

## The Carnegies at Home

Steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie's palatial mansion on Prospect Hill (now Carnegie Hill Historic District in New York City) belies his humble beginnings in his native Scotland. Mr. Carnegie was born on November 25, 1835 in the attic of a small one-story house in Dunfermline "of poor but honest parents, of good kith and kin," as he wrote in his autobiography. His "rags to riches" story is legendary, as is his philanthropy, still in effect today through many foundations. The number of homes he owned might be considered equally legendary, from Georgia to Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New York, and of course his beloved Scotland.



Louise and Andrew Carnegie at a children's playground, New York City. Copyright Bettmann/CORBIS.

It was at his home in New York City on East 91<sup>st</sup> Street where Mr. Carnegie was perhaps the most happiest, with his wife Louise (1857-1946) and their daughter Margaret (1897-1990). In 1907 Mr. Carnegie wrote "It is now twenty years since Mrs. Carnegie entered and changed my life...my life has been made so happy by her that I cannot imagine myself living without her guardianship."

## A Happy Home

The house where they spent the last years of their married life was a testament to Mr. Carnegie's interest in technology and construction. He wanted "the most modest, plainest and roomiest house in New York" with land for his wife to garden. Mr. Carnegie took an active role in the construction of his 64 room houses, designed by New York architects Babb, Cook and Willard. Central air conditioning, telephones, and a passenger elevator were among the many innovations included in the house. For her part, Mrs. Carnegie met often with the architects and decorators to ensure they designed and furnished a house that would be welcoming to visitors and above all, enjoyed by friends and family.



The south facade of the Carnegie's New York residence with the extensive garden, 1903. Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.



The state-of-the-art boilers in the basement. Courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

Every morning Walter C. Gale, a renowned church organist, would arrive and begin to play the massive Aeolian organ in the main hallway, its pipes extending through three floors. The music drifted to the second floor bedrooms of the Carnegies where they were gently wakened by their favorite tunes. The house was brought to life each day by the twenty servants of whom Mr. Carnegie wrote “no man is a true gentleman who does not inspire the affection and devotion of his servants.”



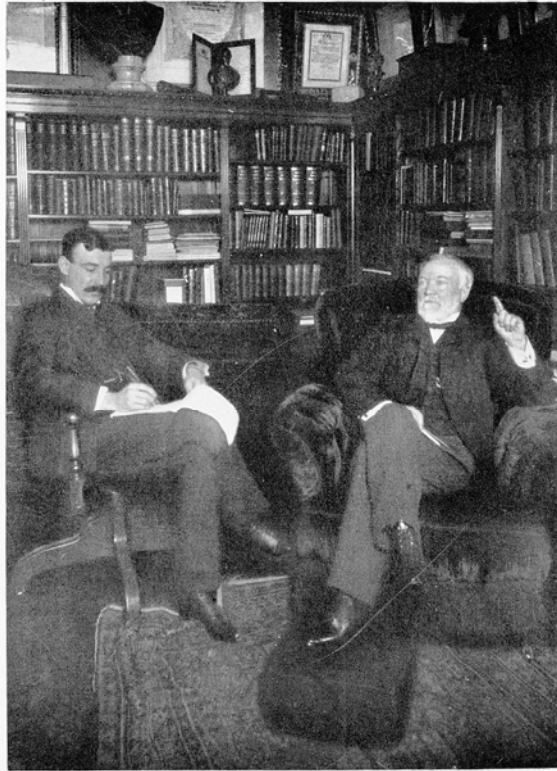
The Aeolian organ at the east end of the entrance hall. Copyright Bettmann/CORBIS.



The staircase in the entrance hall led to the Carnegie's bedrooms. Courtesy the Museum of the City of New York.



Mrs. Carnegie's boudoir on the second floor. Courtesy the Museum of the City of New York.



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MR. CARNEGIE IN HIS LIBRARY, DICTATING TO HIS SECRETARY



**Mr. Carnegie's library led to his private study entered through the door at the right rear. Copyright the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.**

Mr. Carnegie would spend his mornings on the main floor of his home in his library, with windows overlooking Fifth Avenue, and his private study at the rear. Both rooms were stenciled with Carnegie's favorite inspirational sayings such as "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

**Mr. Carnegie consulting with his private secretary James Bertram in his library. Copyright the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.**



**Mr. Carnegie's private study overlooked the garden. Copyright the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.**

It was at his library that Mr. Carnegie received applicants for his philanthropic largess. Each afternoon at four o'clock, he would walk around the nearby Central Park reservoir, often with his wife or with a friend.

