



VALUING DETROIT'S ART MUSEUM

A History of Fiscal
Abandonment and
Rescue
Jeffrey Abt

Palgrave Studies in American Economic History



Palgrave Studies in American Economic History

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Jeffrey Abt

Valuing Detroit's Art Museum

A History of Fiscal Abandonment and Rescue

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Palgrave Studies in American Economic History
ISBN 978-3-319-45218-0 ISBN 978-3-319-45219-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-45219-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016959016

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Cover illustration: Main floor plan, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1927. From *The Detroit Institute of Arts: The Architecture* (Detroit: DIA, 1928).

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To the
resourceful, hard-working, and ever hopeful
citizens of Detroit*

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NOTE TO THE READER

The museum at the center of this book was established in 1885 as a non-profit corporation called the Detroit Museum of Art. By 1919 its board of trustees had handed over to the City of Detroit its collections and building whereupon the museum was made a municipal department and renamed the Detroit Institute of Arts. The trustees of that nonprofit organization did not dissolve their corporation, however. Instead, they reconstituted it—as a separate entity to lobby and acquire art for the now city-owned museum—under the new name “Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society.” As that nonprofit organization evolved and grew over the following decades it continued modifying the name, eventually dropping “Founders Society” from it (for the complete list of names, see “FS” in the abbreviations list below). Despite these changes, the original nonprofit organization nonetheless remains to this day and it is the entity to which Detroit returned the museum at the end of the city’s bankruptcy. For the sake of clarity I refer to it as the “Founders Society” from its adoption of that moniker in 1920 to the present. Additionally, for much of its existence, the governing body of the Founders Society was a “board of trustees.” It too changed its name at one point to “board of directors.” Here too, for clarity’s sake, I refer to that body as its board of trustees throughout.

Money is a prominent topic in this story and there are many instances when one might wonder what various sums would be in today’s economy. I answer that question in the chapter endnotes by using an internet tool, cited at “CPI” in the abbreviations list below, to provide modern equivalents of those figures. For example, in 1882 a journalist expressed his

hope that several wealthy donors might contribute \$5,000 apiece to create a museum. The endnote documenting this statement includes “\$5,000 = \$119,000 CPI 2014,” indicating the equivalent in today’s economy. “CPI” refers to the Consumer Price Index, which was used as the conversion basis because it is the most relevant for this book; and 2014 is the most recent year for which I could obtain modern equivalents. These are provided through 2012, after which point the differences between then and the point at which this book was completed are negligible. Finally, please note these numbers are rough approximations and should be read as illustrative only.

ABBREVIATIONS

There are abbreviations in the notes following each chapter which are not included in the list below. They are confined to legal-document citations and conform to guidelines in *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation*, 19th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law Review Association, 2010). These citations are nearly all associated with the City of Detroit bankruptcy case and are available, for a fee, through the US Federal Courts' Public Access to Electronic Court Records (PACER) system at <https://www.pacer.gov/> (accessed July 2015). Detroit's case number is 13-53846.

AC	Arts Commission, City of Detroit, 1919–2001
ACM	Arts Commission: Minutes, 1919–2001, RLA, DIA
AVS	Scrapbooks, 1882–1987, RLA, DIA
BOS	William A. Bostick Records, 1946–1976, RLA, DIA
BUR	Clyde H. Burroughs Records, 1906–1946, RLA, DIA
CPI	Consumer Price Index, figures calculated at Samuel H. Williamson, “Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present,” <i>MeasuringWorth</i> (2015), accessed July 2015, http://measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare
CUM	Frederick J. Cummings Records, 1964–1984, RLA, DIA
DIA	Detroit Institute of Arts, 1919/20–present
<i>DIAaBH</i>	William H. Peck, <i>The Detroit Institute of Arts: A Brief History</i> (Detroit: Founders Society Detroit Institute of Arts, 1991)
DMA	Detroit Museum of Art, 1885–1919/20
FS	Founders Society (full name: Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society, 1920–1962; Founders Society Detroit Institute of Arts, 1962–1992; Detroit Institute of Arts Founders Society, 1992–1998; variously Detroit Institute of Arts, The Detroit Institute of Arts,

