

A \$10 Million Gift for Conservation at the Morgan

By CAROL VOGEL

In a small space that was once J. P. Morgan's nursery, two full-time conservators spend their days caring for the Morgan Library's extraordinary collection of works on paper in cramped quarters and on a shoe-string budget.

A \$10 million gift from Eugene V. Thaw, the dealer and collector, and his wife, Clare E. Thaw, is about to change all that. The gift is to go toward building the Thaw Conservation Center, a new conservation laboratory that will be more than twice the size of the library's current one, created in the 1940's. The money will also help finance a larger staff and a schedule of comprehensive education programs.

Along with the new center, the library, at 29 East 36th Street, will develop a separate exhibition plan-

ning department to handle responsibilities currently carried out by its conservation department.

"It's a win-win situation," said Charles E. Pierce Jr., director of the library. "This gift helps all our collections. It's my goal and the Thaws' to create one of this country's best centers for works on paper."

At the moment, Mr. Pierce added, the library's conservators do not have time to keep up with objects in its permanent collection because so much energy has to be devoted to preparing special exhibitions.

Once the new center is completed, the library plans to undertake the conservation of the nearly 300,000 objects — drawings, books, and literary, historical and musical manuscripts — that are in its permanent collection. Some of its expanded staff will work only on exhibitions while others only on the permanent collection.

"I felt the Morgan should be a

leader in the field of conservation," said Mr. Thaw, who joined its board 11 years ago and who in 1994 promised the library his collection of Old Master and 19th-century drawings, described by experts as the finest in private hands. "The educational component is as important as the new facilities. It's our goal to train a new generation of conservators."

Construction of the new center is scheduled to begin in the fall and is expected to take about year. Samuel Anderson Architect, the New York-based firm that recently completed the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies and the Agnes Mongan Center at Harvard University Art Museums, has been chosen to design the new center. It will occupy the entire 5,600-square-foot fourth floor and will include designated areas for various treatments of the collections, for advanced seminars, graduate internships and postgraduate fellowships, and for matting,

framing and preparation of exhibitions.

Mr. Anderson said he planned to take the roof off a portion of the library's building to install tilted skylights that will exclude south-facing light, which is too harsh for delicate works on paper, while admitting northern light. The new center will also have sophisticated climate control.

Margaret Holben Ellis, the chairman of the conservation center at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, has been appointed director of conservation planning for the library. Working with Patricia Reyes, the library's chief conservator, Ms. Ellis will be responsible for the new center's design and for a graduate-level educational program, an international exchange, a research network and staff. Ms. Ellis will continue as chairman and professor at the Institute while overseeing the creation of the new center.



David A. Loggie/Pierpont Morgan Library

and pencil (circa 1900), part of the us collection of works on paper.