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From Useful Knowledge to Rational Amusement: Museums in Early America

Allison M. Morrill
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Allison M. Morrill entitled "From Useful Knowledge to Rational Amusement: Museums in Early America." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Lorri Glover, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

J.P. Dessel, G. Kurt Piehler

Accepted for the Council:


Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

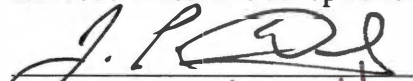
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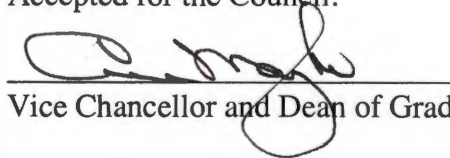


J.P. Dessel



G. Kurt Piehler

Accepted for the Council:



Vice Chancellor and Dean of Graduate Studies

**FROM USEFUL KNOWLEDGE TO RATIONAL AMUSEMENT:
MUSEUMS IN EARLY AMERICA**

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Allison M. Morrill
May 2004

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Abstract

This study examines the rise of early American museums following their birth from intellectual societies in the American colonies. The two primary categories of collections, scientific and patriotic items, were examined for their significance and intended purpose. Likewise, both popular education and interesting entertainment were identified as factors encouraging early museum proprietors to seek the appeal of the general public while simultaneously drawing visitors to these early establishments of learning and leisure.

In order to understand the motives behind intellectuals' desires for popular education, scientific knowledge, and patriotic enthusiasm, the writings of many American intellectual elites were consulted. The study relied upon writings of the Founding Fathers to better understand the growing importance of educating the general public and the desire to form a stronger and more resilient nation following the American Revolution. In addition, broadside and newspaper advertisements, biographical accounts, and the extensive papers of Charles Willson Peale, one of Philadelphia's first museum proprietors, helped trace the development of museums from a specialized scientific cabinet associated with private intellectual organizations to the establishment of publicly available museums.

This study challenges the long held belief that cabinets of curiosity and early museums were comprised of random items with no clear objective or purpose in mind. In fact, research indicates that the ideas for creating profitable, educational, and entertaining museums mattered greatly in revolutionary America. The two earliest museums in Philadelphia serve as models to study the birth of publicly accessible museums in America. The formation of these two influential museums in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, inaugurated issues surrounding museums that still persist some two hundred-twenty years later.

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Introduction

The museum movement in America began not as a “chance assemblage of curiosities” as George Brown Goode, the assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institute, told his audience at the third annual meeting of the American Historical Association in 1888. Rather it derived from the American democratic culture attuned to serious and egalitarian aspirations.¹ This work will dispel Goode’s false assumption by tracing the origins of early American museums, primarily founded in Philadelphia, from their inception as “cabinets of curiosity” to the fully formed museums of Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere and Charles Willson Peale in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Examining the early intellectual societies and formation of museums following the American Revolution, reveals that museums were typically thoughtfully founded and systematically organized. The earliest collections indicate that the primary focus of colonial intellectual societies and museums centered on the study of science and natural history specimens. Avid study of these subjects allowed British-American intellectuals to learn more about their environment, while bolstering patriotic sentiments. Investigating the collections also allows scholars to understand that intellectuals hoped the accumulated objects could be used to educate the citizens in a young United States as

¹ George Brown Goode, “Museum-History and Museums in History,” in *Papers of the American Historical Association* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1888), 263.

well as counter negative European perceptions of America. The simultaneous competition between ideals of democratization in education and popular entertainment also provides an interesting perspective in understanding how social values influenced early museum proprietors.

Despite the importance of intellectual societies and museums in the minds of men such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, early American museums have attracted little attention among historians. The limited amount of scholarship that does address this topic often implies that museums in America began with the efforts of Charles Willson Peale. Peale's descendent and biographer, Charles Coleman Sellers, has written two histories of Peale's life and the accomplishments of his museum, founded in 1786. Both *Charles Willson Peale* and *Mr. Peale's Museum* tell the story of Peale's life as an artist and his achievements as museum proprietor. Two years after the publication of Sellers' second book, another work, *Charles Willson Peale and His World*, emerged. This impressive work also focused on Peale's accomplishments, but this author emphasized Peale's work in art and science. Finally, David Brigham in 1995 wrote *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, again centered on Peale, stressing how his museum affected its audience.²

None of those scholars discussed Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, America's first true museum proprietor. Du Simitiere, a native of Geneva, whose formal museum existed only two and one-half years in Philadelphia, has been ignored or marginalized in much of

² Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969); Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980); Edgar P. Richardson, Brooke Hindle, and Lillian B. Miller, *Charles Willson Peale and His World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982); David Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

the scant historical literature that does exist on museums. Paul Ginsburg Sifton and Joel Orosz have provided much of the information that is known about the Swiss. Sifton, writing his unpublished dissertation on Du Simitiere in 1960, provides us with a thorough history of the Swiss's life and collecting activities. Impressively done, the work sifts through pamphlet and broadside collections, allowing the reader to see that Du Simitiere was much more than a flighty collector. Indeed one of Du Simitiere's major achievements was his avid and focused collection of 710 pamphlets and 358 broadsides pertaining to the events surrounding the American Revolution.³ Historians today writing the intellectual history of the founding generation have benefited enormously from the preservation of materials such as these, allowing scholars and readers alike the opportunity to better understand the reasons for the North American split from the British empire.⁴ Orosz recounted Du Simitiere's often overlooked contributions to American numismatics in his study, *The Eagle that is Forgotten: Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, Founding Father of American Numismatics*.⁵ But this short study is narrowly focused on Du Simitiere's passion for collecting numismatic materials and his role in creating the Great Seal of the United States, rather than the Swiss's museum facilities and its broader ramifications.

³ Paul Ginsburg Sifton, "Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere (1737-1784): Collector in Revolutionary America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 209.

⁴ For historical scholarship that utilizes pamphlets pertaining to the American Revolution to better understand the motives, assumptions, beliefs, and ideas behind events of the time, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁵ Joel Orosz, *The Eagle that is Forgotten: Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, Founding Father of American Numismatics* (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Bowers and Merena Galleries, Inc., 1988).

Singularly focused books also exist on the establishment of Benjamin Franklin's Junto, the Philadelphia Library Company, and the American Philosophical Society.⁶ These kinds of works retell the history of the organization, but refrain from discussing the broader implications each association held for the formation of subsequent intellectual societies, the eventual accumulation of cabinets of curiosity, and their role as precursors to museums founded later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

By studying the available sources and investigating the goals of many elite intellectuals during the eighteenth century, it becomes clear that the earliest efforts to establish museums reveals the shift in American values from hierarchicalism to more democratizing impulses. Ideas explored by Gordon Wood are clearly manifested in the transformation from private, elite dominated institutions to public venues of education and entertainment. In *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Wood's asserts that the Revolution thoroughly altered American society; social relationships, the way people connected to one another, had fundamentally changed.⁷ Thus, society in the early years of the nineteenth century was markedly different from colonial society. Students of museum history often cite the Revolution, with its radical effects upon society, as the time when museums first began to form in America. However, upon closer examination, one discovers that museums began much earlier, blossoming out of the intellectual organizations in cities such as Philadelphia in the mid-eighteenth century. Museums in

⁶ See, for example Edwin Wolf, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin: A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1731-1976* (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1976); George Maurice Abbot, *A Short History of the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1913); Austin K. Gray, *Benjamin Franklin's Library: A Short Account of the Library Company of Philadelphia 1731-1931* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1936).

⁷ Gordon Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

early America actually trace their origins back to intellectual society's cabinets of curiosity. Thus the transformation they underwent should be recognized as a reaction to the radical shift in society that occurred during the years surrounding the Revolution. By tracing the beginning of museums back to these early collections, students then clearly see the evolution of small collections for private viewing into public venues for education and leisure.

Scholars, by too often overlooking this important occurrence and confusing the chronology of this topic, are missing a significant aspect in the public diffusion of the sciences and arts, as well as the advent of public education and emergence of entertainment in America. Following the Revolution, many intellectuals felt it their responsibility to create an enlightened citizenry, knowledgeable of their new country and its plant and animal inhabitants. Through the acquisition of scientific knowledge by the general public, elites expected to build a stronger, more resilient nation.⁸ When Du Simitiere and Peale formally opened their museums to ordinary citizens in the 1780s, visitors found many examples of scientific specimens for study. By tirelessly collecting and displaying objects of science the early intellectual societies and museum proprietors provided scientific knowledge to a broader audience.⁹

Correspondingly, both Du Simitiere and Peale sought to influence the level of American artistic taste and entertainment. Du Simitiere endeavored through the use of

⁸ The importance of science in early America is explained in Brooke Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956).

⁹ For the shift from elite to public forms of American education see David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the America Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1985); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

his artistic insight and talents to increase the level of cultural appreciation of the average North American citizen. By displaying many various pieces of art and patriotic memorabilia, he intended a tour of his museum to be both entertaining and meaningful to visitors. The added benefit of personally led tours through Du Simitiere's collection meant that each visitor would receive an anecdotally enhanced visit. Personally led tours would become only one of many amusements to be found at Peale's Museum over the course of its existence in Philadelphia. After the turn of the nineteenth century participation in leisure activities became more acceptable and Peale, embracing this new phenomenon, facilitated the rise of entertainment in society by adding many intriguing items to his collection. The atmosphere he succeeded in producing thus enhanced and promoted the use of museums as a form of education and entertainment well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰

The collections of Du Simitiere and Peale also reveal the shift from the complicated, contested terrain over Independence to the patriotism that dominated the early nineteenth century. Museums offered one way to supply the public with grand images of their new nation. Joyce Appleby has investigated how the Revolution profoundly altered the lives of white Americans, and how Americans in the New

¹⁰ For the rise of leisure in American society see Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Barbara G. Carson, "Early American Tourists and the Commercialization of Leisure," in Cary Carson, ed., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 373-404; Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

Republic experienced those changes and growing national pride.¹¹ Both Du Simitiere and Peale sought to promote feelings of patriotism by displaying engravings or paintings of Revolutionary heroes for their patrons to view. By facilitating the public's access to knowledge about the founding of their new country and its leaders, museums filled a vital role in building support for the fledgling nation. Feelings of patriotism and nationalism could then proliferate as Revolutionary sentiments encouraged personal initiative and achievements.

