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## **LET THE NEW FRICK FLOWER**



Here is a tale of old New York whose ending is soon to be written.

Pittsburgh's Henry Clay Frick, chairman of Carnegie Steel, was a robber baron who ordered hundreds of armed Pinkertons to attack Homestead Steel strikers in 1892, producing mass casualties.

In 1905, the "Most Hated Man in America" moved here with hopes of rehabilitating his image. After renting the Vanderbilt mansion on Fifth Ave., Frick purchased the Lenox Library in 1912, whose collection had just moved to the new New York Public Library on Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.

The Lenox Library was such a fabulous building that Frick offered to pay to move the structure wherever the city might want it located. When the public squabbled over a new site, Frick tore down the Lenox, built his dream house on the site and filled it with the world's finest art.

After Frick died in 1919, his wife lived among works by Rembrandt, Velázquez, Vermeer, El Greco and Goya until her own death in 1931. Then, after modifications, the building opened as a museum in 1935 and has since housed the great Frick Collection at Fifth Ave. and 70th St.

Starting in 1940, the museum's trustees begin to envision expansion. Between then and 1972, they purchased three adjacent townhouses but failed to raise sufficient capital for a major expansion. Instead, they settled for a modest new entrance and created a garden that can be viewed from the street but not visited.

Now, the trustees say they have the funds for their long-planned upgrade — but architects and community activists say the Landmarks Preservation Commission must save the garden because the neighborhood is designated a historic district.

Here is preservationism run amok: A privately owned garden must be kept a garden forever rather than let a top cultural institution to add gallery, lecture and education space while integrating the museum with the Frick Art Reference Library.

Plus improve access for people with disabilities, who enter the museum via a below-grade service ramp used for garbage, with those in larger motorized wheelchairs having to change to smaller wheelchairs to get into century-old elevators.

Plus create a new garden that is more than half the size of the present one and that visitors will be able to actually enter.

While the locals love the garden as it is, the time has come to let the new Frick flower.