Detroit Institute of Arts, Inc., 1998–present). Note: Although the nonprofit corporation founded in 1885 to create what is now the DIA has gone through many name changes and adjustments of purpose, it remains the same entity. For a complete list of the changes in name and mission, and the numerous documents associated with those changes, search ID no. 708054 in the database located at, “Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, Corporations Division, Business Entity Search,” State of Michigan, accessed May 2016, http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/bcs_corp/sr_corp.asp

- FST Founders Society: Board of Trustees Minutes, 1883–1998; DIA Board of Directors Minutes, 1998–present, RLA, DIA
- GRI Armand H. Griffith Records, 1882–1913, RLA, DIA
- MAAH Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
- MCA Michigan Council for the Arts (later Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs)
- MotV* Jeffrey Abt, *A Museum on the Verge: A Socioeconomic History of the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1882–2000* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001)
- NEA National Endowment for the Arts
- PAR Maurice D. Parrish Papers, 1989–1998, RLA, DIA
- RCH Edgar P. Richardson Records, 1930–1962, RLA, DIA
- RLA Research Library and Archives (DIA)
- SAC Samuel Sachs II Records, 1985–1997, RLA, DIA
- VAL William R. Valentiner Records, 1921–1945, RLA, DIA
- VG* Julia P. Henshaw, ed., *The Detroit Institute of Arts: A Visitor’s Guide* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1995)
- WDS Willis F. Woods Records, 1962–1973, RLA, DIA

PROLOGUE

Detroit is as synonymous with urban decay and crime as it is with automobiles and Motown music. Once a center of invention and industrial might, becoming the “arsenal of democracy” during the Second World War, the city began declining soon thereafter. Occasional revitalization schemes briefly diverted attention from mounting and unstoppable challenges—deindustrialization and job losses, depopulation and abandoned property, falling tax revenues, and waning municipal services. The downward spiral only quickened after the turn into the twenty-first century and few were surprised when Detroit sought bankruptcy protection in 2013. But observers *were* startled when word spread that the city’s nearly 130-year-old art museum, one of America’s largest and finest, was a municipal asset and that it might be sold to settle the city’s debts. This book traces the history of the museum from its founding in 1885 through Detroit’s emergence from bankruptcy in 2014, its survival thanks largely to a “Grand Bargain” based on the art collection’s monetary value.

Beginning as the Detroit Museum of Art, an independent nonprofit like America’s other major museums, it struggled to pay its bills from the outset and in 1919 the museum’s trustees turned it over to Detroit. Reborn as the Detroit Institute of Arts, it benefitted from the city’s prosperity during that era, receiving generous sums to acquire major artworks and construct an innovative new building. The city was cheered on by the founders who continued their nonprofit organization to lobby officials on the museum’s behalf and encourage private art donations. The Depression and slow post-Second World War recovery, however, forced the museum into competition with other city services such as police and

fire protection. When its cultural value was weighed against pressing social needs, the museum invariably lost out, setting a pattern that continued, even after its support was taken over by the State of Michigan in the mid-1970s. Nonetheless, the founding organization continued to acquire masterpieces and spearhead building expansions, helping the museum earn an international reputation for the quality of its collections, exhibitions, publications, and educational programs. Over time the Detroit Institute of Arts grew into one of America's largest and most highly regarded art museums. But unlike its peer institutions it remained dramatically under-endowed and overly dependent on government funding which, when slashed during recessions, forced gallery closures, staff layoffs, and curtailed exhibitions and educational programs. A capital campaign for yet another round of building renovations, expansions, and a visionary reinstallation of the collections in the mid-2000s failed to address those underlying problems. A new source of government funding, this time a regional tax levy, bought time to boost the museum's endowment starting in 2012. And then Detroit went bankrupt.

The museum's collection—particularly that portion acquired with City of Detroit funds—was discovered to be one of the city's most valuable and potentially liquid assets. As creditors, including municipal-employee pension funds, began closing in on the museum to recover their losses, a debate erupted once again over the museum's cultural value in the context of urgent social needs. The debate was fueled by the readiness and wealth of a global art-investment industry poised to sweep in and purchase the museum's holdings, as well as uncertainty over presumptive legal safeguards for this “public trust.” While many features of the story are unique to the Detroit Institute of Arts, others are relevant for nonprofit and municipal art museums in America, and government-run museums globally.

