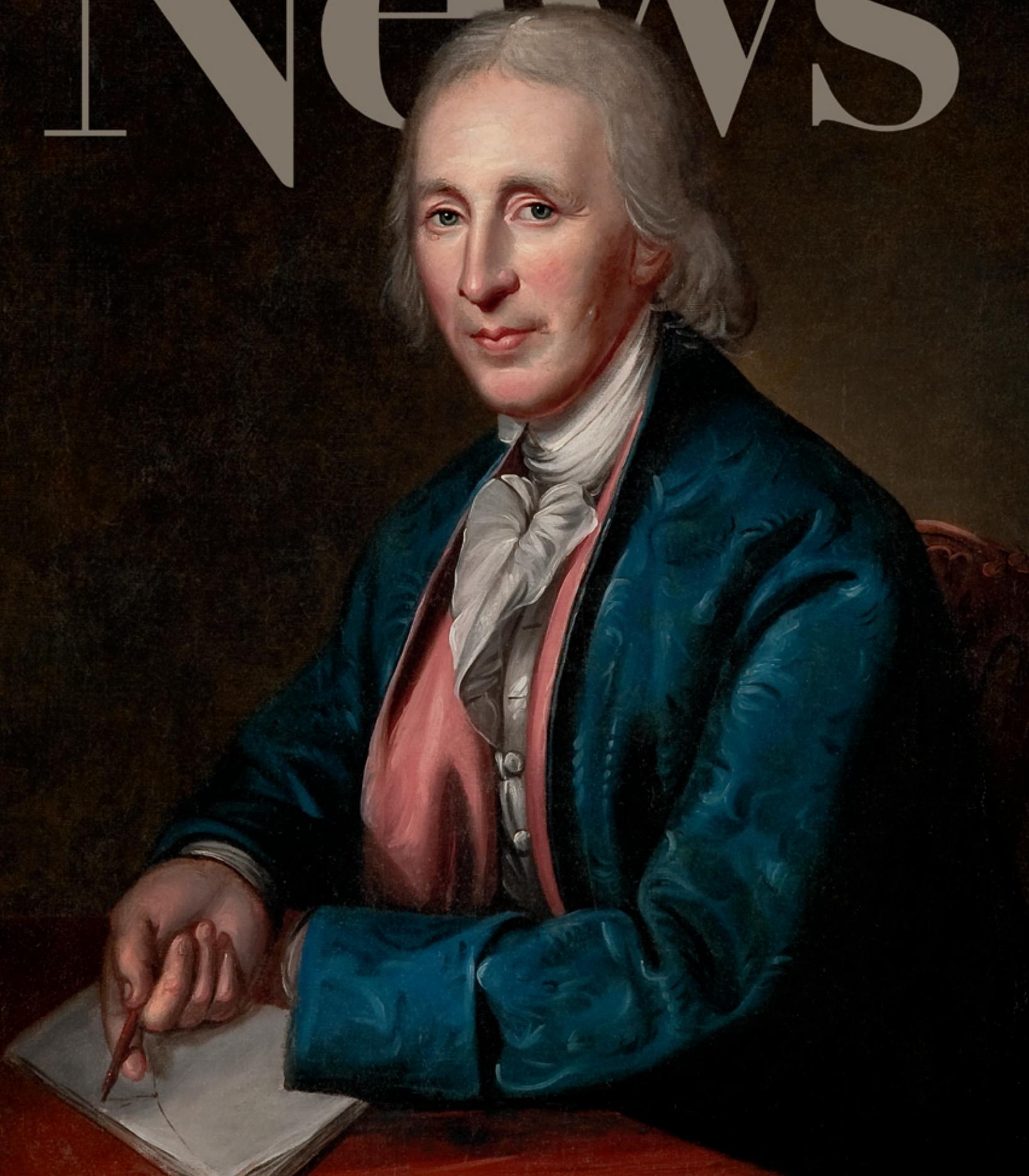


AUTUMN 2017

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

NEWS



THE EXHIBITION NOW ON VIEW at the APS Museum is *Curious Revolutionaries: The Peales of Philadelphia*. This exhibition displays the work of the Peales, an early American family of patriots, soldiers, artists, politicians, inventors, explorers, naturalists, entrepreneurs, and world-class, ever-busy tinkerers. Their boundless curiosity led them to pursue a wide variety of interests, which ranged from excavating mastodon fossils in upstate New York, to collaborating on inventions like the polygraph, to painting the pantheon of American leaders, to collecting and cataloging thousands of species from all over the world.

