

**5045**

## Herter Brothers, *Mantelpiece*

**Dominic Carter:** This luxurious mantel comes from one of the mansions that used to line Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, before apartment buildings and office towers took over. Hand-carved by the world-famous Herter Brothers company, the simplicity of the mahogany woodwork sets the stage for the ornate fireplace accessories. The brass lamps, the candle brackets, and the fire screen were probably all imported from France.

**Barry Harwood:** I think part of the reason for using the brass was that it really must have glittered in the relatively low gas lighting of these late nineteenth-century interiors. The effect between the gas lighting and candles and the candelabra must have been really quite beautiful and glittering in the evenings.

**Dominic Carter:** Curator Barry Harwood says that this mantelpiece was part of an elaborately decorated library.

**Barry Harwood:** This library is in the really sort of English Jacobean style, or at least the late nineteenth-century interpretation of that seventeenth-century style. What is really wonderful, since the room is de-installed and we can see it, is that the back of the paneling is stamped very proudly with the Herter Brothers name—even though no one was ever going to see these stamps.

**Dominic Carter:** Pieces like this evoke the intersection of art and commerce during the so-called Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century, when a new class of American industrialists became fantastically rich. Look closely at their prized possessions and you might catch a glimmer of how they saw themselves, or how they wanted to be seen.

The portraits on both sides of the mantel suggest its original setting. The women portrayed were privileged and wealthy and would have been very much at home in a lavishly decorated interior.

