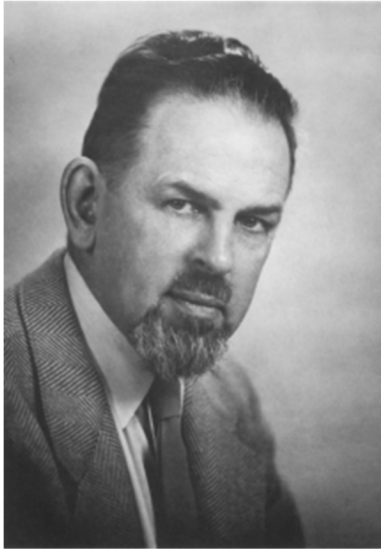


**James Marshall Plumer****1899–1960****Professor of Asian Art History and Collector of Asian Art**

Born in Newton Center, Massachusetts, James Marshall Plumer spent the majority of his early years in New England, attending St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, and then Boston Latin School. He earned his BA at Harvard University, where he developed a deep interest in Chinese art and language under the tutelage of archeologist Langdon Warner (1881–1955), with whom he developed a lifelong friendship and scholarly partnership. Perhaps inspired by Warner's sense of adventure, Plumer worked as a seaman during the summers while at Harvard, sailing the eastern seaboard of the United States. In 1920 he sailed to China. Three years later he returned to China, where he remained and built a life. Plumer worked for the Chinese government's Office of Maritime Customs until the late 1930s. He also met and married his wife, Caroline (Carol) Plumer, and welcomed their first two children. In 1929, upon the suggestion of Warner, Plumer became a tutor in the Chinese language and secretary of the Harvard-Yenching Institute. Around this time, Plumer and his wife began to study and collect Chinese ceramics, from highly finished masterpieces to imperfect shards that had been tossed into kiln waste piles. The couple traveled across Asia, collecting ceramics, bronzes, and jades from Korea, India, and Japan, with Chinese objects composing much of their collection.

In the early 1930s Plumer embarked on numerous "exploratory trips" into the Chinese interior in search of ancient kiln sites. In 1935 he discovered the site for *jian* ware, an ancient ceramic type with origins in the Song dynasty (960–1279), and he soon became a highly regarded expert in Chinese art. After this major discovery, he spent the summer of 1935 in the United States and, during that time, University of Michigan appointed him as a lecturer on Far Eastern Art. He continued to teach at the University of Michigan whenever he returned to the States, eventually being promoted to associate professor in 1941. Among the students he trained was Harold P. Stern (1922–1977), who became the fourth director of the Freer Gallery of Art. During his academic career, Plumer edited the *Far Eastern Ceramic Bulletin* and published articles on the art of China, Korea, Japan, and India.

During World War II, Plumer served in the Massachusetts National Guard, Cavalry. Due to his expertise in the language and geography of China, he was selected to organize and lead the China Unit of the US Army Corps of Engineer's Map Service at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. In 1944, upon Warner's suggestion, the Roberts Commission recruited Plumer to produce maps and lists of important Chinese monuments. The following year, Warner nominated Plumer, who was ultimately selected, to serve with the Arts and Monuments

Division of the Civil Information and Education Section of General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Tokyo, Japan. This division was the Pacific theater's version of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Program, which protected cultural property on the European front during and after the war. With his family in tow, Plumer lived in Japan in 1948 and 1949, where he inspected multiple important architectural sites and staved off looting.

Plumer's sudden death on June 15, 1960, prompted the dispersal of his large collection of Asian art. Two years later the Detroit Institute of Arts presented a memorial exhibition that featured the collection James and Caroline Plumer had built during their life together. Working with the dealer Frank Caro of C.T. Loo & Company (later renamed Frank Caro Chinese Art), Caroline Plumer gifted and sold pieces to museums and collectors, including the Freer Gallery of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Fogg Museum (now part of Harvard Art Museums), the University of Michigan Art Museum, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

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#### **ARCHIVAL HOLDINGS**

James M. Plumer Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, James Marshall Plumer Papers, FSA.A.14. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

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