drew significant crowds and generated handsome profits. The cultural exchange represented here only goes in one direction -- the Penobscots are considered passive even in performance. Sally Price has noted the enduring tendency of Western art curators and critics to assume that craftsmen and artists from other cultures are not equal participants

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[240] Clipping, Culin Archival Collection.

[241] David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 2. See also: Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 4.

in cultural exchanges, not really capable of the proper aesthetic or intellectual responses.[242] However, primitive art did sell well.

Peasant costumes were also used to create and market new designs. The Brooklyn Museum staff believed that European peasant art would appeal to the different nationalities in Brooklyn, as well as influence designers to create more colorful, vibrant materials. Culin proposed that an industrial center could use Czechloslovakian peasant costumes to influence the Czech designers and consumers in America, and other peasant costumes could be used in similar ways.

Unlike many of the artifacts in the Rainbow House, Dutch art was considered part of "our" New York cultural heritage. The American Rooms portraying Patrician Dutch interiors opened in 1927, and this tribute to tradition was celebrated as an older vision of the good life which resonated loudly during the materialistic 1920s. Philip Youtz, Assistant Director of the Museum, contrasted Dutch society with Puritan society, and concluded that it was the Dutch love of progress and luxury that shaped New York culture. Youtz praised their love of food and rum, and their well-appointed middle-class dwellings. Of the Schenck House interiors which comprised one of the American Rooms, Youtz explains:

> [t]he Schenck House and its furnishings recall a tradition which does much to account for the realistic and material values which have always characterized New York. . . . The home was a creation of a thoroughly democratic people who had a firmly rooted belief in this life and the pleasures of good and comfortable living.[243]

The Director emphasized the compatibility of acquisitiveness, consumption, and democracy in Dutch society. This commodification of art, "primitive" and otherwise, was inextricably linked to an interest in broadening the appeal and influence of the

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[242] Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 34.

[243] Philip Newell Youtz, "New York Dutch Households in the Eighteenth Century," 1933, Records of the Office of the Director, BMA.

Museum. In 1929 Stewart Culin died, but his vision was carried on to a great extent by those remaining on staff.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art also forged strong partnerships with business and industry in the 1920s. The Office of Associate in Industrial Arts was created in 1917 and Richard Bach was named its Director of Industrial Relations. Throughout the next decade Bach and the Metropolitan worked to provide inspiration and research facilities to improve American design and American taste. Most importantly, Bach strove to help American designers step out of the shadow of the European cultural tradition. The *New York Herald* declared,

> The Metropolitan Museum is producing crafstmen and designers who will make such use of the fine things of the past shown in the museum that the American style will gradually take shape. Europe has no designers to give or lend to America.[244]

Obviously, the author was not suggesting that no European designers were available, but rather that the time had come for American artists to take their place as the primary producers of art for American consumption. Richard Bach agreed, and he rejoiced that the American public was now favoring "the use of American sources of study by American manufacturers and designers, toward manufacture of American products for an American public."[245] As with other efforts to educate the public, the office of Industrial Arts was supposed to aid the Americanization process. One article in an industry organ explained MMA's utility in this process:

> Many of our people in America were born under foreign skies. While Americans in name they and their children born here are unaware of the quality of our traditions. A journey through the eighteen rooms of the American Wing will provide a setting for those traditions, lovely as jewels and must prove invaluable

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[244] Charles Phillips, "Art Study for the Nation's Artisans," *New York Herald*, (July 2, 1922).

[245] Richard Bach, "For American Design," in *The Fashion Art League of America Bulletin*, April, 1925, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 147.

for the Americanization of a people of mixed origin.[246]

It is not perhaps surprising that a World War would exacerbate the fears of rising immigration in our cultural capital. New Yorkers turned to the museums to reinforce traditional design hegemony but also to create distinctly new American traditions with the stamp of expert approval only museums could provide.

The Metropolitan aided these processes in several ways: annual industrial art exhibitions, a separate space provided for designers to examine the collections (Work Study Hours), lectures, tours and lending exhibitions by the education division, the Costume Institute and the Office of Associate in Industrial Arts, and the promotional efforts of Bach to publish in industry organs.

The annual industrial art exhibitions served to showcase MMA's collections alongside manufactured pieces which were currently being sold in stores, and the evolution of these exhibitions demonstrates the growing willingness of the Museum leaders to promote industrial goods in the guise of education. Early exhibits showed only those contemporary designs which had been directly inspired by study of the Museum's collections. If possible, a label would indicate the exact piece in the collection on which the new design had been based. One fashion designer drew women wearing the modern designs in front of the paintings on which these costumes were based. Artists such as Rubens, Vermeer and Rembrandt served as the inspiration for contemporary and fresh designs, but their provenance could be seen in the master works behind them.[247] A review of the 5th annual exhibition lamented the unoriginal quality of some of the products, but predicted that the future would see more confident use of the collections. The reviewer echoed a commonly held view of art early in twentieth century America. Producing great works from the designs of old found in museums

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[246]Page Eaton, "The American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Keystone*, March 1925, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 150.

[247]*New York Times Magazine,* (January 2, 1921).

> . . . presupposes an ease in the presence of art which we have not yet attained. Most of us in the presence of 'real art' are anxious and subdued, and if we use it we do so timorously and with consciousness that we are taking a liberty. . . . [248]

It was this unease with great art that museum officials sought to dispel with their exhibitions and education programs. Grace Cornell, liaison to the designers of the Textile Study Room, expanded upon this theme.

> Some wise person has said that reverence and irreverence are both needed to help the world along . . . the art of other times will be used in a broader and different way and the museum influence will be greater than it is today.[249]

Familiarity with the great designs of the collections would not breed contempt, they hoped, but that mixture of reverence and irreverence needed to inspire the current designers to bold interpretations rather than imitations. Thus would a unique American style be born.

By 1925, it was no longer necessary for a piece to be directly inspired by the Museum's collections to be accepted for the annual exhibition of industrial art. It is obvious what the manufacturers stood to gain by these exhibitions. Advertisements for their furniture, textiles, and clothing included the reference to their placement in the Metropolitan's exhibits. And the collections inspired more than just the design of the objects, but the packaging and advertisements as well. One trade journal told the story of a salesman who praised the annual exhibit, but lamented he could not think of any way in which it could help him in the soap business. The following year Jergens featured a display at MMA of a cake of soap wrapped in a design inspired by Grecian artifacts.

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[248] Ibid.

[249] Grace Cornell, "Silks of the Future," *American Silk Journal,* February 1921, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 146.

Colgate displayed wrappers based on Flemish lace designs. This same exhibit featured advertising designs, which caused one journal to conclude happily,

> advertising art is taking its place side by side with art industries, and art industries are taking their places side by side with the Fine Arts.[250]

Richard Bach argued that "design sells," but those designs clearly could take the form of advertising.

As discussed earlier, museums also benefited from these partnerships in a variety of ways. In one example, one of these alliances led directly to corporate sponsorship. In 1922 retailer James F. Ballard of St. Louis donated a rug collection which spanned the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries and was valued at over half a million dollars. He later added a few more pieces. When asked why he chose MMA for his patronage, Ballard noted that "here in New York 5,000 will see the rugs to one in other places."[251] It no doubt also helped that the rug industry and its trade journals were intimately familiar with the Museum's promotion of industrial design.

It was no accident that the trade journals featured MMA's events so often in their pages. Richard Bach aggressively sought them out and gave them press releases, interviews, and articles. He noted that as a result of his efforts, "[i]n many cases the Museum has been accepted as a distinct editorial aid, as well as a source of 'art news.'"[252] The New York press was also generous in its coverage and praise for the Museum's work with industry. The *New York Herald* noted the unique opportunities afforded by MMA to workers.

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[250] Ernest Knaufft, "Art in Advertising," in *Review of Reviews*, June 1922, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 147.

[251] *Price's Carpet and Rug News*, June 1922, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 147.

[252] Richard Bach, "Art Work, Its Trade Influence," in *Brass World*, January 1922, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 147.

> On any morning of the week between 9 and 9:30 there gather in the entrances of the Metropolitan Museum of Art numbers of artisans, young and old, of both sexes, who are admitted ahead of sightseers. . . . For years the public museum had for its chief aim the pleasure of the people and the convenience of the privileged classes, until a progressive directorate grasped the opportunity to help in the education of the people, and now it is beginning to recognize the part it has to play in the labor of its people.[253]

The *Sun* praised the combination of American and international styles of design displayed at the Museum and their efforts to inspire a modern American style.[254] National arts magazines were just as fulsome in their praise. *Arts and Decoration* wrote

> Exemplifying what may be considered nearly perfection in modern museum functioning, the Metropolitan Museum of Art stands conspicuously forth as one of the most helpful, valuable and enlightened public institutions the world over.[255]

Far from viewing their partnerships with industry as elitist, most journalists viewed it as representing modern public service.

At the same time, museums across the country promoted the industrial arts and machinery in institutions such as the Commercial Museum in Philadelphia (founded in 1893), the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry (founded in 1921), and the New York Museum of Science and Industry (opened in 1930).[256] However, the difference is that these museums were specifically intended to celebrate industry and commerce. The industrial exhibits and design programs at the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan Museum were attempts to bridge the gaps between the everyday objects most people

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[253] *New York Herald*, "Art Study for the Nation's Artisans,"July 2, 1922, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 147.

[254] *New York Sun*, "The Museum's Practical Help," September 22, 1922, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 147

[255] Gardner Teall, The National Influence of the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Arts and Decoration*, 1921, Historical Clippings and Ephemeral Files, MMA, Box 147.

[256] Michael Wallace, "Progress Talk: Museums of Science, Technology and Industry," in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 87-100.

could afford to buy (or at least view) at their local department stores and the artifacts these designs were based on. These projects to educate and entertain the public were attempts to fulfill the earliest mission of these institutions. Museum officials forged partnerships and programs which paved the way for later corporate sponsorship as we will see in chapter six. The following chapter highlights public/private partnerships at the municipal level that paved the way for federal sponsorship.

Chapter Four

New York City Museums and the State: Early Partnerships

Of the four institutions under review for this dissertation, only the New-York Historical Society failed to form a lasting partnership with the local government. This chapter examines the origins of the partnerships of BMA, MMA and MCNY with the state, and the failure of NYHS to create one. These partnerships led to better public access and services for the first three museums, while the lack of public support hampered NYHS in its development and relationship with the public. New York City's government began supporting museums early in the nineteenth century, but the New-York Historical Society trustees refused throughout the much of their early history to request public subsidies to avoid the attached requirements regarding public programs and accessbility.

For example, when offering financial support and land grants to BMA, MMA, and the Museum of the City of New York from their inceptions through the 1920s, New York City insisted that the museum's charter include provisions for free days and evenings for working people and full access for public school teachers and classes. In 1921 Mayor LaGuardia promoted a bill which would require local museums to offer industrial design rooms open to craftsmen. Although the bill was never passed, museums continued to reserve space for craftsmen and designers to study artifacts, showing their commitment to LaGuardia's proposed program of public service. As the amount of municipal funds going to New York museums increased by the 1920s, these institutions responded by developing more educational programs, and closer ties to the public school system and curricula.

This appears to have been a national trend. For example, statistics gathered from the American Association of Museums during World War I demonstrated that institutions

receiving public money were more likely to have education programs for the public.[257] One expert on museums later conceded that "city fathers . . . are not going to support a cultural Fort Knox."[258] They would not support an organization that was not easily accessible to the general public.

The Brooklyn Museum of Art

The Brooklyn Museum's history began in 1823, and its fiscal relationship with the City had roots which stretched back into the nineteenth century. This institution was founded during a meeting on August 7, 1823, held in Stephenson's Tavern. The meeting was advertised in the local papers and although it was open to all, it specifically targeted craftsmen:

> The citizens of the village of Brooklyn, particularly the master mechanics, are requested to attend a meeting at the house of Walter Stephenson . . . for the purpose of establishing an Apprentices' Library in this village.[259]

The Marquis de Lafayette was on hand to help lay the cornerstone for their first building in 1825, which was funded by a joint stock company. After a brief period of inactivity following the death in 1833 of their first president, Robert Snow, the library reopened in 1835 on Washington Street.

The New York Legislature approved the charter of the Brooklyn Institute in 1843, thus establishing a major cultural facility that has survived more than a century and a half. The new institution offered lectures by luminaries such as Louis Agassiz, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Ward Beecher. For the next several decades the Brooklyn

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[257] Daniel M. Fox, *Engines of Culture: Philanthropy and Art Museums* (Madison, Wisconsin: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 40-65.

[258] Theodore L. Low, *The Museum as a Social Instrument* (New York, 1942), 34.

[259] Quoted in Rebecca Hooper Eastman, "The Story of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1824-1924," 1924, NYPL, 3.

Institute was the "center of the social and intellectual life of the young and rapidly growing city."[260] The Institute was reorganized into a wide array of departments that were infused by the vigor of member organizations such as the American Astronomical Society, and was renamed the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences.

It was clear that the Institute had outgrown its current location, and the New York Legislature took action in 1889, amending the Institute's charter to allow a new building to be erected on public land and built at public expense. Bonds would be issued to the credit of a fund called the "Museum of Art and Science" fund, and these monies would be used for the creation and maintenance of the building.[261] This building, to be called the Central Museum at the time, is a sprawling Beaux Arts creation on Eastern Parkway. In 1897 the first section of the museum opened and the charter was amended again to provide that this fund would appropriate no less than $20,000 annually, a sum that increased steadily over the next thirty years.

Recognizing the important role that museums could play in early education, the City agreed to establish a separate institution of learning for children, which opened in 1899. Also in 1889 the Institute held a meeting with New York Mayor Alfred C. Chapin, who agreed to set aside lands rather than sell them on Eastern Parkway between Washington and Flatbush Avenues. The Legislature passed a bill in 1890 which set the land apart for the Central Museum. The following year the City appropriated over $300,000 for the building on Prospect Hill along Eastern Parkway. Soon thereafter the City authorized another $300,000 for the building of the Central Museum. The contract was given to McKim, Mead and White, and the lease on the property was for 100 years.[262]

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[260] Rebecca Hooper Eastman, "The Story of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1824-1924," NYPL, 6.

[261] *First Yearbook of the Brooklyn Institute*, 1888-9, BMA.

[262] *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 12 1925), 1-7.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the central portion took place on June 6, 1900. The hopes and expectations from the City for its investment were voiced by Comptroller Hon. Bird S. Coler:

> This institution is an important factor in the development of a sound public sentiment that will in time create and sustain better political conditions and better municipal government. . . . There is no reason why, if the citizens will promise to fill the Institute, that we should not go ahead with another wing next year. There should be a new wing each year with the $300,000 appropriation.[263]

Coler clearly indicated that citizen participation (demonstrated by attendance) would guarantee future allocations for expansion, and that the Institute would greatly enrich the polity of Brooklyn. Though the onus would appear to be on the public to come visit, it was the Institute leaders' duty to create an institution of beauty and science that would attract and instruct many. The Hon. St. Clair McKelway, Member of the New York Board State of Regents echoed this view, comparing the Institute to higher education and calling the Institute's offerings a "great system of electives" for the people.[264] McKelway stressed the significance of the public partners of the Brooklyn Institute in its sound development as well as the development of the community:

> [a]nd it is one of the felicities of our municipal government, whose imperfections we deplore and whose scandals we mourn, that this Institute has been made part and parcel of our educational system; that the noble building already in use is public property; that the noble addition for which ground has been broken here to-day is public property; that the persons in official charge of the finances of the Institute, for building purposes, are public officials . . . and the revenues of the government and the people are pledged to the maintenance of edificial foundations already laid and to the progressive completion of the great series of structures here competently planned …[265]

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[263] Hon. Bird, S. Coler, Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, *Yearbook, 1899-1900*, 456-457.

[264] Hon. St. Clair McKelway, Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, *Yearbook, 1899-1900*, 461.

[265] Ibid.

Mindful of the unsavory reputation of local government fostered by Tammany (now shared with Manhattan after the1898 consolidation that made Brooklyn an official borough rather than an independent city), McKelway took pains to reinforce Coler's argument about the important role played by the Institute in the cultural and political environment of Brooklyn. Though these public representatives stressed the benefits to government of a strong Institute, they had also noted the educational responsibilities of the Institute to the community. This sentiment did not fall on deaf ears. Director Franklin W. Hooper concluded the ceremony by heralding the aims of the Institute "to exhibit the prime needs of man for the public welfare. To open to the humblest the gates of access to the far-reaching and enriching culture of the world . . ."[266]

The Institute continued to expand its "far-reaching" offerings from around the world with public aid. The City also authorized funds for a new Children's Museum building in 1907. That year the City contracted with the Brooklyn Institute to create an arboretum (now the Brooklyn Botanic Garden) and astronomical observatory. Like the Central Museum, as the Eastern Parkway museum was then called, the Botanic Garden was by the 1920s popular and innovative in its programs (it mailed hundreds of thousands of seed packets to school children for them to plant at home and at school).[267]

The Institute now had several publicly financed buildings, situated on public land, and maintained at least in part with public funds. The City had donated very valuable land which had been part of Prospect Park and created several buildings at a cost of well over $600,000 for several different types of cultural institutions. All of these thrived throughout the 1920s. Meanwhile, the Institute's Central Museum still featured a wide array of departments in addition to its large and varied collection of art, including ethnology and natural history.

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[266] Franklin W. Hooper, Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, *Yearbook, 1899-1900*, 464.

[267] Eastman, 1-19.

In 1920, the Brooklyn Institute's Central Museum received an annual appropriation which had grown from the original $20,000 to over $137,000.[268] Now, the City was responsible for funding Museum salaries as well as maintenance. All of this came with charter regulations on operating days and attendance fees as well as an overall expectation that the Institute would provide easy access to their collections and education programs that complemented and enhanced the public school system curricula. The Institute provided free admission on all holidays, and free admission any day for teachers with classes. Only Monday and Tuesday were pay days.

Attendance had kept pace with rising public funds, and would climb even higher once the City extended subway service to Eastern Parkway that same year (the subways at that time were run by private companies, but the Board of Estimate and Appropriations took an active role in transit service nonetheless). The Eastern Parkway -- Brooklyn Museum station opened on November 22, 1920, and the Annual Report for the Central Museum the trustees happily reported at the end of the year:

> Already the attendance from outside the Borough of Brooklyn shows an advance and it is evident that knowledge of easy and comfortable access to the Museum is rapidly spreading.[269]

An increase in attendance of 29,000 over the previous year was good news indeed, since the new station had only been open for a month (total attendance for the Central Museum was over 305,000).[270]

And the Museum continued to improve its public service and education programs. Teacher attendance was "much increased" by an alliance forged with the Board of Education. Frank Collins, Director of the Art Departments of the Elementary Schools,

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[268] BIAS, *Report of the Director of Museums – Central Museum* (1920), 42.

[269] Ibid., 7.

[270] Ibid., 20.

devised a plan in 1920 in which the Brooklyn Museum provided illustrated lectures to art teachers, who in turn, gave them to their students.[271] Handicapped children were also welcomed in a new program that year, including a lecture and a motion picture. “Thus it will be seen that the constant endeavor of the Museum staff is to tie the Museum close to the schools and from its collections supply object training not provided for in school equipment.”[272] Gertrude Young, the Museum Guide and Instructor, also sent out a list of their exhibits which corresponded with the school curriculum in the high schools, and several of these schools responded by visiting. Classes in design given at the high schools were another method of outreach, exploring Ainu, Chinese, Indian, and Polynesian art, with a view toward improving their own modern designs using museum materials and lessons. Numerous high school design classes visited to study the Museum’s Oriental collection.

Over 37,000 school children attended their programs in 1925, an increase of almost 10,000 over the previous year.[273] The trustees and staff were responsive to requests for improvements in their services. For example, the Director of Art in High Schools James P. Haney convinced the Central Museum’s leaders to offer four special lectures by the Museum Docent to high school art students, which drew nearly 1,400 students. The Board of Education also convinced the Museum officials to offer two lectures to elementary art school teachers a month instead of one.

The Board of Education was not the only organization to help develop their outreach and education programs with students and teachers. A Brooklyn Institute flyer listed the many other organizations with which they collaborated: Brooklyn Training Schools for Teachers, Pratt Institute, the Brooklyn Public Library, School Art League, the

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[271] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1920), 7-8.

[272] Ibid., 9.

[273] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1925), 5.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Young Men's Christian Association. The library staff loaned hundreds of plates and pictures throughout the city schools in the early 1920s, and demand continued to grow.[274] In 1923 the City appropriated $1,050,000 to complete sections F and G of the Central Museum building. These additions included plenty of exhibition space, but also "sorely needed lecture and study rooms" for schools and groups that "are now coming to the Museum in such large numbers."[275] In 1925 the trustees of the Brooklyn Institute thanked their benefactors for the building and its additions, as a "monument to the progressive and generous policy pursued by the City in the encouragement of its cultural institutions."[276] To increase the appeal of its school programs, special prizes were added to reward outstanding students who came to study the collection (the Institute did not receive any special grants to underwrite this program). That same year new education initiatives were launched, including School Art League lectures for high school students, and "Chronicles of America" motion picture showings donated by Yale University Press. These were popular with both students of all ages, as well as museum members. And in view of increased demand for weekend lectures for workers, Saturday lectures were replaced with Sunday lectures, to the delight of working visitors.[277] The library offered a new children's hour on weekends to study plates and pictures, and new classes were introduced in clay modeling for elementary school children, and drawing classes for high school students.[278] Teachers took advantage of a new course offering in Drawing with credit given by the Board of Education. It drew over 450 teachers in its second semester.

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[274] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1922), 7-8.

[275] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1923), 5.

[276]BIAS *Central Museum Annual Report* (1925), 5.

[277] Ibid., 8.

[278] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1927), 6-7.