Curious Revolutionaries draws on the extensive APS Library collections, including the largest existing archival collection of Peale materials. The Peale-Sellers Family Collection (of 19 linear feet, comprising some 38 boxes and 147 volumes) and the Society's related collections include letters and diaries, as well as sketchbooks, painting palettes, hand-cut silhouettes, and watercolors. Highlights from the APS Museum collections include admission tokens from Charles Willson Peale's Philadelphia Museum (which was located in Philosophical Hall from 1794 to 1810), miniature fireplace patent models designed by Charles Willson Peale and his son Raphaëlle, and several paintings. Together, these important collections reveal the Peales' influence on early American popular culture through innovations in art, science, and technology.

The exhibition is divided into three major thematic sections: The Peales and the New Nation, Peale's Philadelphia Museum, and The Legacy of the Peales. Each section offered us the opportunity to explore lesser-known aspects of the Peale family and experiment with new curatorial approaches.

The Peales and the New Nation

Formative visitor studies indicated that most museum-goers were unfamiliar with the Peales—except, on occasion, for their portraiture. Taking this into account, we used the exhibition's opening section to introduce visitors to the Peale family and emphasize their role in the nation's early history. We focused on the roles of Charles Willson and his brother James in the American Revolution, along with their early artistic endeavors. One of the highlights of this section of the exhibition is a dictionary of painters that the Peales treated as a family bible, recording family births, deaths, and marriages in the front pages.

During the Revolutionary War, the brothers fought in several battles while completing sketches and portraits of their fellow soldiers and officers. On display are both James's and Charles Willson's wartime sketchbooks featuring military scenes drawn from the field.

Toward the end of the war, Charles Willson created immensely popular patriotic window displays that drew huge crowds from all over the city. However, Charles Willson's participation in Philadelphia's radical political scene damaged his reputation among local elites. To restore his good name, he began painting portraits of American Revolutionary heroes and leaders. By focusing on Charles Willson's various (and not always glorious) roles in the conflict, we hoped to present a more complicated history of the American Revolution.

As his portrait gallery grew and attracted a supportive audience, Charles Willson's idea for developing a public museum began to take shape. By educating the American public and increasing their understanding of the natural world, Peale believed his museum could help cultivate a more enlightened citizenry and advance America's prestige around the world. In 1786 (the year he was elected a Member of the APS), he founded the Philadelphia Museum at his home on Third and Lombard Streets, establishing what would become the first successful public museum and a model for future democratic museums.

Sketches from Hudson River sketchbook, Charles Willson Peale, 1801. Watercolor and ink on paper with leather binding. APS. Peale-Sellers Family Collection.



Self-Portrait, Charles Willson Peale, 1777-1778. Oil on canvas. APS. Charles Willson Peale completed this self-portrait during the British occupation of Philadelphia. He proudly wears his Pennsylvania militia uniform and a captain's gold braid on his hat. Peale sketched military scenes and painted his fellow officers throughout the war.

Curious Revolutionaries:

The Peales Give Their Encore at Philosophical Hall's Museum



Two birds, "drawn for Capt. M. Lewis," Charles Willson Peale, 1818. APS. Peale-Sellers Family Collection.

"Mr. Peale's Museum, containing the portraits of Illustrious Personages, distinguished in the late Revolution of America, and other Paintings—Also, a Collection of preserved Beasts, Birds, Fish, Reptiles, Insects, Fossils, Minerals, Petrifications, and other curious Objects, natural and artificial."