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The Detroit Museum of Art

THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO GIVE

Little in Detroit's origins suggests it might create one of America's largest and most distinguished art museums. The city began as a settlement along the western side of a waterway that became a route for westward expansion and trade through the chain of "great lakes" from the Atlantic coast to the American interior. Eventually called the Detroit River, it not only connects Lake St. Clair on the north with Lake Erie toward the south, it also provides a comparatively narrow crossing point from the east—now the Canadian province of Ontario—to the west—now Michigan. The strategic importance of this intersection of water and land passages was first recognized by French explorers who established a frontier trading post and fortification there in 1701 that came to be known as Detroit two years later. For another sixty years the French governed the slowly growing settlement until it was conquered by the British who remained more or less in control until they were forced out by the United States during the War of 1812.

Due to the uncertainties of changing governance and a devastating fire in 1805, Detroit grew only haltingly during the remainder of the nineteenth century. By 1870, its population was just shy of 80,000, placing it eighteenth among American cities and well back of its nearest neighbors, Chicago with nearly 300,000 citizens and Cincinnati with around 216,000. The statistics for the largest cities underscore a confluence of

industrialization, rail lines, trade, and growing populations which in turn buoyed expanding economies that concentrated wealth in the hands of a rising class of manufacturers, mercantilists, and financiers. Though circumstances varied from one city to another, in each a vision of urban improvements shared by business, opinion, and political leaders fostered the creation of cultural and social amenities including libraries, orchestras, parks, hospitals, and other charitable institutions. Soon several of the nation's largest cities added art museums. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston were founded in 1870, what would become the Philadelphia Museum of Art was started in 1876, and the Art Institute of Chicago was begun in 1879.¹

Although Detroit was still comparatively small by the early 1880s, remaining eighteenth in size and with barely over 116,000 residents, the city fathers began contemplating the creation of their own art museum. Detroit's water and rail shipments of Michigan grain, lumber, and minerals—especially iron and copper—were spurring an economy that seemed poised for further growth. It was home to over 900 factories, foundries, and machine shops providing a variety of goods ranging from agricultural products to iron and steel manufactures. They fostered an expanding industrial base that soon came to include shipbuilding; wheel works; and before long the production of stoves, railway cars, pharmaceuticals, paint, furniture, and clothing. These enterprises were led by an increasingly wealthy and ambitious community of entrepreneurs who, like peers in other cities, hoped to create local versions of the finer accouterments of European urbanity they came to value through higher education and travel abroad. Their prosperity, knowledge, and optimism about Detroit's future were essential ingredients for gauging the city's museum potential. They did so by organizing a temporary "Art Loan Exhibition" to test public interest.

The initiative was launched in 1882 by William H. Brearley and backed by James Scripps—both newspapermen. Brearley (1849–1909) was a Civil War veteran who came to Detroit in 1872 to be advertising manager for Scripps's *Detroit Tribune* and who subsequently held the same position at Scripps's *Detroit Evening News* (now the *Detroit News*) for which he also occasionally wrote. In 1887 Brearley left Scripps to purchase the *Detroit Journal*, a rival evening paper, and to organize the American Newspaper Publishers' Association. Scripps (1835–1906), born in London, England to second-generation bookbinders and publishers, immigrated to America with his parents. He later began his newspaper career as a proofreader

and reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and subsequently moved east to become editor of Detroit's *Daily Advertiser*, a paper he soon purchased, later merging it with the *Detroit Tribune*. He continued on to begin the *Detroit Evening News* which quickly attained a circulation surpassing all the other Detroit papers combined, a success that yielded the resources for his family to form the nationwide Scripps newspaper chain.

Brearley proposed the loan exhibit idea to Detroit's citizens in an unsigned *Evening News* article in which he linked the prospect of a successful temporary exhibition to the creation of a "permanent art museum." The potential for that next step was greater than most readers knew. Scripps had already confided to Brearley that his will contained a \$25,000 bequest for a museum. Brearley imagined Detroit achieving "a pre-eminence among the cities of the west in ... the fine arts" and responded to Scripps with plans for achieving it. He recommended assembling "with system and profound judgement" a selection of works by "every American painter, living or dead, who has attained to a certain standard of fame," copies of "noted works of the old masters," and "original works by the great modern European painters."²