In addition to working with educators, the Brooklyn Institute's governing committee (board of trustees) went out of their way to establish good relations with anyone involved in government or politics. For example, the Natural History division cooperated with the New York State Conservation Commissioner to create an exhibition on the propogation of oysters.[279] And when the Democratic National Convention was held in New York in 1924, the Committee invited delegates and their friends to a reception and tea.[280]

By 1928, the annual gift from the City to the Brooklyn Museum had nearly doubled since the beginning of the decade, to the amount of over $230,000. Over 500,000 visitors filed through its doors that year.[281] Clearly, the City believed the Museum's work with the public to be a worthwhile investment. As the decade closed, even the onset of the Depression had not yet hurt the Museum's attendance or coffers. William Fox, the President wrote that "[o]n Sundays and holidays, the galleries were crowded to suffocation . . . "[282] The City in 1930 provided $250,000 to the maintenance fund (representing an increase of over 90% since the Museum's first subsidy in 1897), and the Museum boasted of record attendance of regular visitors, as well as a record number of visitors to the Education Department.[283] Furthermore, the staff pioneered new methods of entertaining people and bringing them in: published school bulletins, motion pictures, and radio broadcasts. All of these proved successful in heightening the public profile of the Brooklyn Museum. More importantly, however, these programs were part of BMA leaders' efforts to offer the public a good return on their investment: a cultural institution

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[279] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1926), 9.

[280] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1924), 9.

[281] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1928), 5.

[282] William Fox, Memoirs, BMA, 402.

[283] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1930), 5.

that was open nights and weekends for workers, with free days to make it affordable, and offered education programs that worked in concert with the public school system and other cultural institutions. Other museums benefited from City generosity as well.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Public Funding

As noted in chapter one, the Metropolitan Museum also developed a financial relationship with the government of New York City and State in the nineteenth century. In 1871, the New York State Legislature passed an act to create the Metropolitan Museum at a cost not to exceed $35,000 (this law also created the American Museum of Natural History), and in 1873 the Legislature appropriated $30,000 in a Board of Estimate tax levy for the museum.[284] Like their counterparts in Brooklyn, the Metropolitan Museum was offered property carved out of parkland: the Parks Department issued a lease which was valued at a half a million dollars on Fifth Avenue in Central Park for the building site. The City would own the building and the trustees would own the collection. In exchange for the financial support of the government, the museum's charter specified that the Metropolitan Museum must be open free of charge from 10am to one half hour before sunset four days per week and on all holidays except those falling on Sundays. In addition, teachers from public schools should be granted access.[285] This also paralleled the City's policies toward the Brooklyn Institute. In 1888 the City spent another $400,000 to construct a north wing, "in pursuance of the agreement to furnish buildings, which we agree to fill with works of art for public education."[286] The "for public education" part of the clause would create some conflict.

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[284] Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc.: 1970 and 1989), 45.

[285] Howe,179-200.

[286] MMA, *Annual Report* (1890), 472.

MMA's officials continued to request more money, and the City continued to request increased public service. Unlike the Brooklyn Museum trustees, who accepted and even embraced these conditions, the Metropolitan trustees and the City argued over this agreement as it was carried out. The City pushed MMA to open free of charge two nights per week to ensure better access for working people. The City offered to increase the annual payment to MMA by $10,000 to cover the cost if the museum would open Tuesday and Saturday free, or on Sunday. This agreement was only partially honored, however. On the one hand, the City clearly wished the Museum would open to the public without charge on Sundays. MMA's trustees were was afraid to do this because members and other backers did not wish to open on the Sabbath. Therefore, they opted for Tuesday and Saturday as free evenings.

> The pressure, however, for Sunday openings was rather increased than relaxed by this concession. Petitions, numerously signed, were poured in upon us for a free Sunday; the ardent champions of this measure unhesitatingly encouraged us to expect all the pecuniary aid necessary to meet the increased expenses of such a step. . . .[287]

Unfortunately, the City did not always pay the amount promised to cover costs. In 1891 the trustees complained that of the $95,000 the City promised, only $50,000 was appropriated.[288] Adequate funding was not the only issue. They quote Museum board President Johnston's diatribe about the increasingly popular but "'erroneous" assumption that "'your Museum is a public institution.'"[289] However, they bowed to pressure from social settlements, unions, the press and from the legislature to open on Sunday in 1891.

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[287] Ibid.

[288] MMA, *Annual Report* (1892), 538.

[289] Trustee quoted in Winifred E. Howe, *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (1946), 240, found in Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig, *The Park and the People,* 361.

By the end of the year, the Executive Committee requested that this be repealed due to the expenses involved. While the Committee conceded that high Sunday attendance figures demonstrated that the measure was popular with the larger public, they complained that they had alienated patrons. "We know of large bequests that have been revoked on account of our opening on Sunday, and we have reason to apprehend the loss of others."[290] Nevertheless, they admitted that Sundays at MMA "may continue to prove of great advantage to the general public. . . . [291] The City agreed and continued to pressure MMA to remain open on Sundays. Over the next decade, this move won better municipal support, as the City's appropriation "multiplied six times," as municipal authorities successfully used their generosity to keep control over public access to the Museum.[292] In addition to their operating hours, the Museum put many other programs in place to attract and educate visitors. Since 1919, for example, MMA had offered two free concerts each year, and these were broadcast by the local municipal station.[293] In 1920 the City appropriated over $300,000 (nearly 40% of the Museum's operating budget) and the attendance approached one million visitors.[294] The Report of the Trustees for that year looked at the preceding fifty years with pride in its educational services to the public, including lectures, classes, and concerts. They noted that the value of their service "should be easily understood by all classes of society and one which should enlist the support of government and individual alike. . . ."[295] The trustees

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[290] MMA, *Annual Report* (1891), 501.

[291] Ibid.

[292] Blackmar and Rosenzweig, *Park and the People*, 363.

[293] MMA, *Annual Report* (1925), 26.

[294] MMA, *Annual Report* (1920), 9.

[295] Ibid., 4.

cautioned that this principle required "constant development to meet changing conditions and new needs, and in particular, constant definition."[296]

One element of service that continued to develop was the relationship with public school officials, as cooperation continued with the Assistant Superintendent of Schools and the Director of Drawing in the Elementary Schools. Docents worked weekdays and weekends, with students of all ages and with teachers, such as the New York Training School for Teachers. Another service was museum extension, introduced in 1921. Study hours for young girls and homemakers were offered starting in 1925. That year the City once again appropriated over $300,000 and the attendance topped one million visitors.[297]

In 1930 MMA leaders created a new position for education and hired Huger Elliot as Director of Educational Work. In its first year the education division gave fifty-five radio talks, twenty summer school talks, study hours for the staffs of various clerical schools and department stores, and 800 public school teachers registered for lecture course. Taking advantage of the new medium of radio meshed perfectly with the desire to entertain as well as educate, and to broaden the Museum's audience. Encouraging teachers to bring their classes in for tours (and to attend lectures designed for teachers) brought in thousands of children who otherwise might not venture into the Beaux-Arts building on Fifth Avenue. Not including attendance at lecture halls, the trustees boasted that visitors attending their Education division programs accounted for more than five percent of the total number of attendees.[298] Creating programs for workers in the fashion industries and department stores was another attempt to bring in working people and elevate standards of taste for all New Yorkers.

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[296] Ibid., 4.

[297] Ibid., 9.

[298] MMA, *Annual Report* (1925), 26.

By 1930 the City appropriated over $500,000 and the attendance exceeded 1.2 million, a level of attendance would not have been achieved without significant outreach efforts..[299] Municipal funds were not earmarked for specific educational programs, but were instead devoted annual to "Maintenance," which included salaries, physical plant maintenance, utilities, and other typical operating expenses. Funds were also earmarked for land acquisition, and expansion plans. However, the municipal authorities made it clear that its continued benevolence required the museum to keep the institution open, accessible, and useful to the public, as in the case of Sunday openings, night hours, and free days. Thousands of teachers and school children received free visits and programs, and the City's board of education worked with museum leaders to tailor these programs to the public school system's needs. And municipal radio stations broadcast the Metropolitan's programs and announcements, increasing their outreach efforts without cost.

The New York Historical Society and The Museum of The City of New York

The New-York Historical Society petitioned the Legislature early and often in its first half-century. It was founded in 1804 and first requested aid in 1810. The Legislature passed an act to create a lottery to raise funds for NYHS' library. Twelve thousand dollars was raised, but the trustees soon ran through those funds. Other grants were made in 1826 and 1828. In 1862 NYHS successfully petitioned for funds for a new building in Central Park. Six years later this parcel was increased. After the depression of 1873, NYHS officials neglected to request more funds for a while, which may have been due to political considerations.[300] Historian Pamela Spence Richards argues that the corrupt practices of Tammany in this era repelled the leadership. She quotes a trustee of the other

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[299] MMA, *Annual Report* (1930), 4-40.

[300] *Pamela Spence Richards, Scholars and Gentlemen: The Library of the New-York Historical Society: 1804-1982* (Hampden, Conn: Archon Books, 1984), 14-66.

major local library, the Tilden Trust (part of the future New York Public Library), who argued that City funds meant dependence on political whims. Although anti-Tammany feeling may have prevailed among NYHS trustees during the late nineteenth century, the Society's distance from the public sector would continue well into the twentieth century. However, following May Van Rensselaer's campaign to draft them into public service (described in chapter two), with the help of new leadership the Society made some improvements in public access and education programs. However, its independence from the public sector would continue to hamper its progress in developing closer contacts with the community.

The Museum of the City of New York was incorporated in 1923 and given the use of Gracie Mansion by the City to open to the public in 1927. Though Van Rensselaer lost her bid for the charter in favor of Henry Collins Brown, in its first years MCNY officials remained fairly faithful to her plan for a history museum focused on education and public access. The museum was open on Saturdays, Sundays, and evenings, and admission was free every day except Mondays. The City then offered a site on upper Fifth Avenue for a permanent building with the proviso that the trustees raise $2,000,000 by its deadline. With healthy attendance for a new museum (over 92,000 in 1927, the first year of its annual reports), wealthy donors, and plenty of volunteers, it was clear that MCNY was likely to succeed. In their first annual report, the trustees wrote:

> As the Museum receives no financial support from the city, it is dependent on its members and friends for funds. During the next two years, when the work of the building will be in progress, every effort must be made to widen this interest.[301]

Despite the trustees' failure to give the City credit for the financial support already given through the donation of the Fifth Avenue site, they soon requested annual support as well.

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[301] MCNY, *First Annual Report*, MCNY Archives, (1927).

MCNY began to show City appropriations as early as 1931 (approximately $10,000 the first year, steeply rising to $74,000 the following year).[302] In 1932 MCNY's trustees were able to secure Carnegie Corporation funding for an educational department, which offered tours to public school teachers and children (the Carnegie Corporation's impact on MCNY's education programs will be explored further in chapter six). In an effort to ensure that the education division "function for all people" it offered Sunday lectures on historic and current topics, and encouraged the public to suggest future topics.[303] In addition, MCNY offered a free college course to public school teachers in conjunction with the Board of Education, City College, and Hunter College.[304] MCNY's leaders were fortunate enough to receive private funding earmarked for education, but municipal funding was likely influential in their early policy-making, such as their decision to offer hours attractive to working people.

As many scholars have recognized, federal funding was an effective catalyst in democratizing cultural institutions, as we will see in chapter seven. In contrast, scholars have paid scant attention to municipal funding, but it merits more analysis. Municipal funding was a very different type of funding stream, but very influential and long-lasting in its impact. City support was primarily earmarked for three categories: general operating funds for salaries and maintenance, land grants, and capital dollars for renovation or expansion. In the main, these types of support did not lead to the type of creative experiments fostered by the New Deal, but they did ensure significant attention to public access, particularly for school children and teachers at all levels. The municipal

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[302] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1932), 14.

[303] MCNY, *The Museum of the City of New York: Its Collections and Activities* (New York: MCNY, 1935), 65.

[304] Ibid.

funding the City provided came with strings attached from the very beginning of these partnerships.

More operating hours, free days, and programs for schools were just some of the examples of improvements the City encouraged or demanded in return for funding the Brooklyn Institute, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Museum of the City of New York. Some of these stipulations were made explicitly in charters, while others were made in negotiations each year, as in the case of Sunday and night openings at MMA. While MMA's leaders required some pressure to improve public access, the officials of Brooklyn Institute and the Museum of the City of New York were quicker to expand operating hours and public programs. NYHS eschewed public support between the 1870s and the Great Depression, and took pains to highlight its independence in their publications. Not coincidentally, though they offered free admission, the Society's trustees were slow to embrace education programs, Sunday openings, and evening hours. What is also important about these financial relationships is that when the crisis of the Depression hit, the City already had a stake in the survival and success of these institutions. The culture of the community, it was clear, was at least in part the responsibility of the local polity. And in return, the City would continue to request ever better access and service for its citizens.

Women as volunteers, staff and donors also played a significant role in increasing museums' public service and education programs in the difficult years of the Depression.

Chapter Five

New York Women and Museums in the 1930s

As the depression deepened, women made a greater impact as volunteers, donors, and staff at the New-York Historical Society, Brooklyn Museum of Art (then known as the Central Museum of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences), the Museum of the City of New York, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art than ever before. Museums became more inclusive in the 1930s. Some women worked towards to a greater emphasis on education, public service and new types of exhibits, and presented modern ideas and techniques, while others made these institutions slightly more representative of the public they served. Although this chapter is organized into categories of volunteers, donors, and staff within each institution, these women crossed these boundaries regularly, making contributions of time, money, and objects within their principal museum and others. There were important limits to their influence in promoting their agendas, and increasing public service. These limits and the obstacles they faced as well as their successes are explored in this chapter, and the ways in which their activities differed from women's roles in the 1920s.

One of the obstacles to women's increased participation should have been the poor economy, at least in terms of gaining staff positions in museums. We saw in chapter two that women at the Brooklyn Museum, Metropolitan and the MCNY had posted some impressive gains professionally in the 1920s in traditionally female areas such as education, as well as others. This reflected a more general influx of women into the paid workforce. Between 1920 and 1940 the percentage of women in paid positions climbed

from 37.5% for women under 24 to 45.6%, and from 21.5% to 30.5% for women over 25.[305]

Yet, in many sectors of the economy, hiring women during the depression could be controversial. Many felt that the few jobs available should go to the traditional family breadwinners: men. This argument was often made when the WPA jobs were handed out, and the same argument was used to justify unequal pay scales on relief. There was also a danger that the poor economy would encourage retrenchment in the newer museum activities often important to women: education and outreach.

Surprisingly, women actually gained in total numbers and posted a modest one percent gain as a percentage of the workforce during the crisis. Despite the obstacles, over two million women joined the workforce for the first time in the decade following the stock market crash, with married women making the most dramatic gains. In fact, historian Susan Ware points out that women were less adversely affected by the depression than men, "because the occupations they were concentrated in (clerical, trade and service occupations) contracted less than those in which men were concentrated (manufacturing, for example)."[306] Librarians and clerical support staff fared relatively well, and museums offered a growing number of jobs in these areas. As in the 1920s, museums were expanding their staffs in all areas, and growing attendance caused by

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[305] Michael Bernstein, *The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 62.

[306] Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 36. Chapters two and three analyze the obstacles and advantages women faced in all types of job sectors, and women's successes in finding and keeping jobs throughout this period. See also, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Ware cites Kessler-Harris and others who share her view that sex-typing in the workplace maintained stereotypes, but also prevented women from mass layoffs during the depression. For a discussion of opposition to women working during the Depression and New Deal, see Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: 1980).

enforced leisure for the unemployed put even more pressure on museums to keep or expand their workforce levels. At the same time, however, due to the poor economy, donations declined as many people could not give as generously as before. So, how did the depression impact women who wanted to contribute to museums as volunteers, donors or staff?

Volunteers at MCNY

As of 1940 no women had been elected to the MCNY's Executive Committee, but they were very active as volunteers. This was particularly true of educational activities, such as their "Trips and Trails" program for school children. Mrs. A. Barton Hepburn of the City Club continued to have her headquarters at MCNY and was listed as an Honorary Vice-President. The Executive Secretary of the Club, Mary F. Smart, worked at the museum daily, and the Club lent a working library, stereopticon, screen, and 4,000 lantern slides. Up to thirty guides and docents were provided to MCNY throughout the week from Clara A. Molendyk's organization Cooperation in Government, Inc. It is quite possible some of these volunteers were male, but a majority of volunteer guides for museums in the City at this time were female.

Female volunteers led by May Van Rensselaer played a key role in the origins of the Museum of the City of New York in the 1920s. After her death in 1925, many of her associates went on to serve MCNY on its Women's Committee. The Committee was formed in 1932 in connection with a temporary exhibition on antique toys. Like the Woman's Auxiliary at the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Committee was large, active, and served as greeters, educators, hostesses, donors and fundraisers. As late as 1940, the Women's Executive Committee was listed prominently on the masthead just

underneath the main Executive Committee, suggesting that although women were shut out of the principal group, they were considered a satellite committee of real significance.[307] The MCNY Women's Committee served as "patronesses" (hostesses) at the opening of the new building in 1932, where they greeted 10,000 visitors. In the early 1930s they also hosted exhibition openings and other social functions, but their role was larger than that. As in the Museum's first decade, they also developed some exhibitions, from decorative arts and costumes, to theater and trade cards. For example, the Women's Committee presented a costume gallery alcove in 1934. The *New York World Telegram* reported that

> The Women's Committee of the Museum of the City of New York has been busy ransacking New York attics, exploring old New York houses for early American paneling and digging back into contemporary eighteenth century records for local color. The result, they say, is a swell show.[308]

These elite women used their connections to secure loans and donations of artifacts from other members of prominent New York families. And what connections they had!

Scanning the family names, the list reads like a *Who's Who* in New York museums, philanthropy, and society. Several were married to officers of the MCNY's executive committee, and many were married to board members and major donors of other museums. For example, Mrs. Solomon Guggenheim of the Solomon Guggenheim Museum, Mrs. Edward C. Blum, married to the President of the Brooklyn Institute and also a donor to the Institute, Mrs. Robert De Forest, whose husband had been President of the Metropolitan Museum, or Mrs. Edward Harkness, who along with her husband gave

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[307] Museum of the City of New York *Bulletin*, 4 (November 1940), 1.

[308] *New York World Telegram*, February 19, 1934, clipping, NYPL, James Speyer Papers, box 4.

generously to the Met. The families of Old Dutch New York were well-represented, including several relatives of May Van Rensselaer, as well as Livingstons, Remsens and Fishes.

In addition, many boasted ties to newer scions of wealth and power, such as Mrs. August Belmont (also known for her feminist politics and suffrage work). Four officers of the committee were appointed to oversee 193 members, an impressive number of volunteers considering the museum had been in existence for less than ten years. Of these 193, only fourteen women were single. The remaining members were married and usually listed themselves using their husband's full name, such as Mrs. Luke Vincent Lockwood.

The Women's Committee was listed in the annual report on an equal basis to all the other appointive committees that reported to the Trustees (such as the Committee on Membership, or the Committee on Exhibits). Oddly, the MCNY also created a Women's Auxiliary Committee, but unlike the Children's Museum Auxiliary, this one functioned as an auxiliary to the Women's Committee and was composed of three men. It is unclear what the function of that committee was, since they were not mentioned elsewhere in the reports. It seems logical to assume that the men did not play a social role, as hosts or patrons, but rather as a sort of liaison to the rest of the committees and Board.[309] Towards the end of the decade, this auxiliary had been disbanded, but the Women's Committee soldiered on. Some of its members now joined other committees that had

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[309] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1932), 7.

previously been exclusively male. For example, the Membership Campaign Committee by 1938 had three officers, all female.[310]

Despite the role they played in founding and developing the museum, it appears that the Women's Committee's work, though welcomed, was viewed in strictly gendered terms by the Director. Director James Speyer argued that these women's role in education was primarily due to their influence as mothers. In 1937 he addressed the Women's Committee as follows:

> We want . . . the women to influence their children and make them and their friends come here and learn . . . . As my friend, the late Arthur Brisbane, has said, 'Women have given strength to men and civilization to the world.'[311]

In Director Speyer's mind, at least, women were contributing to culture primarily because of their differences vis-à-vis men. Unfortunately, his papers do not mention the response to his remarks. His emphasis on women's maternal roles is all the more striking when we examine the high numbers of women on his paid staff, who presumably were paid to do more than simply encourage children to come to the museum.

MCNY Staff

As the 1930s opened, women comprised one-third of the staff at the MCNY listed in its annual reports: V. Isabelle Miller, who was "In Charge of Costume, Silver, and Household Furnishings," May Davenport Seymour, "In Charge of Theater and Music Collection," Grace M. Meyer, "In Charge of Prints," Annie O. Peet, Assistant Director of the Department of Educational Work, and Laura C. Jacobus, Chief Docent.[312] These staff

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[310] MCNY, *Bulletin* 1 (February, 1938), 40

[311] James Speyer, remarks, James Speyer Papers, NYPL, box 4.

[312] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1932), x.

positions had an important role in exhibitions and programs, and these women did not have to work their way up from assistant positions first. Some female donors parlayed their donations into jobs, however. May Seymour, a niece of an actress and daughter of a theatre producer, donated many pieces to the Museum of the City of New York. She ran the Theatre and Music Collection beginning in 1932. This collection was an important one in MCNY, and was featured in many special exhibits. It was a tribute to the vibrant entertainment scene in New York, and featured recent as well as early theatre and music history. It is striking that all these women appeared to be single (listed with the title of "Miss"). By 1940, the staff had not increased at all, but there were now six women out of a staff of fifteen, slightly more than one-third. All three working in the Department of Education were female. Perhaps aware of the key roles women played in museum education, the MCNY offered free docent services to women's clubs, but not to other types of clubs. May Davenport Seymour and V. Isabelle Miller's titles were changed to the more professional term "curator."[313] Overall, the Depression did not significantly diminish women's presence at MCNY, and in fact may have helped women expand their roles. As the staff expanded, women assumed positions as curators and educators, and the numbers of volunteers continued to grow.