During the day, Mrs. Carnegie cultivated her beloved garden, filled with a variety of flowers, azaleas, wisteria, rhododendron and ivy. Often her husband joined her. In the spring and summer months, Mrs. Carnegie would host tea parties for her friends in the garden. Although the garden was ringed by a fence, the hedges were spaced to allow passers-by a view of the beauty within. Her love of flowers extended to the house, with its jewel-like conservatory.

Mrs. Carnegie was very involved with the household management and from time to time put on an apron to paint furniture or clean out a cabinet. Occasionally Mr Carnegie would be driven in his motor car to St. Andrews Links in Westchester County for a game of golf.



**Left: Mr. Carnegie on the links of St. Andrews, Westchester County, New York. Right: Mr. Carnegie in his small cottage on the property where he could rest. Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.**

Mr. Carnegie's automobiles were housed in his garage just around the corner at 55 East 55<sup>th</sup> Street. As with Mr. Carnegie's house, the garage was the latest in technology of the time. The three-level "automobile house," as it was called, contained five electric cars, battery-charging panels, hydraulic lift and housing for the

Carnegie's footman and four chauffeurs.

During the evenings, the Carnegies would host dinners at their home, often accompanied by favorite organ tunes. Guests would arrive at 8:00pm, greeted by the Carnegies. Dewar's scotch, Mr. Carnegie's favorite, would no doubt have been served to the men, and wine from the 1500 bottle cellar with white cards bearing inked descriptions

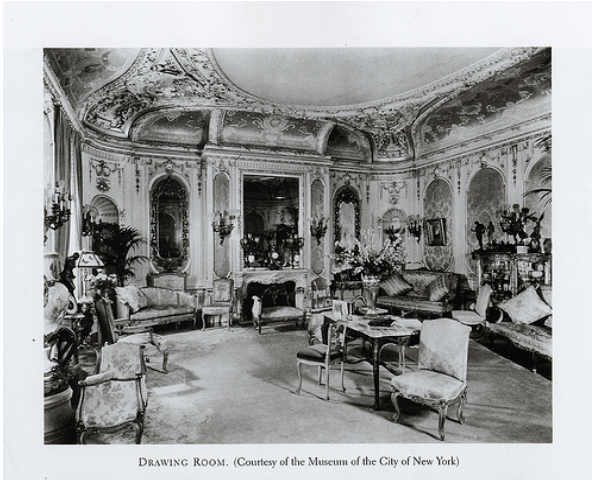


DINING ROOM. (Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York)

**The dining room on the first floor of the house. Courtesy the Museum of the City of New York.**



**Andrew Carnegie in his car at the main entrance of his New York home. Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.**



DRAWING ROOM. (Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York)

**The drawing room was arranged with intimate seating areas. Among the Carnegie's guests were Marie Curie, Booker T. Washington, presidents and statesmen from around the world.**

the place cards to seat them together and by the end of dinner, the two men were reconciled. Mr. Carnegie, known for his bon-mots, said "if you wish to play peace-maker, seat adversaries next to each other where they must begin by being civil."

One of the most entertaining visitors to the house was Mr. Carnegie's close friend Mark Twain. When Mr. Twain heard of Mr. Carnegie's retirement from the steel industry, he wrote:

"Dear Sir and Friend, You seem to be prosperous these days. Could you lend an admirer a dollar-and-a-half to buy a hymn-book with? God will bless you if you do; I feel it, I know it. So will I. If there should be other applications, this one not to count. Yours, Mark. P.S. Don't send the hymn book, send the money. I want to make the selection myself."

**A guest bedroom at the Carnegie's home. Courtesy the Museum of the City of New York.**

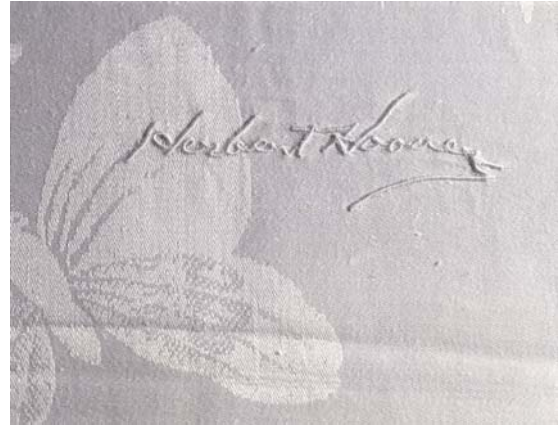


A BEDROOM

"Champagne," "Sparkling Moselle," and "Marsala" would have been enjoyed by all. The inaugural dinner in the house was given for the Carnegie Veterans' Association; men who helped Carnegie obtain his vast fortune. In 1908 Carnegie's twelve-year old daughter Margaret was made the second honorary member, the first being her mother. This dinner went well beyond Carnegie's usual 10:00 pm bedtime, when it ended close to midnight with "Auld Lang Syne."