If the loan exhibit were successful, Brearley believed it would inspire leading Detroit citizens who possessed "the judgment, skill and energy necessary" to establish a museum. Ideally several "liberal men" would contribute \$5,000 each and thereby the "burden and honor of equipping and maintaining the institute will be widely distributed." This kind of civil-society log-rolling was well established in America by then as famously observed by nineteenth-century French visitor Alexis de Toqueville: "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial ... companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive," all based on "pursuing in common the object of their common desires." Brearley's confidence the loan exhibition's success would become the foundation for a museum was reasonable provided "there are men in Detroit ready and eager to go on with the superstructure."³

Brearley's other observations regarding art and civic prominence, the breadth and incremental development of collections, use of copies, and private philanthropy reflect patterns in American museum development during the period. At least some of his insights came from visiting other institutions in 1882, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Similarly, his notion of using a loan exhibition to lay the groundwork for

a museum was almost certainly borrowed from Cleveland and Cincinnati. Loan shows were presented in both cities in 1878, the latter's leading to the Cincinnati Art Museum's founding in 1881. Detroit's version, presented in 1883, succeeded by all measures. It attracted nearly 5,000 loans, including many noteworthy artworks along with numerous curiosities; was attended by about 135,000 visitors (Fig. 1.1); yielded a modest profit; and stimulated the public enthusiasm for a more enduring art display sought by Brearley and Scripps.⁴

Anticipation of the loan exhibition's success inspired a \$10,000 pledge during the show's planning from Thomas W. Palmer who stipulated that it be matched with another \$30,000 of donations. Son of a successful merchant, Palmer (1830–1913) began a lumber firm in 1853 that earned

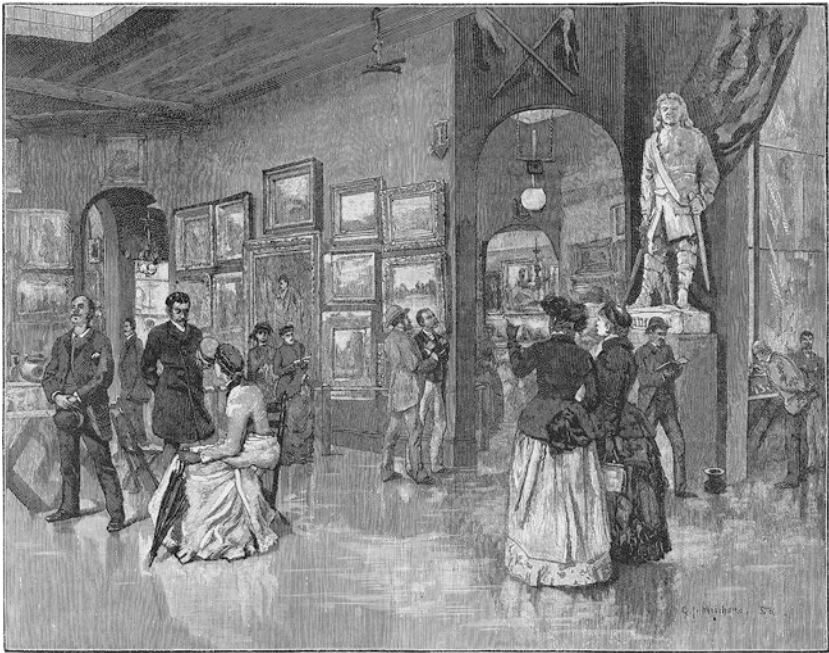


Fig. 1.1 “The Detroit Art Exhibition,” from *Harper’s Weekly: Journal of Civilization*, vol. 27, no. 1397 (29 September 1883): 621. The wood engraving is based on a drawing by Detroit artist Gari (Garibaldi Julius) Melchers (1860–1932).

him a considerable fortune. He became interested in politics with the Republican party's birth in 1854. After serving five years on Detroit's Board of Estimates, he was elected state senator in 1878, and in 1883 he was chosen to complete the term of a US senator. Palmer was appointed US minister to Spain in 1889, and in 1890 he was named a commissioner of the World's Columbian Exhibition, later being chosen its president.⁵