The growing conviction that an educated and motivated public was vital to the strength of the new nation played into Peale's museum design. The various locations the museum occupied reveals the gradual shift in importance of the facilities. Beginning in an annex built adjacent to his home, the museum took on a domestic context. However, as the museum moved from its first location to that of Philosophical Hall (in 1794) and lastly to the Pennsylvania State House (in 1802) the museum moved from a highly respected location to one of national recognition and importance. The moves represent a continual elevation in status as well as an affirmation of patriotic sentiments.¹²

The enhanced status of Peale's museum paralleled the shifts in middle-class notions of respectability after 1790. As the museum became more attractive to more upwardly mobile Americans, Peale moved to larger and more honored locations. As seen in Richard Bushman's *The Refinement of America*, after the 1790s the middle class

¹¹ Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹² David Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), especially 13-17.

sought to gain respectability and an elevated distinction in society.¹³ Adopting activities, like visiting museums, formerly reserved only for elites, the middle class partook in leisure opportunities and performed the rituals of refinement. Peale seized on this opportunity, opened his museum to the public and augmented his museum's purpose to that of public education and rational amusement.

Clearly then scientific, patriotic, educational, and cultural values all influenced the transformation of America's first museums. The formation of early intellectual societies and museums was steeped in the desire to instill pride among North Americans while also teaching them about science and natural history. As republican ideals spread among white intellectual elites, museums became a valued venue for the dissemination of knowledge and protections of the nation. Thus by the late eighteenth century, the political and cultural atmosphere of America allowed men such as Du Simitiere and Peale to enthusiastically open their museums to the public.

In order to obtain a clear picture of the evolution from private curiosity cabinet to public museum a wide variety of sources was consulted. The recently published *Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale* proved invaluable. These volumes provide a broad and thorough understanding of Peale's goals and achievements in establishing his museum in Philadelphia. Likewise, the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin* and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* in addition to Thomas Jefferson's published papers and *Notes on the State of Virginia* all reveal the intellectual elite's goals for public education in its many forms and elucidate the early intellectual American's interests in science and natural history.

¹³ Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

Because so few works center wholly on the subject of museums in early America, information from these primary sources were gleaned in fragments and woven together to understand the influences of specific individuals and social values on the establishment and proliferation of museums in early America.

In 1822 Charles Willson Peale, nearing the end of his life, painted a self-portrait entitled *The Artist in His Museum* (Figure 1). It depicts Peale standing in his museum, beckoning visitors to enter the wonderful “world in miniature” he so passionately crafted over the course of his adult life.¹⁴ By the second decade of the nineteenth century museums had become a critical link between elite scientific and scholarly organizations and the egalitarian impulses of public education and entertainment. The painting presents images of these values and showcases the myriad contributions Peale made in the development of museums. The primary figure, Peale himself, is lifting a heavy crimson drapery, as he welcomes visitors to the Long Room of his Philadelphia Museum housed in the Pennsylvania State House now call Independence Hall. Around the wall, cases of birds, mounted in realistic poses with painstakingly accurate backgrounds, seem alive once more. Above the glass cases, hang double rows of portraits of Founding Fathers and Revolutionary War heroes, which Peale hoped would remind visitors of these men’s accomplishments and inspire patriotism. Behind the curtain stands the skeleton of Peale’s main attraction, his mastodon.

¹⁴ Charles Willson Peale, *Autobiography, Peale Papers*, 5; 272.

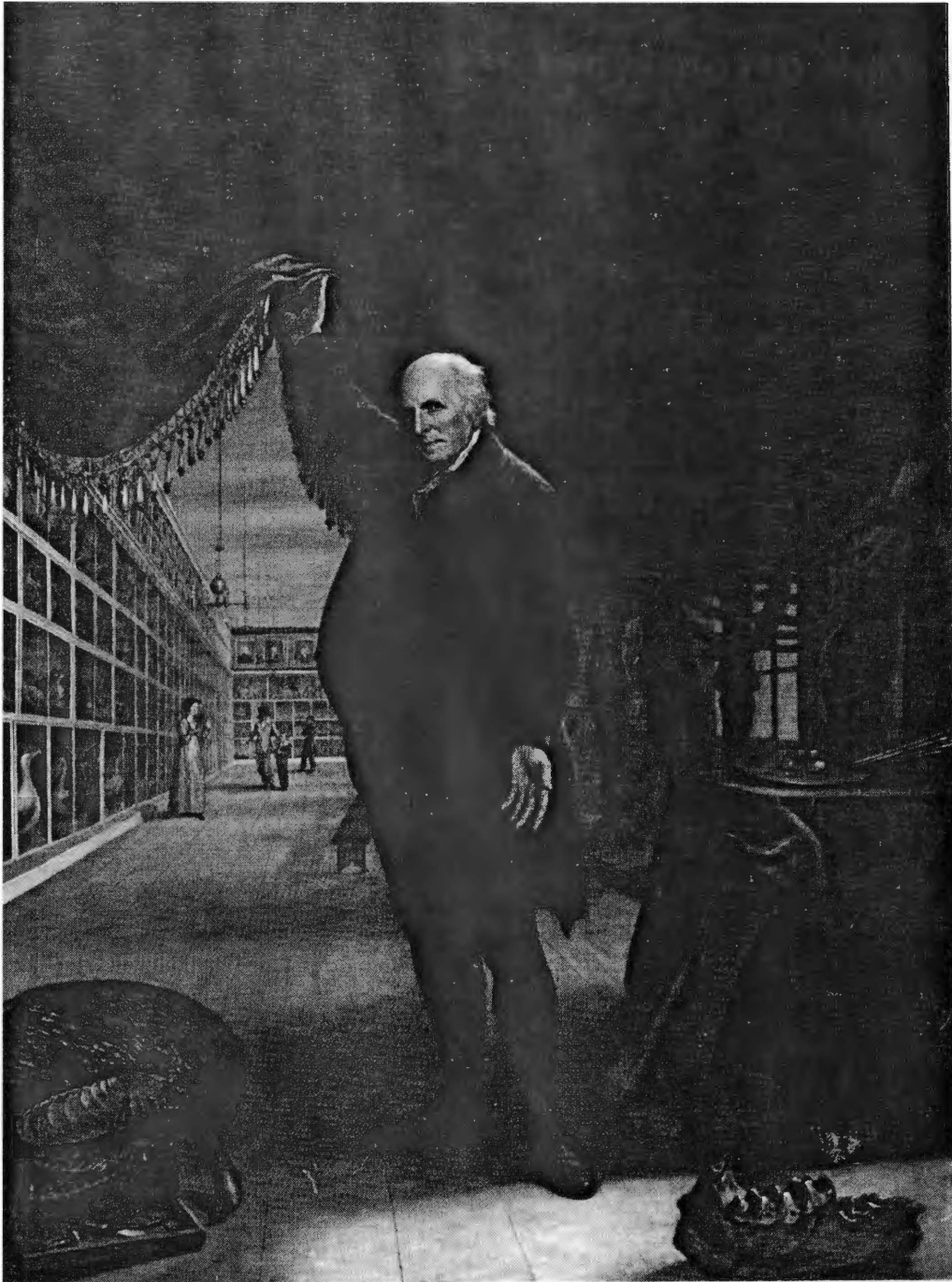


Figure 1. Charles Willson Peale: *The Artist in His Museum*. 1822 (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia)¹⁵

¹⁵ Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, Plate XIV, 402d.

In the foreground Peale reveals the tools of his trade. An open drawer contains accouterments of a taxidermist, delicately placed in a box under the body of a stuffed wild turkey. On the green table to Peale's right lay his brushes and palette, used both in creating and conserving paintings. Along the ceiling hang lamps, which provided light for visitors into the evening hours and represented scientific progress. And gazing in every direction are Peale's museum guests, representing different ages, genders, and religions. A young woman, gazing in amazement at the huge form of the mastodon, wears a bonnet that identifies her as a member of Philadelphia's Quaker population. Behind her stand a man and boy. The father teaches his son about natural history, so this family represents the educational experience visitors will receive. The final patron, an adolescent male, stands arms crossed in contemplation. Peale's painting therefore represents the broad range of his audience as each responds differently to their surroundings. The painting succeeds in presenting the museum in its entirety as a public space straddling the realms of education and entertainment.

Again, one's eyes fall to the main figure of Peale himself. His hospitable stance and "welcoming" arm represent the openness of his museum to anyone wishing to learn or find amusement. He securely holds the drape up knowing that all who take a glance will wish to enter. So please proceed, and take a peek at the transformation from useful knowledge to rational amusement.

Chapter One

“Diffusion of Knowledge”:

The Proliferation of Intellectual Societies

The rapid growth of Philadelphia during the first half of the eighteenth century gave the city a diverse and lively citizenry, full of intellectual curiosity. Becoming one of the most prominent ports in the colonies promoted contact between colonists and Europeans, perpetuating the flow of information and interchange of ideas.¹ As Philadelphia grew in size and affluence, several of its prosperous citizens dedicated their energies to cultural activities and urban improvement. This desire for information gave rise to early organizations of cultural enhancement such as the Library Company and American Philosophical Society. Begun initially as repositories for books, the organizations sought to serve mankind by proliferating knowledge. As their collections of books grew, the organizations incidentally began to obtain other objects of a natural and scientific quality. These once small stores of objects increased through individual donations, creating larger and more diversified collections. Through the diversification

¹ Louis B. Wright, *Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607-1763* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 228.

of collections, colonial intellectuals hoped to offer scientific and cultural knowledge to the Philadelphia public. Their desire for practical knowledge in an enlightened age enabled cultural institutions to make the slow transition from organizations with small collections to museums founded for the purpose of instilling an “appreciation for the curious and historical.”² Thus, efforts by Philadelphia’s emerging intellectual societies to collect books and manuscripts for scholarly study also created the foundation for several early American museums (Figure 2).

