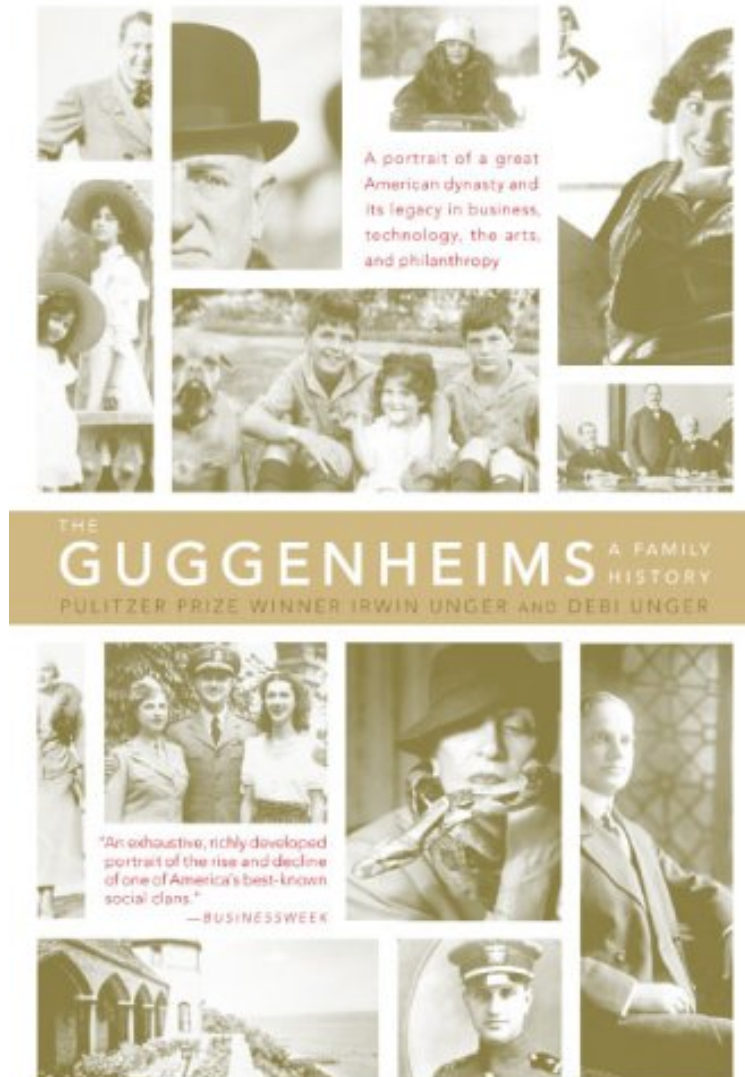


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The Guggenheims: A Family History

Debi Unger, Irwin Unger

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Louisgood read0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One of the worst books I've read in yearsBy CustomerOne of the worst books I've read in years. Fails to capture any of the interest of the family. Great stories capture a people and bring these to life. Nothing in the book does that. Entire book could better be condensed into a Wikipedia page.

A portrait of a great American dynasty and its legacy in business, technology, the arts, and philanthropyMeyer Guggenheim, a Swiss immigrant, founded a great American business dynasty. At their peak in the early twentieth century, the Guggenheims were reckoned among America's wealthiest, and the richest Jewish family in the world after the Rothschilds. They belonged to Our Crowd, that tight social circle of New York Jewish plutocrats, but unlike the others -- primarily merchants and financiers -- they made their money by extracting and refining copper, silver, lead, tin, and gold.The secret of their success, the patriarch believed, was their unity, and in the early years Meyer's seven sons, under the leadership of Daniel, worked as one to expand their growing mining and smelting empire. Family solidarity eventually decayed (along with their Jewish faith), but even more damaging was the paucity of male heirs as Meyer and the original set of brothers passed from the scene.In the third generation, Harry Guggenheim, Daniel's son, took over leadership and made the family a force in aviation, publishing, and horse-racing. He desperately sought a successor but tragically failed and was forced to watch as the great Guggenheim business enterprise crumbled.Meanwhile, "Guggenheim" came to mean art more than industry. In the mid-twentieth century, led by Meyer's son Solomon and Solomon's niece Peggy, the Guggenheims became the agents of modernism in the visual arts. Peggy, in America during the war years, midwifed the school of abstract expressionism, which brought art leadership to New York City. Solomon's museum has been innovative in spreading the riches of Western art around the world. After the generation of Harry and Peggy, the family has continued to produce many accomplished members, such as publisher Roger Straus II and archaeologist Iris Love.In *The Guggenheims*, through meticulous research and absorbing prose, Irwin Unger, the winner of a Pulitzer Prize in history, and his wife, Debi Unger, convey a unique and remarkable story -- epic in its scope -- of one family's amazing rise to prominence.

From Publishers WeeklyA biography of an illustrious family can be like a cassoulet: lots of delicious bits that combine beautifully but no tastes that fully stand out. Such is the case with this remarkably researched history of the Guggenheims. Pulitzer Prizendash;winner Irwin Unger (*The Greenback Era*) and his wife, Debi (coauthor, with Irwin, of *LBJ: A Life*), assemble an extraordinary collection of letters, interviews, memos and contemporary documents to tell the story of the family's rapid rise and slow decline, a saga marked by a combination of "profound Americanism" and Jewish "old world heritage." The sheer size of the Guggenheim familymdash;the Ungers note that the "legion" descendants of Meyer (1828ndash;1905), the family patriarch, are "impossible" to follow through timemdash;means that no one member of the clan stands out, though the feisty Harry, "fighting entropy" in the family for much of the 20th century, burns brighter than many of his relatives. The scintillating Peggy Guggenheim, known for her patronage of modern art and her robust sex life, gets ample play here, but her story is told more thoroughly in recent biographies by Anton Gill and Mary Dearborn. Readers looking for a broad, appetizing sweep of American life will find it here, but those hungry for sharp, burning flavors may skip to the next course. 16-page bw photo insert not seen by PW. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.From BooklistResearched from the ground up, this profile of the Guggenheims depends little on its numerous predecessors (most recently, *The Guggenheims*, by John H. Davis, 1978) and is at present the best-informed account of the clan. Describing the 1848 immigration to America of the original Guggenheim, the authors ably recount the creation of the fortune (from mining and smelting) by first-generation Meyer and the business expansions by son Daniel, who led the Guggenheims to their prosperous peak in the 1920s. Then comes the reading fun: what the next generation did with the money. After logging the fates of a few aimless sybarites, the Ungers discuss in detail the more enduring activities of three third-generation Guggenheims: clan chief Harry (founder of the newspaper *Newsday*); Solomon (founder of the Guggenheim Museum); and Peggy (patron of artists such as Jackson Pollack). The authors texture the business and philanthropic activities of various family members with their character traits, their houses and haunts, and their religion. An engaging history of the famous family. Gilbert TaylorCopyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved lquo;This fascinating family saga told with the brisk spirit of its subjects, evokes the strength necessary to create a dynasty.rdquo;