NYHS Staff

At the New-York Historical Society, there were a few female staffers in the 1930s, coming from a variety of backgrounds. Brooklyn-born Librarian Dorothy C. Barck, for example, came from a family of professional historians. Her brother was a Professor of American History at Syracuse University. Her father, a collector of

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[313] MCNY, *Bulletin* 4 (November, 1940), 1.

historical artifacts and documents and historian for the American Sons of the Revolution, was a life member at the Society. In addition to her Historical Society membership, Dorothy Barck was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Association of State and City Archivists.[314] Her official title in the Library was Editor and Head of Research, and she wrote many articles for the *Quarterly Bulletin*. Joining her in the Library were nine other staff, five of them female.[315]

Like May Davenport Seymour at the MCNY, in 1935 a woman named Bella C. Landauer donated her large collection to the New-York Historical Society, and secured herself an unpaid position for life as honorary curator of that collection, and a separate room to house it.[316] For her gifts, she had been elected a fellow in 1927. Her collection of advertising and business artifacts and documents was featured in several exhibits and she contributed articles highlighting the collection in the Society *Quarterly Bulletin*. She also lent and donated her artifacts for display to other institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum, the New York Public Library and the Institute of Aeronautical Sciences. In addition to her position at the Historical Society she served as a consultant to several colleges on the history of commercial art and printing. She died in 1960 at the age of 85, survived by her two sons and five grandchildren. Though she had been a collector of all types of "scraps of old paper," including cigar bands, canceled railroad passes and United States lottery tickets, her largest collection was the Landauer Business

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[314] *New York Times*, "Dorothy Churchill Barck," Obituary (April 20, 1965), 39.

[315] NYHS, *Quarterly Bulletin* 24 (July, 1940), 8.

[316] Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 75.

and Professional Collection.[317] The *Quarterly Bulletin* emphasized the significance of this "useful and much desired" material.[318] Consisting of over 100,000 objects, this array of advertising materials, book plates, and trade cards became a prominent and popular collection of business history for academics and business people by the 1950s.[319]

In 1939 the Society first began listing its staff in their publications, and in addition to Barck and Landauer, women had been hired in a variety of positions, including painting restoration, cataloguing, curator of manuscripts, and heading the sales desk. Women comprised 12 of the 29 staff members listed, or almost half.[320] They were successful at finding work at the oldest museum in the city specializing in the study of long-ago generations. Particularly in the areas of decorative arts and old New York artifacts, women were well-positioned to have some knowledge and access to collections. However, it is striking to see success in less traditional areas of specialty such as theatre, painting restoration, and trade cards. More importantly, these were not just support positions, but professional jobs with room for advancement.

NYHS Donors

The New-York Historical Society expanded its building and services in the 1930s, thanks in large part to the largesse of Mary Gardiner Thompson and her family, whose bequests totaled several million dollars and funded major construction projects at the Society. Mary Thompson was elected a life member of the Society in 1905, and died on

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[317] *New York Times*, Obituary, "Bella C. Landauer, Collector, Was 85," (April 25, 1960), 29.

[318] NYHS *Quarterly Bulletin* 19 (April, 1935), 25.

[319] Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 75.

[320] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee* (1939 and 1940).

April 22, 1935 at the age of 91. She had also been involved with other museums and charitable institutions. Her bequests were given without conditions, which allowed the museum maximum discretion in finding uses for the funds.

Mary Thompson did not attempt to build a new institution or to steer the course of an old one. Unlike May Van Rensselaer, Thompson caused no controversy and was not quoted in the newspapers. The *New York Times* stated that "Miss Thompson gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to religious, charitable and other organizations. Much of her beneficence was done so quietly that few knew of it."[321] She did not, so far as we know, influence NYHS to increase public service or introduce experimental exhibition ideas.

As Kathleen McCarthy observed of Louisine Havemeyer's generosity to the Metropolitan Museum "it helped strengthen an institution – and an artistic canon – that paid scant homage to women's contributions, whether as artists, as curators, or as potential trustees."[322] Is Havemeyer's unassuming style typical of most of the patrons of these old, established museums? Did they usually donate in the names of men in their family and without strings attached? Did they usually wish to leave the institutions richer but essentially the same? NYHS' leaders were certainly as conservative in its leadership and curatorial philosophy, if not more so, than the Metropolitan's leaders. Certainly, Mary Thompson's gift strengthened one of the most conservative museums in New York. However, this quiet female philanthropist had an impact on public service, whether that was her intention or not. Any gift as large as that one contributes to the vigor of an

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[321] *New York Times*, "Wills, Aids & Institutions," (May 2, 1935), 14:2.

[322] Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture*, 111-112.

institution and brings notice to female philanthropists in general. Prior to Thompson's death, the Society was poised to take halting steps in modernizing and increasing NYHS' public role. Under Alexander Wall's directorship, it sought to serve the public and gain more attention. Thompson's gift was not the first from her family to the Society, but it got everyone's attention.

In 1907 the children of David Thompson, who was president of the New York Life Insurance Company, drew up matching wills. They planned to leave their life interest in property to each other, and when they died, in equal parts to six institutions. The beneficiaries of Charles, Elizabeth and Mary were the New-York Historical Society, the Children's Aid Society, New York Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, Society of New York Hospital, Presbyterian Hospital, and Columbia University.[323] NYHS leaders had known a bequest was coming, but had no idea what the amount would be. The Annual Report for 1935 stated that the 131st anniversary of the Society was significant, but much more so was the new gift, which was a:

> Much larger development, long contemplated, may be realized in the enlargment of our building and in the increasing of our activities which will enable the Society to carry out a program of greater usefulness. Funds sufficient to plan this work have been received from the estates . . . which indicate that the scope and influence of the Society may be greatly increased by serving the public in the many demands made upon it.[324]

These funds could have been spent in many ways, such as purchases for the collection. Instead, officials made it clear that they had been looking forward to expanding their public services and profile. Although attendance at the museum was low compared to

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[323] *New York Times*, "Wills, Aids & Institutions," (May 2, 1935), 14:2.

[324] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee*, (1935), 9.

other museums at this time (just under 20,000), use of its library was increasing and its collection was outgrowing the Society's space and resources. If they were going to realize their goal of expanding their public role, they would need more space. At this point, NYHS leaders merely hoped to complete one of the two wings they envisioned with Thompson's bequest. They still had no idea how large the gift was. The total gift, doled out in installments between 1935 and 1942, was $4,633,915. In Depression dollars this was enormous.

The expansion plan (including two wings) was approved June 16, 1936. Even after the Thompson funds were allocated for construction, there was still enough for "an endowment to carry forward the work of the Society on a greatly enlarged scale."[325] The endowment portion was over three million dollars. This was a tremendous increase over the current endowment. It had been one million during the 1920s, but was heavily invested in the Stock Market, and lost money after the crash.[326] Included in the construction plans was a special research room for students, and hosting more classes was "one of the important activities now being studied for the future program."[327] Better public service and more popular exhibits were pushed by Director Wall, who was highly committed to education.[328] These initiatives were enhanced by the fact that the Thompson bequest was also used immediately to raise salaries and hire additional staff in the library. That the bequest helped usher in the changing direction of the institution is

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[325] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee for the Year* (1936), 9.

[326] Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 77.

[327] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee* (1936), 9.

[328] Richards, *Scholars and Gentlemen*, 67.

echoed by Wall's wife Lilian, who wrote a memoir of their marriage and her husband's career. She notes that Wall was extremely involved in the planning and construction of the expansion, and calls the bequest "a turning point."[329] R.W.G. Vail, a Director who came after Wall, pointed out that the bequest paid for several new employees to be hired, wages to be raised, and a greatly expanded exhibition space to finally show off the enormous collection. He described the gift as "a tide turned."[330] Indeed, attendance went up in both the museum and the library, and more classes were brought in.

In addition to giving large sums of money or big collections, female donors contributed significantly to the collections of NYHS with smaller gifts. In 1935, 25 of the 51 donors of objects were female, and some of these artifacts were quite valuable, such as Nora Durand's many gifts of Asher B. Durand paintings over the years.[331] Another gift that was greatly appreciated was the theatre collection donated by Mrs. Gertrude Bushfield Weed. The collection of 3,000 photographs donated by Mrs. Weed in 1927 led to the 1930 exhibit and programs highlighting the "New York Stage, 1850-1911." She had been collecting at auctions and receiving donations from her actor friends for many years, before her death in 1927. Spokesmen for the Society praised her "wide knowledge" of the field and her "great joy in her collection. . . . The stage has long occupied a place of prominence in the life of New York."[332] So they were not surprised

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[329] Lilian B. Wall, *Entre Nous: An Intimate Portrait of Alexander Wall* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1949), 162.

[330] Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday*, 239.

[331] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee* (1935), 25.

[332] NYHS, *Quarterly Bulletin* 14 (July 1930), 48.

that the attendance for this show outpaced any exhibit in NYHS' long history, or the favorable attention in the newspapers.[333]

Women also made up a large portion of donors of money each year. Many gifts by these women were relatively small, but taken as a group they were significant. Women represented at least half of the donors listed year after year, which is striking given their lack of representation on the board of trustees. Unlike the Museum of the City of New York, the Historical Society hardly used volunteers at all in the interwar years, with the notable exception of Bella Landauer and the all-male board. Like MCNY, however, the Society continued to reap the benefits of women's generosity and was able to increase public service as a result.

MMA Donors

Some female donors gave large gifts of money and art to the Metropolitan Museum. To be declared a Benefactor, donors had to give a minimum of $50,000. In 1930, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and Mary Harkness were named Benefactors for their monetary gifts and in 1932 Jane E. Andrews was also declared a Benefactor (no mention was made in the reports of whether their gifts were restricted to any purpose or division). In 1935 Emma C. Bolles was declared a Benefactor for her bequest, which included money and objects. The Trustees were delighted to report that Emma C. Bolles had given her bequest without being solicited:

> No acquaintanceship existed between Miss Bolles and the Trustees and officers of the Museum, and we have one of those pleasant occurrences of practical recognition of the Museum's work by generous friends and public spirited citizens.[334]

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[333] Ibid., 66.

[334] MMA, *Annual Report* (1934), 5.

Female donors were also significant for the sheer number of gifts, particularly during a bad economy. For example, in 1937, women represented 12 out of a total of 27 donors of money. At a lower level than Benefactors but still lucrative were Fellows for life: they gave a minimum of $1,000. By 1940, 65 fellows for life were female, out of a total of 172 in contrast to the lower female ratio of 66 of 233 five years previously. But the ratio of female gifts increases when it comes to donations of art; 36 of 68.

MMA Staff

In 1930 the Metropolitan's staff listed in the annual reports had grown to 93, and more than half were female, a significant increase from the early days of the twentieth century. Winifred Howe, who wrote for the Metropolitan Museum journal as well as serving as an historian of the institution, recalled that the first female staff person, Frances Morris, was hired in 1896 but did not have any female colleagues until the museum's Director General di Cesnola died in 1904. His "aversion to women assistants" was common knowledge, and it was not until 1905 that more women were hired and conditions improved.[335] Since it was not considered proper for them to join the men's lunchroom at the time, Frances Morris invited the small group of women to join her in her attic office each day at lunch time. They had to bring lunch from home. Later a room was found for them and a matron was permitted to prepare meals for them. This rather informal gathering was soon called the "Ladies Lunch Club," and soon guests of honor in the museum world enlivened the proceedings. In 1932, the matron, Mrs. Budds,

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[335] Howe, Winifred, *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volume II, 1905-1941: Problems and Principles in a Period of Expansion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 201.

retired and the Club was discontinued. It was now time to join the male staff on "equal terms."[336]

Of the 47 women on staff in 1930, Gisela Richter was a curator, 8 were assistant curators, one was an assistant in charge of publications, and another was an assistant in charge of advertising. Many received promotions. By 1938, out of a staff of 103, 45 were female, so the ratios had stayed relatively the same. In 1940 Gisela Richter was the sole female curator, but four associate curators and ten assistant curators were female. There was almost no discernable pattern to the departments they joined, no obvious segregation. For example, Gisela Richter headed the Department of Greek and Roman Art, and associate and assistant curators also worked in the Department of Near Eastern Art, the Department of Paintings, the Department of Arms and Armor, and the Department of Industrial Relations. Other positions of responsibility for women included the Editor in Charge of Publications, Senior Instructor, and Manager of the Restaurant. Despite a lack of representation on the Board of Trustees and an uneven representation in top curator positions, there is plenty of evidence of promotion for women within the Metropolitan throughout this decade. Assistants were promoted to Assistant Curators (there were ten by 1940), and three Assistant Curators were promoted to Associate Curators.[337]

BMA Volunteers and Donors

In the early 1930s, the governing committee of the Brooklyn Institute still had the same number of women on it as at the end of the 1920s, which was 5 out of 14. None

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[336] Ibid., 202.

[337] MMA, *Annual Report* (1937), xiii.

had been elected to the executive committee, however.[338] Like other museums, BMA was able to attract female volunteers during the 1930s, such as ten volunteers from the Brooklyn Junior League, who taught children's arts and crafts classes and led gallery tours. These classes were "filled to capacity and attracted many new members."[339] Starting in 1931, League member Florence Read began organizing monthly meetings of her chapter at the Museum with accompanying tours and lectures to help their members learn about the Museum.[340] They also had an exhibit in the Gallery of Living Artists in its inaugural year (1935): "Exhibition of Region II of the Association of the Junior League of America."[341] And though the Children's Museum's Curator in Chief had seen her goal realized of a larger staff (to 9, of which 6 were female), they still were "successfully administered by its staff with the aid of the Women's Auxiliary."[342] In addition, the Museum ran the Lefferts Homestead museum in Prospect Park, with the aid of the Fort Greene Daughters of the American Revolution.[343]

Though the Central Museum had many volunteers, it did not benefit from women's volunteer networks to the same extent as the Children's Museum, which may have convinced the Brooklyn Institute's leadership that large paid staffs were not needed by the Children's Museum. Overall, however, the Brooklyn Museum was more inclusive

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[338] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1932), 4.

[339] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1947), 45.

[340] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1931), 7.

[341] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1935), 72.

[342] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1933), 5.

[343] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1934), 15.

in their board than other museums. By 1939, 14 women had been elected to the Board of Trustees (out of a total of 33), including those already on the governing committee, such as Mrs. Frederic B. Pratt. The relative openness to female leadership at BMA may be proportional to its relatively low endowment compared to other New York City museums.[344] The Central Museum controlled a permanent endowment in 1940 of about $150,000, compared to MMA's having received more than that in gifts that same year and having permanent funds that topped $2 million. The New-York Historical Society, as we saw earlier, received over $3 million towards their endowment from Mary Thompson alone in the 1930s.

As in the 1920s, women were an important source of donations of objects and funding to help BMA throughout the Depression. Objects ranged from traditional art, such as Miss Harriet White's gift of Samuel F.B. Morse's portrait of John Adams, to a whole Print Room to display the collection and generate Museum publications, underwritten by Mrs. William Putnam in memory of her husband, a BMA Trustee.

BMA Staff

As of 1932, women accounted for more than one-third of BMA's staff. These included: Susan Hutchinson, Curator of Prints and Librarian, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts Elizabeth Haynes, the Senior Docent, Membership Secretary, Chief Registar, and Honorary Curator of Lace and Embroidery, Mrs. William Henry Fox, wife of the Director. She was given the title in honor of her volunteer work and donations to the collection, not as a paid staff member. However, she was still listed as a member of the staff, not as a volunteer. The background history of each staff person varied: some, such

[344] See Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture*, 111-112.

as Mrs. William Henry Fox, did not receive a salary and earned her title as a result of her voluntarism, patronage, and connections. Others followed a different path.

Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts Elizabeth Haynes was born in Brooklyn. Her father was an exporter. Unlike many of her female colleagues, Elizabeth Haynes enjoyed the advantage of post-secondary education. She graduated from Wellesley College in 1913 and completed a museum course at Newark Museum in 1926. Haynes was fortunate to receive her schooling and training prior to the stock market crash in 1929. Not surprisingly, the percentage of women in post-secondary schools dipped somewhat following the crash, as families had to prioritize the use of this expensive endeavor. Unfortunately, this trend would continue. Though the numbers of women enrolled continued to rise throughout the 1930s, the decline of women compared to men receiving post-secondary schooling continued steadily throughout the 1940s-1950s.[345]

The year after Haynes took the museum studies course, she became curator at the Brooklyn Institute. She served there between 1927 and 1937. Following that job, she traveled to Europe to study museums and then found a job as keeper of lace and embroidery at the Cooper Union. Haynes contributed to professional magazines, and had also written for The *New York Sun*. Before her death she was writing a book on historical American costumes. She had lectured at New York University, the Brooklyn Museum, and City College, among others, and was a member of a variety of elite clubs, including the Brooklyn Wellesley Club, the Cosmopolitan Club, Women's University Club and the

[345] Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 56-59.

Needle and Bobbin Club of Manhattan.[346] Like many female museum professionals, she never married.

In addition to her outside publications, Haynes contributed frequently to the *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, on topics such as the BMA costume collection, or "Ladies of Philadelphia."[347] Her department oversaw the American Rooms (installed in 1924), which grew in popularity throughout the 1930s. Many visitors were women's groups, such as Colonial Dames, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Junior League. Perhaps in recognition of their contributions as volunteers, Haynes organized special study hours for the Junior League in which League members brought their own heirlooms for study and discussion.[348] The Division of the American Rooms collaborated with other departments regularly to produce exhibitions. Haynes' level of education and professional achievements were high compared to many of her female colleagues, but she was enmeshed in women's clubs and volunteer networks, and her field of decorative arts was also a common one for women. Another common position for women in museums at this point was in the library, and the Brooklyn Institute was no exception. The Chief Egyptologist was Librarian Elizabeth Reifstahl (after the Historical Society transferred their collection to the BMA in 1936), and the main librarian for the Institute was Susan Hutchinson.

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[346] Obituary, "Elizabeth Haynes, Americana Author: Keeper of Lace, Embroidery at the Cooper Union Museum Dies – Studied Costumes," *New York Times*, (July 2, 1948): 21.

[347] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1931), 57.

[348] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1934), 14-15.

Susan A. Hutchinson followed in the footsteps of a long line of librarians since the founding of the Brooklyn Apprentice Library in 1823, including Walt Whitman. As historian Abigail Van Slyck has shown, women by the twentieth century had come to dominate the professional ranks of librarians, and this institution followed this pattern.[349] Their first female librarian was hired in 1869. Hutchinson served as the librarian, Curator of Books and Curator of Prints from 1900 until her resignation in 1935. Up to that time, she had contributed frequently to museum publications. One of her most insightful and delightfully humorous articles followed a summer research project. It was called "As Others See Us: By an Insider Who Saw From the Outside." As someone with many years experience in library service to the public, Hutchinson was ideally suited to study museum service from the visitors' point of view. She spent months criss-crossing the nation to analyze museums, and came up with several trenchant observations about the museum's relationship with the public. Her first target was the vast scope of museums, growing all the time, without adequate places for rest or refreshment.

> Is there any connection between fallen arches and museums? It is the insider's belief that a careful study of the rise of the foot specialist and the rapid development of museums in this country would show that there is.[350]

Could she have been speaking of her own workplace? Certainly the Brooklyn Museum fit this pattern in terms of size and rapidity of growth, but they did make some attempt to provide a nice, colorful restaurant, at least. Next she railed against pay days, "an archaic survival of other lands and other days when the museums were for the

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[349] Van Slyck, Abigail, *Free to All*, 4-66.

[350] Susan A. Hutchinson, "As Others See Us: By An Insider Who Saw From the Outside," in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 12 (October 1925), 179.

few."[351] She particularly noticed the glee with which poorly dressed children viewed the posted signs marking free days, and suggested that tax dollars ought to be used to eliminate public fees, comparing museums to public schools, which did not charge admission a couple of days per week. Hutchinson paid particular attention also to the staff, from security personnel, to the information desk, and concluded that the staff, "from the highest to the lowest, is a much greater factor in drawing power than she had ever dreamed."[352] Hutchinson lamented the lack of adequate funding for assistants. As she well knew, service and education positions in museums were not very lucrative, but they attracted vast numbers of people in search of information or exposure to something new. Finally, she concluded that a nation needs to go beyond supplying material goods. "Knowledge and culture and beauty are as much a part of everyday living as bread and butter," she explained, "and the more we have of these, the better cities and states and country we shall have."[353]

By the mid-1930s the Central Museum had expanded to 26, and more than half were women. It was noted that it was necessary to hire younger people, due to the "low salaries available," and most of these 15 new hires with low salaries were female: three docents, four secretaries, four assistants, and a cataloguer.[354] This is a clear case where the Depression actually helped women gain positions when the Institute was ready to expand, because they accepted the low salaries and because these jobs were either

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[351] Ibid.

[352] Ibid., 180.

[353] Ibid., 182.

[354] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1934), 8.

educational or clerical, with a high percentage of women by the 1930s. These positions were entry-level, but the museum had a good promotion record, so presumably there was chance for advancement in both responsibilities and income in the future.

By 1939 the Education division of the Central Museum was all female, including the supervisor, which was very uncommon at other museums. This female perspective was reflected in the annual reports written by Education division staff, who emphasized the variety of programs geared toward individual women and women's groups. It was extremely common to note the many women's groups that visited the museum, from the National Council of Jewish women, who came for a special five-part series of lectures, or the two hundred members of the Federation of New jersey Women's Clubs who attended tours and talks for the Maya Collections, American Rooms and Glass show, or an arts and crafts program for student nurses from a local hospital organized by Mrs. Robert Blum, a BMA donor and wife of a Trustee.[355]

Due to lack of adequate funding for staff, particularly during the museum's reorganization and construction during the late 1930s, many women had to hold several positions at once, without any extra pay. Director Youtz reported that particularly after the WPA workers were dismissed in 1939 staff members worked long hours without overtime pay. He expressed the hope that the City would approve funding to allow "each man receive a slight increase of wages" every year, in recognition of the "men who have given faithful years of service."[356] Yet he specified that the salaries for both the Central Museum and the Children's Museum (exclusively female) be raised, suggesting an

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[355] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1936), 38-55.

