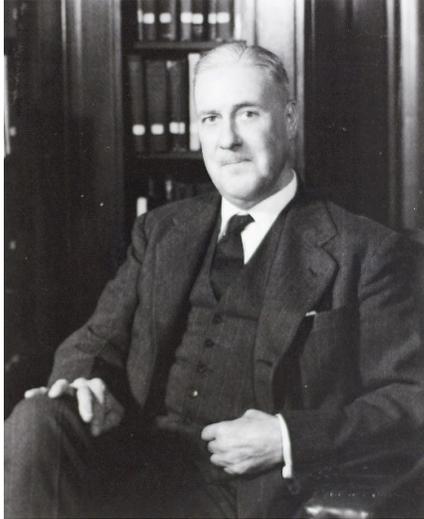


## Archibald Gibson Wenley

1898–1962

Scholar, Epigrapher, and Museum Director



Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Archibald Gibson Wenley served with a railroad artillery battery in France during World War I. In 1921 he graduated from the University of Michigan, where his father was a distinguished professor of philosophy, and then pursued his study of librarianship at the New York Public Library. Wenley met John Ellerton Lodge (1878–1942), the first director of the Freer Gallery of Art, when he applied for the post of librarian at the new museum in 1924. Although Wenley possessed no background in Asian art, Lodge sent him on a six-year course of study of Chinese and Japanese history, language, and art. Wenley began his studies in Beijing under the tutelage of Carl Whiting Bishop (1881–1942). They occasionally flew in an eight-seater

Vickers-Vimy airplane over ancient sites in China. From the air they could observe and decipher important interconnections between earthworks, embankments, and foundations in archaeological monuments and sites. After he continued his apprenticeships in Paris and Kyoto, Wenley returned to Washington, D.C., in 1931 and served for more than a decade as an associate in research under Lodge. Wenley, now a recognized scholar of Chinese art, assumed the role of the Freer Gallery's second director in 1943 after Lodge's death.

During World War II, Wenley worked for the Department of the Navy by translating Japanese sailing directions. One of his most important tasks as the Gallery's director during the war was to protect the collections from possible damage caused by public demonstrations against Japan, or worse, by enemy air raids. The collections were safely stored in the museum's subbasement, and the Japanese objects were put back on display in 1946.

In that same year Wenley published his most important scholarly publication: a catalogue of the Freer Gallery's ancient Chinese bronzes. As a scholar, he devoted time to deciphering inscriptions on ancient bronzes and hand scrolls in the collection, and as a museum director, he established the Freer as a fully functioning center for research in Asian art. Wenley also developed the Freer's library into a first-class scholarly resource, with two full-time librarians. In 1951 Wenley added a technical laboratory to investigate the methods and materials of ancient Asian craftsmen. Wenley and his colleagues at the University of Michigan also introduced *Ars Orientalis*, a peer-reviewed scholarly journal on Asian art that is still published today.

### Literature

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