

Alfred Bader Fonds

Chemistry and Art
More Adventures of a Chemist Collector

Introduction

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Introduction

Alfred and Isabel Bader

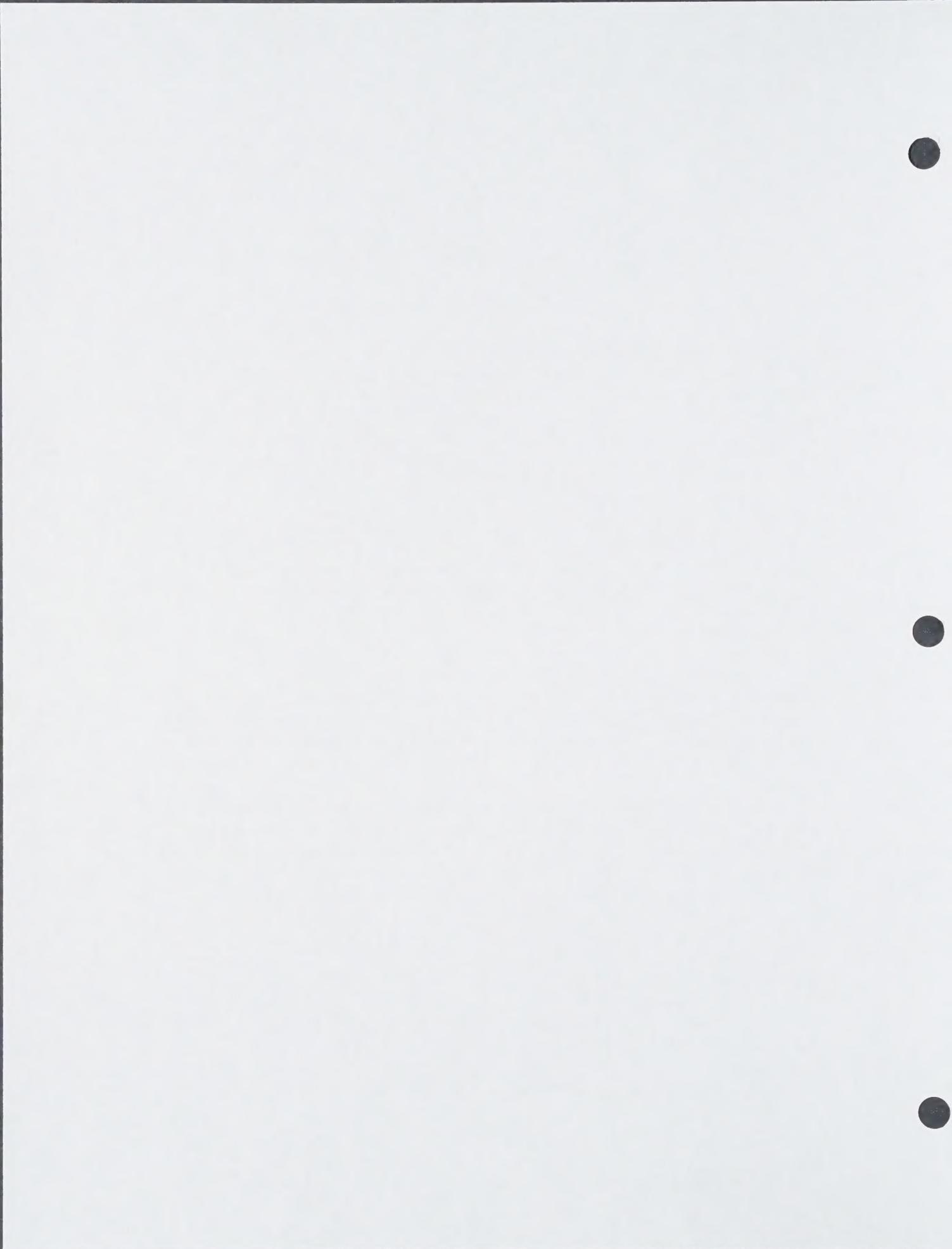
One of my greatest joys since coming to Queen's in 2004 has been my relationship with Alfred and Isabel Bader. Philanthropists are generally a happy breed, but the Baders are uniquely so. Whether as gracious hosts at their home in Milwaukee, or as guides around the grounds and the castle of the International Study Centre in England, they are an extraordinary couple who relish each moment. Their giving is reflective of their generosity of spirit, their deep caring for others and their enduring sense of the wonder, magic and joyful 'accidents' of existence.