[356] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1937), 52.

awareness that female staff members were just as overburdened as their male counterparts. Despite the increased work load, women's new responsibilities provided them with valuable experience. In 1939, for example, Louise W. Chase, formerly an assistant, held the positions of Acting Curator in the Division of American Rooms, Textile Division, and Division of Industrial Art. In addition, "Miss Root, Sales Manager, and Miss Farley, Sales Assistant, have done a substantial amount of work as curatorial assistants in other departments."[357]

The desperation of the times helped women gain entry-level positions, promotions, and experience, but they had another ally. Despite its inequities in job opportunities and pay scales, over 400,000 women found jobs in the WPA by 1938, and many of these were positions that advanced their training and professional status or recognition.[358] Some of these were artists, such as Agnes Tait, who painted murals at Bellevue hospital or Lucienne Bloch, who decorated the Women's House of Detention. Many others became supervisors and project managers.[359] In fact, the directorship of the Federal Art Project (FAP) was first offered to Audrey MacMahon, but she opted to head the New York FAP, soon the largest and most influential state branch. MacMahon was joined by Juliana Force of the Whitney Museum, Berenice Abbott, photographer, and many others, as leaders within the New York FAP.[360] (the impact of the FAP as well as Abbott's powerful and widely-distributed work will be examined in chapter seven.)

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[357] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1937), 7.

[358] Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 21-81.

[359] Ibid., 145-6.

[360] Ibid., 143.

Women seeking careers and advancement at museums in this period gained, rather than lost ground, during the Depression. All these institutions expanded during these years to handle their growth and rising attendance, and many of these positions available in the library, in education departments, and as support staff were open to women. That was true in part because these fields tended to be female-dominated, but also because women were more likely to accept (for lack of alternative) the low salaries being offered. Assistants became Assistant Curators, and even women at the Sales Desk took on curatorial duties when needed at some museums. And the WPA played a major role in offering women new opportunities to make an impact on the cultural life of their community and their nation.

The importance of female volunteers also increased because of the Depression. Museums struggled to cope with increased attendance with decreased revenues, so volunteers became increasingly important for new institutions such as MCNY, and for established organizations such as the Brooklyn Museum. Yet, in examining the New-York Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum of Art, only the Brooklyn elected women to its Executive Committee by decade's end. MCNY had an Executive Women's Committee that was strong, large, and influential, but they were still segregated.

Despite the poor economy, women continued to be significant as donors, both in percentages of total donors, and in terms of significant gifts such as Mary Thompson's bequest. Only a few of these important gifts had strings attached, and few of these women received widespread recognition or fame. Several, however, parlayed their gifts into jobs, such as Bella Landauer and May Davenport Seymour. Many of the women

contributed to their museums in all areas, as volunteers, as donors, and as staff members. While many objects donated by women were in traditional female areas of decorative arts and costumes, there was a huge variety. Women's contributions became more significant in the weak economy as volunteers and as relatively poorly paid staff members. Instead of having to cut back on public service, women who provided free or inexpensive labor helped museums maintain or improve public service and operating hours. The areas of education, decorative arts, sales, and libraries were commonly more open to women in these museums. Women made great gains as staff members in a variety of divisions, not just traditionally female-dominant areas such as library science. Most important, many women played key roles in expanding public service for these institutions, but particularly as docents, librarians, editors and writers. Staff members such as Susan Hutchinson at the Brooklyn Museum, for instance, used their museum articles to promote increased public access and education programs. Only the Brooklyn Museum elected women to the highest positions of leadership, such as Anna Gallup as Director of the Children's Museum, and on the Executive Committee, such as Mrs. Luke Vincent Lockwood. However, the New-York Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art did offer increasingly influential positions on staff and auxiliary committees to women during the 1930s. And as a result, these institutions were able to offer better public service to the community. Foundations entered the arena of museum patronage during the Depression, using their support to underwrite and encourage public service.

Chapter Six

"A Dignified but Showman's Job:" Museums, Foundations and Commercial Culture in the 1930s

The city's philanthropic, governmental and business leaders sought to enable museums to weather the crisis of the Depression by bolstering their ability to educate and entertain the public, particularly the vast ranks of the unemployed. Although some critics have argued that the museums' commitment to serving the public was weak, public programming was maintained, and in many cases, strengthened during the economic downturn. Inspired in part by the commercial culture of the city, these institutions used concerts, radio and motion pictures to attract new audiences. While chapter three examined the early origins of the partnership between the commercial sector and New York City's museums, this chapter analyzes the impact of foundation largesse and museums' growing alliances with the corporate sector during the Depression Era.

The Carnegie Corporation was particularly instrumental, donating money specifically earmarked for education programs at the Brooklyn Museum, the New-York Historical Society, the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of the City of New York. Carnegie was one of the first modern American foundations to emerge in the early twentieth century, as a generation of immensely wealthy entrepreneurs and their wives began investing in philanthropy on a new scale. The Russell Sage Foundation (1907), the Carnegie Corporation (1911), and the Rockefeller Foundation (1913) all date from this era.[361]

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[361] The Foundation Center defines private foundations as follows: "A nongovernmental, nonprofit organization with funds (usually from a single source, such as an individual, family or corporation) and program managed by its own trustees or directors. Private foundations are established to maintain or aid social, educational, religious or other charitable activities serving the common welfare, primarily through the making of grants." See the Foundation Center's website Glossary, in their Researching Philanthropy section, www.fdncenter.org.

These institutions were an American creation, tied, in part, to the nation's tradition of limited government. As Barry Karl and Stanley Katz point out, prior to World War I the country "would have been threatened down to its partisan and regional roots by any attempt to create a nationally unified conception of social policy. Into the gap created by this impasse stepped the modern foundation."[362] Grantmaking institutions provided a mechanism for solving problems that could not be resolved by the federal and local governments alone. Many of these problems stemmed from rapid industrialization, which created an unprecedented gap between rich and poor. Industrial magnates addressed this issue by ensuring that they would distribute their wealth as they saw fit to promote the common weal.[363]

Created by Andrew Carnegie, the Carnegie Corporation reflected the steel magnate's belief in the power of education to "help those who will help themselves," and his faith that the existence of great wealth was a blessing that encouraged the rich to apply their "superior wisdom, experience, and ability" to solve society's problems.[364]

Four years after the Corporation was founded, Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Daniel Guggenheim were called to testify before Senator Frank Walsh and the United States Commission on Labor Relations in the aftermath of the Ludlow Massacre at Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. Walsh felt these men had the power to unduly shape public policy and maintain their donors' positions of power. The

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[362] Barry D. Karl and Stanley N. Katz, "The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere, 1890-1930,"238.

[363]Ibid, 243-248.

[364] Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth," in *The Gospel of Wealth and other Timely Essays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1933), 13-15. "The Gospel of Wealth" was first published in 1897 in the *North American Review*.

following decade changed the course of foundation leadership with the passing of the founders and the professionalization of their staffs, as grant-makers increasingly worked in tandem with a growing variety of institutions to achieve their goals.[365]

Their priorities changed as well. The original mission of the Carnegie Corporation was to foster "the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding" in America. By 1922 the Corporation trustees agreed upon three basic areas of work: 1) the support and promotion of research; 2) the pursuit of "the highest educational aims" and efforts to assist in the "ready diffusion of knowledge"; and 3) efforts to "further the understanding of that deeper stratum of knowledge and feeling which involves philosophy, art, and the comprehension of human relations."[366]

The third criterion led them into museum education. Earlier historians have portrayed the Corporation's staff as devoting their grant-making to the the promotion of traditional elite values. However, despite their elite connections and traditional views on art and educational canon, the Corporation's leaders were not interested in forcing their beliefs and values onto an unwilling public. In fact, their approach during the interwar years under Frederick Keppel's leadership reflected a growing desire to be more inclusive in their grantsmanship. In part, this reflected Keppel's background, which had exposed him to both elite and public institutions and culture. Born in 1875, Keppel had grown up in Yonkers the son of a print dealer. He attended public schools early on and went on to study at Columbia, eventually becoming dean. He took over as President at the Carnegie Corporation in 1923, coming from the Russell Sage Foundation.

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[365] Karl, Barry and Katz, Stanley, "The American Private Philanthropic Foundations, 1890-1930," 250-253.

[366] Frederick P. Keppel, *The Changing Social Order in Philanthropy and Learning with other papers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 81.

In her study of the Carnegie Corporation, Ellen Lagemann stresses his alliances with men such as art critic Royal Cortissoz, and Professor Paul Sachs, who created Harvard's first museum studies program, as evidence that Keppel promoted elite culture over broader, more public fare. To quote Lagemann, Keppel was "seeking affiliation with what one might call the upper class of the educational profession – that is, college and university professors rather than public school teachers; men rather than women; school administrators rather than classroom teachers."[367] There is much truth to this, particularly the lack of female officers and consultants at the Corporation. Certainly, the conservative views of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE), which Keppel helped to form in 1926, seem to reflect this interpretation, but this group's conservatism should not be overstated.

The presence of Newark's iconoclastic museum director, John Cotton Dana, on the advisory board of AAAE is described by Lagemann as the exception to the rule, and not influential in policy-setting or grant-making. Yet Dana's views were so forward-thinking that his selection should not be dismissed; nor was his a lone voice in the wind on educational issues. His habit of favoring the display of everyday objects such as those found in popular stores, for example, is depicted by Lagemann as unusual among museum leaders in general and this board in particular. And so it was, prior to World War I, but as we saw in chapter three, many museum leaders in the 1920s began to follow Dana's lead in displaying common objects and industrial art. This trend was supported by AAAE leaders such as Keppel and Richard Bach, who headed the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Industrial Relations, and future Carnegie grantees such as the Brooklyn Museum.

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[367] Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 107.

Lagemann notes that many Carnegie grants supported elite education, such as Paul Sachs' museum course at Harvard. But Carnegie consultant Paul Marshall Rea viewed museums as a vehicle for widening educational opportunity for those who could not attend prestigious universities such as Harvard. The museum, Rea declared, "is essentially a popular university," which is why the Corporation consistently offered free adult education to museum users, who came from a variety of economic, educational and social backgrounds. While much of the material used in these art courses and traveling teaching sets was very traditional, more universal examples of art, including modern industrial pieces, were also featured at grantee programs.

Nor was their emphasis solely on Americanization. Lagemann points out that trustees Elihu Root and Henry Pritchett "wished to change and to adjust new immigrants" to traditional American values.[368] However, this was not everyone's view at the Corporation. Board members Charles Beard and Richard Bach, for example, fought Root and Pritchett over this type of grant-making policy. And Keppel certainly did not agree with this direction, eschewing the "evangelical" approach of many engaged in Americanization activities and worker education. "In every case," he noted, "somebody is willing to pay in order that other people may think as he does. These projects are at bottom really missionary rather than educational."[369] Finally, the Corporation's grant-making sought to link museums and public school educators.

As the Carnegie-sponsored Brooklyn Conference on Adult Education explained in 1931:

> diffusion of education is now conceived to be the primary function of the museum, not only, as formerly, by giving adults the opportunity to familiarize with objects of beauty and rarity, but by

[368] Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*, 120.

[369] Keppel, *Education for Adults and other essays*, (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1926), 20.

directly linking the museum with the school.[370]

Public schools represented a much wider spectrum of New York's population than that of adult museum visitors, and constituted a crucial target for museum efforts to democratize art education.

The Brooklyn Museum was a recognized leader in this area. After his term as BMA Director had ended, William Henry Fox recalled the inspiration he had received as a child by visiting museums. Those visits filled him with a sense of awe and wonder that never dimmed, and inspired him to undertake museum work as an adult. When Philip Youtz took over as Director in the early 1930s, he extended Fox's love of education by creating entertaining programs for school and adult groups from across the state. The Brooklyn Museum received a glowing review on this work from the *WPA Guide to New York City:*

> [t]he Brooklyn Museum . . . is outstanding not only for its arts and crafts of primitive, Oriental, Egyptian, and American peoples, but for an extensive and progressive educational program that has made it one of the leading educational forces in New York. . . . A progressive directorship has widened the cultural ties between the museum and the community; in the words of the director [Youtz], 'the whole museum is conceived as a place for enjoyment, recreation and education, not as an exclusive palace where art is remote from the common touch.'[371]

Youtz emphasized inclusiveness and highlights the fun and educational experiences to be had at his museum, rather than the importance or value of the collection. By the late 1930s, more than one million visitors came to BMA annually, enticed by courses, lectures, concerts, folk festivals, art demonstrations, films and tours, as well as the exhibitions. All these activities were in concert with women's work in building audiences at BMA and elsewhere through their promotion of educational activities and volunteer work.

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[370] Untitled Report, Brooklyn Conference on Adult Education, 1931, BMA, 1.

[371] *The WPA Guide to New York City: The Federal Writers' Project Guide to 1930s New York* (New York: The New Press, 1939), 488-489.

Inspired by business leaders and the Carnegie Corporation, which sponsored surveys around the country, museum officials also adopted the new forms of marketing research and psychological surveys to study current visitors. In their view, the staff often devoted its attention to collections management but forgot the importance of public relations, with the result that "the museum is frequently bewildering to the new visitor."[372] The Carnegie-sponsored Brooklyn Conference on Adult Education conducted an extensive survey of visitors to BMA between 1930 and 1932, part of a growing national trend to investigate visitors' experiences and backgrounds. The Brooklyn Conference on Adult Education was founded in 1926 and soon attracted members from a broad range of educational, cultural and civic organizations: the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, the American Federation of Labor, People's Institute of the United Neighborhood Guild, College of the City of New York, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, Brooklyn Ethical Culture Society, and William Fox of the Brooklyn Museum. As they explained in their 1928 grant proposal to Carnegie, the organization was formed to bring educators together but also to study the current educational options for adults in the community. They wanted to know who participated, how these programs were being used and how they were perceived.[373] The Conference received a grant of $11,000 from Carnegie in 1929 with the broad purpose to question people about their experiences with adult education.

Toward that end, it conducted an extensive survey of 156 visitors. Sunday visitors were asked a variety of questions, ranging from their occupations and educational levels to their views on the museum's exhibits and services. The researchers avoided large groups and foreign-language speakers for logistical reasons, but otherwise interviewed people at random. Of the 156 interviewees, seventeen were artists, ten were

[372]Untitled Report, Brooklyn Conference on Adult Education, 1931, BMA.

[373] Seymour Bernard, Chair, Brooklyn Conference on Adult Education, to Dr. Frederick Keppel, December 31, 1928, Carnegie Corporation of New York collection (CCNY), Grant files, box 64, folder 10, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University .

teachers, thirty-four listed themselves as professionals and administrators, thirty-three were clerical and sales workers, fifteen were industrial workers, twenty-six were homemakers (most of whom listed their husbands as professional businessmen), and twenty-one were students. It is interesting to note that the number of industrial workers almost equaled the number of artists, and the clerical and retail workers were on a par with the number of professional and administrative workers among the interviewees.

In addition, a summary of a larger survey of the educational and occupational backgrounds of visitors to different kinds of museums was included, which stated that those respondents with higher levels of education were far more likely to visit museums at least occasionally, particularly art museums. History and science museums drew from a larger pool of less well-educated people. While the Brooklyn Museum survey also questioned visitors about their educational levels, as well as the types of cultural activities and reading material they enjoyed, this information has not survived. However, the summary report did note that aside from the artists, only twenty-six of the 156 interviewees had taken art courses.

The survey reflected the fact that museums are often classified as recreational rather than educational institutions in guide books such as the *WPA Guides*. It also reflected the concerns of museum leaders that they had to compete effectively with other amusements for audiences. The list of recreation and leisure activities in the survey that could be checked off was extensive, and interviewees were encouraged to specify not only that they listened to radio, for example, but to list their favorite program. BMA staff expressed concerns that " [a]nyone who visits the Brooklyn Museum may expect a pleasant time, but unless he knows in advance what he wants it is doubtful if he will emerge with many clear and distinct ideas or aesthetic experiences that will live in his

imagination."[374] Entertaining the visitors was considered very important, but it was hoped that the experience would have a coherent meaning for them as well. Visitors gave different reasons for their trip to the Museum, such as an interest in a new sculpture exhibit (forty-one). A few adults had been convinced by their children to visit, and the surveyors must have hoped that those same children had been brought to the museum or had museum staff come to their class in conjunction with the Education Division work.

The twenty-five newcomers to the Museum held a special interest to the surveyors, since their responses brought into specific relief some of the factors influencing the public's reception of the museum's offerings. Most of these newcomers identified their favorite exhibits as the Oriental, Egyptian, and American rooms, all of which were on the first and second floors near the most accessible entrance. The "imposing stairway" leading to the main entrance proved to be a significant hindrance to many. The Museum leaders hoped that visitors would begin at the top floor and work their way down, but did not post signs to that effect, nor did they offer a guidebook or directory. The survey convinced then Assistant Director Youtz to hire the architectural firm McKim, Mead and White to remove the stairway the following year.

Philip N. Youtz's battle in 1933 to get the stairway removed reflected his desire to make the Museum more accessible and attractive to as many prospective visitors as possible. McKim, Mead and White, which had originally designed the building, advised against the stairway's removal. For Youtz, the debate with the architects exemplified the evolution of museums' cultural role. He wished to provide easier access for visitors; they wished to preserve the stairway's grand effect, whether visitors could climb it or not. In recalling his conversation with its architects Mr. Kendall and BMA trustee Mr. Van der Bent, Youtz paraphrased their views for Keppel:

[w]hen we [the architects] designed this building, museums were not intended

[374] Ibid.

> for the public; they were for the few who could really appreciate art. We purposely made the access difficult. . . . Museums today are getting to be places of cheap public entertainment. The public simply goes into the museum because they have a good time. . . . This seems to me the end of Art.[375]

The firm's distinction between high and low culture could not have been more clearly stated: only the few could appreciate art. The public was degrading museums and culture, and they should therefore be discouraged from entering them. Youtz vehemently disagreed.

According to Youtz' memoirs, the architects were so annoyed over the stairway squabble that they made sure that his membership application to the prestigious Century Association was rejected. He had been nominated by Frederick Keppel and letters of support had been sent by other members and museum leaders such as BMA board members John Van Pelt and Walter Crittenden, Frederick Allen Whiting of the Cleveland Art Museum, Morse Cartright, Director of the American Association for Adult Education, and Robert Cushman Murphy of the American Museum of Natural History. Two years after his 1934 nomination it was "withdrawn by request," possibly at the behest of art critic and Century president Royal Cortissoz, whose professional career began as an office boy at the McKim, Mead and White firm.[376] Therefore, Youtz was unable to enjoy the social and professional advantages of many museum senior staff, donors and trustees who became Centurions, including the Metropolitan's Joseph H. Choate, Herbert E. Winlock, William M. Ivins, Jr., Henry W. Kent, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. BMA's new curator of ethnology Herbert Spinden had become a member in 1931.[377] Youtz's rejection by the Century Association did not hamper either his career or the museum's development in any significant way, however.

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[375] Philip N. Youtz to Dr. Frederick P. Keppel, December 30, 1933, Records of the Office of the Director, BMA.

[376] Century Association, *Candidates for Membership*, 1936, 163, Century Association Foundation Archives, New York.

[377] On officers and other members, see, *The Century Yearbook 2006* (New York: The Century Association), 48-51, The Century Association Foundation Archives. On Royal Cortissoz, see, William Adams Delano,

Youtz also requested $5,000 from the foundation to pay the fee required by the architects to remove the stairway. Though Carnegie's trustees elected not to sponsor this effort, they were sympathetic to its importance. Keppel praised Youtz for his "able championing of the public," in fighting the McKim, Mead and White architects.[378] The firm did eventually agree to comply with Youtz' demand that they remove their stairway.

In addition to making the museum more physically accessible, BMA staff began to employ new educational approaches, efforts which begun under Stewart Culin before World War I. The visitor was to be treated like a consumer. What did visitors want, they asked? The answer lay in visual stimulation and appeal, combined with expanded educational programs. In January 1930, BMA trustees and Director Fox approached the Carnegie Corporation for funding to launch a School Service project. BMA's proposal explained that current education programs were limited to the services of two docents for guiding visitors and delivering occasional lectures. What was needed was a more extensive and more intensive program that would reach school children. Children, they believed, were more susceptible to art education than adults. The proposed project would

> present materials in the history of human arts for the use of teachers and sources in applied design for the inspiration of students . . . . advantage is taken of the fact that children are able to appreciate primitive ideas of use and beauty and are able to assimilate successfully higher expressions of art as their own mental horizons are enlarged.[379]

"Memoirs of Centurian Architects," The Century Association, *The Century: 1847-1946* (New York: The Century Association), 223-224, The Century Association Foundation Archives.

[378] Frederick P. Keppel to Philip N. Youtz, January 4, 1934, CCNY, box 64, folder 12, Reports on Grants, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[379] Edward Blum, Mr. Crittenden and William Fox, to Frederick P. Keppel, January 1, 1930, CCNY, Box 64, folder 12, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Keppel's reply noted that art education for schools was not a current priority of the foundation, and said the proposal would not be considered until the new president joined them in October. Two days later, Fox fired back an angry and petulant letter:

> I seem to have very poor luck in my relations with the Carnegie Corporation – poor as contrasted with the generous aid it grants others. . . . I am wedded to no special idea . . . What we need immediately and especially is an Education director. . .[380]

As Fox admitted, the proposal did not contain a lot of specific ideas, and its main purpose was to fund an education director. In fact, its lack of specifics was one of the real reasons for its rejection. Clark Wissler, advisor to the foundation, privately confided to Keppel that "it is obvious that the Brooklyn Museum got its cue from the grant to the Philadelphia Museum for an educational director and followed through with an application without having fully thought out a plan of procedure."[381] However, Fox's desperate plea was surprisingly effective enough to convince the foundation to reconsider the proposal if a more specific plan was laid out.