By the early eighteenth century the Enlightenment had permeated American society, particularly in urban areas such as Philadelphia. Based upon notions of human

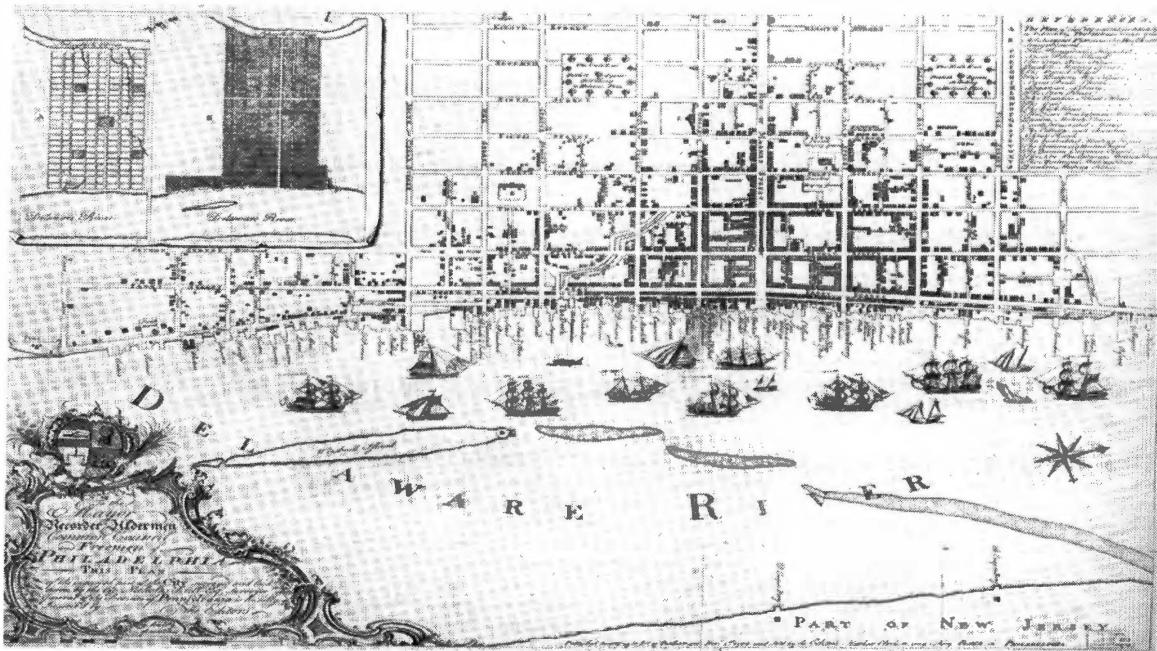


Figure 2. Plan of Philadelphia, 1762 (Library of Congress, Map Division)³

² Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 25.

³ John L. Cotter, Daniel G. Roberts, and Michael Parrington, *The Buried Past: An*

progress through rational thought and civic concern, the Enlightenment began as a reaction to scientific advances that occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Skepticism became very pronounced. Natural history, with its emphasis on the sciences was heavily studied. The movement attracted intellectuals who believed human reason could be used to combat ignorance and tyranny for the betterment of humanity.⁴ Eager to emulate European models, Americans attempted to establish centers of intellectual and scientific knowledge that would in an orderly, practical, and useful manner instruct an inquisitive public.

As the colonies grew in size and population in the early eighteenth century, Philadelphia became a center for Enlightenment thinking, and Philadelphian Benjamin Franklin came to personify this ideal.⁵ In 1727 Franklin and several friends established a “Club of mutual Improvement which we call’d the Junto,” and proclaimed an oath to “love mankind, respect one another, believe in freedom of opinion, and love truth for truth’s sake.”⁶ Meeting in a tavern on Friday evenings, the club required all members to prepare several questions concerning morals, politics, or natural philosophy that the company could discuss. Additionally, members produced papers discussed at quarterly

Archaeological History of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 42.

⁴ Ibid., 12-14; See also Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁵ Gary Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 72-73.

⁶ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 2nd ed., ed. Leonard Labaree (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 116-117.

meetings.⁷ As group discussions grew livelier, the club desired a place with more privacy than a local tavern could afford. Many members of the Junto belonged to the working class in Philadelphia, but one young gentleman in the group offered a room in his home for the meetings.⁸ With this more secure, private meeting place, Franklin suggested that books owned by members be brought together where the group met, “that upon Occasion they might be consulted. Hav[ing] each of us the Advantage of using the Books of all the other Members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each owned the whole.” Thus a common library was formed in the home whereby each individual could use any book for personal study. Although each member initially placed his books in the common collection, the arrangement lasted only about a year as “The Number was not so great as we expected; and tho’ they had been of great Use, yet some Inconvenience occurring for want of due Care of them...each took his Books home again.”⁹

Undaunted by the initial failure of successfully creating a library for the Junto, Franklin set out to establish a separate organization. The failure taught Franklin that a successful library would need a broader base of community support. He and friends from the Junto realized that no individual could afford to fund a private library in colonial Philadelphia, but by combining resources they might accumulate enough capital for the necessary books.¹⁰ Unlike the Junto’s library in which books were owned by individuals

⁷ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 117.

⁸ Robert Grace, an exception among other working class members of the Junto, was “a young gentleman of some fortune, generous, lively, and witty.” He opened his house on Pewter Platter Alley for the Junto to meet and conduct their discussion group. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 117-118.

⁹ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 130.

¹⁰ Edwin Wolf, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin: A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1731-1976* (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1976), 1-2.

and merely stored in a common location, books in this new holding belonged to the Library Company of Philadelphia. As its founder, Franklin desired the library to become the “Mother of all N[orth] American Subscription Libraries.”¹¹

On July 1, 1731, Franklin and fifty other subscribers, “the Majority of us so poor...mostly young Tradesmen,” agreed to invest forty shillings each to start the library. They pledged ten shillings more each year to help buy additional books and pay for maintenance of the institution.¹² The goal of such an endeavor was to “improve the general Conversation of the Americans” and make “common Tradesmen and Farmers as intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries.” Open to any “civil gentleman” unless the person had to be awakened twice or showed any evidence of ‘pulex irritans’ [fleas], the library offered a liberal visitation policy.¹³ Indicating their desire to educate a broad range of men, Franklin and the other Directors sought to make readily available the materials owned by the Library Company. Anyone (awake and deloused) could come to the reading room, which opened for visitors Saturday afternoons from four until eight o’clock. Members could borrow books freely; non-members could also borrow books if they put up a surety, something of value that could be sold if the book was not returned.¹⁴ With its open door policy, the Library Company established a liberal visitation policy, providing reading materials to anyone in the community, regardless of religious

¹¹ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 130.

¹² Franklin, *Autobiography*, 142; and Wolf, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin*, 2.

¹³ George Maurice Abbot, *A Short History of the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: LCP, 1913), 24, also see Gary Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory*.

¹⁴ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 142; and Wolfe, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin*, 8.

affiliation, political group, or social class. At the outset of the institution Franklin noted that there were few people who could read in Philadelphia, yet over time, “Reading became fashionable.” He attributed the libraries popular success to “our People, having no publick Amusements to divert their Attention from Study,” in which they “became better acquainted with Books, and in a few Years were observ'd by Strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than People of the same Rank generally are in other Countries.”¹⁵

After establishing membership and determining a mission, the next step was to draw up a list of books for purchase in England. Rather than ordering works on theology, members requested texts on mathematics, astronomy, architecture, grammar, history, and philosophy.¹⁶ With regard to the books purchased, the Library Company differed greatly from large libraries collected by colleges such as Harvard and Yale, which focused their collections on theological works. The deliberate shift away from religious texts directly reflected the Enlightenment’s influence upon religion in the colonies, and represented the characteristic difference between a theological seventeenth century in the British colonies and a Deistic eighteenth century. As Enlightenment ideals gained popularity, many intellectuals came to believe in the existence of God on purely rational grounds, thus dismissing the notion of worshipping a god that supported and defended a monarchical society, as was found in Europe.

The content found on the shelves at the Library Company reflected the changing nature of American intellectual thought. Religious literature no longer dominated the

¹⁵ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 131, 142.

reading lists of intellectual elites. The desire to read works by Plutarch, Homer, and other secular writers reveal the earnest desire of industrious young tradesmen to improve themselves intellectually. Early shipments of books obtained by the Library Company represent the shift from education centered on religious theology to scholarship based on self-education and science as a means of advancement in American society. The request for texts covering “hard sciences” reaffirms the rising interest in secular subjects in Philadelphia during the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁷

The organization continued to flourish and membership remained steady throughout the late colonial era. Jacob Duché, Rector of Christ Church, noted in 1774 in *Observations on a Variety of Subjects* his amazement at the variety of books available to all orders and ranks of people in the city. The librarian in conversation with Duché assured him “that for one person of distinction and fortune, there were twenty tradesmen that frequented this library,” demonstrating the Library’s continued open door policy.¹⁸ Yet, despite its local popularity, the forty-shilling membership dues were sometimes hard to raise. Therefore, Directors of the Library Company permitted payment to be made by other means. One way to meet the outstanding charges was to pay in kind. Thus, by the late 1740s, the Library Company began to accumulate various specimens of historical or natural interest.¹⁹ One gentleman presented stuffed snakes, another gave a dead pelican,

¹⁶ Gray, *Benjamin Franklin’s Library*, 9-10.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Observations on a Variety of Subjects* was a series of letters written about Philadelphia composed by a “Gentleman of Foreign Extraction” to the nobility in England, Gray, *Benjamin Franklin’s Library*, 19-20.

¹⁹ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 16.

and a third gave robes belonging to former Indian chiefs and made out of animal skins. In 1761, one subscriber bequeathed to the Library a set of fossils. Soon the Library became home to an increasing collection of books as well as a complete “cabinet of curiosities.”²⁰

The Library Company thus also served as a museum, due to the natural history specimens it acquired. The directors saw the presence of interesting materials as advantageous to the “improvement of knowledge.”²¹ They therefore continued to accept additional scientific apparatuses of interest, including the Company’s acquisition of both a microscope and telescope later in the century.²² The Library Company was then able to flourish as it adopted an acquisition policy responsive to the needs of its intellectually aware, economically industrious, but non-elite membership whose new emphasis of study shifted to science and nature.

This growing interest in the study of nature and science encouraged Franklin to found the American Philosophical Society in 1743. By this time Franklin had decided that “the first drudgery of settling new colonies is now pretty well over and there are many in every province in circumstances that set them at ease, and afford leisure to

²⁰ Austin K. Gray, *Benjamin Franklin’s Library: A Short Account of the Library Company of Philadelphia 1731-1931* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1936), 15; Wolf, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin*, 6. The word “cabinet” had two meanings in the eighteenth century. 1. A collection of specimens of natural history, paintings, or instruments, that especially has curious or unusual characteristics; and 2. A cabinet as a case or room devoted to the proper preservation and safe display of specimens or other valuables, defined in Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., “The Cabinet of the American Philosophical Society,” in Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., et al., *A Cabinet of Curiosities: Five Episodes in the Evolution of American Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), 3, and Oxford English Dictionary.

²¹ Minutes of the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, I, 79, quoted in Brooke Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 65.

²² Gray, *Benjamin Franklin’s Library*, 20.

cultivate the finer arts, and improve the common stock of knowledge.”²³ The indefatigable Franklin hoped to found an institution that would “promote the knowledge of natural things and useful experiments,” just as the Royal Society had done in England almost one hundred years earlier in 1663.²⁴ He sought to overcome the geographic distances between “Men of Speculation” throughout the colonies. However, this attempt to create a new intellectual club failed to attract an enthusiastic membership, and it died out within three years. By 1767 another scientific organization had gained prominence. This group grew out of Franklin’s old Junto and members utilized his model for an intellectual society of inquiry, referring to themselves as the American Society for Promoting and Propagating Usefull Knowledge, held in Philadelphia.²⁵ Simultaneously, a member of Franklin’s original American Philosophical Society revived the old organization in Philadelphia. The two groups briefly competed for members before realizing that Philadelphia could not support two scientific societies. By the end of 1768, the organizations combined their resources and merged their titles to be known thereafter as the American Philosophical Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting Usefull Knowledge.²⁶

²³ Benjamin Franklin, “A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America,” (Philadelphia, May 14, 1743). Reprinted in *Early American Imprints*, No. 5190.

²⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), December 18, 1728.

²⁵ Louis B. Wright, *Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607-1763* (New York: Harper & Brother, 1957), 231; Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 18-19.

²⁶ Wright, *Cultural Life of the American Colonies*, 231.

The newly formed American Philosophical Society became a lively society continuing to emphasize the study of science.²⁷ The scientific interest of discoveries made in the colonies led to an increased desire to observe as many actual specimens as possible. To meet this longing the American Philosophical Society encouraged the donation of “what is curious or valuable in the formation [of] a cabinet...as acceptable presents.”²⁸ As donations of interesting materials began to arrive from locations across the colonies, the American Philosophical Society created positions for three curators who would be responsible for the preservation and maintenance of the artifacts and the exhibition of each piece.²⁹

The creation of these positions indicates the vast quantity of materials arriving in Philadelphia. One of the first curators to be appointed by the American Philosophical Society was a young man named Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere. A native of Geneva, he came to the Americas intending to study the flora and fauna of the West Indies and North America in order to write and illustrate a compilation of his findings.³⁰ While in the

²⁷ On March 17, 1768 the original APS published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* a list of their goals, stating “the chief merit of the society was to encourage and direct inquiries and experiments; receive, collect, and digest discoveries, inventions and improvements; and communicate them to the public, thus uniting the labors of many, to attain one end, namely the advancement of useful knowledge and improvement of our country.” One week later they issued a list of subjects they had created committees to study further including:

1. Natural philosophy, mathematics, optics, astronomy and geography
2. Medicine, chemistry, and anatomy
3. Natural history and botany
4. Trade and commerce
5. Mechanics and architecture
6. Husbandry and American improvements

Pennsylvania Gazette, March 17, 1768, and March 24, 1768.

²⁸ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 17, 1768.

²⁹ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 19.

³⁰ Paul Ginsburg Sifton, “Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere (1737-1784): Collector in Revolutionary America” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 5.

West Indies he studied, collected, and painted wildlife. Later he moved north and in 1769 became a naturalized citizen of the province of New York.³¹ Spending time in New York and Boston before settling in Philadelphia, the Swiss obtained access to the brightest intellectual minds of the time. Residing there at the time were such men as Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and David Rittenhouse, each prominent in the scientific world in the colonies and all members of the American Philosophical Society. Taking advantage of the immense opportunities Philadelphia's cultural and intellectual life offered, Du Simitiere, at the age of twenty-nine, obtained the social and intellectual prominence needed to afford him membership into the American Philosophical Society. There he gained appointment as one of three curators during the critical years between 1776-1781.³²

Primarily known as a painter, Du Simitiere also became an avid collector of art, coins, specimens of natural history, and historical artifacts. Financially hindered because of his insatiable desire for collecting, he apparently hoped to earn a living by painting portraits of prominent colonists. Obtaining portrait commissions would, he believed, compensate for the costs of his collecting and provide his livelihood.³³ His artistic ability and knowledge of heraldry put him in contact with several colonial leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and John Adams. Adams, who consulted Du Simitiere on medal and seal designs in 1776 for the seal for the United States of America,

³¹ May 20, 1769. *Journal of the Legislative Council of the Colony of New York*, Vol. II, December 1743...April 1775, (Albany, 1861), 1708, quoted in Sifton, 11.

³² *Minutes of the APS, January 1774-June 1787*, meeting of January 6, 1776, elected "Mr. Rittenhouse/Dr. Duffield/ Mr. Simitiere" as curators.

³³ Sifton, "Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere: Collector in Revolutionary America," 18.

wrote his wife that he had called upon “a Gentleman of French Extraction... whose Designs are very ingenious, and his Drawings are well executed. He has been applied to for advice.”³⁴ While Adams failed to identify the correct nationality of Du Simitiere in the letter, he did perceptively recognize the skill the Swiss had in numismatic design.

Permanently established in Philadelphia by 1774, Du Simitiere organized a private cabinet in his home containing accumulated pieces of American natural history. For the next several years the Swiss allowed visitors to view his collection free of charge. However, by the end of 1781 he recognized the financial opportunities that accompanied opening his collection to the paying public. In April 1782 he advertised through small notices in the newspaper that his private cabinet was open for public viewing, marking the first time a private collection had been turned into a public museum in American history.³⁵ The initial opening failed to attract large numbers of people, so in June Du Simitiere circulated broadsides and ran newspaper advertisements grandly announcing the opening of his “American Museum” (Figure 3). The advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* indicated the variety of unique items available for visitors to see, including Indian antiquities, various weapons, paintings, and a “number of miscellaneous Curiosities of various kinds.”³⁶ Located on Arch Street above Fourth Street, just blocks

³⁴ John Adams to Abigail Adams, August 14, 1776, Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers, Series II: Adams Family Correspondence*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963), 96; Joel Orosz, *The Eagle That Is Forgotten: Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, Founding Father of American Numismatics* (Bowers and Merena Galleries, 1988), 14, 41-2. A further discussion of Du Simitiere’s contributions to American numismatics is found in chapter 2.

³⁵ Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere to Monsieur Gerard, September 12, 1782, Du Simitiere Letter Book, Peter Force Papers, Series 8d, Library of Congress, quoted in Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 35-36. An earlier attempt at a museum in Charleston, South Carolina had been made in 1773, but closed just five years later in 1778 because a fire destroyed the collection. Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 22-23.

³⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), May 1, 1782.

American Museum.

THE Subscriber having been induced from several motives, to open his Collection for the inspection of the Gentlemen and Ladies, Strangers in this City, and their Friends, who are desirous to see the Curiosities it contains, thinks it incumbent upon him, to subjoin for their information, a short enumeration of the subjects of which it is composed, collected from most parts of America, the West-Indies, Africa, the East-Indies, and Europe.

NATURAL CURIOSITIES.

MARINE PRODUCTIONS. A very large and complete Collection of the most rare and beautiful Shells, Sea-eggs, Corals, Sea-plants, Fishes, Tortoises, Crabs, Sea-stars, and other curious animal productions of the sea.

LAND PRODUCTIONS. Rare Birds, and parts of Birds and Nests; a variety of Snakes, Lizzards, Bats, Insects, and Worms, the most of them from different parts of the West-Indies.

FOSSILS. Ores of various metals, Platina, and other mineral substances, Agates, Moccas, Jaspers, Cornelian, Onyx, Chrysolites, Crystals, Sparrs, Quartzes, Asbestos, and other curious and rare-figured, pellucid and diversely coloured Pebbles.

PETRIFICATIONS, of various kinds of wood, Plants, Fruits, Reptiles, Insects, Bones, Teeth, and of those subjects that once belonged to the sea; such as Shells, Sea-eggs, Sea-worms, Shark's Teeth, Corals, and Madreporas: As also curious concretions of petrified waters, and stony incrustations over several kinds of bodies, natural and artificial.

Likewise, Fossil substances produced by the eruptions of Volcanos.

BOTANY. A very considerable Collection of the most curious Plants of the West-Indies, together with the several productions of those Plants; such as their Wood, Bark, Fruits, Pods, Kernels, and Seeds, all in the highest preservation.

ARTIFICIAL CURIOSITIES.

Antiquities of the Indians of the West-Indies, and of the North American Indians.

Ornamental Dresses of the modern Indians of North and South-America, with their Weapons and Utensils.

Curious ancient European and East-Indian Weapons; also a valuable curiosity from the Island of Osaheité.

Various Weapons, Musical Instruments and Utensils of the Negroes, from the coast of Guinea, and the West-Indies.

A Collection of curious Paintings in Oil, Crayons, Water-colours, Miniature, Enamel, China, with specimens of the ancient and modern transparent painting on glass, and a curious deception of perspective.

Besides a number of miscellaneous Curiosities of various kinds.

The days of admittance are Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and the hours for each company at Eleven and Twelve o'clock in the forenoon, and at Three, Four and Five o'clock in the afternoon, allowing an hour for each company; which to avoid inconveniency to themselves, he hopes will not exceed six, or at most eight in one set. By sending for tickets a day or two before, the day and hour that suit the company will be particularly mentioned.

He takes this public opportunity to return his grateful thanks to all those persons who for several years past have from various parts of this Continent contributed to increase his Collection, and hopes he will continue to be favoured with such articles as may fall in their possession, more particularly as he intends his Cabinet to be hereafter the foundation of the first American Museum.

TICKETS to be had in the forenoon of every day, Sundays excepted, at his house in Arch-Street, above Fourth-Street, at HALF A DOLLAR each.

P. E. DU SIMITIERE.

Philadelphia, June 1, 1782.

PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP.

Figure 3. Broadside announcement for the opening of Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere's American Museum, June 1, 1782. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)³⁷

³⁷ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 37.

from Independence and Philosophical Halls, Du Simitiere situated his fledgling museum in a central location, sure to attract visiting dignitaries and interested locals alike.

Charging a half-dollar admission fee for the “American Museum,” Du Simitiere hoped to provide himself with a steady income, while not pricing admission beyond the means of Philadelphians.³⁸

For the fifty-cent admission price, a visitor received a tour from Du Simitiere himself, in groups of no more than eight people and lasting approximately one hour.³⁹ Guests enjoyed the opportunity to examine the natural history specimens, view the works of art, and look at books and historical artifacts. They could also examine an exhibit of coins and paper money, to which the Swiss dedicated an entire section of his museum. Unfortunately, no catalogues or descriptions of the museum exist, so scholars cannot be certain of every item he owned or displayed. However, the broadside advertisements for the opening as well as the auction of Du Simitiere’s belongings gives a fairly solid estimate of what he owned (Figure 4). One can also surmise that he organized his collection logically, perhaps categorizing similar objects together, given Du Simitiere’s contempt for disorganization of other such collections he viewed.⁴⁰

³⁸ The announcement of the museum is preserved as an Early American Imprints Broadside #17523. PS530.E37.

³⁹ As described on Du Simitiere’s broadside, “American Museum,” Early American Imprints Broadside #17523. PS530.E37.

⁴⁰ Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, *Scraps*, no. 92, p. 14, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

For SALE at PUBLIC VENDUE,

On THURSDAY the 10th Day of March, at the late Dwelling House of

Pierre Eugene du Simitiere, Esq.

In Arch-street, between Third and Fourth-streets, where the State Lottery Office is now kept,

THE AMERICAN MUSÆUM.

This curious Collection was, for many Years, the principal Object of Mr. Du Simitiere's Attention, and has been thought worthy of Notice by both American and European Literati: It consists of the following Articles, which will be sold in Lots, viz.

