



WHY WAS THE MET BUYING HISTORIC ROOMS?

These buildings were caught up in the early 20th-century preservation movement that led to the Met's purchase of this room's woodwork. This movement was sparked by a worldwide rise in industrialism, urbanization, and nationalism. It resulted in hundreds of historic buildings' interiors being removed and put on display as backdrops in museums.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, industrialization swept the world, bringing with it substantial changes. Mass production and electricity gave rise to large factories, and populations quickly shifted from farms to urban centers. As with any change, people felt their traditional ways of life threatened, and the flood of immigrants to fill new jobs only increased this fear. A spirit of nationalism grew in countries around the world as societies struggled to maintain their national identity during massive change.

It was within this context that the idea of featuring period rooms began, first in Europe and then in the United States. The Met was one of the first to experiment with this model in the United States. In 1909, as part of a state-wide anniversary celebrating the history of New York, the Met arranged a period room exhibit, "The Hudson-Fulton Exhibition of American Industrial Arts." It featured Colonial decorative arts - furniture, ceramics, and silver - with one display using the backdrop of a fireplace wall from an 18th-century Connecticut farmhouse. The result was a nostalgic look at the founding of the region and country, incorporating patriotic symbols and romanticizing early America. The exhibit was a huge success, drawing around 300,000 visitors in ten weeks. The Met immediately began plans to build a new American collection by acquiring historic architectural rooms in which to display the nation's decorative arts.



This postcard depicts parade float from the Hudson-Fulton Celebration. Postcards created by the Hudson-Fulton Celebration Commission

Collection of Gadsby's Tavern Museum



Chairman of the Committee on American Decorative Arts R.T.H. Halsey sent Met Curator Durr Friedley to travel the country in search of rooms. In a letter between the two, Halsey specifically suggested, “*We must only put beautiful rooms in the new wing...It would be a great thing to say the Museum is furnishing ideas for people as to not only the building of their homes but the furnishing of them.*” In addition to beauty, Halsey sought rooms associated with great figures in American history. He believed if contemporary Americans, both long-time citizens and recent immigrants, could experience the decorative arts of the country’s founders, they would gain a greater appreciation for the ideals they should be emulating in their own lives.