A couple of weeks later BMA received $5,000 for "Studies in the Fields of the Arts," toward expenses for a Scandinavian art exhibit. Dr. Herbert J. Spinden had taken over as Curator of Ethnology after Stewart Culin's health began to fail, and was also chosen to lead the new education initiative. After Spinden resubmitted the School Service proposal with more specifics, the foundation allocated additional grants, including $600 to create a test School Service unit: "special study of extension museum work." The test unit was developed to fit the schools' curricula, so at Keppel's suggestion, rather than emphasize art history, the unit incorporated visual instruction of elementary and high school subjects such as geography and history. The unit was sent

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[380] William Fox to Frederick P. Keppel, February 1, 1930, CCNY, Box 64, folder 12, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[381] Clark Wissler to Frederick P. Keppel, December 17, 1930, CCNY, Box 64, folder 12, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

with approval letters and suggestions from the New York City Board of Education. It was successful enough to warrant further grants: between 1932 and 1935 BMA received a total of $50,000 to underwrite the School Service Project.

These funds made it possible for BMA to produce twelve teaching units, including Asia, Australia, Europe, South America, Africa, and two on early New York. These were sent to the 26 Supervisors of the 52 school districts. The Board of Education assisted with the coordination of the units with the curricula, and the Brooklyn Museum staff offered a course on Human Geography in their teachers' course series to help prepare teachers in using School Service units. Private school units were also created and enthusiastically received by some schools. "The project is clearly in line with progressive tendencies in education" in terms of subject and form in which the units were presented, i.e., visual education. "Visual memory," Spinden explained, "provides a deep stimulus and is capable of awakening in children" a desire to learn and emulate what they saw.[382] Spinden viewed the new emphasis in education in visual presentation as a reflection of larger cultural shifts. "Possibly this trend from the abstract to the concrete presentation is due in part to the example of the illustrated periodical, the newspaper, the advertisement and the movies. Or it may be due to psychological studies of the learning process. . . . For modern education the old adage, 'seeing is believing,' takes on a new significance."[383]

Youtz applied to Carnegie for other projects as well, such as an addition to the west wing. It was either to be used for a Museum of Science and Industry, or an Industrial Center. The Museum of Science and Industry failed to materialize because BMA could not get their coalition of other museum and industry leaders to agree on the

[382] Herbert J. Spinden, *Report on the Brooklyn Museum School Service Project*, June 1934, CCNY, Reports on Grants, Box 64, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[383] Herbert J. Spinden, *Report on the Brooklyn Museum School Service Project*, June 1, 1933, CCNY, Reports on Grants, Box 64, folder 12, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Collection.

mission. The Industrial Center was created, and was developed with public and foundation funds as BMA's Industrial Division. The Carnegie Corporation granted $15,000 and Youtz successfully applied for a PWA grant (with Mayor LaGuardia's enthusiastic support). Youtz declared that it was "high time we gave industrial art the same representation and study that we have given fine art."[384] The Rockefeller Foundation also contributed, awarding BMA $22,000 for a training program in 1935.[385]

A report written by Rockefeller board member John Marshall explained that the Rockefeller Foundation became involved in museum work in the early 1920s, "represented by the late Charles B. Richards, who under a grant of the Board, made in April, 1919, to the National Society for Vocational Education, had served as its director of an 'industrial art survey of national scope.'"[386] Richards also served as the Director of the American Association of Museums. The board then established a Division of Art Applied to Industry and asked Richards to run it. They granted $350,000 to the Philadelphia Museum to create an industrial wing, and Richard F. Bach of the Metropolitan Museum $4,500 to study economic impact of design in art industries. In the 1930s, the General Education Program (1934-1940) was developed to enhance general education from secondary school onward. It was in under this rubric that the Rockefeller Foundation supported museums during the Depression. By decade's end, the RF had

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[384] Phillip N. Youtz to Frederick P. Keppel, August 8, 1935, CCNY, Reports on Grants, Box 64, folder 12, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Collection.

[385] Interview notes, Frederick P. Keppel, with Phillip N. Youtz, August 6, 1935, CCNY, Reports on Grants, Box 64, folder 12, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Collection.

[386] John Marshall, *The Rockefeller Boards and Museums*, December 9, 1965, Rockefeller Archives Center (hereafter, RAC), Pocantico Hills, New York, Box 5, folder 44, 1.

spent $1.4 million on museums, primarily for education programs.[387] David H. Stevens, appointed by the RF Director of the Humanities in 1935, declared that while many museums "have given more attention to the conservation of objects and of standards to public enlightenment. . . . More hopeful, however, are the cases where institutions have extended their educational activities to meet depression needs of a wider public."[388] He cites the Brooklyn Museum as exemplary in this vein.

Phillip Youtz wrote to David Stevens in March 1935 to lament that "[m]useum education has too long been a tail that didn't wag, attached to the rather portly body of the museum."[389] After preliminary discussion, Youtz' proposal, "Project for Offering Practical Experience in a Socially Oriented Art Museum to Younger Members of the Museum Profession," was submitted two months later. In his proposal, he recognized that other art museums that received public support, but too often "clung to the aristocratic tradition of exclusiveness and failed to render a maximum service to the public."[390]

The Rockefeller "interne" program, as it was called, lasted three years, and offered museum personnel a one-year course of practical training at the Brooklyn Museum. The program got off to a rocky beginning in its first year, as the first trainees, chosen by Paul Sachs, had more classroom experience than museum experience, and did

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[387] Ibid., 2.

[388] David H. Stevens, *Museums, libraries and orchestras in community life*, 1935, quoted in John Marshall, "The Rockefeller Boards and Museums," report, December 9, 1965, Rockefeller Archives Center (hereafter, RAC), Pocantico Hills, New York, Box 5, folder 44, 2.

[389] Phillip N. Youtz to David H. Stevens, March 2, 1935, RAC, Box 5 folder 44.

[390] Phillip N. Youtz, *Project for Offering Practical Experience in a Socially Oriented Art Museum to Younger Members of the Museum Profession*, May 6, 1935, RAC, box 5, folder 44, 1.

not share Youtz' progressive vision of museum work. In addition to being more scholarly than service-oriented, these trainees were all ivy-league educated men. The Rockefeller Foundation received a letter that they forwarded on to the Brooklyn Museum from the Dean of Women at Ohio State University, questioning the lack of female internes chosen in 1935. She asked whether women were eligible.[391] Though there is no record of a reply from the Brooklyn Museum, the following year's class of internes was markedly different, in terms of region, experience, and gender. In 1936 internes were "chosen from the personnel in museums of the West and South so as to give younger leaders in the Museum field the advantage of a year of intensive practical experience in New York. The internes will have an opportunity to study all the museums of the East as well as practice at Brooklyn."[392] Three of the six internes were female, though none were chosen from Ohio State University. Among the younger leaders were two museum directors.

The internes immediately made an impact, and were given a variety of important duties, such as editing the *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, as well as organizing and installing some exhibitions on their own and contributing to others. They were entirely responsible for the European Art from 1450-1550 exhibition of 1936, praised by museum spokesmen as being "of outstanding quality and of great educational value . . ."[393] Rockeller Internes Helen McCormack and Maxson Holloway installed an exhibition in the Museum restaurant highlighting the museum's Staffordshire collection. Internes also

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[391] Grace S. M. Zorbaugh, to Director, Rockefeller Foundation, September 17, 1935, RAC, box 5, folder 44.

[392] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1936), 10.

[393] Ibid., 11.

developed an Art and Technique of Ceramics exhibition in June 1937, which was so popular with teachers and students of ceramics it was extended until October. Another show highlighting American industrial art and its processes was the 1936 Rayon and Synthetic Yarns Exhibition, prepared with the assistance of the interne Helen McCormack. As part of this exhibition, an early American loom room was shown, and demonstrations on flax processing, and wool processing were given to students from the Pratt Institute Teachers' Training Course. The exhibition also displayed charts and graphs "and it is hoped that they will prove of lasting use in the Museum educational work."[394]

Rockefeller Foundation's John Marshall looked back on the legacy of museum work accomplished during the 1930s and concluded that the Brooklyn Museum interne project exemplified the Foundation's "most effective and significant grants" in that it "bore directly on the development of methods by which museums could make their holdings more aesthetically accessible to their public."[395] The RF scaled back museum grants in the 1940s and ended their program of museum support by 1950. Marshall speculated that museum grants were not made a larger priority because

> these ideas were somewhat ahead of their time, with the result that opportunities for assistance were not too frequent. In the meantime . . . these ideas have pretty much come to prevail in museum circles, with results that are visible even in such formerly staid institutions as the Metropolitan Museum . . . ."[396]

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[394] BIAS*, Central Museum Annual Report* (1936), 37.

[395] John Marshall, *The Rockefeller Boards and Museums*, December 9, 1965, RAC, Box 5, folder 44, 6.

[396] Ibid.

Indeed, foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation spearheaded important programs that left a lasting legacy at the museums they supported. The interne program was unique and helped both the professional development of museum staff (no advance degrees required) and the improvement of exhibition design to better meet the needs and wants of the visiting public. The establishment of the Carnegie-sponsored (and designed) education department at the Museum of the City of New York, with its "Trips and Trails" program pioneered large scale loan and teaching programs. The Carnegie Corporation also helped introduce market survey research and exhibitions that focused on manufactured products. At the same time, corporate alliances also inspired the use of commercial techniques such as market surveys to help to reshape museums in this period. These efforts meshed well and reinforced each other.

For example, one of the first projects of the Industrial Division was an exhibition of the American glass industry, which Rockefeller internes also worked on. Held in 1936, the exhibit provided a showcase for the nation's leading glassmakers, and was warmly received by retailers and manufacturers. Older examples of glass were displayed alongside recently manufactured pieces, in order to enhance the prestige of the machine-made contemporary products. The artist, craftsman and machine worker were to be accorded recognition for their combined aesthetic contributions to the manufacture of glass. Of course, the names listed were brand names, not those of artists or operators. A review in the *New York Times Magazine* noted that the new glass compared favorably:

> the imperfections of the crude hand technique used in this early glass ... are accepted by conniosseurs as esthetic contributions. In contrast with the slight undulations of surface, minute bubbles within the glass and variations of color, the geometric perfection of shape and crystal clearness of the modern glass are enhanced.[397]

[397] "Fine Examples of American Folk Art on Exhibition," *New York Times Magazine* (April 12, 1936).

The Times points out that the perfection of modern glass can be as beautiful as the idiosyncratic antique glass. The items produced by artisans of the past were made with a "crude hand technique," while the modern items were made by advanced machines and machinists. Continuities were also stressed in the exhibit review in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*:

> People can live in an well-insulated, well-lighted glass houses today and while away the hours crocheting a glass cap for the baby, or perhaps a neat tie for father, made of the finest glass wool. ... Young men examined the bullet-proof glass, women exclaimed over the early American strawberry carafe.[398]

Technology, they suggest, will enhance, rather than disrupt, traditional family and community living patterns. The industrial arts and educational programs developed during the interwar years reflect two related goals of the museum: to extend its influence and appeal via connections with the commercial sector, and to promote higher standards of beauty in technology among consumers and producers. The exhibits suggested that material progress and technological improvements need not destroy traditional values and craftsmanship. This glass exhibit was installed in 1936, many years into the Great Depression, and it is somewhat surprising that these tributes to industrial capitalism were welcomed by the viewing public. The journalists responded quite favorably. Certainly, these exhibits only highlighted the achievements of factory workers and artisans in an indirect way. They clearly lacked any description, critique, or analysis of workers' conditions or daily life. Material progress was equated with technological progress.

It is not surprising that museum leaders became interested in industrial design, which had been developing as a profession over the last decade (as we saw in chapter three). As historian Pat Johnson explains, "from the beginning there were close ties between the advertising industry and the new industrial design industry. . . From the depths of the depression, moreover, new industrial design reflected a hope that

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[398]"Glass Exhibition at Museum Shows Marvels of Industry," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (March 21, 1936).

technological progress would solve economic problems and reinforced a sense of optimism."[399]

This approach was favored at the Metropolitan as well in the 1930s. As the decade opened amid a deepening economic depression, the Metropolitan Museum continued its policy developed in the 1920s of promoting industrial art and using its Department of Industrial Relations to work with businesses. In 1930, eighteen study hours "for practical workers" were offered by Grace Cornell to the staffs of the Gimbels' and Macy's department stores, as well as the Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School. These courses would be used by these groups throughout the decade. Twenty gallery talks were also given for staff members from Lord & Taylor and other salespeople.

These exhibitions echoed the Brooklyn Museum officals' interest in design and manufacturing. Over 10,000 people attended the exhibit of Decorative Metalwork and Cotton Textiles, organized by the American Federation of Arts, in December 1930 (another Carnegie grantee, later headed between 1935 and 1938 by BMA Director Phillip Youtz). The twelfth exhibition of industrial art was held the following year, attracting over 30,000 visitors. This contemporary exhibit reflected the curators' resolve to exclude any "counterfeit of historical forms."[400] Museum spokesman emphasized that the industrial relations department was an important part of its educational work, noting that, the concept of service, to which the Museum is devoted in all its public relations, receives a special emphasis and achieves readily demonstrable results in that phase of Museum activities classed as industrial relations."[401]

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[399] Pat Johnson, *Real Fantasies*: *Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 124.

[400] MMA *Annual Report*, (1931), 30.

[401] MMA *Annual Report*, (1930), 28.

MMA officials stressed the importance of design to salability for manufacture. In a depression, design would prevail as the ultimate sales tool, and the museum would help manufacturers improve design to create better "refrigerators, percolators, electric fans, radio instruments, alarm clocks, cameras, in addition to the great range of furniture."[402]

In addition to offering study hours and gallery talks for salespeople, MMA staff worked on a variety of projects with trade associations, many chambers of commerce, and government agencies. These included the National Retail Dry Goods Association, American Management Association, Fashion Group, Home Furnishings Guild, the United States Department of Commerce and the survey on Recent Social Changes. The Hoover administration asked the Carnegie Corporation and others to examine the status of the arts as part of this survey, with MMA's cooperation.

Hoover's reliance on the foundations for the Recent Social Changes social surveys illustrates the ways in which grant-makers worked with public policymakers in the 1920s and 1930s. In the Rockefeller-funded report, Keppel and R.L. Duffus, President of the Research Committee, emphasized the "ever-strengthening alliance[s]" between museums and the commercial sector in their educational activities, a situation that was true at MMA.[403] Noting an increase in attendance in 1935, the Met reported that "the Museum's relations with the public are closer than they have ever been."[404] In 1936 the Industrial Relations Department, rather than the Educational Department, was given the task of managing the Neighborhood Exhibitions, a travelling series of shows sponsored by the WPA. The initiative was enormously successful and far-ranging, marking another success for Bach's department.

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[402] Ibid, 29.

[403] Frederick P. Keppel and R.L. Duffus (President's Research Committee on Social Trends), *Arts in American Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1933), NYPL, 70.

[404] MMA, *Annual Report*, (1935), 7.

At the close of the decade, MMA spokesmen continued to stress the importance of working with industry, declaring it "one of the most important and immediate functions of the Museum," which allowed the Museum to "take its proper part in the commercial as well as the intellectual life of the city."[405] The Museum's spokesmen boasted that almost 70,000 people visited the fifteenth industrial art exhibit in 1940, and the link between education and industrial relations was made official the following year as a new Department of Education and Extension combined the former Industrial Relations and Education Departments. In addition to the earlier programs, this new division was now in charge of public relations overall, including radio talks, the first television broadcast by a museum, and a growing number of free admission days for the general public.

The Carnegie Corporation also aided MMA's efforts to improve its outreach and education throughout these years. In 1929 Keppel easily persuaded his board that it would be "a neighborly thing" to send art teaching sets of books and plates to the Museum, "not only because of the practical use to which the set might be put there, but in recognition of the very large degree to which the success of these sets is due to the generous help of the members of the Museum staff."[406] The Metropolitan's officals asked for aid for several additional projects in the next several years.

At one meeting in 1933, Keppel was approached regarding potential grants for three different projects which museum spokesmen hoped would help them establish closer contact with the community. This problem had been under discussion with the foundation for quite some time.

Carnegie advisor Paul M. Rea, had written a report two years earlier on the Museum's hopes for a better relationship with the community, not only because of its

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[405] MMA, *Annual Report* (1940), 9.

[406] Frederick P. Keppel to William Clifford, December 23, 1929, CCNY Grant Files, box 220, folder 1.

importance in attracting funding, but because it "affects profoundly the status of the museum as an important social institution. . ."[407] He reported on the Museum's declining municipal funding, and rising operating budget expenditures per visitor. He concluded that "attendance is a commodity that can be bought," but not with operating dollars.[408] Rather, both attendance and municipal support would increase if the Museum demonstrated expanded and improved public service. This was the goal of the three proposals discussed at the 1933 meeting.

The first proposal involved Museum instructors going to the schools with lending sets of teaching materials on a regular basis, and would cost $15,000 the first year. The second involved establishment of a branch museum in Flushing, and the third suggestion was to move the restaurant to 5th Avenue, encouraging teachers and others to stay for late meetings with museum staff (the third proposal to move the restaurant sparked no interest from Keppel at all). Of these, Keppel and the Corporation agreed that the first two were most attractive. Though the branch museum idea would cost $100,000, almost ten times the cost of the other outreach project, Carnegie was willing to underwrite it if the museum agreed. Unfortunately, it is unclear why these two projects were never developed, but fortunately the FAP began funding the Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions, which effectively brought the Museum to many neighborhoods and schools.

Another Museum request that Keppel considered was for publicity: $15,000 for "a dignified but showman's job."[409] Keppel gave it consideration because he suspected that despite the initial stated purposes of approved grants, "a fair share of our museum

[407] Paul M. Rea, "The Metropolitan Museum and Its Community," December 22, 1931, CCNY Grant Files, box 220, folder 1, 2.

[408] Ibid.

[409] Arthur Page, Internal CCNY Memorandum, December 15, 1939, CCNY Grant Files, Box 220, folder 1, 1.

grants have gone for this purpose in one form or another," anyway.[410] He turned it down for budgetary reasons, but he did fund other projects such as a small grant for foreign travel for museum workers. In addition, in 1935 the foundation gave $7,000 for a cataloguing project on a rare glass collection. At the request of Huger Elliot, the Metropolitan's Director of Educational Work, Keppel attempted to persuade the Museum's board members to open the Met in the evening. They agreed it was worthwhile, and would begin a study of how to achieve that goal (under the present economic circumstances).[411] In all, Keppel and the Carnegie Corporation had used grant funds, in-kind donations of teaching equipment, and influence to promote the Metropolitan's improved relationship with the community and public service through its education and industrial art departments.

The New-York Historical Society staff also began in the 1930s to work harder to attract and entertain its audiences, increase public services and public relations efforts, and stage some exhibitions which reflected the commercial life of the city. For example, as noted in chapter three the Bella Landauer collection of trade cards was shown frequently, and the *Quarterly Bulletin* printed articles written by Landauer about her collection. The *Bulletin* quoted an Oxford scholar on the importance of a collection like Landauer's: "'commercial art. . . . is the folklore of an age.'"[412] NYHS staff also lent material to commercial exhibitors such as Saks, MGM, Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., James McCreery & Co., and many others.

In 1938, A.J. Wall, Jr., the son of the Director, was hired to head a new public relations department, which was to be responsible for more than just publicity: "All

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[410] Frederick P. Keppel, quoted in Arthur Page's Internal CCNY Memorandum, December 15, 1939, CCNY Grant Files, Box 220, folder 1, 1.

[411] Frederick P. Keppel to Huger Elliot, November 17, 1930, CCNY Grant Files, Box 220, folder 1.

[412] Dr. John Johnson, quoted in NYHS, *Quarterly Bulletin and Annual Report* (1935), 26.

publicity and educational work will be conducted by this department."[413] In addition to getting media coverage, Wall arranged for groups of children and adults to be guided through the museum. Museum spokesmen reported with delight that in 1939 their publicity was "more extensive than ever before, and the attendance four times as large."[414] Over 2,000 column inches of media coverage resulted from their press releases, 400 posters, and other publicity efforts. They also coordinated with others on the World's Fair art exhibits on "Campaigning without Electricity."

And, like several other museums, they successfully won a grant from the Carnegie Corporation for educational purposes. It may have helped that Frederick Keppel was a life member of NYHS. As early as the 1920s, A. J. Wall (the elder) had used his position as Director to promote education, but this initiative was a more ambitious and long-term program than was typical for the Society. Once again, Keppel was able to use Carnegie funding to encourage the creation of a new education project. As with other museums that Keppel aided, Wall and the Society's other leaders seemed inclined to move in that direction already, but the incentive of special funding for the purpose was an important catalyst. The Society's successful 1939 proposal garnered a $15,000 award over three years to create a program of graduate study in early American painting. Begun in 1940, the highly ambitious initiative was intended to combine lectures with publication of a series of ten monographs. In conjunction with New York University, fifteen lectures each year were opened to graduate students as well as the general public. The lectures attracted students as well as college faculty and staff members from the Frick Collection museum library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Brooklyn Museum.[415]

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[413] NYHS, *Quarterly Bulletin and Annual Report*, (1938), 41.

[414] NYHS, *Quarterly Bulletin and Annual Report*, (1939), 12.

[415] Ibid.