—The Pennsylvania Packet, 1788

Peale's Philadelphia Museum

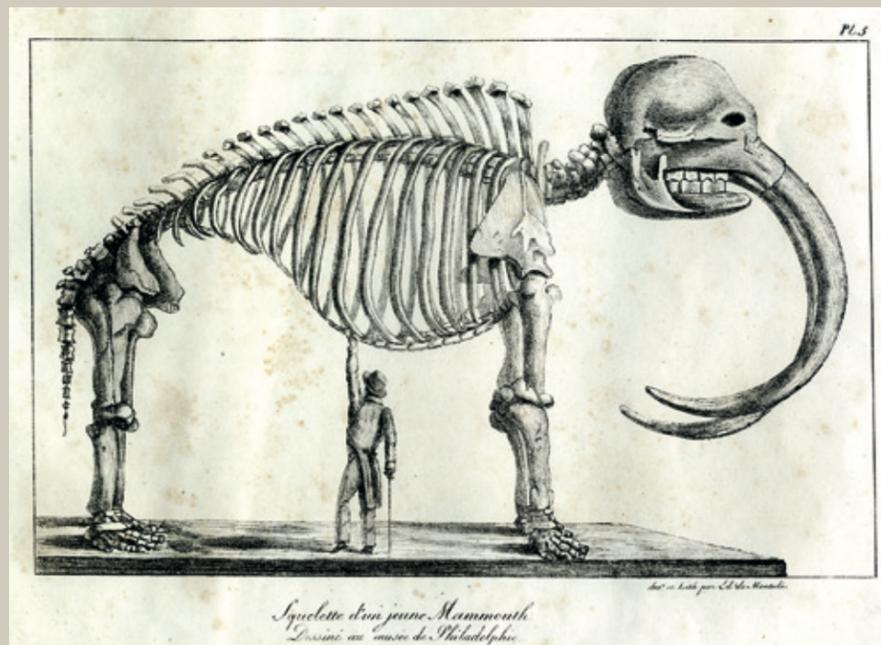
In 1794, Charles Willson Peale moved his museum (and his family) into the APS's Philosophical Hall, where it remained until 1810. One of the most exciting finds in the Society's collections was the October 25, 1794 edition of the *General Advertiser*, which contains Charles Willson's announcement of the move. In 1795, Benjamin Franklin Peale was born in the building and was promptly named after the Society's founder. In 1802, Peale expanded the Philadelphia Museum into the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall), where it remained until his death in 1827.

Throughout the museum's heyday, Charles Willson made his business successful through innovations in advertising, sales, membership, and appeals to public curiosity. He promoted tiered ticket subscriptions—for daytime or nighttime, and for three, six, or 12 months—and convinced Philadelphia's political and social elite to subscribe.

Visitors to the Philadelphia Museum received a short, digestible gallery guide to help them interpret the museum's displays. Charles Willson also gave public lectures, and the museum contained a menagerie of wild animals, including two live grizzly bears. In 1802, John Isaac Hawkins gave Charles Willson his physiognotrace invention—a device for tracing profiles in min-

ature—which became Charles Willson's most successful publicity innovation for selling museum souvenirs. Charles Willson entrusted its operation to his slave, Moses Williams, who became particularly skilled at cutting intricate, accurate likenesses. Each year, as many as 8,000 visitors bought profiles at eight cents apiece.

In 1801, Charles Willson and his family made their most famous contribution to science and the fledgling field of paleontology when they excavated two mastodons in upstate New York. The American scientific community was intrigued by the remnants of giant bones that had been found in the area and debated their significance. The preeminent French naturalist, Comte de Buffon, had promoted his theory of American degeneracy, arguing that species were weaker and smaller in North America. In 1789, APS Member Nicholas Collin gave a speech calling upon the community to find a complete skeleton of the gigantic animal. After hearing about the discovery of a mastodon in Newburgh, New York, Charles Willson successfully solicited \$500 from the APS in order to undertake the full excavation. He documented the enterprise in his diary, on display in the exhibition, and memorialized the scene in his painting, *Exhumation of the Mastodon*.



Squelette d'un jeune Mammouth. Dessiné au musée de Philadelphie. Voyage en Amérique en Sicile et en Égypte, Édouard de Montulé, 1821. APS.