- BOOKS.**
- LOT No. 1 ALMANACS and Registers**
- 2 Architecture, viz.
The Temple, etc. etc.
The Village, etc. etc.
- 3 Catalogues of Books and Curiosities.
- 4 Dictionaries and Grammars, viz.
Glosses of Dutch and English Languages, etc.
French and English Dictionaries, etc.
Grammars, etc. etc.
- 5 Drawing, viz.
Alphabet on Tablets, etc.
The Art of Perspective, etc.
The Art of Drawing, etc.
The Art of Engraving, etc.
The Art of Sculpture, etc.
The Art of Architecture, etc.
The Art of Painting, etc.
The Art of Music, etc.
The Art of Dancing, etc.
The Art of Fencing, etc.
The Art of Riding, etc.
The Art of Boxing, etc.
The Art of Wrestling, etc.
The Art of Juggling, etc.
The Art of Acrobatics, etc.
The Art of Gymnastics, etc.
The Art of Games, etc.
The Art of Sports, etc.
The Art of Amusements, etc.
The Art of Pastimes, etc.
The Art of Diversions, etc.
The Art of Recreations, etc.
The Art of Pleasures, etc.
The Art of Delights, etc.
The Art of Joys, etc.
The Art of Happiness, etc.
The Art of Contentment, etc.
The Art of Satisfaction, etc.
The Art of Peace, etc.
The Art of Quietness, etc.
The Art of Modesty, etc.
The Art of Humility, etc.
The Art of Meekness, etc.
The Art of Mildness, etc.
The Art of Gentleness, etc.
The Art of Kindness, etc.
The Art of Goodness, etc.
The Art of Beauty, etc.
The Art of Grace, etc.
The Art of Virtue, etc.
The Art of Wisdom, etc.
The Art of Knowledge, etc.
The Art of Science, etc.
The Art of Art, etc.
The Art of Industry, etc.
The Art of Diligence, etc.
The Art of Industry, etc.
The Art of Diligence, etc.
The Art of Industry, etc.
The Art of Diligence, etc.

- LOT No. 11 Miscellaneous, [5] viz.**
- 12 Occult Philosophy, viz.
The Art of Magic, etc.
The Art of Witchcraft, etc.
The Art of Sorcery, etc.
The Art of Necromancy, etc.
The Art of Divination, etc.
The Art of Astrology, etc.
The Art of Palmistry, etc.
The Art of Physiognomy, etc.
The Art of Chirology, etc.
The Art of Gemology, etc.
The Art of Astrology, etc.
The Art of Palmistry, etc.
The Art of Physiognomy, etc.
The Art of Chirology, etc.
The Art of Gemology, etc.
- A Lot (5) consisting of**
- 13 Natural History, viz.
The Art of Botany, etc.
The Art of Zoology, etc.
The Art of Mineralogy, etc.
The Art of Geology, etc.
The Art of Cosmology, etc.
The Art of Meteorology, etc.
The Art of Astronomy, etc.
The Art of Geography, etc.
The Art of History, etc.
The Art of Chronology, etc.
The Art of Genealogy, etc.
The Art of Heraldry, etc.
The Art of Epigraphy, etc.
The Art of Numismatics, etc.
The Art of Archaeology, etc.
The Art of Epigraphy, etc.
The Art of Numismatics, etc.
The Art of Archaeology, etc.

- LOT No. 16 Physic and Surgery, viz.**
- 17 Poetry, viz.
The Art of Verse, etc.
The Art of Prose, etc.
The Art of Drama, etc.
The Art of Comedy, etc.
The Art of Tragedy, etc.
The Art of Satire, etc.
The Art of Epigram, etc.
The Art of Epitaph, etc.
The Art of Epitaph, etc.
The Art of Epitaph, etc.
- LOT No. 18 News-Paper, viz.**
- 19 Voyages and Travels, viz.
The Art of Navigation, etc.
The Art of Commerce, etc.
The Art of Trade, etc.
The Art of Industry, etc.
The Art of Diligence, etc.
The Art of Industry, etc.
The Art of Diligence, etc.
- LOT No. 19 Books and Papers relat. to America, viz.**
- 20 A Collection of Pamphlets, etc.

- LOT No. 20 A Collection of Pamphlets, etc.**
- COINS.**
- 21 A Collection of Coins, containing ancient and modern Gold, Silver and Copper Coins and Medals; among which are some very curious Bronzes.
- CURIOSITIES.**
- 22 Indian and African Antiquities, Decrees, Weapons, Utensils, &c.
- 23 Preservations in Spirits, in 38 Plates.
- 24 An elegant Collection of Shells and other Marine Productions.
- 25 Fossils and Petrifications.
- 26 A Collection of Woods, Bark, Fruits, Pods, &c. from the West-Indies.
- DRAWINGS & PRINTS.**
- 27 A Port Folio containing about 120 Drawings.
- 28 Ditto (a) containing about 200 Prints.
- 29 Ditto (b) - - - 190 do.
- 30 Ditto (c) - - - 150 do.
- 31 Ditto (d) - - - 140 do.
- 32 Ditto (e) containing Drawings, finished and unfinished; Specimens of Writing and of old Print.
- 33 Ditto (f) containing about 150 Prints, and a Hortus Siccus.
- 34 Ditto (g) containing about 100 Maps, and Plans.
- HORTISICCI.**
- 35 A Port Folio (h)
- 36 A Collection of Parchment and Paper Money.

MATTHEW CLARKSON, EBENEZER HAZARD, Administrators.

Philadelphia, printed by CHAS. LEITCH, 1795, at the Corner of Fourth and Arch-streets.

Figure 4. Broadside announcement for the sale, at public auction, of the collection of Pierre Eugene du Simitiere's, March 10, 1785. (The Library Company of Philadelphia)⁴¹

⁴¹ Orosz, Curators and Culture, 42.

However well the museum was presented, it did not prove to be a financial success for Du Simitiere. Yet the museum did successfully draw many distinguished people to the exhibit space. Artifacts were sent from numerous locations from people who had visited the Swiss, as well as those who read his broadside and understood his desire to “continue to be favoured with such articles as may fall into their possession.”⁴² The respect and interest held by many for his collection allowed the Swiss to continue to add to his wide variety of “curiosities.” The valuable contributions made by many signify the interest and respect held for Du Simitiere and his collection. His efforts may not have proved immensely popular at the time, but did lay the groundwork for future museums and historical societies.

Even as Du Simitiere collected, exhibited, and worked to create a center for cultural learning, Charles Willson Peale began to display his paintings out of his home. One of America’s foremost artists, Peale moved himself and his family to Philadelphia in 1776. In 1782 Peale opened his portrait collection to the public, displaying paintings of distinguished soldiers and statesmen of the colonies. Aside from painting, the talented artist’s interests also included natural history and science. Consulting several learned gentlemen in Philadelphia including David Rittenhouse, Robert Patterson, and Benjamin Franklin, Peale decided to display his artifacts in his home to a curious, paying public.⁴³ Thus, four years after Du Simitiere opened his “American Museum,” Peale opened his

⁴² Broadside announcing the opening of Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere’s American Museum, June 1, 1782. American Imprints Series microfilm no. 17523.

⁴³ Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale’s Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1980), 9-11. David Rittenhouse was a prominent Philadelphia astronomer and mathematician. Robert Patterson was professor of mathematics at the University of Pennsylvania.

“Philadelphia Museum” (July 1786). Located in his house at the intersection of Third and Lombard Street he billed the museum as a “Repository for Natural Curiosities.” The new gallery included small preserved mammals displayed in painted habitats, stuffed birds, Indian figures dressed in ceremonial garments, and fifty portraits of Revolutionary heroes.⁴⁴ In October of that year, the editor of the *Pennsylvania Packet* touted Peale as having “acquired the means of preserving birds and animals in their natural form, and that he intends to place in his collection of curiosities every species of birds and animals that he is able to obtain, belonging to North and South-America.”⁴⁵ By doing this, Peale determined “to bring into one view a world in miniature” (Figure 5).⁴⁶



Figure 5. Admission Ticket to Peale's Museum, 1788. (Collection of Elise Peale Patterson de Gelpi-Toro)⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Pennsylvania Packet*, July 7, 1786.

⁴⁵ *Pennsylvania Packet*, October 31, 1786.

⁴⁶ Charles Willson Peale, *The Autobiography of Charles Willson Peale*, ed. Sidney Hart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 272.

⁴⁷ Image of “Admission Ticket,” 1788, *Peale Papers*, 2: 235.

As interest in Peale's museum on Lombard Street expanded, so did his collection and reputation. The success of the museum prompted Peale to move his family and entire collection to Philosophical Hall, home of the American Philosophical Society, in 1794. The more centralized location in the heart of Philadelphia contributed to the rapid growth of the museum, so that eight years later, in 1802, Peale needed to move again. This time he shifted most of his artifacts and paintings to the rented top floor of the Pennsylvania State House, better known today as Independence Hall. Between 1802 and 1811 he occupied both locations because of his large amount of displayable materials.⁴⁸

At his Lombard and Third location, Peale housed his collection in an additional annex he built connected to his house. The facilities offered a skylit room, which illuminated his portrait collection, as well as an artificial landscape of hills, trees and bushes with birds, animals, and fish spread about. The museum grew in popularity and the gallery began to fill with additional objects as they were procured either by purchase or donation. As objects accumulated, the gallery began to overflow and the former painting room at the front part of the museum was transformed into a representative environment for natural specimens. By 1794, when Peale relocated the museum in Philosophical Hall, at an annual rental rate of £130, he gained a remarkable location.⁴⁹ Here shelf-lined walls held glass cases built to protect the various natural history specimens, lamps hung from the ceiling to promote nightly visitation hours, and portraits

⁴⁸ David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and Its Audience* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 16-17.

⁴⁹ Charles Willson Peale, *Autobiography, Peale Papers*, 221-222.

of esteemed gentlemen graced the perimeter wall. Linnaean classification dictated the arrangement of each specimen, and comprehensive labels were fixed above the exhibit cases with captions naming the order, genus, and species in Latin, French, and English.⁵⁰ In additional rooms Peale offered magic mirrors, a phsiognotrace that would sketch one's silhouette, and a pipe organ.