Another organization Mr. Carnegie enjoyed hosting was the Authors Club of New York. The dinners were managed by Richard Watson Gilder, editor of "The Century" magazine. When drawing up the guest list for a dinner, Mr. Gilder knew that writers Ernest Thompson Seton and John Burroughs did not see eye-to-eye and seated them apart. Mr. Carnegie rearranged

After each dinner, Mrs. Carnegie asked the guests to write their names in pencil on the Irish linen tablecloth. Later the names were embroidered, preserved as a souvenir of the evening. Courtesy the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum.



Margaret Carnegie was allowed to entertain her classmates from time to time. In February 1916 she held a luncheon for her Spence School senior classmates. The next day, she wrote an account of the event to her mother, who was with her husband in Florida:

“My darling Mother,

...and now I must tell you about the great party yesterday...there were bunches of daffodils in the drawing room, and a big bunch of forsythia in the high silver vase, tulips in the yellow room and a vase of roses in the big dining room. The coat racks were put in the library, and it looked very well, with the table arranged with the mirror, etc., and a few daffodils at each side. I wore my fawn Sunday dress, with the pink on the waist. We looked at the cerise voile, but it seemed very brilliant and I was so afraid of being conspicuous...the luncheon was a triumph! So hot, delicious and quickly served. It could not have been better and I am so appreciative of all the good planning and hard work which made it go off without the slightest hitch...you ought to have heard the clapping when I told them of the plan of writing their names on the tablecloth! Mother dear, it was the hit of the party...”



Left: Margaret Carnegie, age 15. [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)  
Right: Margaret's sitting room. Courtesy the Museum of the City of New York.



## The Last Days

By this time, Andrew Carnegie had grown quite frail. His wife installed a putting green in the garden, and arranged for a coming out party for Margaret on December 8, 1916. In a letter to Mr. Carnegie's private secretary she wrote "the older persons could come early and the younger ones could keep up as late as they wished, and Mr. Carnegie could be present the early part of the evening." 800 guests attended and the party ended at 2:00a.m.

Perhaps the most joyous event the house witnessed was the April 22, 1919 marriage of Margaret Carnegie to Roswell Miller. Coincidentally it was the Carnegie's thirty-second wedding anniversary. Over one hundred guests attended the noon wedding with Walter Gale playing the wedding march on the organ. The main floor of the house was decorated with hundreds of fresh flowers and Margaret, in white satin and lace with a bouquet of lilies of the valley, was married in the south terrace room overlooking the garden. The room, converted into a floral chapel, was filled with ferns, orange blossoms, and Easter lilies. During what was called breakfast, a string orchestra played and pipers serenaded the guests with "The Campbells are Coming," and "Annie Laurie." The frail 83-year- old danced with his wife and daughter before retiring upstairs.

Soon after, the Carnegies left for Shadow Brook, their home in Lenox, Massachusetts for the summer. On August 11, 1919 Andrew Carnegie died. He is buried with his wife in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Tarrytown, New York. In his will, Mr. Carnegie left his long-serving butler, housekeeper, nurse, and oldest servant sizeable amounts as "these four are as members of my family." Mrs. Carnegie continued to live in her Fifth Avenue home until her death on June 24, 1946.



**A bird's eye view of East 91st Street, taken shortly after Mrs. Carnegie's death in 1946. Copyright Bettmann/CORBIS.**



## After the Carnegies

After Mrs. Carnegie's death the house was turned over to the Carnegie Corporation, who leased it to the Columbia University School of Social Work. In 1968 the collections and library of the Cooper Union Museum for the Arts and Decoration were transferred to the Smithsonian with the stipulation that they remain in the city. A solution was found in the Carnegie mansion, which was leased to the Smithsonian by the Carnegie Corporation and then in 1972, donated to the institution. The house was adapted for use as the Cooper Hewitt National Museum of Design. Although several original features, such as the Carnegie's beloved organ, were not retained, one can still imagine the Carnegies in their beloved home.

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