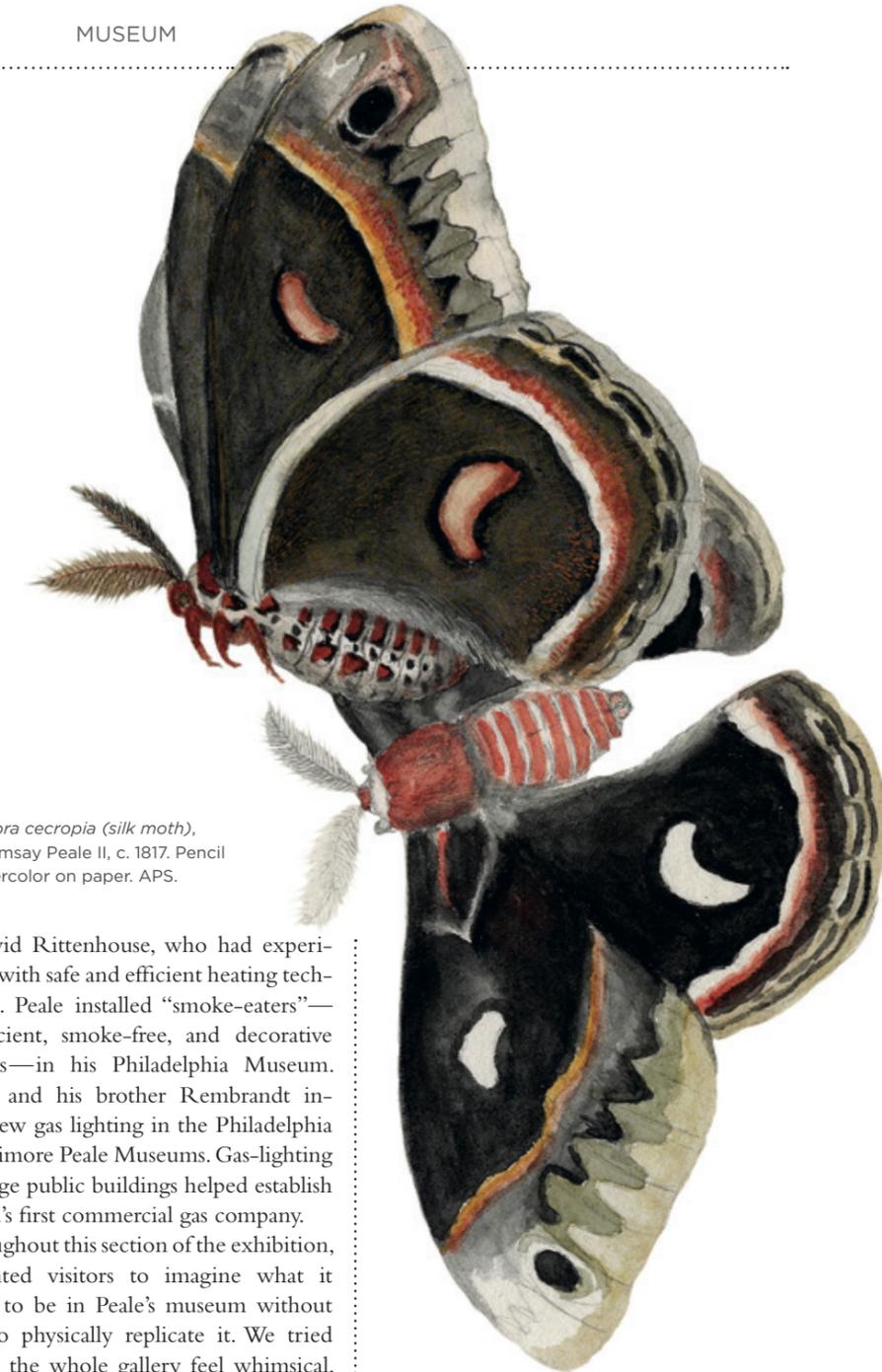
Once home, Charles Willson and his sons pioneered techniques in comparative anatomy to mount two full mastodon skeletons, the first of which was unveiled on Christmas Eve 1801 on the second floor of the Society's Philosophical Hall. It was so popular that Charles Willson charged visitors an additional 50 cents to see it. The second mastodon toured Europe with Rembrandt and Rubens Peale in 1802 and 1803. In addition to combating Buffon's claims, the discovery and its publicity promoted wider public and scientific conversations about the age of the earth and the then-controversial concept of extinction.