Unfortunately, illness forced Dr. William Sawitzky, the author/professor the Society had hired, to abandon the teaching aspect of the program after the second year to concentrate on finishing the publications. He had finished only one so far (*Life and Work of Matthew Pratt (1734-1805)*). A year later two were completed, and Dr. Sawitzky requested an additional year's salary ($3,000) to finish the rest. Director A.J. Wall rejected this request. In his report to Carnegie in 1943, Wall wrote of Dr. Sawitzky that "no one else has the grasp of early American art that he has," justifying the decision not to hire anyone else to take over the work.[416] Yet, Sawitzky had already made it clear that he had a chronic lung condition that was not likely to improve, so Wall must have been fairly certain they would not complete the program. Carnegie's records do not show what the reaction was to the Society's handling of this project, but they were not likely impressed with the outcomes. Yet, NYHS leaders were otherwise demonstrably committed to improving and expanding public programs, and New Yorkers responded favorably.

In 1939 the Museum began to open on Sundays for the first time, and their attendance, raising its attendance figures to over 57,000. By 1940, it was open free on every day except Monday. Attendance continued to climb, to almost 70,000. By the 1940s NYHS staff had successfully begun to use the techniques of commercial culture to form a better relationship with the public. Although Carnegie grant funding does not appear to have been the main impetus for this change, reaching out to the foundation to underwrite an educational program signaled a significant change in attitude toward education programs and to building partnerships with other institutions.

The Carnegie Corporation also sponsored "Art in America," a program comprised of radio talks by representatives of museums such as the Metropolitan Museum and MoMA. The New-York Historical Society aided this program behind the scenes as well

[416] A.J. Wall to CCNY, October 28, 1943, CCNY, Grant Files, box 265, folder 8.

as airing their own radio talks on several stations).[417] Keppel believed strongly in the potential of radio for educational purposes. He gave an address at the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education, held in Chicago in 1934. He described the shift in the American arts leadership as follows:

> oligarchy was the word which naturally came to mind ten years ago, and that democracy is the word one thinks of today. Years ago, too, adult education was something of which we highbrows thought the underprivileged should have a little. Today we wonder if we do not need quite a lot of it ourselves, which may not be a bad way to manifest the spirit of democracy.[418]

Use of the word democracy was a bit optimistic, but it reflected an important shift in cultural philanthropy. Although Keppel classified himself among the "highbrows," he clearly saw a sea change in the role of arts education for the public, as well as an equally significant shift in the role of the public themselves in arts education. He felt that distinctions between elites and the public were being increasingly blurred by a movement in adult education to create more inclusive programs for employers, workers, etc. He also pointed out that some of the largest sectors of growth in adult education came from women taking extension courses.[419]

Alliances among the commercial sector among foundations, educators and curators were also a part of these changes. In their report for Hoover on "The Changing Social Order," Keppel and Ruffus posited that the growth of commercial art was a positive sign of "a growing popular interest in the aesthetic."[420] The Committee as a whole echoed this conclusion. Despite an exploding advertising industry promoting

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[417] NYHS, *Quarterly Bulletin and Annual Report*, (1933), 97-98.

[418] Frederick P. Keppel, "The Changing Social Order in Philanthropy and Learning" with other Papers (NY: Columbia University Press, 1936, 135. From an address given at the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education, Chicago, October 8, 1934.

[419] Keppel, *Education for Adults and other essays*, 20.

[420] Keppel and Duffus, *Arts in American Life*, 83.

competing commercial leisure activities, cultural institutions were becoming ever more popular. The Committee applauded this trend, as well as the growing trend of commercial institutions enlisting artists and museums to improve industrial design. "Art appears to be one of the great forces which stand between maladjusted man and mental breakdown, bringing him comfort, serenity, and joy."[421] Again indulging in some hyperbole, and echoing the sentiment of an Oxford scholar quoted in the NYHS *Bulletin*, Keppel called commercial art "a popular art; in a sense it is folk art."[422] More than merely a reflection of that "indisputable" growing interest in the aesthetic between the wars, Keppel believed commercial and advertising art to be one of the catalysts of that turning point.[423]

The Carnegie Corporation worked with MCNY to help them establish an Education Department in 1932. An official history of the museum written by a curator decades later termed the creation of this department "probably the single most important event in the progress of the Museum . . ."[424] Yet it very nearly did not happen.

MCNY's first Director, Henry Collins Brown, first began asking for funding in 1924, and was rejected repeatedly over the next six years. An eccentric yet indomitable personality, Brown was not easily dissuaded. He invited Morse Cartright of Carnegie to visit after the first rejection in 1924 (Brown had invited the Carnegie Corporation to become founding members for $1,000). Cartright's first impressions of MCNY's collection and of the Director were quite mixed:

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[421] The Research Committee on Social Trends, "A Review of Findings by the President's Research Committee on Social Trends," in *Recent Social Trends*, (1933), liii. President Hoover acknowledged that since these surveys were aimed at identifying change in American life, they were skewed toward "an emphasis on instability rather than stability in our social structure."

[422] Keppel and Duffus, *Arts in American Life*, 151.

[423] Ibid., 151-207.

[424] Albert K. Baragwanath, *More Than a Mirror to the Past: The First Fifty Years of the Museum of the City of New York* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1973), 13.

> a good many of these items are of questionable value from a museum standpoint; a great deal of very bad art being in evidence. . . . Brown, I should describe as a zealous, but irresponsible Director with excessive bad taste but genuine enthusiasm for his work. Has excellent publicity ideas . . . [425]

Whether it was the collection or the Director that the foundation viewed as a poor risk, MCNY and Brown continued to receive negative replies over the next three years.

Even Brown's departure from the museum in 1927 did not help; applications in 1928, 1929 and 1930 were turned down.[426] In his request for capital funding, MCNY's board member John Van Pelt complained that "none of us can see why the Carnegie Corporation which helps similar institutions in all parts of the world should not do something for the Museum of the City of New York."[427] Keppel had written earlier that while the foundation did not give capital grants, "it is actively interested in the educational programs of museums, and is looking for opportunities to support such programs."[428] He also cautioned that he would visit MCNY only after the museum leaders had worked out a practical plan for administration of the institution for the future.

Like BMA's first request for funding to establish an education department, MCNY's first application was hastily put together and rejected for that reason. As before, Keppel did not give up, but pressed for more a more detailed plan. And he continued to offer suggestions to improve the department's work, such as widening the

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[425] Morse Cartright, *Memorandum of Interview with Henry Collins Brown*, September 8, 1924, CCNY, Grant Files, folder 1.

[426] Brown's departure from MCNY did not mean an end to his requests to Carnegie; he continued to ask for funds as an author to write and publish books on New York history. He did get very small amounts, perhaps as payment for the entertainment value of his humorous self-deprecating begging letters. In one request to Keppel, he writes, "I enclose a prospectus – call an ambulance before you read it." Henry Collins Brown to Frederick P. Keppel, March 19, 1934, CCNY Grant Files, box 65, folder 11.

[427] John Van Pelt to Frederick P. Keppel, October 14, 1930, CCNY Grant Files, Box 232, folder 1.

[428] Frederick P. Keppel to James Speyer, March 22, 1929, CCNY Grant Files, Box 232, folder 2.

focus to offer services to adults as well. He authorized a grant with the provision that a satisfactory plan was received.

The first step involved John Van Pelt of MCNY's newly formed Education Committee touring museums all over the United States and meeting with Board of Education officials to gather ideas. Based on the Committee's report and plan, Keppel recommended a $52,500 gift over three years to support the educational program. The next step was finding a good candidate to develop and lead the new department. Reflecting the Educational Committee's plan to develop a close relationship with public schools, Frank Rexford, Director of Civics and Civic Activities of the Board of Education High School Division, was hired at an annual salary of $7,500. Over 300,000 people visited the museum in 1932, MCNY's best attendance to date.[429]

Rexford established a diverse array of educational programs "so that the museum shall function for all people."[430] For children, MCNY developed "Trips and Trails" coursework for schools and young visitors, featuring maps and guide sheets on historical points of interest throughout New York City "from Ellis Island to the Van Cortlandt mansion," portable history sets with elaborate scale models of historical scenes for schools, as well as games accompanying special exhibits.[431] For teachers and other adults, college courses were offered on Museum Methods and Practice in Social Studies, as well as the use of docents for groups, and free Sunday lectures on contemporary and historical topics on City life. Lecture topics were intended be popular rather than scholarly (politics, theatre, traffic control, etc.) and MCNY's published materials specifically requested public input on future topics.

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[429] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1932), 9.

[430] MCNY, *The Museum of the City of New York: Its Collections and Activities*, (1935), NYPL, 65.

[431] Ibid., 12.

The reaction at Carnegie following receipt of the first year's report was positive, particularly regarding the cooperation between the museum and the Board of Education and the "excellent" Trips and Trails material.[432] Overall, MCNY was praised for adapting and improving on the best models available in museum education (including the work of the Metropolitan Museum).

Keppel was annoyed, however, when John Van Pelt requested that some of the 1933 education grant funds be used toward an operating deficit. "We can find nothing in our record to indicate that either the Museum or the Corporation understood that such operating charges were to be made against the grant."[433] Undeterred, Van Pelt repeated his request the following day. Keppel, incredulous, could only wonder sarcastically if Van Pelt had received his response. Van Pelt's replacement, Robert LeRoy, wasted no time in repeating the request to use $3,000 of the education funds for general operating costs, which was finally approved. The Carnegie Corporation renewed support for the education program in 1936 at the reduced rate of $12,600 over three years, but MCNY officials continued to press for additional emergency operating funds.[434] While $1,300 was approved in 1938, Keppel cautioned that "this comes from an unrefillable bottle and is not subject to renewal."[435] Education program support (for a total of $19,500) was extended between 1940 and 1942, but ceased at that point. A Carnegie internal memorandum reflected the exasperation that their support had produced the development of great new programs, it had also been misused at times:

> . . . we have done more than our share in trying to get the Museum established. I believe the record will show that the funds granted for

[432] *Internal Memorandum*, February 21, 1933, CCNY Grant Files, Box 232, folder 2.

[433] Frederick P. Keppel, to John Van Pelt, April 20, 1933, CCNY Grant Files, Box 232, folder 2.

[434] Frederick P. Keppel to Hardinge Scholle, March 27, 1936, CCNY Grant Files, Box 232, folder 2.

[435] Frederick P. Keppel to Hardinge Scholle, January 11, 1938, CCNY Grant Files, Box 232, folder 2.

> educational work have been used in many cases for general expenses of the Museum.[436]

In those ten years Carnegie had given $111,100 to support MCNY.

The results were tremendous: an education department was developed, and successful programs created that served many thousands of New Yorkers of all ages. Funds were also used by the Educational Department to develop an extensive booklet filled with photographs to publicize the museum's collection and programs ("The Museum of the City of New York: Its Collections and Activities,") that was published and distributed in 1935. In it, Luke Vincent Lockwood, MCNY's Chairman of the Committee on Education praised the generosity of the Carnegie Corporation for its assistance in creating the Department "as a connecting link between the Museum and the public," and the activities and services offered by the Education Department were featured prominently in the guide.[437] Overall, MCNY's results achieved with Carnegie funds are all the more impressive because they were achieved as the new museum struggled to establish itself during an economic crisis and world war. Fortunately, Carnegie was not the only generous donor to MCNY during the depression. MCNY was able to attract an array of prominent donors, particularly corporations. Unlike Carnegie grants, these were intended to sponsor exhibitions, not education programs.

The content of MCNY exhibits was directly linked in many cases to corporate donations. For example, an exhibit on the history of communications was created by the support of various corporations. The list reads like a W*ho's Who* of communications companies in America at the time: American Telephone and Telegraph Company, Bell Telephone Laboratories, International Telephone and Telegraph System, National Broadcasting Company, New York Telephone Company, Radio Corporation of America, and Western Electric Company.

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[436] *Internal Memorandum*, April 13, 1942, CCNY Grant Files, Box 232, folder 2.

[437] MCNY, *The Museum of the City of New York: Its Collections and Activities*, 5.

An exhibit called the History of Retail Trade in New York was created with funds donated by Mrs. James Donahue and Mrs. Charles McCann, daughters of the late F.W. Woolworth. The donation was made as a memorial to him.[438] The History and Development of Fifth Avenue gallery was named the Altman Foundation Gallery, for their donation. The History of Public Lighting in New York gallery was sponsored by the Gas and Electric Companies of Greater New York, the Consolidated Gas Company of New York and Affiliated Companies. In order to name a gallery, each donor gave a minimum of $100,000. Corporate donors who gave a minimum of $10,000 to the building and endowment drive included the National City Company, and the *New York Evening Post*.

In 1933 the museum's Annual Report solicited donations for proposed exhibits on the stock exchange and history of banking, transportation, and sports. In 1937 an anonymous donor gave $50,000, which supplemented funds from the New York Stock Exchange to create an exhibit on the history of banking and the New York Stock Exchange. In effect, MCNY's promise to chart the "growth and development" of the city had a highly commercial tone. These galleries charted advancements and progress by businesses with the names of some of these businesses prominently displayed at the entrances (donor-named galleries). MCNY officials thus ceded unprecedented control over exhibition content and pedagogy to donors, a development which set the stage for future controversies over corporate patronage and its effects. This decision by MCNY leaders may have been influenced by a short-term shortfall in the building fund, but it had long-term implications.

Much more so than in the 1920s, leaders of all four museums demonstrated their increasingly close ties to the commercial sector, by hosting industrial art exhibits, providing educational services and materials to retail workers and designers, or

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[438]MCNY, *Annual Report* (1932), 7-8.

promoting the significance of trades throughout history. Businesses showed them how to become more appealing to the public. They learned how to sell the museum experience. The experience itself was enriched by new educational programs (that were in many cases made possible) by grants from the Carnegie Corporation, exemplifying two new sources of philanthropy: foundations and private corporations.

The Carnegie Corporation and its President, Frederick Keppel, left a marked imprint on the city's museums in the 1930s, particularly in the educational arena, efforts that often dovetailed with business-influenced innovations. Carnegie supported surveys at the Brooklyn Museum that identified who visited, as well as what the visitor wanted in terms of educational programs. Carnegie worked with the Metropolitan to improve its relations with the public as well, through the provision of grants, supplying teaching resources, and using their expertise to advise the Museum staff on how best to achieve its outreach goals. At the New-York Historical Society, the foundation sponsored a course on painting, but also paid for radio programs that had a dual method of expanding museum education, broadening the museum's educational experience via lectures and concerts on the airways, and encouraging new audiences to visit the museum. At the Museum of the City of New York, Carnegie sponsored the creation of a new educational department, complete with docents, touring materials, a promotional booklet, and courses for young and old.

The Rockefeller Foundation also had an impact, by developing the interne program at the Brooklyn Museum. Not only did internes gain valuable practical training, but they performed a variety of important functions at a time when the whole staff was stretched to its limits of abilities. They curated a variety of important educational exhibits. More importantly, they left a legacy. After their fellowships ended in 1937, six internes remained on as volunteers the following year to help out and continue to learn. "Apparently, the interne has taken root and is to become a permanent part of the

Brooklyn program."[439] And in addition to the original fellows, the program attracted new participants. That year a museum from New England sent its director to take part in the program. This model pilot program was important because it enabled the Brooklyn Museum to continue providing educational and creative exhibits and programs throughout an economic crisis. Just as important, it stimulated the professional development of a new generation of museum leaders, from graduate students to directors, throughout the country. The Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations contributed to the practical development of museum practice and museum education in an unprecedented time of need.

Corporate cultural philanthropy, which was also diverse, was more likely to highlight a particular sector of the economy, such as the Stock Exchange's gift to MCNY for an exhibit on the Exchange. The capital campaign gifts to MCNY clearly demonstrated that many businesses were involved by the interwar years, paying large sums of money in order to have the story of their company or trade told in a positive light in a museum setting.

Yet, corporate patronage of art and culture was not merely a good public relations tactic. It grew out of several developments during the interwar years, from the increasing importance of art in advertising photography, and photography in art, from a growing corporate interest in culture as good business, as exemplified in the World's Fair. And, it grew out of the partnerships built over the years since World War I, cultivated by businesses and museum leaders alike.

The Depression years saw a proliferation of new groups of leaders from businesses, foundations, educational organizations, and Hoover's administration working together to expand and enhance the ability of museum to serve the public. They built initiatives begun in the 1920s. One of the areas of common ground that made this

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[439] BIAS *Central Museum Annual Report* (1937), 7.

possible was their belief in the potential of commercial art and commercial promotional techniques to make museums more welcoming and more useful. The next chapter explores the government's role under Franklin Roosevelt in aiding museums during this difficult period.

Chapter 7

A New Deal for Museums: 1929-1941

In March of 1930, President Herbert Hoover prophesied that the "worst effects of the crash upon employment will have passed during the next sixty days."[440] By the following year, with banks failing, businesses closing, and unemployment climbing upwards of eight million, Hoover's prediction assumed an increasingly hollow ring.

Yet, despite the worsening economy, New Yorkers did not stay home. With the rise in unemployment, many turned to inexpensive diversions such as museum-going to pass the time. Throughout the 1930s, New Yorkers continued to flock to the museums for edification and entertainment, although not necessarily in that order. As we saw in chapter six, despite the Depression, NYHS, MCNY, BMA, and the Metropolitan did not significantly cut back on services or exhibits. This was partly because of heavy demand, but also because they continued to receive financial support from corporations, a small number of foundations, and public sources such as the City government and the Federal Art Project.

While corporate and foundation support in this period stimulated the growth of public relations initiatives and popular museum programs that would entertain as well as educate, it was primarily a middle-class audience these programs were intended to attract and serve. Government support, in contrast, specifically demanded increased accessibility for people from all economic backgrounds, through a variety of means. Museums worked with government agencies and public schools towards these objectives. Municipal support had become increasingly important by the 1920s, and had already resulted in expanded and more affordable visitor hours, and the beginnings of educational work for school groups. This chapter examines the crucial impact of City support during

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[440] Quoted in T.H. Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co.), 51.

the Depression, as well as the impact of the Works Projects Administration museum projects. Though there were important differences between local and federal partnerships with museums, both types of government support enabled museums to provide the same or better services and outreach programs than before the Crash.

Only the New-York Historical Society saw relatively few visitors during these years, (less than 20,000 in 1932, almost 60,000 in 1939), and even its numbers rose significantly. Unlike the other museums, NYHS did not receive any City funds, which hampered its ability to deliver public programs and increase their popularity. At the Museum of the City of New York on the other hand, enjoyed record attendance in 1932, as over 300,000 locals and tourists came to view their exhibits. The Metropolitan Museum received over one million visitors in 1930.[441] All these institutions felt the economic pinch, but their leaders endeavored to increase, rather than diminish, services.

As the crisis deepened, MCNY, BMA, and the Metropolitan leaders continued to request and receive support from the New York City government, and they felt obligated to give something back in return. Underscoring the democratizing effect public sector sponsorship can have on private institutions, in 1930 BMA's trustees declared:

> [w]e, in the Museum look back upon the year 1930 with great satisfaction. The Institution has been successful in contribution to public education and the Trustees and Staff feel more than ever the incentive to greater efforts in this direction on account of the liberality and broadmindedness displayed by the City authorities.[442]

Over 500,000 visitors were welcomed for that year, marking the museum's largest attendance to date.[443]

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[441] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1930), 38.

[442] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1930), 5.

[443] Ibid.

At a time when over 750,000 New Yorkers lived on City relief rolls, it is remarkable that the City found any spare dimes for cultural institutions.[444] Throughout the Depression years, City support fluctuated, but did not disappear. Although municipal grants were not enough to keep the museums running in the black every year, City funds were still an important piece of their operating budgets, and an important reminder of their duty to the public to provide inexpensive and inviting entertainment and instruction.

The Brooklyn Museum offers a good example of the extent to which museums improved their outreach and education programs for children and adults despite BMA's declining revenues. In 1930, loan exhibitions and bulletins were sent out to many schools, radio broadcasting was "constantly resorted to by members of the staff," and motion pictures were introduced for the first time as a regular program. In addition to many educational films borrowed from the YWCA and Chronicles of America, BMA also showed more popular films such as *Nanook of the North*, a reflection of their increasing emphasis on combining entertainment with education. In addition, the children's art classes were expanded significantly. In 1932, for example, BMA had seven art classes available for children aged nine to fourteen. Just two years later BMA had expanded the age limits to between three and sixteen, and the number of classes from seven to twenty-three. The museum continued to work with high school and college students and teachers in conjunction with the Board of Education and the College of the City of New York to offer a range of courses and lectures. And mindful of rising numbers of jobless visitors, it offered special lectures for students in the "New York State classes for the unemployed."[445]

However, the lean years and the struggles to maintain operations with diminishing funds caused the Brooklyn Museum's staff to become frustrated and annoyed at times

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[444] Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 70.

[445] "Clubs and Classes in the Brooklyn Museum," in *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, 12 (July 1934), 67.

with any reductions in appropriations. Overall, the reductions were not drastic. For example, in 1932, the BMA got just under $250,000 from the City, while in 1937 the City's appropriation fell to $200,000.[446] Long accustomed to City support, however, they now assumed it was their due. Museum officials complained by 1936 that deficits were often reduced through the generous contributions of the Trustees, who were now tapped out. As the Museum reorganized and modernized, working overtime became commonplace. Meanwhile, staff salaries often had to be reduced. No one had received a raise since 1930. "The time has now come when the City should provide necessary maintenance for the Museum in its annual budget."[447]

However, this feeling of annoyance toward the City did not last. By the end of the decade, BMA spokesmen would reflect on the Depression years with more appreciation for municipal aid, declaring it "absolutely vital" for the museum's continued operation.[448] The relationship with New York City government aided the Brooklyn Museum in modernizing its facilities, and improving its public programs. If the City had drastically reduced its annual appropriation to BMA, services would have been slashed, and the physical plant would have languished. Instead, their education division continued to find innovative ways to reach the public, and the staff's modernization efforts of the building and exhibits ensured that they would keep the visitors' interest once they arrived.

MCNY officials also responded to the crisis with better public service, even when annual appropriations fluctuated. As we saw in the previous chapter, this was due in part to the three year grant given in 1932 from the Carnegie Corporation to fund its

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[446] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report* (1932), 45. See also, BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1937), 9.

