

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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Tuesday, December 20, 1955

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS OF DAVID E. FINLEY, DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, PRESIDING AT THE FIRST DAY ISSUE CEREMONIES OF THE ANDREW W. MELLON CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATIVE STAMP IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D. C. AT 12:00 NOON, Tuesday, December 20, 1955.

We have met here today to take part in a very special ceremony. The Government of the United States, through its Post Office Department, is issuing a memorial stamp, commemorating the centennial of the birth of Andrew W. Mellon, who numbered among his many achievements the founding of the National Gallery of Art.

It is a great and deserved honor that his Government is paying him; and it is particularly appropriate that this ceremony should take place in this building which has come to all of us as a gift from Mr. Mellon. Speaking for the Trustees and staff of the National Gallery, I should like to say to the Postmaster General that we are most grateful to him for giving us an opportunity to take part in this ceremony and for holding it in this building.

There are many friends of Mr. Mellon's here today and also members of his family, including his son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. On the platform are the two Senators from Pennsylvania, Senator Martin and Senator Duff, and Congressman James Fulton from Pittsburgh, while in the audience are many

old friends of Mr. Mellon's Washington days, all of whom rejoice at this honor that is being paid to his memory.

Mr. Mellon will be remembered for many reasons. He was, first of all, a builder- a creator of banks, of great business enterprises and industries. Thus he gave to thousands of men and women the opportunity to lead useful and productive lives by supplying goods and services which the world needs. He also served his country well as Secretary of the Treasury, and later as Ambassador to Great Britain. But, in addition to all these things, Mr. Mellon recognized the obligation to contribute not only to the progress and the physical well-being of the American people, but also to their cultural and spiritual needs. I shall mention only one of the many instances in which he succeeded in doing this and that is in the founding of the National Gallery of Art.

When Mr. Mellon came to Washington in 1921 as Secretary of the Treasury, he found here no Government-owned museum with a comprehensive collection of paintings and sculpture by the greatest masters, such as could be found in other world capitals of comparable importance. He determined to provide a building and to give to the American people his famous collection of works of art to form the nucleus of what he hoped would some day become a great National Collection.

In making his gift, Mr. Mellon expressed the hope that this newly established National Gallery would attract gifts from other

collectors throughout the country; and this has proved to be the case. Great works of art have come to the National Gallery from Mr. Samuel Kress and his brother, Mr. Rush Kress, from Mr. Chester Dale, from the Widener family, from Mr. Lessing Rosenwald, and many others. Today, in the scope and quality of its collections, the National Gallery ranks with the great art museums of the world. More than 24,000,000 people have visited the National Gallery since it was opened in 1941, and all have carried away some knowledge or some happy impression that they did not have before. That is a great deal for any group of men to have done for others, and that is why Mr. Mellon and the other benefactors of the National Gallery will always be remembered by a grateful country.

That is also the reason why Mr. Mellon, although he was a truly modest man and tried to efface himself in connection with his gift of this building and his collection, will always be held in grateful remembrance by this and future generations as the Founder of the National Gallery of Art.

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