The goal of the Kress Provenance Research Project is the discovery of the most complete provenance information available concerning the Samuel H. Kress Collection now distributed among scores of museums around the United States. In some cases, even those histories which appear to have an unbroken chain of owners may, upon closer examination, reveal ‘hidden’ stories. This is particularly true for provenance during and immediately after the tumultuous period of World War II.

This fourteenth century triptych, acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation in 1952, is referred to by the name of its presumed first owners, identified by the coat of arms on the base of the middle panel in the lower right. Of Florentine origin, the noble Aldobrandini family’s ties to Rome were strengthened considerably on the election of one of their own, Ippolito Aldobrandini, to the papacy as Pope Clement VIII in 1592. The triptych is attributed to a follower of the Florentine artist, Bernardo Daddi (c. 1280–1348).

Nothing is known about the whereabouts of the triptych from its likely commission in Florence until the early twentieth century, when it is found in the collection of Viennese industrialist Oscar Bondy (1870-1944), in whose estate sale it figured in 1949. Bondy had business interests both in Austria and the former Czechoslovakia, and fled to the latter just after the March 1938 Anschluss of Austria into Nazi Germany. He and his family eventually settled in the United States, but left behind in Vienna his extensive art collection, which was soon confiscated by the Nazis and put under the care of the Austrian Bundesdenkmalamt, or Federal Monuments Office. The fate of Bondy’s collection, as those of many other exiled Viennese Jews, is recorded in Sophie Lillie’s 2003 book, Was Einmal War (“What Once Was”). In the case of the Aldobrandini triptych, we knew it was sold by the Bondy family in New York in 1949. However, given the earlier history of the Bondy collection in Austria, it seemed quite likely that this triptych had a ‘hidden’ history between 1938 and 1949.

Researching the fate of the Portland altarpiece was complicated by the fact that Bondy owned two similar Renaissance triptychs, both of which were sold in 1949. While they don’t look the same in shape and size, the compositions are such that the written descriptions are virtually identical: Madonna and Child with Angels in the center, Crucifixion on the right, Nativity on the left, Annunciation above.
This second triptych, associated with the artist Jacopo del Casentino (d. circa 1350), was acquired at the 1949 Bondy sale by tobacco executive Karel Goldschmidt (d. 1989), in whose collection it remained until sold by his estate at Christie’s New York in 1995. Its current location is unknown.

We contacted the archives of the Bundesdenkmalamt regarding the Bondy collection, and initially the only records that turned up related to the Jacopo del Casentino triptych, which had indeed been confiscated from the Bondy residence in Vienna. Shortly thereafter it was acquired by Hitler’s curator Hans Posse, to be included in the Führer’s intended museum at Linz, Austria. Recovered after the war and returned to the Bondy family, its fate is catalogued in Birgit Schwarz, *Hitler’s Museum*, 2004, no. V/13.

Our colleagues in Vienna kept looking for references to the Kress triptych, and after much searching found the documents referring to it, fortunately with an image that cleared any doubt that the documents referred to the Kress painting. The Aldobrandini triptych had, as suspected, been confiscated from the Bondy home in Vienna. However, unlike the Casentino triptych, it remained in a storage depot at the monastery in Kremsmünster, Austria. Recovered there after the war with much of the Bondy collection, it was then, ironically, turned back over to the Bundesdenkmalamt, now responsible for post-war restitution. In 1948 the Aldobrandini triptych was returned to the heirs of Oscar Bondy, as indicated by the handwritten notation at the bottom of this inventory page.
At the 1949 sale, the Aldobrandini triptych was bought by the dealer Julius Weitzner, who sold it three years later to Kress. In addition to the auction sale, Mrs. Bondy also sold other objects privately through the Blumka Gallery and E. and A. Silberman Galleries, both former Viennese dealers. Objects with a Bondy provenance can now be found in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Wadsworth Atheneum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among many other public collections.