Peale's museum contributed to science by pioneering organizational principles in its displays. Natural specimens were arranged according to Linnaean principles of taxonomic order. By 1814, the museum contained 1,824 birds, 250 quadrupeds, 135 reptiles, and 650 fish, in addition to its 269 paintings. Some of these original specimens are on display in our exhibition.

Many of Charles Willson's children inherited their father's appreciation for the natural world and contributed to collecting for the museum. Rubens assumed control of the Philadelphia Museum, and, in 1814, Rembrandt established another Peale Museum in Baltimore. In 1825, Rubens established yet another branch in New York. This exhibition compares Charles Willson's drawings of bird specimens collected by Lewis and Clark with those of his son, Titian Ramsay Peale II. Titian became a prolific scientific illustrator in his own right, documenting new species on expeditions around the globe. The exhibition includes Titian's drawings, watercolors, and bird specimens from the U.S. Exploring Expedition in 1838–1842.

At his museum, Charles Willson Peale initiated moving picture shows, built one of the nation's first skylights, and installed new heating and cooling technologies. One of the APS Museum's most interesting collections includes five fireplace models made by Charles Willson and his son Raphaëlle. In May 1796, the Society launched a contest for the improvement of fireplaces. The Peales submitted five models, won the competition (they ran unopposed), and were granted a U.S. patent for their designs. The models built on previous designs by Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Thompson,

Hyalophora cecropia (silk moth), Titian Ramsay Peale II, c. 1817. Pencil and watercolor on paper. APS.



and David Rittenhouse, who had experimented with safe and efficient heating technologies. Peale installed "smoke-eaters"—fuel-efficient, smoke-free, and decorative fireplaces—in his Philadelphia Museum. Rubens and his brother Rembrandt installed new gas lighting in the Philadelphia and Baltimore Peale Museums. Gas-lighting these large public buildings helped establish America's first commercial gas company.

Throughout this section of the exhibition, we wanted visitors to imagine what it felt like to be in Peale's museum without trying to physically replicate it. We tried to make the whole gallery feel whimsical, quirky, and amusing. As visitors enter, they are greeted by Charles Willson Peale revealing his museum behind a curtain, in a reproduction of his famous painting, *Artist in His Museum*. Beneath the newspaper advertisement announcing the Philadelphia Museum's move to Philosophical Hall, visitors are invited to add their signatures to those of George Washington, John Adams, and James Monroe, in a replica subscription book for tickets to the museum.

Flanking the gallery on one side is a large, colorful vinyl reproduction of the museum as it appeared in the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall). On the

other side, our spatial designer, Russ Drisch, constructed a large set of cases meant to mimic an Enlightenment cabinet. This highlights the Peales' interests in taxidermy, archaeology, and global exploration. The cabinet also includes an educational box where visitors can take out and touch a shell or mastodon tooth. Facing visitors on the opposite side of the gallery is a wall of silhouettes. At the far end of the gallery, visitors can use a touchscreen to watch topical videos about silhouettes, taxidermy, and paint palettes, as well as a short, amusing film on Peale's museum produced by Independence National Historical Park.



Philadelphia Museum admission ticket, 1822. APS. Peale-Sellers Family Collection.

The Legacy of the Peales

We focused the final section of the exhibition on the Peale family's legacy as both artists and museum operators. Charles Willson's portraiture of American Revolutionary heroes defined his legacy as an artist. Raphaelle, Rubens, and many other Peales in subsequent generations pursued an artistic life and inherited many of his techniques and skills. This section includes sketchbooks, color palettes, notes on painting techniques, and several portraits and still lifes. Rembrandt, Titian, and others also continued in the tradition of advancing their own careers through the production of patriotic imagery and national iconography. Patriotic primers and designs for American currency showcased in the exhibition reveal this continued trend of nationalism.

