



Legacy: Walter Chrysler Jr. and the Untold Story of Norfolk's Chrysler Museum of Art

Peggy Earle

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The Norfolk museum that would one day bear the Chrysler name was always a good museum of its kind, home to a respectable collection serving a smallish city. But when Norfolk native Jean Outland married Walter Chrysler, heir to the automobile manufacturing fortune and an avid art collector, the museum found a person with whom its fortunes would be intertwined, sometimes spectacularly, for decades to come. Walter had already established a Chrysler Museum in Provincetown, Massachusetts, but in 1971—in need of more space and, admittedly, a fresh start—he relocated the operation to Norfolk.

The museum that had once fretted over the possible purchase of a minor Cézanne because it would by itself deplete the entire budget now found itself playing host almost overnight to works by the Old Masters as well as many of the most notable modern artists. Chrysler's was a world-class art collection, containing pieces by, among others, Fragonard, Ingres, Géricault, Tiffany, Matisse, and Braque. The groundwork was laid for Norfolk's place on the cultural map.

In *Legacy*, Peggy Earle paints a vivid picture of this provincial museum's transformation into one of the finest art museums on the East Coast. She also delivers a captivating portrait of Walter Chrysler, a generous and demanding man who found in art patronage a focus not only for his wealth but also for his tremendous energy. Not content to merely admire the work, Walter had a naturally gregarious side and was apt to deal with artists such as Pablo Picasso directly. And yet he was also intensely private. Earle provides readers with a fascinating view of the politics of the museum world, where even good relationships are never uncomplicated. (The addition of the Chrysler collection's works to the museum was not unanimously applauded by the community; nor was it a foregone conclusion that, upon Chrysler's death, the pieces would even stay with the museum.)

This lively account of the unlikely union between an arts maverick and a city on the cusp of cultural evolution sheds new light on how great art finds a place to call home.

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