[447] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1936), 8.

[448] BIAS, *Central Museum Annual Report*, (1939), 27.

educational activities. Even so, City funding was a relatively new, but an important part of meeting its yearly costs. In 1933 the City appropriation was reduced from $90,000 to $29,310. This was a significant decrease, reducing its ttotal operating budget from $143,000 to $85,000.[449] But in 1934, MCNY saw its City appropriation cut by a third, while the attendance at its Sunday programs doubled from the previous year. The Trustees had to make up the deficits themselves. As they reported several years after the Crash,"[a]lthough it has been necessary to curtail expenses throughout the year, the Museum has been able to expand in many ways and to continue its various services to the public."[450] And like BMA, by 1940, MCNY saw its funds restored to pre-Depression levels.

The Metropolitan's experience with the City during this period was much like that of BMA and MCNY. The Metropolitan received just over $501,000 in City appropriations in 1930, less than their usual appropriation, but the trustees did not panic about the financial situation.[451] The Metropolitan's trustees noted that attendance on pay days decreased after the Crash, but that the attendance at special programs had increased, a fact which reinforced the importance of these programs in their view. So, in addition to eliminating pay days, they continued to expand services.[452] Soon, however, the trustees were crying poverty. Just one year later, they lamented, "The present financial depression has shown itself plainly in the annual membership. . . . In view of the depression the active recruiting of Members was discontinued. . ."[453] Unfortunately, while income was down, expenses were up, due to the growth and development of the

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[449] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1933), 2.

[450] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1934), 16.

[451] MMA, *Annual Report* (1930), 5.

[452] MMA, *Annual Report* (1940), 9.

[453] MMA, *Annual Report*, (1931), 7.

institution that had taken place in recent years. Increasing the collection, staff, wages and pensions had doubled the administration costs.[454]

The Metropolitan's leaders discontinued membership appeals due to the Depression, but it did not discontinue its public programs and outreach efforts. In 1930 MMA created a new position for education, and hired Huger Elliot as Director of Educational Work. That year the education division staff gave fifty-five radio talks, twenty summer school talks, study hours for the staffs of various clerical schools and department stores, and 800 public school teachers registered for lecture course.[455] Taking advantage of the new medium of radio meshed perfectly with the desire to entertain as well as educate, and to broaden the Museum's audience. Encouraging teachers to bring their classes in for tours (and to attend lectures designed for teachers) brought in thousands of children who otherwise might not venture into the Beaux-Arts building on Fifth Avenue. According to the trustees,

> [t]he appropriation made by the City, membership dues, and admissions on pay days, to cite only a few, all continued to decrease. . . . [the] budget has been balanced in spite of an increase in services to the public, particularly through the Department of Education Work and the exhibitions in the neighborhood houses and branch libraries in Manhattan.[456]

Overall attendance held steady in the first two years following the stock market crash. Trustees were particularly pleased to report that participation in educational and special programs had increased. This was remarkable, they felt, in view of the economy, the size of the "population of the city, the size of the city, the great distances covered by the residential sections, the immense foreign population, and the great number of 'counter

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[454] Ibid., 8.

[455] Ibid., 25-30.

[456] MMA, *Annual Report*, 1933, 5.

attractions' offered both winter and summer."[457] The size of the foreign population concerned them because it meant that museum publicity would not reach those who did not speak English. This was one of the reasons they were anxious to bring loans and programs to the public schools, neighborhood houses and libraries in areas where immigrants and their families lived. In 1933 the Metropolitan launched a series of neighborhood circulating exhibitions with three settlement houses and with a branch library. In one settlement alone, the first month and a half brought in over 23,000 visitors.[458] (Later, the WPA provided support for the program's expansion, which will be examined later in the chapter.) They also gave free talks organized by the Council on Adult Education for the Foreign Born which attracted over 1,000 people.[459]

In order to maintain public programs, other sacrifices had to be made. So, museum officials made a conscious decision to limit acquisitions to objects of major importance, and to limit expansions and improvements to the buildings. Putting off their expansion plans had the salutary effect of encouraging MMA to make more loans available to other institutions and communities locally and abroad, since they lacked sufficient space to display their collections. In addition to expanding the numbers of loans they made, they noted that "it has become more and more the Museum's policy to assist other institutions with loans of longer duration."[460]

Appropriation levels from the City were increased a couple of years later. In 1935 out of a total MMA budget of $2,141,262.65, the City gave $362,130.67, an increase of $6,427.64 from the previous year.[461] The Metropolitan Museum received $365,029.88

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[457] MMA, *Annual Report*, 1931, 7-8.

[458] MMA, *Annual Report* (1933), 15.

[459] Ibid., 31.

[460] Ibid., 14.

[461] MMA, *Annual Report*, 1935, 46-49.

from the City by decade's end, plus extra funds for construction and supplies. This was out of a total MMA budget of $1,853,805.34, which still left a deficit, but was very helpful.[462]

City funding had allowed the Museum to maintain and even expand their education programs, and free use of municipal radio stations allowed it (and the other museums) to use the airwaves for outreach. NYHS was able to maintain and increase services during the economic downturn without City funds because of the extraordinary Thompson bequest (discussed in chapter five). MCNY, BMA, and MMA leaders were aware of the debt owed to the public for the City funding they received, and they responded by continuing and expanding education programs.

Although local government stimulated museums toward greater public service during the 1920s, the greatest impact of government involvement was to come in response to the Depression in the form of the New Deal. Even when local municipal funds were temporarily reduced during the worst years of the Depression, the federal government encouraged education and outreach programs, and kept the idea of public support for the arts alive. The federal government also provided crucial support for several interesting projects at New York museums through New Deal programs. The Federal Art Project attempted to help hungry artists, but also to enrich the lives of ordinary citizens by bringing them a sense of American culture.[463] President Roosevelt praised these programs, which exposed Americans to art "painted by their own kind in their own country, and painted about things they know and look at often and have touched and loved."[464]

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[462] MMA, *Annual Report*, 1940, 5.

[463] On the New Deal's democratization of art and culture, see, Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), introduction.

[464] Quoted in Park and Markowitz*, Democratic Vistas*, 6.

As noted in chapter three, government support for art and history museums was controversial during the interwar years for some of the same reasons it is today. Unlike many other countries, this nation does not have a strong record on support for public culture. Furthermore, Americans have attempted to balance our pride in our cultural institutions with the fear that they are too elitist, or not elitist enough. The outlook during the early years of the Depression for public-private partnerships in cultural philanthropy was dim. As a pamphlet for the WPA/FAP recalled,

> [i]n 1933 President Hoover's Committee on Recent Social Trends reported that 'there is no indication of direct government patronage of the arts to be expected in America in the near future.'[465]

Like Hoover's prediction that the Depression would only last sixty days, this prophecy also proved faulty. The Public Works of Art Project was founded that same year, and the more ambitious Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (FAP) was formed only two years later.

Holger Cahill in Washington was given the task of managing this unique agency, whose primary and initial aim was to support artists. Cahill pointed out that "it is a pretty lopsided business when three-quarters and more of the economic support given to art in this country goes to the work of artists long since dead . . ."[466] He supervised regional directors across the country, with the largest concentration of FAP projects and artists located in New York City. He soon envisioned much loftier goals for the FAP than merely helping artists earn a living wage during the Depression.

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[465] Quoted in Federal Art Project, "Art as a Function of Government, a Survey," 1937, Federal Art Project (FAP), Box 52, 18, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

[466] Holger Cahill, *Lecture Before the The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City*, March 28, 1937, in FAP, NARA, Box 52, 6.

Cahill proclaimed that the FAP was "trying to make art an expression of the people, to broaden its meaning through mass participation as well as appreciation."[467] At an Art and Democracy Dinner, he disparaged art patron and museum leaders' focus on "archeology," and failure to support living artists.[468] The FAP, he declared, was predicated on the belief that "it is not the solitary genius but a sound general movement which maintains art as a vital, functioning part of any cultural scheme."[469] Therefore Cahill and the FAP worked to support craftsmen, commercial artists, as well as those working in the fine arts. To ensure that their work would be sold, the government would also attempt to address the problem of "underconsumption," by promoting art through education classes, radio talks, and exhibiting art in public institutions. As historian Lizabeth Cohen points out, the role of the consumer took on much greater importance during the Depression, and Franklin Roosevelt's administration increasingly shifted the focus of its attention and resources away from boosting production and toward boosting consumer purchasing power.[470] Cahill believed that the potential audience for art was tremendous and that all that was required to develop it was increased exposure to art, in institutions such as schools, libraries and museums. This was not only an important means to aid artists and the American economy, but also to "conserve and enhance" the

[467]Quoted in Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz *A New Deal for Art: Government Art Projects of the 1930s with Examples from New York City and State* (Produced and circulated by the Gallery Association of New York State, 1977) 10.

[468] Holger Cahill, *Lecture at the Art and Democracy Dinner*, New York City, June 7, 1938, in FAP, NARA, box 52, 1.

[469] Holger Cahill, Lecture *Before the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York City, March 28, 1937, in FAP, Box 52, NARA, 9.

[470] Lizabeth Cohen, A *Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), chapter one.

polity itself. "The Project has been guided by the belief that in a democracy such as ours art should belong to everybody."[471]

The Federal Art Project was divided into the following categories: almost half of FAP staff belonged to the Fine Arts division, which produced murals, sculpture, easel paintings, and graphic arts. The second largest division was the Practical Arts, which included posters, photography, the Index of American Design, arts and crafts, dioramas, and theater stage sets. The Educational Services division, which included Federal Art Galleries and community art centers, art teaching, the Design Laboratory, research and information, was the third largest group. Finally, the smallest division was the Technical and Coordinating staff. By the end of its first year the FAP employed approximately 5,000 people.[472]

Each division had its own role to play in achieving the mission of preserving and strengthening the national culture. Within the Fine Arts visual art such as murals, were considered a "silent educational force," to be placed in public buildings, each with an uplifting social theme. For example, at Riker's Island the Commissioner of Corrections ordered the installation of a mural depicting workers across America laboring each in their own way toward the final product of a loaf of bread being placed on a family's table. The Educational Services division was perhaps the most concerned with the social significance of FAP work. Cahill explained that art classes offered disadvantaged children wholesome forms of expression and quoted a New York school superintendent who declared that art classes "'have done more to stabilize the schools in this city during a difficult period than any other single agency.'"[473] Each week over 50,000 people of all ages were taught by FAP art teachers.

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[471] Holger Cahill, *Lecture Before the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York City, March 28, 1937, in FAP, Box 52, NARA, 12.

[472] Ibid., 8.

[473] Ibid, 22.

The work of the FAP, perhaps in New York more than anywhere else, generated plenty of controversy. The themes of some art highlighted political divisions, and reflected the shifting political winds and the impact of events such as the United States' entry to the war. Communism continued to be the greatest spectre haunting the FAP, as many feared the WPA was rife with Communists. Three witnesses who claimed to be former Communists testified to the House Appropriations Committee Investigating Relief that the Workers Alliance was heavily Communist and influenced the New York Theatre project to award jobs predominately to Communists. The race card was played as well. Two of the witnesses were black, and testified that Moscow intended to use the dissent caused by the Depression to create a "black belt" republic in the United States.[474] The Workers' Alliance circulated a petition denying any Communist affiliation, but attacking the 'red scare' that led to a law being passed prohibiting Communists from getting WPA jobs. They also proclaimed it an attack on the Bill of Rights.[475] And in 1940, Audrey MacMahon, Assistant FAP Director resigned her membership from the American Artists' Congress because she felt it was too politicized.[476] She also instructed a photograph to be taken and filed that showed leftist newspapers such as the *Daily Worker* and *Progressive Times* on display at the New York Federal Writers Project office. Amidst these controversies, the FAP's leadership initiated new programs to aid the war effort.

In 1941, as Americans endured its third year of world war, the FAP proposed new phases of work to wartime needs. One was dedicated to Civilian Morale, in places where "aliens gather for the purposes of instruction. . . . for use of education of foreign born toward good citizenship. . ." Designs included "civilian behavior in war time;

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[474] Clipping,"*WPA Witness Says Soviet Trained Him in Street Fighting*," by Henry N. Dorris (June 7, 1940), FAP, NARA, Box 63.

[475] Flyer "*Protect the Constitution*!"(undated), FAP, NARA, box 52.

[476] Audrey MacMahon to American Artists' Congress, April 16, 1940, FAP, NARA, Box 63.

military insignia for civilian instruction; fire prevention and precaution; sanitation and disease prevention; home therapy and first aid."[477] Proposed new services included art therapy in hospitals, training camp activities, factory morale, etc. These initiatives demonstrate that the FAP, despite its progressive tendencies, allied itself with traditional causes as well. While some of these programs addressed practical health and safety issues, the Civilian Morale program was clearly intended to promote national and cultural unity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the FAP turned to New York's venerable and established cultural institutions to help achieve its goals.

From the FAP's inception, museums worked with and benefited from all the FAP divisions. Although the federal government's partnerships with museums began mostly during the New Deal, museum leaders had already formed ideas on how to give better public service. They needed more resources and expertise, however. Therefore, collaboration began quickly on many projects and expanded others. Only the New-York Historical Society got off to a slow start.

Compared to MCNY, BMA, and the Met, the Society was the most independent from the public sector. During the depths of the Depression they boasted that despite the great demands made on the institution by the increased volume of visitors, they maintained this independence:

> The distressful prevalence of unemployment in the past several years, with the resultant enforced leisure, has brought much extra work to libraries, museums, and other educational institutions, which, with decreasing budgets, has produced problems not easily solved. ... The Society renders a great free service to all who apply to it or come to its rooms, and it has always supported itself without public funds.[478]

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[477] New York City WPA Art Project, *Sponsor's Semi-Annual Narrative Progress Report for the period January 1- June 30, 1941*, FAP, NARA, box 65, 4.

[478] NYHS, *Report of the Executive Committee* (1933), 9-10.

The statement that NHYS received no public funds was repeated in every *Quarterly Bulletin* throughout the 1930s and was intended to encourage private patronage. It also reflected an attitude of mistrust toward government involvement, as discussed earlier. However, in 1937, NYHS officials applied for government sponsorship for a research project to collect and distribute all the vital statistics on file at the Department of Health since 1850, a task that could only be accomplished with outside aid. Unfortunately, they were turned down.

In 1939 NYHS was able to partner with the WPA's Field Activity Program and the City's Department of Education to create a docent service for children. In less than a month, over 3,000 school children visited. The WPA continued to provide docents, and also donated four murals on the history of New York for NYHS' classroom. The following year, 11,000 children toured the museum with the WPA docents, which the Trustees hailed as "an important feature in the use of our materials."[479]

However, NYHS continued to operate without City maintenance funds. This lack of public support had long-lasting consequences for its operations. Even after exhaustive efforts throughout the 1930s to expand their public profile, it was impossible to catch up to the other museums in terms of popularity. Under the leadership of Alexander J. Wall NYHS inaugurated many new programs designed to increase audiences, such as radio programs, free music concerts, opening the museum on Sundays and holidays, and abolishing admission fees every day except Monday. These programs, including the WPA docent program tripled their attendance from an average of 20,000 at the start of the Depression to 70,000 annually by 1940. Yet, NYHS still lagged way behind MCNY, BMA and the Met in endowment and attendance figures.

At the Museum of the City of New York, a photographer named Berenice Abbott launched a new project which firmly established her reputation and that of the MCNY for

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[479] NYHS, *Quarterly Bulletin*, 24 (April 1939), 12.

chronicling the culture of the city. Her photography exhibit "Changing New York" highlighted the rise of the New York skyline, the growing poverty of the Great Depression, and both native and immigrant popular culture. The success of this exhibit convinced the WPA to fund her continued efforts to capture the city in photographs. The idea for the exhibition as well as the art was hers. In a letter to Director Harding Scholle written in 1931, Abbott laid out her plan for a documentary record of New York:

> The city is greatly uncrystallized and is in the making. To record what remains of its early and various influences, its dramatic contrasts, its rapid state of flux emerging into one big form that is New York, is I am certain of great importance for the future archives of this city.[480]

Indeed, her photographs have become an important record of New York in the 1930s, and have helped define our visual impressions of that period. In addition, her shows at the MCNY introduced a new medium for historical museum exhibitions. It was rare during this period for MCNY or any other museum aside from the Museum of Modern Art to display photographs, and historical museums displaying current photographs was an even more unusual occurrence (Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the Museum of Modern Art's first Director, established a Photography department shortly after he was appointed).[481] Her subject matter was also more inclusive of New York's diverse population than the other MCNY exhibits. Abbott also took on a rare combination of roles: artist, entrepreneur, and administrator.

Berenice Abbott was born in Springfield, Ohio in 1898, and enrolled in 1917 at Ohio State University. In 1918 Abbott quit school and moved to New York's Greenwich Village, where she became interested in photography. Her career was launched after she

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[480] Berenice Abbott to Harding Scholle, New York, November 16, 1931, Berenice Abbott Collection, MCNY.

[481] www.moma.org/about_moma/history/index.html.

took a job with Man Ray as his darkroom assistant. He taught her valuable techniques and gave her encouragement. After a successful period of work in Paris working with Parisian photographer Eugene Atget, Abbott moved back to New York with renewed enthusiasm.[482] Like Atget, she wished to capture images of both past and present on film before the future overtook them.

Her idea sparked the interest of historian Isaac Stokes, who endeavored to help convince MCNY to undertake it. Although Director Scholle was intrigued by the plan, funds were difficult to procure. Her application for a Guggenheim fellowship was denied, as was an application to the New-York Historical Society in 1932. By now, she had christened her project "Changing New York." Although she and Scholle failed to get private funding, her photographs attracted the notice of the Museum of Modern Art and other galleries, who showed some of her work in 1933.[483] Over forty of Abbott's New York photographs were displayed at MCNY from November 1934 to February 1935. A colleague from the Municipal Art League suggested applying to the Federal Art Project.

In 1935, the FAP named Abbott as a supervisor and superintendent for the WPA/FAP and Changing New York became her official project from 1935 to1939. Their sponsorship allowed Abbott to create photographs full time, capturing historic sites that might soon be demolished, and sites that had yet to be defined as historic. She also received a Ford roadster and a staff to drive her around, develop photographs, research and document her subjects.[484] In 1937 MCNY hosted an exhibit of 110 of these photographs.

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[482] Hank O'Neal, *Berenice Abbott: American Photographer* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), 8.

[483] Ibid, 16.

[484] Ibid., 18.

The press release issued for the opening of this exhibit explained that New York City was a place where you can see the "'past jostling the present.'"[485]

> Her photographs are to be ... documents so that future generations can completely reconstruct the world of today even if the world has changed beyond all visual recognition.[486]

No longer content to diagram the past for present generations, MCNY leaders now wished to interpret the present for future generations. The exhibit, they asserted, sought to create a visual record, and "from it the future can read the history of our time in vivid visual images."[487] Visitors to this exhibit would bring their own interpretations of the present, of course, which makes the reception of the exhibit all the more interesting. The present would be interpreted with a view toward how it would be understood as the past, by future visitors or scholars.

The exhibition catalog set the tone for this interpretation with an excerpt from Honore De Balzac on "The City."

> Monstrous marvel ... astounding assemblage of brains and machinery in motion ... City of a Hundred Thousand Romances ... Head of the world ... A monster, indeed is the great city ... Who has not marveled at the dark passages, thy fitful gleams of light, thy deep, soundless blind alleys? ... Students, thinkers, poets, and men of pleasure, who know the art of walking the streets ... reap the harest of delights borne in on the tides of life that ebb and flow within her walls with every hour.[488]

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[485] Press Release, (October 19, 1931) Exhibit Collection, MCNY.

[486] Ibid.

[487] Exhibition Catalog, *Changing New York: Photographs By Berenice Abbott, From the Photography Division -- A Federal Art Project -- Works Progress Administration* (October 20- December 6, 1937), Exhibit Collection, MCNY.

[488] Ibid.

The city they describe is full of shadows and anonymity, but also containing lights and enlightenment. Its scale and complexity dazzle and overwhelm at the same time. The primary component is motion. Those not in motion presumably get left behind when the tide goes out. The exhibition was an attempt to capture this motion with still photographs.

Although many of the pictures do not contain evidence of motion such as speeding cars and street traffic, the contrasting styles of buildings demonstrate constant changes over relatively short periods of time. For example, a photograph of Park Avenue and 39th Street taken in 1936 highlights the varying heights of roofs, from brownstones to skyscrapers. In the foreground is the “House of the Modern Age.” A two-story home built to demonstrate modern style and steel panel construction, the caption reads, “[t]housands of people paid ten cents to see its smart and efficient interior and then it was taken down.”[489] This photograph exemplifies the swift pace of architectural change, and the dramatic contrasts in style between old, present and future visions of New York.

Other photographs focused on immigrant and working-class culture, such as an image capturing the Lebanon Restaurant, taken in 1936, featuring asmall store-front with signs in both English and Arabic. The text below the photograph read,

> Here in the heart of the Syrian district are dispensed shish kebab, stuffed grape and cabbage leaves, baklava and halva, with demitasses of thick black syrupy ‘Turkish’coffee. Not only the signs in Arabic letters reveal the ancient culture of the Near East which the Syrians have brought to America with them, but the very traditions of cooking carry on old habits.[490]

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[489] Elizabeth McCausland, *New York in the Thirties (formerly titled: Changing New York), As Photographed by Berenice Abbott* (New York: Dover Publications, 1939), 5.

[490] Ibid.

Although Lebanese and immigrants from other Middle Eastern countries were latecomers compared to other immigrant groups in America, the text did not stress this point. Rather, Abbott described the effects of immigration by showing the contributions of very old cultures to a relatively new one, American. In this way, even the cultural heritage of the Dutch seems brief. Furthermore, unlike earlier exhibitions at MCNY, Abbott's did not omit African Americans from its documentary history.