By 1802, however, Philosophical Hall no longer offered enough space for Peale's popular and expanding collections. Instead he was granted permission to use "the whole of the upper story" and "the east end" of the "lower story...for the arranging and displaying the said Museum."⁵¹ The move to the State House coincided with the location and subsequent excavation of the mastodon skeleton late in 1801. For this amazing display and other articles, Peale maintained a three-room annex in Philosophical Hall, which could be viewed for an additional charge from the State House museum.⁵²

Other than his keen ability to utilize available spaces for his museum, Peale developed new and unique preservation and display techniques that drew visitors to his every expanding exhibits. He first experimented with his own painter's supplies for preservation materials, then changed from turpentine to arsenic solutions, even using mercury in larger specimens. Improvising on items such as eyes, Peale found a bead of black sealing wax would do, or for larger specimens, a piece of concave glass on which

⁵⁰ Charles Willson Peale to Eleanor Short Peale, Rembrandt Peale, and Rubens Peale, August 30, 1802, *Peale Papers*, 2: 452.

⁵¹ *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, February 19, 27, 1802 and March 24, 1802, quoted in Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 152. For a thorough description of the State House renovations and additions made to facilitate Peale's move, see Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 152-157.

⁵² Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 161-162. The discovery of the American mastodon will be discussed further in chapter 2.

he painted the markings of the original eye.⁵³ Just as he had painted his human subjects against a background of household objects, he was one of the first to demonstrate animal specimens in painted scenes representative of their natural environments, feeling that viewing an artifact this way would facilitate learning about the specimen and its natural habitat. Apprenticed as a saddler as a youth, Peale had learned to use large pieces of wood to support the saddle leather, and drawing from that experience devised the idea of mounting the skins of larger animals on sculptured forms showing the muscle action appropriate to each.⁵⁴ Impressed with Peale's informative presentation of specimens, visitors such as Reverend Manasseh Cutler wrote in 1787 that "[Peale's] natural curiosities were arranged in a most romantic and amusing manner...all having the appearance of life."⁵⁵

The implementation of educational techniques Peale incorporated into his museum displays parallels the transition exclusive intellectual societies made into museums open for public visitation. This shift did not occur in one grand motion; rather the gradual shift from exclusive intellectual society to museum manifested itself under the guidance of enlightened ideals. Early organizations such as the Junto, Library Company, and American Philosophical Society possessed collections of books or artifacts maintained primarily for designated members of the group, while Du Simitière and Peale maintained collections open to anyone willing to pay the entrance fee. Thus

⁵³ Charles Willson Peale, *Autobiography, Peale Papers*, 5: 115-116; Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Hall, October 12, 1792, *Peale Papers* 2: 42-43.

⁵⁴ Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 19.

⁵⁵ "Extracts from the Journals of Manasseh Cutler: New York and Philadelphia in 1787," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 12 (1888): 107-108.

the great debate involving exclusivity of knowledge versus public educational opportunities emerged. In the late eighteenth century many colonial and revolutionary leaders became adherents to Enlightenment philosophies, namely the aspiration to offer education to interested individuals. Thomas Jefferson maintained “tyranny and oppression...will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day...” with the “diffusion of knowledge among the people.”⁵⁶ Looking to the future he also hoped the next generation of leaders would follow his example and support education on a broad scale, even declaring his praise for communities investing in “small circulating libraries.”⁵⁷ Franklin, celebrated for his founding of several successful organizations, pushed for civic associations and the orderly and rational exchange of news and information throughout Philadelphia. The publishing of his widely read Pennsylvania Gazette and Poor Richard’s Almanac as well as the semi-accessible Library Company offset his involvement in membership exclusive groups such as the Junto and American Philosophical Society.⁵⁸ These publicly available works reached a wider audience demonstrating Franklin’s belief in providing information to the public for their benefit and social betterment.

Even though many leaders of the time as well as museum proprietors such as Du Simitiere and Peale espoused the notion that education in the form of libraries and

⁵⁶ Thomas Jefferson to Monsieur DuPont De Numours, April 24, 1816, in Andrew A. Lipscomb, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), 491-92.

⁵⁷ Thomas Jefferson to Monsieur DuPont De Numours, April 24, 1816 and Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche, May 19, 1809 in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 14: 491 and vol. 12: 282.

⁵⁸ Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 9.

exhibitions were free to anyone, there is one dominate contradiction to these ideas. Rather than being free to everyone, the museums allowed only those persons who could afford the price of an admission ticket. Even the much earlier Library Company charged membership fees or the posting of collateral in order to borrow books. Admission prices set at fifty cents for Du Simitiere's museum and twenty-five cents and fifty cents for Peale's natural history exhibit and mastodon respectively limited the number of people who could afford to visit. Even when for a short time in 1790 Peale announced that children under ten would have free admission to the Museum if accompanied by an adult, (he later raised it again to half an adult's price of 12½ ¢) the costs must have been more than some people could comfortably afford.⁵⁹ However, the price was not too excessive, as David Rittenhouse warned Peale prior to his opening that he "might rest assured that it would be a very unprofitable labor."⁶⁰ Although no records remain explaining why Du Simitiere chose to charge fifty cents per visitor, one may speculate that because his museum was only open four days a week he charged the slightly higher fee to offset his enthusiastic collecting expenses. Peale, on the other hand, strove to maintain admission prices that would attract as many people as possible to his ever-expanding facilities.

Even with the admission prices, the phenomenal items collected in Philadelphia became known throughout the colonies. As populations and cities grew, travel within British America also increased. By the end of the eighteenth century, Philadelphia, one of the country's premier cities, saw a rapid rise in travelers. Still very few people

⁵⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, April 26, 1790; *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, January 13, 1791.

⁶⁰ Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, 213.

traveled purely for personal enjoyment. Rather most men traveled for business and partook in leisure activities such as museum visiting in their free time. Women, accompanying family members on such business trips, would often patronize such venues of entertainment as well. George Washington's household account books list several payments for admission to Peale's museum in Philadelphia, once even listing admission for his wife's granddaughters, Elizabeth and Eleanor Custis.⁶¹ Whatever a person's reasons may have been for visiting places of interest and leisure while in the city, people privileged enough to have recreational time were expected to use it for self-improvement.⁶² Thus it became important for leisure activities to be useful.

Understanding the public's desire for useful leisure activities, Du Simitiere and Peale utilized these sentiments to encourage visitors to their museums. The writings of Josiah Tucker, who noted that travel should be used to "gain an enlarged and impartial view of man and things," exemplifies perfectly the notion Peale would later capitalize upon regarding the use of free time to learn about items in his museum.⁶³ For travelers then, a museum offered the best of both worlds; it satisfied people's curiosity with the world beyond their home as well as offered a socially acceptable leisure activity.

Thus by the close of the eighteenth century, small collections of randomly assembled objects had been transformed into ever expanding repositories of the unusual

⁶¹ George Washington's Household Account Book, 1793-1797, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 29, 1905, Vol. 30, 1906, and Vol. 31, 1907.

⁶² Barbara G. Carson, "Early American Tourists and the Commercialization of Leisure," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 398, 400.

⁶³ Josiah Tucker, *Instructions for Travellers*, 1757, quoted in Carson, "Early American Tourists," 401.

and interesting. Men had succeeded in taking their passion for the accumulation of knowledge and objects and found a way of educating the public as well as earning a living. As factors such as the Enlightenment, the spread of republican ideals, and an increased desire for instructive intellectual activities permeated American society their subsequent culmination led to the proliferation of knowledge and successful establishment of museums.

Chapter 2

“An Evidence of Progress”:

Science, Patriotism, and Public Museums

Guided by ideals of the Enlightenment and a freshly formed distinctive American culture, museums took shape amidst the quest for scientific knowledge and the advent of patriotism. Forced to assemble their own collections because the new nation lacked historical riches of a celebrated past, museum proprietors constructed collections which became repositories for the interesting, unusual, and natural. Scientific curiosity encouraged the inquisitive to study and collect the flora and fauna of their environments, yet this interest stemmed from more than simply scientific intrigue. The information gleaned from scientific inquiry would reassert pride among British Americans who had been acutely hurt by European disinterest in and disdain for the American environment. Colonial intellectuals were anxious to dispute the widespread eighteenth-century belief that all life forms in America were weak and immature as had been indicated in scientific literature.¹ Count de Buffon, one of the eighteenth century’s foremost naturalists attested

¹ For further discussion about European perceptions of colonial British America see Michael Zuckerman, “Identity in British America: Unease in Eden,” in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 115-157.

in his book *Histoire Naturelle* that the American environment produced plants and animals that were smaller and less healthy than those in Europe. According to Buffon, the “New World” was too moist, too cold, and too immature to sustain life on a grand, advanced scale. Asserted in 1749, this belief increasingly bothered many intellectual North American colonists who found it an unfair assumption of their new homeland.²

The idea of collecting items of scientific significance to challenge the claims of degeneracy appealed to many colonial leaders and spread as the colonies drew closer to the Revolution. Accumulating specimens of various flora and fauna found in the colonies became important to those interested in the scientific world and taught people everywhere of the great wonders found in America. Collections consisted of plants, animals, rocks, and fossils, demonstrating the wide variety of materials available for study. Museum proprietor Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere’s collection reflected his travels throughout North America prior to his settling in Philadelphia, while Charles Willson Peale’s accumulation of objects emphasized North American materials he collected or acquired from friends and fellow naturalist collectors. His most noted artifact of natural history was the fossilized mastodon skeleton he personally exhumed from the lower Hudson River Valley in 1801.³ Because America lacked a magnificent historical past, scientists, artists, and intellectuals faced the challenge of promoting an atmosphere of intellectual endeavors without European influence. Although aware of Europe’s cultural primacy,

² Joel Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990), 52-53.

³ Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, “Entrepreneurs and Intellectuals: Natural History in Early American Museums,” in *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum*, ed. William T. Alderson, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992), 24.

early museum proprietors self-consciously sought to promote American scientific achievements. By excluding European contributions, community leaders and early museum proprietors teamed together in an effort to cultivate a sense of cultural pride. The objects collected thus helped define early America as a significant participant in the scientific dialogue of the eighteenth century.

The efforts made to advance America in the international scientific community worked to counter European held notions of North American degeneracy. Included in the group of troubled intellectuals was leading American scientist Thomas Jefferson. He boldly renounced the European held notions and wrote extensively to counter Buffon's accusations. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1787, Jefferson fervently defended the vitality of flora, fauna, and inhabitants of North America. He found most troubling the notion "that nature is less active, less energetic on one side of the globe than she is on the other. This new theory of the tendency of nature to belittle her productions on this side of the Atlantic..." could not be true because "the truth is, that a pigmy and a Patagonian, a mouse and a mammoth, derive their dimensions from the same nutritive juices."⁴ In order to substantiate his belief, Jefferson devoted some thirty-five pages of his *Notes on Virginia* to the scientific information he had amassed and maintained that plants and animals varied by size and weight on both sides of the ocean.