By early January 1884, shortly after the Art Loan Exhibition's conclusion, Brearley raised the matching funds from thirty individuals who contributed \$1,000 each. In February he convened a meeting of the donors to begin organizing the museum and selecting a site for its future home. Committees were established, a probable fund-raising need of \$100,000 was discussed, and the name "Detroit Museum of Art" (DMA) was selected. However, to collectively pool and use current and future donations, buy and retain art and land, hire and pay staff, conduct all the other business activities of a museum, and enable it to be self-perpetuating in accordance with American law and organizational tradition, the founders had to establish a corporate entity—ideally one that was not, like commercial enterprises, for profit-making purposes.⁶ But there was a hitch. Michigan's statutes lacked a provision for creating nonprofit corporations dedicated to art. One of the donors who was also a lawyer took it upon himself to prepare the necessary legislation and in May a draft "Bill for the Formation of Corporations for the Cultivation of Art" was ready for approval by the state legislature. The text was published in a booklet that, perhaps to validate local plans, included an appendix of articles of incorporation and legal agreements establishing other cities' museums in previous years.⁷

The bill reached the state legislature in January 1885, was approved by both houses, and signed into law a month later whereupon the DMA's founders drafted and approved articles of incorporation. Although they set up an eight-member board of trustees, the founders functioned as something between corporate shareholders and a membership group that convened for annual meetings or to vote on major decisions. In comparison to the founders and first trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, or the Art Institute of Chicago, for example, the DMA's incorporators and trustees did not, by virtue of organizational design or shared cultural values, represent a particular configuration of interests. Detroit at the time did not have an array of cultural or educational institutions whose professional leadership could be tapped to help guide the DMA, as was the case in Boston, and there was no pattern of trustee board service shared

with other institutions to shape a community-wide cultural ideology as occurred in Chicago.⁸

After incorporating, the founders turned to fund-raising for their museum's building and collection. They undertook several schemes to meet their tentatively agreed-upon \$100,000 goal, including a benefit and mail solicitation. A fund-raising flyer focusing on collection development was aimed at those thinking about memorializing themselves or friends. Rather than erecting "costly monuments for themselves in cemeteries, where few ever see them," stones that will "become discolored, neglected, forgotten, and utterly useless," the flyer's recipients ought to consider a more "suitable and permanent memorial": "a fine work of art, labeled with its title and the name of the donor," installed in a "gallery, where for centuries it would have the best of care." Potential contributors were offered four options: purchasing and donating a work while they were still alive and could enjoy the sight of their philanthropy, giving cash for the same purpose, including the museum in a will, or buying a life insurance policy and designating the museum as the beneficiary.⁹

The \$100,000 goal was met in March 1886 with more than 1900 gifts from individuals, businesses, community service organizations, employee groups, and school classes. The money in hand, securing an appropriate site and selecting an architect was next. The site was settled when a plot at the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Hastings Street near the Detroit River was donated. In November, the trustees authorized an architectural competition, specifying a fireproof building not to exceed \$40,000 in cost. A committee of three Detroit architects evaluated fifty-two proposals and in March 1887 recommended a design by James Balfour (1852–1917) of Hamilton, Ontario. Bids were let in May, and Balfour's Richardsonian Romanesque design, replete with turrets and heavily rusticated stonework, was completed in July 1888. Though imposing from the outside, the museum's comparatively spare interiors and modest 8,000 square foot size found further expression in its opening which occurred with little fanfare the following September (Fig. 1.2).¹⁰

The museum charged admission fees from the outset, following a well-established practice among American art museums by the late 1800s—most European museums of the era were admission-free. The Metropolitan Museum of Art charged admission on two weekdays when it opened its first purpose-built structure in 1880 and was free on Saturdays (it did not open on Sundays until 1891); the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, required admission fees on weekdays when it opened its own building in 1876 and



Fig. 1.2 Detroit Museum of Art, designed by James Balfour (1852–1917, completed 1888) (Courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts). This photograph, taken in 1924 looking toward the main entrance from across Jefferson Avenue, also shows two additions to the rear of the building: the first, in dark stone, starting just beyond the chimney stack to the *left* (completed in 1894); the second, attached to the end of the first addition and in light brick (completed in 1905). The building was destroyed in 1960 to clear space for a freeway.

was admission-free on weekends from the beginning. The specifics of the DMA’s policy are unclear. It charged admission fees for special exhibits every day, but general admission may have been free on weekends, at least by the late 1880s. The prevalence of fees in America may be a legacy of the nation’s nineteenth-century proprietary or “dime” museums, the most celebrated example being P. T. Barnum’s American Museum in New York. If for-profit museums could rely on admission fees to enrich their owners, surely nonprofit ones could rely on fees to cover costs. That was certainly the calculation in Detroit, but the museum suffered its first deficit the year its building opened.¹¹