This section of the exhibition also features the work of Charles Willson's granddaughter, Mary Jane Peale, who carried the Peale family's artistic legacy through the 19th century. Little has been written about Mary Jane despite the Society's large collection of her diaries and correspondence. As she remains relatively unknown, we wanted to highlight Mary Jane's artistic skill and passion. She received great encouragement and tutoring from her uncle Rembrandt, as well

as Sarah Miriam Peale and Anna Claypoole Peale (James's daughters, and accomplished artists in their own right). Specializing in still lifes and portraiture, Mary Jane opened a studio in Pottsville, Pennsylvania in 1852. Anna Claypoole Peale specialized in miniatures. She and her sister, Sarah Miriam, were the first female members elected to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Both were successful painters at a time when professional female artists were rare.

Ultimately, after 62 years as a successful start-up, Peale's museum dissolved and its collections were sold at auction between 1848 and 1854. Many of the paintings were purchased by the city of Philadelphia, and can be seen today in the Second Bank at Independence National Historical Park. The bulk of the natural and cultural collections, sold to Moses Kimball and P. T. Barnum, burned in catastrophic fires in 1851 and 1865. A few remnants were preserved by museums at Harvard, Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences, and here at the APS. The collections that survive are some of the earliest natural collections in the United States, and often represent the "type" or reference specimen for an entire species.

The Peales democratized the American museum—a novel idea that stuck. As a re-

pository of significant artworks, natural objects, and cultural artifacts aimed at amusing and educating the broad public, Peale's Philadelphia Museum set the precedent for modern museums. Today, the use of orderly, scientific displays, as well as approaches to advertising, tiered ticketing, memberships, advisory boards, targeted programming, and guided public tours have become standard practice for museums and cultural heritage sites.

In this section, we included a small homage to Sophonisba Peale and Coleman Sellers, whose descendants have been the main keepers and authors of the Peale family's history. On display are Sophonisba's and Coleman's portraits, marriage certificate, and love letters they wrote to each other during their courtship. We also included an architectural model of the renovation plans for the Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture, an organization working to revive Baltimore's Peale Museum and its original building.

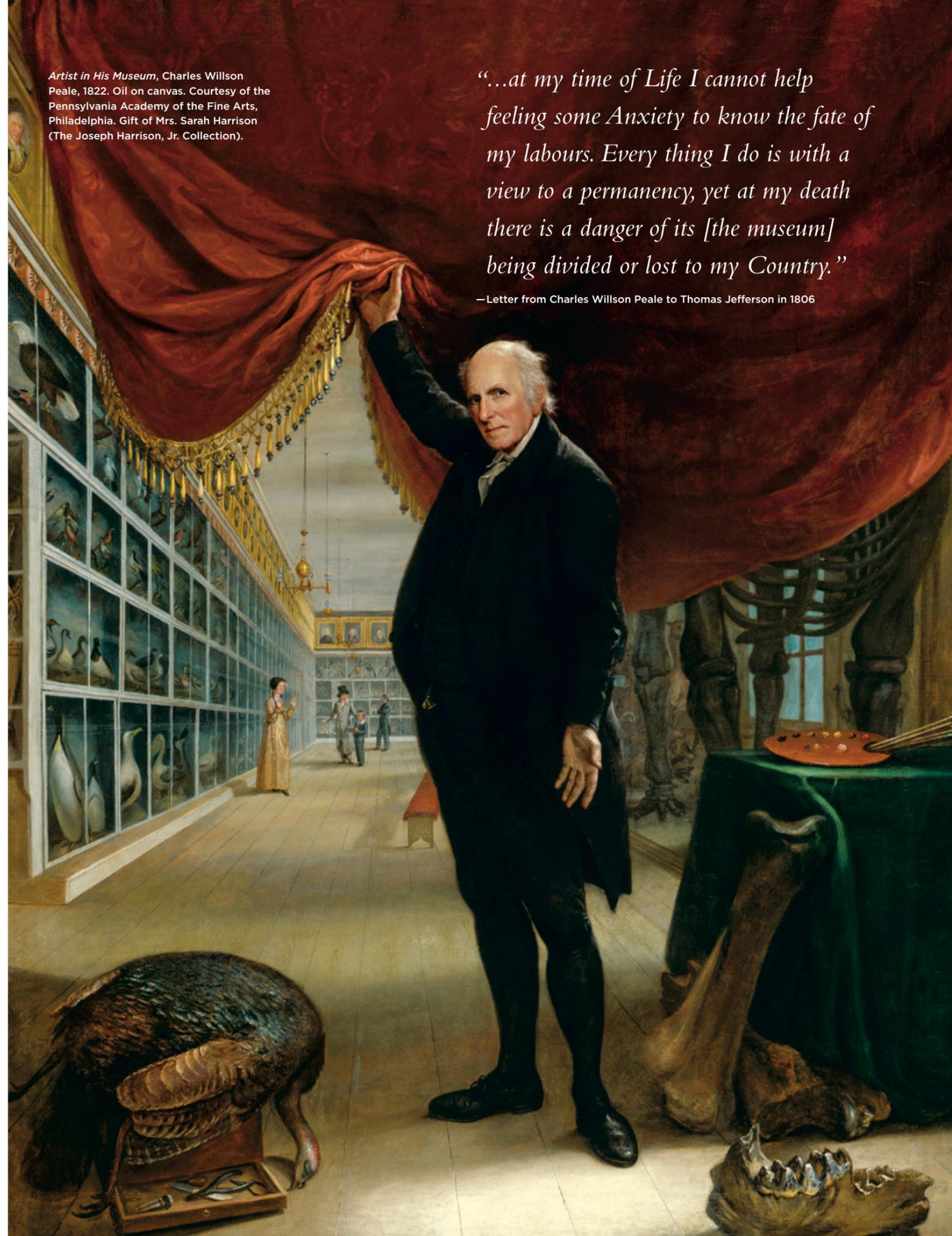
Ever busy and ever curious, the Peales were one of the most productive—and most eccentric—early American families. Committed to advancing Enlightenment ideals and the new American republic, the Peales became influential members of Philadelphia's artistic, intellectual, and political communities. Through their many pursuits, the Peales left an unmistakable legacy that continues to shape American popular culture and the museums we visit today.