While writing the only book-length work he would produce during his lifetime, Jefferson sought comments on the manuscript from many friends. However, he chose

⁴ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 41-42, 64.

only to include colleague Charles Thomson's observations in the printed editions.⁵

Thomson, a Philadelphia merchant and politician, shared with Jefferson two very similar interests: American Independence and the study of science. Aligning with Jefferson, Thomson also refuted Buffon's broad oversimplification of native people in North America arguing, "Monsieur Buffon has indeed given an afflicting picture of human nature in his description of the man of America. But sure I am there never was a picture more unlike the original."⁶

Scholars such as Jefferson and Thomson believed that uncovering scientific information would allow America to combat negative perceptions circulating throughout Europe. Colonial intellectuals recognized science as the way to contribute to the world's increasing empirical interests. They hoped the uncovering of scientific data would prove American equality and garner respect from European intellectuals. Early museum proprietor Charles Willson Peale ardently believed his museum "would present to the American as well as the European World, an evidence of progress in the department of science, whose successful cultivation has always been a characteristical mark of an advanced civilization."⁷ The available access to a vast, continent dramatically different

⁵ Charles Thomson was active in colonial resistance against Britain. Although Pennsylvania conservatives kept him from being elected a delegate to the Continental Congress, Thomson was chosen as its secretary in 1774, and continued in the position until 1789. Thomson was also one of the two original signers of the Declaration of Independence on July 2, 1776. His signature was beside John Hancock's and circulated throughout the colonies as well as sent to George III of England. Additionally, Thomson is credited with creating much of the final design of the Great Seal of the United States. For more information about Charles Thomson and his life see, J. Edwin Hendricks, *Charles Thomson and the Making of a New Nation, 1729-1824* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1979).

⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 183; Boyd Stanley Schlenker, *Charles Thomson: A Patriot's Pursuit* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 199-200.

⁷ Charles Willson Peale, "Address to the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia," October 5, 1795, *Peale Papers* 2: 126-7.

from Europe and containing numerous examples of vegetation, animals, and interesting topography held innumerable opportunities for scientific contributions. The study of natural history, botany, zoology, and geology became particular points of interest. In a letter to Jefferson in March 1782, Thomson noted, “what the soil [of America] is capable of producing can only be guessed at and known by experiment,” indicating an interest in unknown natural history specimens of which scientists and collectors focused much attention.⁸

Interested in the study of natural history and aware of colonial efforts to combat European cultural chauvinism, early naturalist and museum proprietor Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere used his wide-ranging collection to contribute to the endeavor. He dedicated much time, effort, and great amounts of his personal assets to scientific pursuits, including building a large collection of natural history specimens. By 1768, he became sufficiently well known in intellectual circles to be elected a member of the American Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge. Traveling extensively prior to the Revolution, between 1757 to 1774, he visited most major islands in the Caribbean as well as prominent North American cities gathering natural history specimens. When unstable financial circumstances undercut his ability to travel and collect, he chose to establish himself in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁹ At the urging of friends, Du Simitiere opened his American Museum in 1782, where he displayed the natural history specimens he had accumulated, classifying and displaying them to the best of his ability. The collection he

⁸ Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., *Early American Science: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Williamsburg, Virginia: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1955), 19.

⁹ Paul Ginsberg Sifton, *Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 10.

placed on exhibition included a variety of natural curiosities, which he listed on his broadside announcement in June 1782. The exhibit was composed of animals and insects, “the most of them from different parts of the West Indies” as well as various kinds of petrifications, fossil substances produced by eruption of volcanoes, and a considerable collection of the most curious plants “all in the highest preservation.”¹⁰ The impressive collection of artifacts and myriad objects formed the basis of his “American Museum,” indicating that natural history constituted a major part of his collection and demonstrating his achievements in this field of natural science.¹¹

Equally offended by European claims of American inferiority, artist and eventual museum proprietor Charles Willson Peale also spent a considerable amount of time countering these accusations. By studying American wildlife he gained a greater appreciation for the natural wonders found in America. Baffled by the lack of admiration for North America’s natural world, Peale, in a moment of frustration, once said that Buffon must have “either a great antipathy to America or to truth.”¹² Increasingly perplexed and frustrated in the 1770s by the blatant refusal of Europeans to accept Americans as equals, Peale and likeminded intellectuals decided to assemble a collection of artifacts that would demonstrate the greatness of America. This decision worked to dispute European assumptions while simultaneously, and unwittingly, establishing a repository of natural American culture.

¹⁰ Du Simitiere Broadside, June 1, 1782, The Library Company of Philadelphia.

¹¹ Sifton, “Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere: Collector in Revolutionary America,” 17, 134, 249, 306-307.

¹² Edgar P. Richardson, *Charles Willson Peale and His World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983) 87, quoted in Orosz, 53.

At the turn of the century, Peale attached a museum of natural history to the portrait gallery he had opened at his home. He assembled the collection of natural history specimens through trial and error as he devised and tested new methods of taxidermy.¹³ His decision to assemble preserved animals resulted in the largest collection of natural curiosities in the country. The exhibit included such exotic specimens as a golden pheasant given to George Washington by the Marquis de Lafayette, which Peale requested to obtain and preserve upon its death.¹⁴ While collecting numerous specimens and utilizing his artistic talents Peale developed the unique idea of displaying the animals in their natural habitat, as this “is not the practice, it is said, in Europe to paint skyys & Landscapes in their casses of birds and other animals.”¹⁵ In doing so, he created special backdrops for some of his mounted specimens. Additionally, at the end of the gallery space he assembled an earthen mound furnished with trees and a thicket and offset by a small pond and beach. Carefully and thoughtfully placed within the scene were mounted mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds, all preserved in lifelike postures. Aspiring toward scientific accuracy, Peale arranged the mammals and birds based on Linnaeus’s international binomial nomenclature system and likewise utilized other contemporary classification systems for the arrangement of his mineral and shell collections. Thus

¹³ Before Peale could establish a museum collection, he had to learn how to preserve the skins of animals and birds. One of his earliest attempts was an Angola cat brought by Benjamin Franklin from France, which Peale was not able to successfully preserve. By the October 31, 1786, he believed he had perfected the technique, announcing his success in the local news section of the *Pennsylvania Packet*. However, the method was not successful and not until three years later was his taxidermic process exacted.

¹⁴ Charles Willson Peale to George Washington, December 31, 1786, *Peale Papers* 1: 464.

¹⁵ Charles Willson Peale, *Autobiography*, *Peale Papers*, 5: 309. For a more in-depth study of differences between Peale’s institution and European museums, see Toby A. Appel, “Science, Popular Culture, and Profit: Peale’s Philadelphia Museum,” *Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History* 9 (1980): 622-23.

visitors to the museum simultaneously learned something of the behavior and habitats of the specimens on display as well as obtaining information on that specimens place in nature's hierarchy.¹⁶

Yet it was not the golden pheasants or other animals that became renowned, but the fossilized skeleton of a mastodon that was the most popular and far-reaching item of natural history and science installed in Peale's museum. Being alerted to the discovery of a skeleton, Peale quickly moved to secure the bones for his museum. Thus in 1801 Peale led the first scientific expedition in the United States, a five-month undertaking which resulted in the orderly excavation of the mastodon bones (Figure 6). After carefully

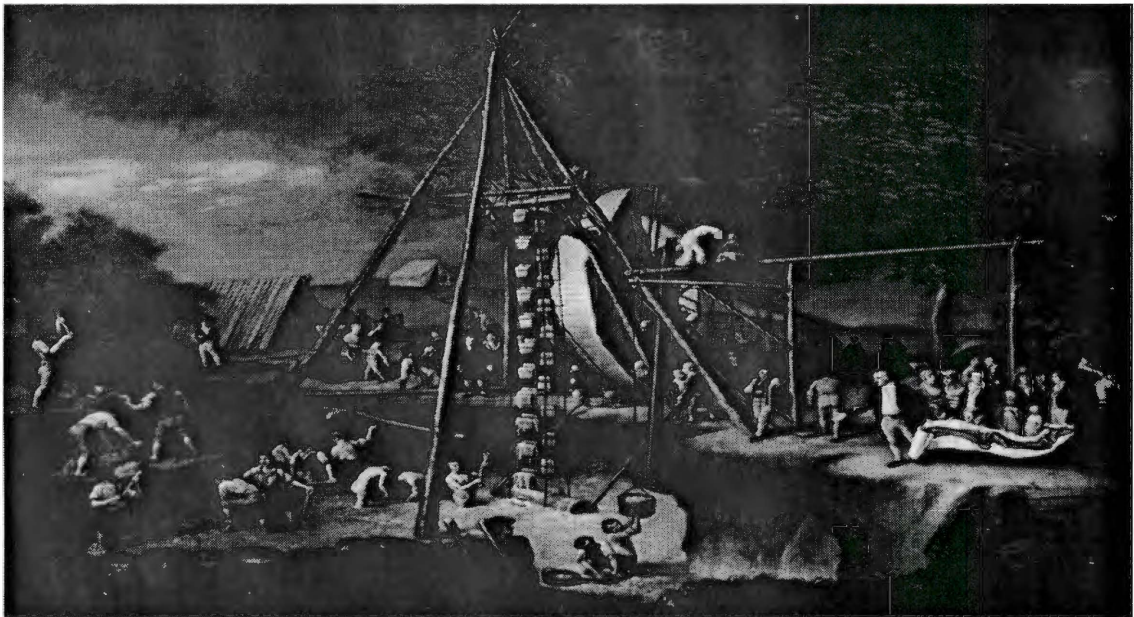


Figure 6: Charles Willson Peale: *Exhumation of the Mastodon* 1806 (The Peale Museum, Baltimore)¹⁷

¹⁶ David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and Its Audience* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 58.

¹⁷ Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, Plate X, 306d.

transporting the bones from the lower Hudson River valley back to Philadelphia, the skeleton was successfully assembled and displayed in the prominently established in Philosophical Hall, where Peale had relocated his museum in 1794. As the bones were being assembled in the most scientifically accurate manner possible, Peale publicized the exhibit opening by special invitation for American Philosophical Society members and a formal broadside announcement to the public. During the long excavation and assembling process, word of the amazing discovery spread across the country, causing excitement that the formal announcements only exacerbated (Figure 7).¹⁸ Peale cleverly enhanced the mastodon's astonishing size by strategically assembling the skeletal remains of an elephant and mouse beside the mastodon. Undoubtedly, visitors found the scene even more remarkable when viewed within the context of these neighboring specimens. Visitors also marveled at the mastodon's enormous proportions relative to a human being. Both men and women found the display incredible, some even suffering adverse physical effects. Deborah Logan, in 1802, reported that the display "frightens the Ladies" as an acquaintance "went to Bed after she returned home from seeing it with the terror it inspired."¹⁹ Despite the occasional shocked response to the "LARGEST of *Terrestrial Beings*," Peale's skeleton positively effected his business as well as the scientific community.²⁰ The new exhibit increased visitation to his museum, enlightening

¹⁸ Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 298-300.