A few months after the DMA's opening John Ward Dunsmore (1856–1945), an Ohioan who trained as a painter, was appointed its first director. He began mounting exhibitions, acquiring works of art and reproductions, including a large collection of plaster casts of Greek and Roman statuary, customary for the time (Fig. 1.3). Dunsmore lasted only a short time, however, and for nearly a year a trustees committee managed the museum's affairs. In early 1891, the trustees appointed Armand H. Griffith (1860–1930) acting director. Griffith, who was the board of trustees' secretary, attended Wesleyan and Wittenberg Colleges without earning degrees, and he briefly studied painting in Düsseldorf, Germany. Before arriving in Detroit he pursued several occupations, including newspaper reporting, acting, photography, and sign painting. By 1893



Fig. 1.3 “Statuary Court,” Detroit Museum of Art, ca. 1890 (Courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts). The sculptures are plaster casts after well-known original ancient Greek and Roman statuary, including the *Apollo Belvedere* (far right) and the *Laocoön Group* (third from right).

Griffith had earned the trustees' confidence and was appointed director (Fig. 1.4).¹²

Despite the leadership changes, the museum began building its collection with gifts that ranged from Scripps's donation of eighty old master

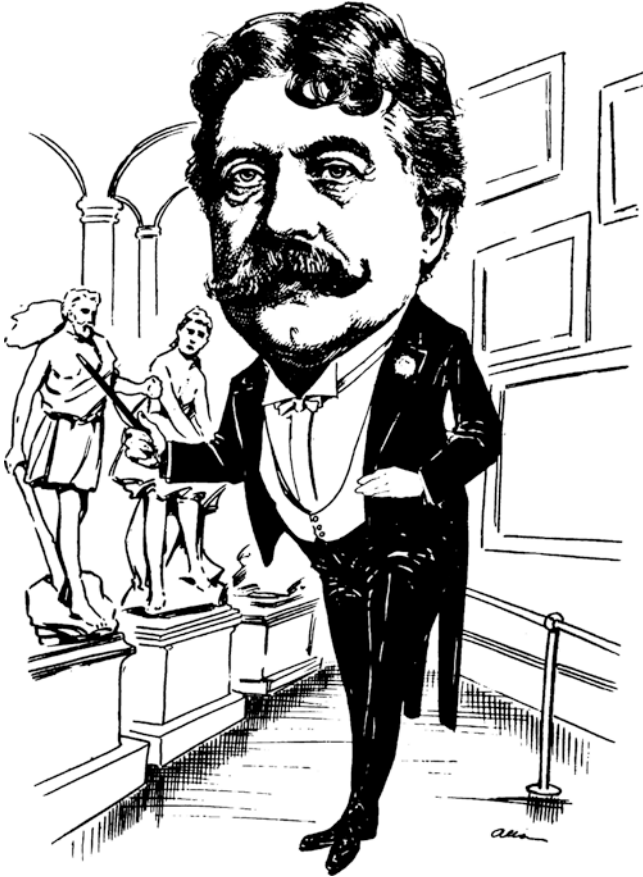


Fig. 1.4 Armand H. Griffith, ca. 1905, from Newspaper Cartoonists' Association of Michigan, *A Gallery of Pen Sketches in Black and White of Our Michigan Friends "as we see 'em,"* ed. by C. O. Youngstrand (Detroit: Wm. Graham Printing Co., 1905), 60. The drawing is by A. G. Allan, then a cartoonist for the *Detroit Free Press*.

paintings—including major works by Dutch, Flemish, and Italian artists (Fig. 1.5)—to Frederick K. Stearns’s gift of over 10,000 Near Eastern and East Asian objects, natural science specimens, and “curiosities.” Attendance, on the other hand, did not meet the trustees’ expectations, with only 16,030 visitors in 1890 in comparison to the nearly 135,000 who attended the Art Loan Exhibition in 1883. Admission-fees income was lower than expected, the trustees failed to fill the gap—perhaps due to a national recession during 1890–1891, and as the museum’s income fell further behind its operating costs rising deficits loomed. The trustees thought the City of Detroit might help and in early 1892 they formally petitioned the city council for \$5,000 per year in exchange for offering another free-admission day. They based their appeal on the museum’s being “educational in the highest sense” and therefore, like “schools and colleges,” it ought to “have the fostering care of the state or municipality.” The trustees feared opposition over the allocation of public funds to their