By learning about the Peales, we hope that visitors to historic Philadelphia will gain a more humanized perspective on early American history and the formation of an American identity. We also hope that our visitors will reflect on the value of museums, archives, and collections—and see them as crucial tools in answering historical and scientific questions. Finally, we hope that visitors will be inspired by the whimsical, wonderful, and peculiar Peales enough to tinker, make art, or start a collection for themselves.

Between April and September 2017, some 74,000 visitors have already come to see *Curious Revolutionaries*. At the very least, we hope the Museum's visitors have developed a new appreciation for the curious Peales.

Diana Marsh and Amy Ellison,
Andrew W. Mellon
Post-Doctoral Curatorial Fellows

Artist in His Museum, Charles Willson Peale, 1822. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection).



"...at my time of Life I cannot help feeling some Anxiety to know the fate of my labours. Every thing I do is with a view to a permanency, yet at my death there is a danger of its [the museum] being divided or lost to my Country."

—Letter from Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson in 1806

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Benedict H. Gross Leverett Professor of Mathematics Emeritus, Harvard University

Laura L. Kiessling Steenbock Professor of Chemistry, Laurens Anderson Professor of Biochemistry, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Rebecca Richards-Kortum Malcolm Gillis University Professor, Department of Bioengineering, Rice University

Michael S. Turner Director, Kavli Institute for Cosmological Physics, Bruce V. and Diana M. Rauner Distinguished Service Professor, University of Chicago

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Stuart H. Orkin David G. Nathan Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School; Investigator, Howard Hughes Medical Institute

Neil H. Shubin Robert R. Bensley Distinguished Service Professor of Anatomy, University of Chicago

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Barack Obama 44th President of the United States

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Katharine Ellis 1684 Professor of Music, University of Cambridge

Frantz Grenet Professor, Collège de France

Meave Leakey Research Professor, Department of Anthropology, Stony Brook University

Louise Richardson Vice–Chancellor, University of Oxford

Silhouette sheet, Moses Williams, c. 1802–1825. APS. Peale-Sellers Family Collection.