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GIFT TO MUSEUM: Carnegie House, with the land it occupies on Fifth Avenue from 90th to 91st Street, has been given to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum by the Carnegie Corporation. It will be remodeled for use by the museum.

Carnegie House Given to Cooper-Hewitt Museum

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The Carnegie House and property on Fifth Avenue from 90th to 91st Street, valued at about $8-million, has been given to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum by the Carnegie Corporation.

The fate of the decorative-arts museum has been a cultural cliff-hanger since 1963, when it was ousted by the Cooper Union and then rescued by a citizens' committee and the Smithsonian Institution in 1967.

But now, with the Carnegie gift, a $500,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, $92,000 for a conservation labaratory from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and a tidy bundle of smaller grants and gifts, the museum's future seems assured.

The museum, which includes such riches as 442 Winslow Homers (22 paintings, 287 drawings and 133 prints), will be vastly expanded in concept to include everything from objets d'art to environmental design. The landmark building will be remodeled—restored in part—to accommodate this new kind of institution.

Museum staff members and consultants have spent the last year in concentrated analysis, under a grant from the State Council on the Arts, deciding policy and programs for the 75-year-old collection.

The curatorial staff has been occupying a smaller house on the Carnegie site while preparing for the move into the mansion. Before the Carnegie Corporation gift, the arrangement was a long-term lease with option to buy at "fair market value."

With the approximately $8-million market value of this prime piece of real estate, the museum's assets, including land, buildings, collection and equipment, are conservatively calculated at $85-million.

With a final $5-million for conversion, installation and programing being sought now in a fund-raising drive, the "new" museum — a radically revamped treasure house of the arts of design — could move into its permanent home some time next year.

The Cooper-Hewitt's sponsors and staff, headed by Lisa Taylor, and the architects for the conversion, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, are cautiously euphoric.

The Cooper Union, now Cooper-Hewitt, Museum was founded in 1897 by the Hewitt sisters, granddaughters of Peter Cooper. Its valuable arts and artifacts have formed one of the world's most distinguished and unusual "working" or reference collections, ranging

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CARNEGIE HOUSE GIVEN TO MUSEUM

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from hundreds of drawings by Daniel Huntington to wallpaper designs (4,000 items, including designs for the Brighton Pavilion).

In 1963, the museum was disowned and faced with dismemberment by a financially hard-pressed Cooper Union, whose architecture students were more involved with urban problems than ormolu. Then the Metropolitan Museum offered to buy the collection, but the merger was stopped by public protests that the move would threaten the identity and integrity of the collection.

Had the Metropolitan Museum succeeded, it would have gotten a fantastic grab-bag bargain. More than 2,000 Frederick Church sketches, for example, at the time valued routinely at $200 each, must now be insured for $5,000 each. The museum was finally adopted by the Smithsonian Institution in 1967.

The alliance with the Smithsonian gives advantages of status, scholarship and collections, but no cash. It is still a private museum without Federal subsidy. But the affiliation makes the Cooper-Hewitt the national museum of design, like London's Victoria and Albert and Paris's Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

Its resources, often comparable to those museums, include about 1,500 examples of ceramics, more than 500 pieces of glass, 300 kinds of woodwork, 250 pieces of furniture, more than 10,000 textiles and 30,000 drawings. They span 3,000 years of artistic production.

Working Man's Museum

The old Cooper Union Museum was a working man's, or working designer's, museum, open at night with every item available for reference. This will not change. The new museum will still be a study collection, with all of its possessions accessible to the public at all times under curatorial guidance.

In its new home, the museum also promises to be chic, beautiful and social—an elegant and rich resource of New York cultural life.

The remodeled mansion will house, in addition to the study collections and a library, conservation and photographic laboratories, a children's environment center, a media center, a museum shop and restaurant and studios and workshops. There will be exhibitions, film showings, theatrical events and lunch with a view of the park.

The collection will be expanded and brought up to date. Presently rich in 18th- and 19th-century objects it will seek 20th-century equivalents.

Since originals are less important in mass-produced articles, images as well as objects will be added. Information banks of photos and film will broaden the definition and range of design from arts and crafts to much of the man-made environment, including architecture, industrial and urban design. Studies are being made of retrieval systems.

In addition to a year of design consciousness-raising sessions for policy and programs, the staff and consultants have held two "think-tank" meetings here and in Paris, a kind of stock-taking that other institutions could envy.

The process has led to "the invention of a new institution," according to the architect, Hugh Hardy. "A museum concept can be a little sloppy, like motherhood," he says. "We're after a heightened public awareness of the synthetic environment."

The Carnegie House is a six-story, 64-room, neo-Georgian mansion built by Babb, Cook and Willard in 1901. Shortly after Mrs. Carnegie's death in 1946, it was leased to the Columbia School of Social Work for 20 years.

It was never an imperial house, such as the Vanderbilts constructed. Its chief beauty, then and even more now, is a handsome substantiality and a spacious garden.

The basement hums with new mechanical systems that are replacing an extraordinary array of devices installed by Andrew Carnegie, ranging from an artesian well, electrical generator and gigantic coal furnaces stoked in rows to primitive air conditioning through water-soaked cheesecloth filters. The machines, gauges and dials, made of solid iron and brass, mounted in marble on floors of Italian tile, are a design museum in themselves.

On the floors above, the chief architectural features are either wood paneling, or in Mr. Hardy's words, touches of "chewing gum French," with large, regular rooms leading to a lovely conservatory. The interiors will be selectively remodeled or restored intact where the best details remain. These decisions are a formidable challenge.

At present, Andrew Carnegie's plain wood roll-top desk—evidently not worthy of the Parke Bernet auction with the rest of the original furniture—stands in the otherwise empty house, in a small library workroom decorated with painted maxims about thrift, virtue and the joys of the mind.

Next come the totems of a consumer society and the joys of the eye.