Fig. 1.5 Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), *The Meeting of David and Abigail*, ca. 1625–28, oil on canvas, 1.8 × 2.5 m (70.25 × 98 in.), gift of James E. Scripps, 89.63 (Courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts/Bridgeman Images).

museum because, though public in purpose, it was still a private nonprofit corporation. They cited possible justifications in Michigan law, as well as the examples of other cities which supported their museums including New York and Cincinnati. The city council referred the petition to its ways and means committee where it languished.¹³

Public response was mixed. Those objecting did indeed argue the city's charter prohibited allocations to private institutions and that if the city began supporting the museum, what would prevent other similar entities, no matter how worthy, from seeking assistance? The trustees sidestepped the "slippery slope" argument but agreed that the city charter was an obstacle and hoped to amend it. Another problem was their failure to explain why \$5,000 was needed, a sum others noted was far higher than necessary to provide a day's free admission each week for a year. The trustees admitted it was based on the current year's operating deficit and recast their petition by offering free admission every day. The revised proposal was approved and in September 1893 the museum began receiving operating funds from Detroit.¹⁴

Emboldened by that support the trustees began planning a building addition because the pace of acquisitions was crowding the galleries. While negotiations over municipal support were still underway, the trustees estimated they needed to add two wings that would more than double the museum's space at a cost of approximately \$36,000. They launched a campaign to fund the additions but fell short by \$16,000. The Detroit Scientific Association, which needed space for its collection, agreed to lease part of one of the planned wings and finish its interior construction. The deal permitted the trustees to proceed and the additions were completed in late 1894, more than doubling the museum's size to 18,000 square feet. The science collections were odd occupants for an art museum, but their arrival fit Griffith's interpretation of the museum's mission which emphasized its educational function along with any materials that might be both popular and pedagogically useful. Despite the museum's articles of incorporation, which specified its purpose as collecting paintings, sculpture, drawings, and "other works of art," Griffith welcomed natural history specimens and artifacts of all types that might capture the public's interest. The museum's rising attendance justified his catholic approach which he augmented with increasingly popular Sunday-afternoon lectures that Griffith—by all accounts a captivating speaker—began offering in 1893. His lectures, on such topics as "the history and development of clothing, ... table manners, fashions, and ... home decoration," further

broadened the museum's appeal, but at the risk of alienating art collectors who felt the museum's acquisitions and programs were straying from its "art purposes."¹⁵

Although attendance reached nearly 100,000 by 1896, the museum's income dwindled as trustees ceased their donations of, and efforts to raise, operating funds, focusing on acquisitions instead. The following year the City of Detroit became the DMA's sole backer by default, but its annual \$5,000 allocation was no longer sufficient. With nowhere else to turn, Griffith appealed to the city council for an increase to \$8,000. Council members expressed concern about the additional funds being used for art purchases, however, and Griffith replied the money was not "to buy pictures, but to pay the necessary running expenses" because the museum now relied on the trustees for art donations or acquisitions made with "private subscriptions." The council authorized the increase provided the museum maintain its free-admission policy and a division of responsibilities between the city and the private sector began taking shape: the former would cover the museum's day-to-day operating expenses and the latter would pay for art. The city's annual appropriations remained at \$8,000 through 1899, when a state legislator, on the museum's behalf, marshaled into law a city-charter revision erasing the prohibition against city allocations to private institutions. Six months later the museum requested and received an increase to \$12,000. The request and its approval formally affirmed the shared responsibilities: "If the people are willing to donate works of art" to the museum, it's the city's duty "to house, take care of and make the collections available for the enlightenment and education of the people." The once de facto arrangement whereby the trustees paid for art acquisitions in exchange for the city covering the museum's operating costs was now official.¹⁶

The boost in city funds encouraged the trustees and Griffith to revisit an idea he brought up a few years earlier: an auditorium addition. Raising the estimated \$50,000 for it was thought to be a minor matter and the trustees' president vowed the sum "will be raised by subscriptions from the good people of Detroit; ... I am willing to put my hand in my pocket as deeply as possible to accomplish this." There is no evidence a campaign was launched, however, and once again the trustees turned to the city for help. This time they did so by taking advantage of Detroit's charter revisions, underway in 1902, drafting a new provision permitting the city to build the addition. Leery of legal challenges, however, they had a friendly state legislator propose a workaround in case the city's initiative fell