Over the years, they have sought out and supported deserving causes, chemists and art historians at universities throughout North America, Europe, and Israel. At Queen's University, Alfred's alma mater, their gifts have contributed to academic excellence through chairs, curatorships, and countless awards in many fields, all aimed at enriching the educational environment for students and ensuring that all have access to it, regardless of means.

Alfred was a newly graduated PhD from Harvard when he co-founded a chemical company in a Milwaukee garage. His astute perception of market needs, and his extraordinary ability to find new and inexpensive ways to produce chemicals and supply chemists, helped him build one of the most important and successful chemical companies in North America.

From a small operation in cramped space, Aldrich Chemical (named for his partner's fiancée) grew rapidly, moving to larger premises as the company soon became widely recognized for the quality and variety of its products. When the American Chemical Society honoured Dr. Bader with its top award for outstanding public service, he had earned a reputation as a "fascinating mixture of ego, modesty and almost boundless energy."

Aldrich resisted buyout offers but in 1975 merged with Sigma of St. Louis, thereby becoming a leading supplier of organic and biochemicals. Alfred was president of the merged company, Sigma-Aldrich, and spent long years building the company's reputation. In 1992, Alfred left Sigma-Aldrich a proud legacy that included the ABCs of his life – art, the Bible and chemistry. He was revered as the chemist who visited laboratories with Isabel, noted for asking, 'What can we do better?' He continues to respond on a personal basis to calls for help and advice from chemists worldwide.



Leaving the company meant more time for art-dealing activities. He moved Alfred Bader Fine Arts (a company he had established in 1961) into Milwaukee's historic Astor Hotel. Although he is well known to international art auction houses, he takes particular pleasure in buying dirty old paintings in antique stores or at auctions and flea markets, hoping that cleaning will reveal great works. His special skill is his capacity to distinguish works by Rembrandt's students from those by the master himself. Slide-illustrated tales of such detective work have held audiences spellbound for years.

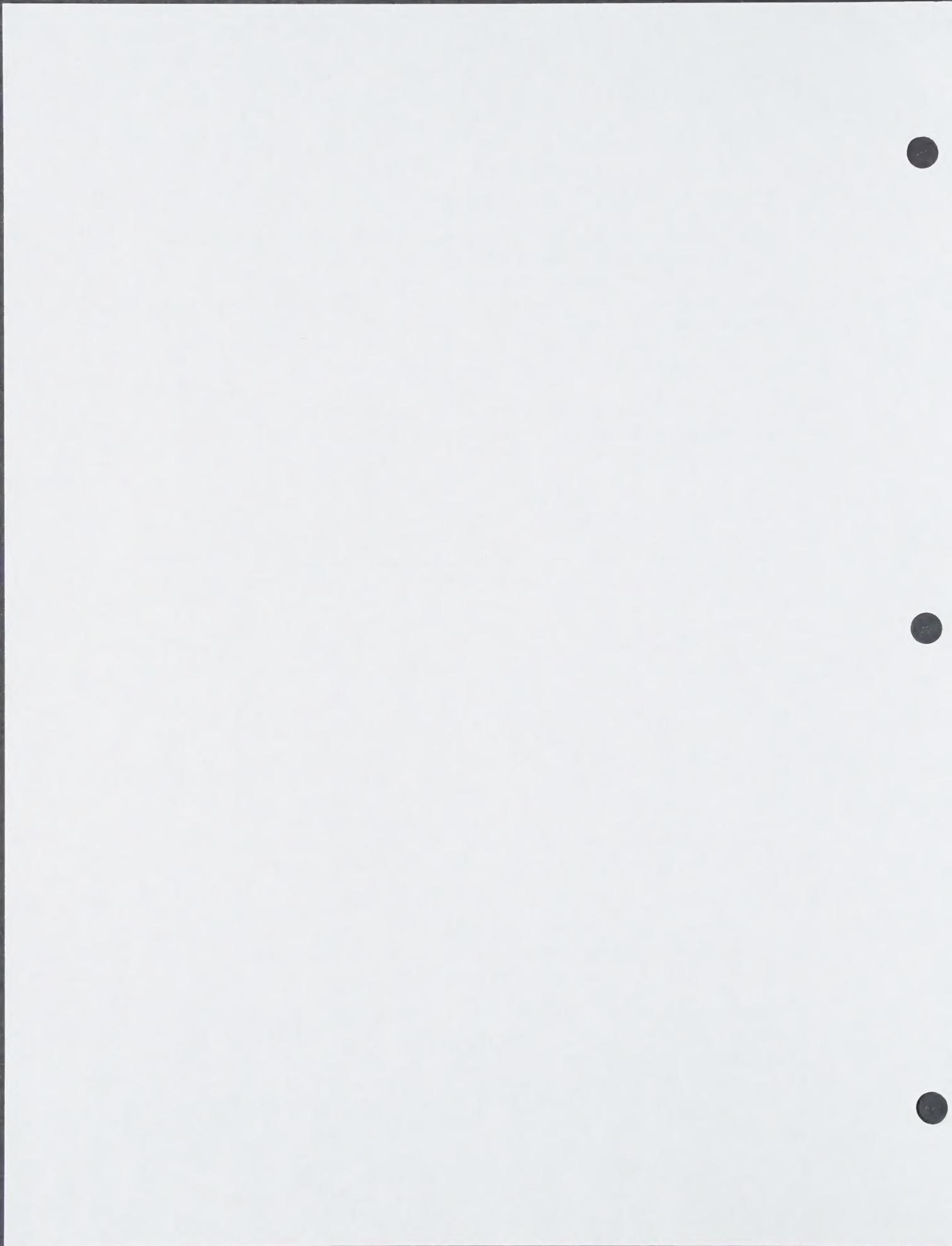
With Isabel his closest advisor and collaborator, he now spends his time dealing in paintings, writing, lecturing, and – most challenging of all in his judgment – undertaking the difficult tasks associated with philanthropy.