Her 1936 photograph titled "Talman Street, Between Jay and Bridge Streets," captures a condemned old-law tenement in Brooklyn. The text noted that it had no hot water, no central heating, and no bathtubs. In a neighborhood once called "Irishtown," blacks now lived side by side with Irish immigrants and their children. It is a bleak picture, with abandoned lots flanking each building in view. Another photograph taken too late to include in the exhibit, but placed on file, depicts a Gay Street brick front house inhabited by Scottish weavers in the early nineteenth century, but which twenty years previously had "the distinction of being the only Negro street in the Washington Square neighborhood."[491] This exhibit and project demonstrated that Harlem was not the only place in New York where African Americans lived and worked. It also highlighted the geographic segregation and mixture by race that divided the city.

Finally, there were the skyscrapers. The name itself jars, suggesting an unnatural growth spurt and its attendant growing pains. A photograph called "Canyon" captures the claustrophobic feeling one gets when staring up at a trio of skyscrapers, in this case at Broadway and Exchange Place. This street is not quite twenty-five feet wide, so the 300 to 400 feet height of the buildings allow very little sunlight into the area. And yet, the name canyon suggests a natural structure, thousands of years old. Others found skyscrapers and the modern machine-age aesthetic to be superficial and representative of the worst sort of materialism. Frank Lloyd Wright sneered:

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[491] Ibid., Gay Street, Nos. 14 and 16.

> New York, so far as material wealth goes, piled high and piling higher into the air, is a commercial machine falsely qualified by a thin disguise. ... The skyscraper envelope is not ethical, beautiful or permanent.[492]

And in the midst of the enduring poverty of the Depression, the skyscraper's grandeur and its pretensions of functionality seemed out of place.[493] Like the rest of the city, this project was ambivalent about the nature of modern architecture and the changing city. The photograph "Washington Square Looking North" depicted the famous arch as dwarfed in size by the apartment building behind it. The caption warned that though the old homes behind the arch had withstood the onslaught of new construction so far, "the skyscraper apartment at No. 1 Fifth Avenue symbolizes the fate the old square may look forward to."[494]

Although Abbott and MCNY leaders wished to record the changes taking place in New York's landscape and help the visitors understand them, they did not always embrace these changes. Some things would be greatly missed. However ephemeral the outline of New York's landscape, Audrey McMahon, regional director of the New York WPA/FAP prophesied that "this superb photography will stand up through the years."[495] Berenice Abbott also introduced a new medium and new subjects for MCNY's exhibits through this popular and pioneering show.

"Changing New York" was not the only activity sponsored by the federal government at MCNY. Between 1934 and 1941, up to sixty FAP employees worked on projects for the MCNY. They installed exhibits, repairing furniture and other artifacts,

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[492] Quoted in Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 17.

[493] Ibid., 169-171.

[494] Ibid.

[495] Audrey McMahon, "New York City and State," in *The New Deal Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs*, ed. by Francis O'Connor, MCNY, 64.

performed guard service, research, bound books, replaced the ventilation system, and photographed objects in the collections. They also greatly aided the education department by building portable history sets for the Educational Department, which traveled to 92 schools in their first year, and by 1937 were studied by 180,000 school children annually. FAP workers also led docent tours. After the Carnegie Corporation's three year grant period that had established the Education Department ended in 1935, the department's Director resigned and there were no funds to run it for the remainder of the year. The WPA, New York City Board of Education, and the Junior League joined forces to run the department for the last few months of the year. [496] In 1937 the WPA helped them film a chronicle of the history of the New York port for their weekly motion picture shows. In 1938 the WPA Adult Education Project began to sponsor classes for young male immigrants from the Lower East Side, some of whom were gypsies from Greece, Turkey, Russia, and Spain. Three years later, the museum hosted an exhibition of photographs of the students' community.

In addition to sponsoring educational programs, the federal government also helped fund music and theater programs at the MCNY. The New York City Works Projects Administration sponsored over thirty concerts at the MCNY year of its existence. In 1934, the first year, these events attracted over 9,000 visitors. Another project, the East Harlem Play Streets Project, consisted of a joint exhibition and play in 1934, and was sponsored by the Civil Works Administration. [497] The Director declared that "without this help much of our progress could not have been achieved."[498] World

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[496] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1935), 22.

[497] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1934), 26.

[498] MCNY, *Annual Report* (1940), 18-19.

War II put a halt to these educational and entertainment projects, as funds dried up with the nation's economy recovering.[499]

The Brooklyn Museum also received WPA aid. The plans for the Brooklyn Museum's Industrial Division (1935-1946) and a Design Laboratory that was officially founded 1947 but received WPA aid much earlier, were based on joint work during the 1920s of Curator Stewart Culin of the Brooklyn Museum and M.D.C. Crawford of *Woman's Wear Daily* magazine.[500] After Culin's death in 1929, Crawford and the museum staff lobbied furiously for their plan for an Industrial Division, which they hoped would become a WPA project. The plan they created involved building a new wing to house the center for industrial design. In a letter to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, Director Youtz argued that an industrial design center would promote American art, stimulate economic recovery, and much more. It would also provide recognition to

> the skilled work of many millions of workers in our American factories. ... I can think of no other project which will do so much for so small an out-lay to accelerate industrial recovery and maintain the ascendancy of American industry.[501]

The plan's sponsors included labor organizations, trade associations, local education groups, and retail houses and manufacturers in the fashion and textile industries.

The principal aims of the proposal favored the salvation of industrial capitalism in the face of growing unrest brought on by the Great Depression. Its supporters wished to accord industrial design the same prestige as hand-crafted design and fine art. They wished to highlight the skilled factory workers' role in the manufacture of art, "to teach the population of our nation to understand and appreciate our industrial civilization," as

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[499] Albert K. Baragwanath, *More Than a Mirror to the Past: The First Fifty Years of the Museum of the City of New York* (New York: The Museum of the City of New York, 1973), 14-15.

[500] Grant Code, "The Changing Museum," *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly,* 14-17.

[501] Philip N. Youtz to Harold L. Ickes, September 6, 1935, BMA.

well as "give school children knowledge of the work of men and machines which is the basis of the modern standard of living."[502]

The architects estimated that it would cost over one million dollars to build, and so the New Deal administrators opted to fund a less ambitious center at the Brooklyn Museum in 1935. No new wing would be constructed. The WPA furnished some workers and funds, but the Industrial Division was housed in a large space in the existing west wing's fifth floor. In addition to stimulating industry and encouraging Americans to appreciate it, the Center was to have a democratic purpose as well. The Brooklyn Museum staff believed the Center would "give industrial art, which affects the entire population of our country, the same recognition which is accorded fine art which can only be afforded by the wealthy few."[503] The Industrial Division and its exhibits represented a significant departure from traditional fine arts leadership to broaden the description of art to include machine-made items produced by millions.

This type of art could be relevant in the lives of those Americans lacking an art history background, exhibits which transformed commonplace household articles into valuable artifacts. Incorporated were the material symbols of the consumer's American dream: fashion, appliances, and furniture. The specific intention of the exhibit designers was to display items of everyday use, recognizable to any consumer. Recent museum critics have accused art museums of continually separating art from everyday life, noting their use of "decontextualization as a strategy of power."[504] Brooklyn Museum Director Philip Youtz identified this problem in the 1930s as "museum- itis."

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[502] Flyer, "Industrial Center of the Brooklyn Museum," BMA, 1935..

[503] Ibid.

[504] Daniel J. Sherman, "Quatremere/Benjamin/Marx: Art Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rotgoff, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 123.

In an essay entitled "Art as Culture History," Youtz argues that the museum objects can have little meaning for the viewer if they are placed in isolation from the cultural environment from which they were created. Life and art should go hand in hand, Youtz declared. He was hopeful about some recent developments in cultural leadership. In particular, he praised the partnership between government and artists in the Federal Art Project, for the ways in which they highlighted the everyday life of the people in the form of art. The Brooklyn Museum's Industrial Division was an attempt to bring art closer to the public.

The Metropolitan Museum leaders also had a positive view of federal sponsorship. In 1935, the MMA applied to the WPA for funds to make changes in the main building. Though that application was denied, the WPA did approve funding for repairs, as well as the construction of two new galleries, through the Parks Department.[505] Their relationship with the FAP began in 1934. The FAP support was crucial in supporting the Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions (mentioned earlier), also known as the Museum on the March, and Caravan of Art, and intended to bring the Met to immigrant neighborhoods. MMA leaders had received many requests to show their collections outside the Museum, and in 1933 they decided to take action. Leaders proposed branch museums as the best method of "reaching the crowded neighborhoods of the underprivileged portions of our population."[506] However, branch museums were costly and difficult to organize, so temporary traveling exhibitions were suggested as alternatives. As noted before, their first year began with three settlement houses and a branch library, and the program was so popular the staff sought to expand it.

In 1934 the WPA provided modelmakers, clerical workers, guards and educational instructors to lead visitors through the galleries. The instructors connected

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[505] MMA, *Annual Report* (1935), 10.

[506] MMA, *Bulletin of the The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (1938), 249.

the exhibits, ranging from 50-400 objects each, to school subjects where possible. This government support continued for over five years, which made it possible for the program to survive and expand. The Neighborhood Exhibits reached Staten Island, Washington Heights, East Bronx, the Lower East Side, Greenwich Village, Harlem, and Fordham. Designed as eight or nine week shows, they proved very popular. Between 1933 and 1938, 1,450,031 people visited these local exhibits. The Metropolitan's spokesmen were only somewhat surprised by the popularity of these shows, which highlighted a wide range of objects drawn from their collections of Ancient Greece, China, Arms and Armor, Egyptian, and Far Eastern Art. Museum trustees and staff were gratified by the popular response to the exhibits, but also grateful for the cooperation of other public institutions. In part due to such cooperation, spokesmen reported that these temporary exhibits "immediately became neighborhood museums, belonging there, promptly absorbed into neighborhood activities."[507] The locations for these traveling shows included branch libraries, a local YMCA, and high schools. Museum leaders declared that the Neighborhood Circulating Exhibits provided new educational opportunities of "immeasurable proportions."[508]

The WPA also provided art instruction in classroom settings under the auspices of the WPA Adult Education Program of the Board of Education (Art Teaching Division). Including the children's classes, 50,000 people received art instruction in New York City alone. The Metropolitan hosted to several of these free classes, and the students' work was shown in two separate exhibits hung in the classrooms. The WPA provided funds and workers to build a new wing for temporary exhibitions, which was completed in 1936, opening with an exhibition of Chinese textiles.

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[507] MMA, *Annual Report* (1936), 37.

[508] MMA, *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,* (1936,) 148.

As part of the World's Fair, the FAP also enlisted the aid of museum personnel to run a program called Art Week. Between November 25 to December 1 of 1938 over 1,000 sales exhibits of artists and craftsman were displayed at the Fair. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt served as honorary national chairman of the National Council for Art Week, and Metropolitan Museum Director Francis Henry Taylor was invited by President Roosevelt to serve as the head of the Council. Taylor announced that Art Week would unleash

> forces that will bring the work of our artists and craftsmen directly to the American home, the church, the business office, the club and other social agencies.[509]

In all, 630 museums and schools took part in Art Week, including Director Harding Scholle of MCNY, who promoted the program in a radio interview along with Director Julianna Force of the Whitney. Over nine million people visited the American Art Today Building where Art Week was featured.

Despite the popularity of FAP and other WPA programs, these faced opposition and controversy by 1938. Texas Congressman Martin Dies had proposed a committee in 1937 to investigate alleged "un-American propaganda," and he soon took on many of the activities of the WPA programs, particularly FAP's. Congress voted overwhelmingly in 1938 to establish what became known as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), and HUAC claimed that FAP projects were rife with Communism. In the midst of a world at war, these allegations undermined support for the WPA and its

[509] Francis Henry Taylor, *Art Week Memerandum*, FAP, NARA, State and Regional Federal Art Project Correspondence, Box 52.

celebration of diverse voices. Congress voted for a budget in 1939 that eliminated funding for FAP projects, and all WPA programs began to be phased out.[510]

The WPA workers were dismissed in 1939, which forced MMA to discontinue several services, including its gallery talks at the Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions. At the end of this year, the Metropolitan's Director, Francis Henry Taylor, reflected on the importance of the local and federal government support they received during the financial crisis. He noted that the "obligation of the Museum to the City and to the Commissioner of Parks, Robert Moses, is great. The help given to the Museum by the Works Progress Administration during the past six years. . . . has been of real value . . ."[511] It is important to note that they did not just thank their benefactors, but that they felt an "obligation" to the public for this support. The FAP had provided badly needed space for new exhibits in their own building, assistance for classroom instruction on the premises, and the personnel, funds and instructors for traveling exhibits. The Metropolitan Museum's tremendous success with these experiments was due in large part to the sponsorship of the FAP, whose goals of democratizing culture mirrored its own.

MCNY, BMA and the Met all received both City and federal funding. NYHS did not receive City support but did garner some WPA support. Museums used the personnel, guidance, and resources of local City funds and agencies, and the Federal Art Project to expand their public programs and profile. City funding encouraged and empowered museums to maintain or increase their level of public service despite declining private sources of revenue. The FAP provided a variety of types of aid. Some

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[510] Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 313-329.

[511] MMA, *Annual Report* (1939), 2-3.

came in the form of clerical and security staff that allowed museums to maintain service. Much of their aid funded innovative programs designed to meet the needs and desires of a wide audience. When the WPA/FAP was liquidated in 1943 all four museums had introduced or expanded Education departments, offering concerts, radio shows, motion pictures, plays, to entertain visitors. Most developed public relations initiatives, including several that designated special departments for these activities. To ensure accessibility, they continued to provide low or nonexistent admission fees, and operating hours on Sundays and holidays. All these initiatives were continued after the WPA was disbanded. Public funding also introduced exhibits and programs highlighting the diversity of New York, and brought traveling exhibits to poor and immigrant neighborhoods. As the New Deal came to an end, not all experimental programs became permanent. Yet, government partnerships with museums set a very visible example of what could be accomplished in bringing the arts and the public together. In comparison to foundation and corporate support, government support required museums to increase public service and improve public accessibility, and provided far more generous and consistent funding to help them achieve these goals.

Conclusion

Leaders representing influential cultural organizations such as the New-York Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art created more welcoming and inclusive public spheres of culture and community for New York's highly diverse population during the turbulent interwar years. In so doing, they became more influential than ever before.

New York institutions played a leading role in the American museum world during the interwar years, launching experiments in educational programming, marketing, and display techniques that benefited other repositories as well. For example, the American Association of Museums' magazine declared that MCNY's Trips and Trails program marked "a new era in the museum function, taking its focus from the past into the present," providing modefls for museums in other cities. [512] The Brooklyn Museum's Rockeller Foundation interne program trained young curators and museum leaders, and sought applicants from other regions to enhance the capacity of less established museums beyond the East Coast. New York City also claimed the largest concentration of Federal Art Project artists and programs, providing experimental fare for communities across the country.

One possible explanation for the eagerness of New York City museum officials to adopt innovation was suggested by Paul Rea, Carnegie's consultant to the Advisory Group on Museum Education. Comparing the attendance records of large, urban museums with those of repositories in smaller communities, Rea found that big city

[512] "Contemporary Life Studied in Museum of New York's Educational Program," in *The Museum News*, 10 (March 1, 1933): 1.

museums had more difficulty competing for audiences than their smaller counterparts. To remedy this, he suggested "the introduction of new and perhaps revolutionary methods of reaching the people."[513]

Some novel techniques tested by New York City's museums included experimentation with contemporary subjects, styles and media, such as the abstract art in Katherine Dreier's Brooklyn Museum exhibition in 1926, or depictions of immigrant communities and homelessness in Berenice Abbott's "Changing New York" Federal Art project. Industrial art, including objects currently on sale in local department stores, was both displayed and cultivated, spurred by the efforts of curator Stewart Culin at the Brooklyn Museum, and Richard Bach at the Metropolitan Museum. A new emphasis on educating and entertaining the public led to innovative programs in art education, public relations, industrial design classes, concerts, motion pictures, radio shows, and traveling exhibitions. Similarly, frustration over the dearth of educational programs led to positive reforms at the New-York Historical Society and the birth of the Museum of the City of New York, a new history museum to tell New York's stories to children, immigrants and the general public.

These innovations were influenced by a widening array of groups. While scholars have primarily focused on individual white male elites' efforts in shaping the early stages of museum development, the preceding chapters illustrate the expanding roles of women, different levels of government, corporations and foundations in New York's repositories during the interwar years. Museum trustees often shared the feeling that New Yorkers

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[513] Paul M. Rea, "How Many Visitors Should Museums Have?" in *The Museum News* 8 (May 1, 1930), 9.

were coming to museums in greater numbers after World War I , and with a more serious purpose, as public programming and public opinion loomed larger in importance.

Women also began to play an increasingly important role during these years. Gifts such as Mary Thompson's bequest to NYHS and the volunteer leadership shown by May Van Rensselaer at NYHS and her Women's Committee of MCNY helped to change the direction of some of New York City's major cultural institutions by the 1920s. Women's contributions during the Depression as volunteers and as relatively poorly paid staff members helped museums to maintain or even improve their public service, despite the economic downturn. As women made important gains as staff members in a variety of divisions, especially as docents, librarians, editors and writers, many used their positions to promote public service and education programs. Though not equally well-paid as men, many were promoted from entry-level clerical jobs to better positions despite a relative lack of professional and advanced degrees. However, with the exception of Anna Gallup, Director of the Brooklyn Institute's Children's Museum, few became part of the managerial staffs, innovations still in the future. BMA's Mrs. Luke Vincent Lockwood was one of the first Executive Committee members in a New York City museum. Women were most influential in less well-established, less conservative and wealthy institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum and MCNY in its early years. Government funding provided an opening wedge for some. For example, the Federal Arts Program (FAP) gave several New York women such as Audrey MacMahon and Berenice Abbott leadership positions and a fair amount of creative freedom that they used to develop new museum programs and exhibitions. While few received recognition or rewards

commensurate with their skills, their presence as staff members, donors and volunteers in most museums grew in size and strength.

The corporate partnerships that developed following World War I were designed to benefit businesses, as well as museums and visitors. Techniques borrowed from advertisers, market surveyors, and department stores created more welcoming museums, and sharply rising attendance figures encouraged museum leaders to continue to implement these reforms. However, alliances with corporations could be a double-edged sword. For example, the corporate donor-driven exhibits in MCNY's new building presaged many of the controversies surrounding corporate philanthropy in the arts today, raising questions about how much control museums should cede to donors over exhibition content. Should they accept money from companies that may have unhealthful or unfair practices? Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, corporate advocacy and sponsorships became increasingly significant, building a lasting legacy of growing importance in the city's cultural life, while introducing a number of gray areas concerning content and control.

Another new form of philanthropic support was foundation funding. During the 1930s the Carnegie Corporation was particularly active, providing funds, oversight, and imagination in promoting programs in a variety of museums. The Rockefeller Foundation also experimented for a few years in this area, creating an important intern program at the Brooklyn Museum that provided hands-on research, curatorial and managerial experience for aspiring museum workers who then moved into repositories around the country. The experiment was such a success that BMA continued it after the Rockefeller Foundation's sponsorship ended.

Government funding was also important during the interwar years, including at the local level. City funding for museums began as early as the nineteenth century in some cases, and included both land grants and annual appropriations. It inevitably came with strings, including requirements for free days, school programs, and enhanced public access, ensuring that repositories would emphasize public service. Though the museums and the city continuously negotiated exactly how these requirements would be carried out, the city won the vast majority of these battles. Municipal funding was perhaps even more influential during the Depression, as competition for public dollars intensified. As BMA's Assistant Director Philip Youtz explained,

> The museum has a strong case for public support. This case, however, can be strengthened by a searching self-appraisal and an energetic policy of increasing the museum's service to the public. If these steps are taken, museums . . . will be in a strategic position to resist threatened cuts in their appropriations.[514]

BMA and other museums followed this policy during the depression by maintaining or increasing services and managed to keep at least some level of funding throughout the crisis. Much of the FAP aid also funded innovative programs designed to meet the needs and desires of the general public, programs that continued after the WPA was disbanded. Public funding also introduced exhibits and programs highlighting the diversity of New York, and brought "the museum to the people" through traveling exhibitions.

Neverthless, some audiences were more welcome than others. Americanization, promoted by May Van Rensselaer and other patriotic society members, was a common theme among museum leaders during and after World War I. Immigrants and their children were therefore considered important potential audiences. Conversely, African

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[514] Ibid., 7.

Americans were excluded from exhibition content and museum positions. With few exceptions (such as Abbott's "Changing New York" photographs of black New Yorkers and their neighborhoods), the topic of race was conspicuously absent from programs, lectures, display cases, and publications. The African art shown in both temporary and permanent exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum by the 1920s was a small step forward, but museums had far to go to fully represent this segment of the city's population, efforts that finally accelerated after the 1960s.

Many important changes had taken place by the onset of World War II in determining what a museum should be and whom it should serve. Rare or nonexistent during the early part of the century, education departments with staff docents, evening hours, classes for students of industrial design and artisans, coordination with public school curricula, and outreach to publicize museum programs were regularly offered at all these museums by 1940. The emphasis on education and public access was put in place by municipal funders as early as the nineteenth century, but only developed fully during the interwar years, changes spearheaded in different ways by women, corporations, foundations, public donors, and even visitors through the use of surveys. The Brooklyn Museum of Art was perhaps the most successful in widening its embrace. Located in an increasingly diverse city of immigrants and their children, heavily dependent on public funding, and less unencumbered by the conservatism of the extremely wealthy trustees across the river, BMA fulfilled its early promise as an institution "For the People, by the People" early on. [515] By 1940, this commitment was also shared to varying degrees by the New-York Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as "sacralization" ceded stage center to more ecumenical visions of museum missions, mandates and public service.

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[515] BIAS, *Yearbook,* (1900), BMA, flyleaf.

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