His relationship with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's began in 1967, when then-curator Frances Smith asked Alfred whether he would consider donating a painting to the fledgling gallery. Pleased to be asked, he felt Queen's would be a good home for the *Salvator Mundi* that had belonged to his mother's family. And so began a relationship of giving that has flourished over the decades. Alfred's gifts of paintings to the Agnes Etherington Art Centre currently more than one hundred, and the remainder of his collection, including more than one hundred other paintings, is a promised bequest. Consisting primarily of seventeenth century Dutch art, the Bader Collection is among the finest of its type worldwide. The collection is known among galleries and art historians around the world.

In August 2003, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre announced the gift of *Head of an Old Man*, a painting by the celebrated seventeenth century Dutch artist Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). *Head of an Old Man* was only the fourth Rembrandt ever to enter a Canadian museum collection and the first in almost half a century. In September 2007, a second Rembrandt joined our first: *Head of a Man in Turban, in Profile* is an oil on panel painted around 1661. Queen's is honoured to be able to share these great works of art that enrich not only our own collection, but also the national patrimony.

The Baders' generosity ranges well beyond their interests in chemistry and art; for instance, they have supported a Queen's humanitarian aid project for disabled war victims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as many other efforts to help the needy, particularly in Europe.

Alfred Bader is a survivor, an astute businessman, a connoisseur, and a scholar. It is fitting that it was the Baders – unconventional benefactors with a love of the past and with bold and extraordinary initiative – who were responsible for Queen's acquisition of the 140-room, fifteenth century Herstmonceux Castle in England. Anyone who visits the castle will know that the Baders' belief in the promise of the remarkable structure and its



grounds to provide unique opportunities for international and interdisciplinary learning was right! The castle has been renovated with their generous support and is now the unique and much-admired Queen's International Study Centre they envisioned. In the fall of 2007, the Baders attended a ribbon cutting for their latest gift — David Smith Hall, a building renovated to offer enhanced faculty accommodation and named at Alfred's request in memory of his dear friend and former Queen's Principal, David C. Smith.

The Baders often say that their gift of the castle posed a serious problem for them — the challenge of what to do for an encore. They have recently responded to this challenge by purchasing a magnificent piece of waterfront land — the future site of Queen's performing arts campus, whose centerpiece will be a performing arts centre named for his beloved Isabel. The campus will benefit Queen's and the entire Kingston community — a wonderfully symbolic and practical gesture.

Alfred and Isabel Bader are a wise and remarkably devoted enabling presence for higher education and the arts. They believe passionately in education and its probable influence on men and women with uncommon potential for making contributions to the solutions for the problems of humankind. And they cherish their roles as partners in the precious activities that invent, develop, and renew the learning tapestry for these students.

Karen R. Hitchcock
Principal and Vice-Chancellor
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Dr. Alfred Bader is quoted from his 1995 book, *Adventures of a Chemist Collector* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson).