¹⁹ Deborah Logan to Albanus Logan, January 10, 1802, Robert R. Logan Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 65.

²⁰ Charles Willson Peale, "Skeleton of the Mammoth is Now to be Seen," Broadside Announcement, 1801-1802, *Peale Papers*, 2:378.

Skeleton of the Mammoth

IS NOW TO BE SEEN

At the Museum, in a separate Room.

FOR ADMITTANCE TO WHICH, 50 CENTS; TO THE MUSEUM,
AS USUAL, 25 CENTS.

*Of this Animal, it is said the following is a Tradition, as delivered in
the very terms of a Shawanee Indian:*

"TEN THOUSAND MOONS AGO, when nought but gloomy forests covered this land of the sleeping Sun, long before the pale men, with thunder and fire at their command, rushed on the wings of the wind to ruin this garden of nature-----when nought but the untamed wanderers of the woods, and men as unrestrained as they, were the lords of the soil----a race of animals were in being, huge as the frowning Precipice, cruel as the bloody Panther, swift as the descending Eagle, and terrible as the Angel of Night. The Pines crashed beneath their feet; and the Lake shrunk when they slaked their thirst; the forceful Javelin in vain was hurled, and the barbed arrow fell harmless from their side. Forests were laid waste at a meal, the groans of expiring Animals were every where heard; and whole Villages, inhabited by men, were destroyed in a moment. The cry of universal distress extended even to the region of Peace in the West, and the Good Spirit interposed to save the unhappy. The forked Lightning gleamed all around, and loudest Thunder rocked the Globe. The Bolts of Heaven were hurled upon the cruel Destroyers alone, and the mountains echoed with the bellowings of death. All were killed except one male, the fiercest of the race, and him even the artillery of the skies assailed in vain. He ascended the bluest summit which shades the source of the Monongahela, and roaring aloud, bid defiance to every vengeance. The red Lightning scorched the lofty firs, and rived the knotty oaks, but only glanced upon the enraged Monster. At length, maddened with fury, he leaped over the waves of the west at a bound, and this moment reigns the uncontroled Monarch of the Wilderness in despite of even Omnipotence itself."

[Carey's Museum, December, 1790,—page 284.]

Ninety years have elapsed since the first remains of this Animal were found in this country---they were then thought to be the remains of a GIANT: Numerous have been the attempts of scientific characters of all nations, to procure a satisfactory collection of bones; at length the subscriber has accomplished this *great object*, and now announces that he is in possession of a SKELETON of this ANTIQUE WONDER of North America; after a long, laborious and uncertain enterprize. They were dug up in Ulster county, (State of New York) where they must have lain *certainly* many hundred years-----no other vestige remains of these animals; nothing but a confused tradition among the natives of our country, which states their existence, *ten thousand Moons ago*; but, whatever might have been the appearance of this ENORMOUS QUADRUPEL when clothed with flesh, his MASSY bones can alone lead us to imagine; already convinced that he was the LARGEST of *Terrestrial Beings!*

C. W. PEALE.

NB. *The Mammoth and Museum will be exhibited by lamp light, every evening, (Sunday evenings excepted) until 10 o'Clock.*

[Printed by John Ormrod.]

Figure 7: "Skeleton of the Mammoth is Now to be Seen." Broadside, 1801-02. (American Philosophical Society)²¹

²¹ Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 146.

visitors about the scientific world around them, and simultaneously promoted national pride by furnishing American naturalists with a weapon to combat European claims of American degeneracy.

Years before the mastodon exhibit had been conceived at Peale's museum, American intellectuals had hoped museums could be used as one tool for promoting republicanism and national pride among the public.²² Leading participants in the struggle for independence felt an urgent responsibility to demonstrate the cultural importance of North America to the populace. The lack of appreciation and respect from European scientists such as Buffon following the Revolution caused American intellectuals to resent their "provincial" status in the world of science. Intellectuals believed it imperative to demonstrate to the world "the favorable influence that Freedom has upon the growth of useful Sciences and Arts."²³ Recognizing the need for national enthusiasm, intellectual leaders then used the idea of American inferiority as their rallying cry to bolster more public support of science and the arts. Now separated both politically and culturally from England, the United States had to depend upon intellectual stimulus from within the country. Incipient public institutions, such as Du Simitiere's and Peale's museums, thus became custodians of significant cultural memorabilia and information during the revolutionary era. Intellectuals engrossed in the task of establishing the

²² Important works on the American Revolution, its origins, and effects upon national identity include Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: Norton Press, 1972); Gordon S. Wood *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

²³ Charles Willson Peale to John Beale Bordley, December 5, 1786, *Peale Papers*, 1: 462n; Address of Welcome to Benjamin Franklin, September 27, 1785, American Philosophical Society Minutes, [III], not paged, quoted in Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789*, 382.

government could easily have forgotten institutions such as these, however, attention to the sciences and arts did not fail. Men such as Jefferson, Franklin, and Peale continued to emphatically assert the importance of such cultural matters. Consequently, learned Americans demonstrated their capability of producing viable scientific and artistic work, which was displayed in early museums.²⁴ As an accessible venue for the average citizen to visit, museums became a scientifically and culturally educational tool intellectuals utilized for the promotion of national pride.

The effort to counter negative perceptions of the American environment, and consequently, American character, allowed early museum proprietors to exhibit items of both scientific and patriotic significance. Other than their function to expand scientific knowledge within the nation and abroad, museums recounted the Republics' revolutionary past. By the end of the eighteenth century, museums increasingly assumed this dual role, becoming both the principle means of acquainting increasing numbers of the lay public with the sciences as well as presenting a memorial to the Revolution. Collectors endeavored to preserve the scientific record, while simultaneously amassing and protecting memorabilia pertaining to the origins of their newly formed country. Chiefly involved in the acquisition of patriotic material to demonstrate the importance of the revolutionary movement, collectors, and later museum proprietors, sought to intensify public devotion to the republican system of government and individual military and political leaders in the early national era.

Even before independence, Du Simitiere began to collect documents and artifacts lauding prominent American revolutionaries. Other than his extensive natural history

²⁴ Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789*, 382-384.

collection, he also indulged his interest in politics by collecting materials related to the events of the interesting and turbulent late eighteenth century. As the practice of using printed materials to convey messages to a larger audience became more widespread prior to the Revolution, Du Simitiere recognized the value in preserving those materials.

Between 1750 and 1784 he collected many important pamphlets and broadside materials, demonstrating the importance of such materials prior to and during the Revolution.²⁵

Early pamphlets and broadsides reflect the increasingly difficult political and economic duress of colonial citizens. The accumulated media viewed chronologically permits the reader to trace the increasing disharmony between England and America and the origins of the American political identity.²⁶

While collecting during the revolutionary period, Du Simitiere obtained a variety of resources ranging from papers lauding the accomplishments of George III to a copy of the American Declaration of Independence. Such a wide range of confusing and conflicting literature indicates the varying sentiments and loyalties dispersed among colonists at the time, and the variety of items a collector such as Du Simitiere would have been able to gather. The accumulation of such a wide range of broadside and pamphlet materials demonstrates a foreign-born man's interest in the preservation of what he deemed to be significant to colonial inhabitants during the American Revolution.

Through his interest in preservation and exhibition of materials, Du Simitiere, thus

²⁵ Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., *Patriot-Improvers: Biographical Sketches of Members of the American Philosophical Society 1743-1768*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997), 505; and Sifton, "Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere: Collector in Revolutionary America," 17, 144. For analysis of significance and content of colonial and revolutionary pamphlets, see Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).

²⁶ Sifton, "Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere: Collector in Revolutionary America," 144, 207.

greatly contributed to the safeguarding of materials, which today allows scholars to read the expressions of average men during the revolutionary era, thereby bettering our understanding of the break with England.²⁷

Interestingly, Du Simitiere's eclectic interests also made him a valued consultant as American leaders crafted iconic seals for their respective states as well as the new nation. Other than his collection of art, natural history specimens, and paper articles, Du Simitiere also was among the earliest numismatists in America. His enthusiasm for America, fine artistic talent, and knowledge of heraldry made him a perfect candidate for consultation on medals and coins in the new country.²⁸ Working with "Dr. Franklin, Mr. J. Adams, and Mr. Jefferson...to bring in a device for a seal for the United States of America," the Swiss suggested several elements adopted by the committee.²⁹ Among these contributions was the personification of Liberty as a goddess for the new nation, the use of Roman numerals, the implementation of the traditional heraldic shield, and finally his suggestion for the United States motto of "E Pluribus Unum."³⁰ His incorporated suggestions thus left an indelible mark upon American numismatics and demonstrated his desire to participate in patriotic activities.

Charles Willson Peale would be far less eclectic and more ideologically driven than Du Simitiere in his collecting endeavors. While the Swiss collected because of his

²⁷ Ibid., 171, 207-209.

²⁸ Joel J. Orosz, *"The Eagle that is Forgotten": Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, Founding Father of American Numismatics* (Bowers and Merena Galleries, Incorporated, 1988), 13-15.

²⁹ Richard S. Patterson and Richardson Dougall, *The Eagle and the Shield: A History of the Great Seal of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1978), 6.

³⁰ Orosz, *The Eagle that is Forgotten*, 41-45. The Latin phrase translates to "One out of many," and is still used today as the motto of the United States.

love for interesting curiosities, Peale concentrated his efforts on building a repository of artifacts and knowledge that would shape public memory and inspire Americans to be “animated with a sacred love for their country.”³¹ Having served in the Continental Army with George Washington at Valley Forge, Peale felt a special fondness for the leader. That affection compelled Peale to use his artistic abilities for several public displays honoring the general. When Washington visited Philadelphia in 1781 Peale used the opportunity to create a display of allegorical transparencies. These backlit paintings on varnished paper portrayed images of the General with rays of glory surrounding him. Additional depictions included America seen as a woman trampling on a snake-haired Discord, and a third portraying a foundation inscribed “THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE,” supporting thirteen columns representing the states.³² Continuing to contribute to citywide celebrations of victory, Peale in January of 1784 built a spectacular Roman arch covered with transparent paper and painted with revolutionary scenes and mottoes “for the Public rejoicings on the peace.”³³ Peale also participated in Philadelphia’s festivities in honor of Washington’s inauguration in April of 1789 by building an elaborate display for the newly elected President to enter the city through. For the occasion he ingeniously fashioned an ordinary log bridge spanning the river leading into Philadelphia into a laurel wreathed allegorical avenue of triumph (Figure 8). Always the innovator, Peale also built

³¹ Charles Willson Peale quoted in Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, 191.

³² Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory*, 134.

³³ Charles Willson Peale to Edmund Jennings, December 10, 1783, in *Peale Papers*, 1: 403.

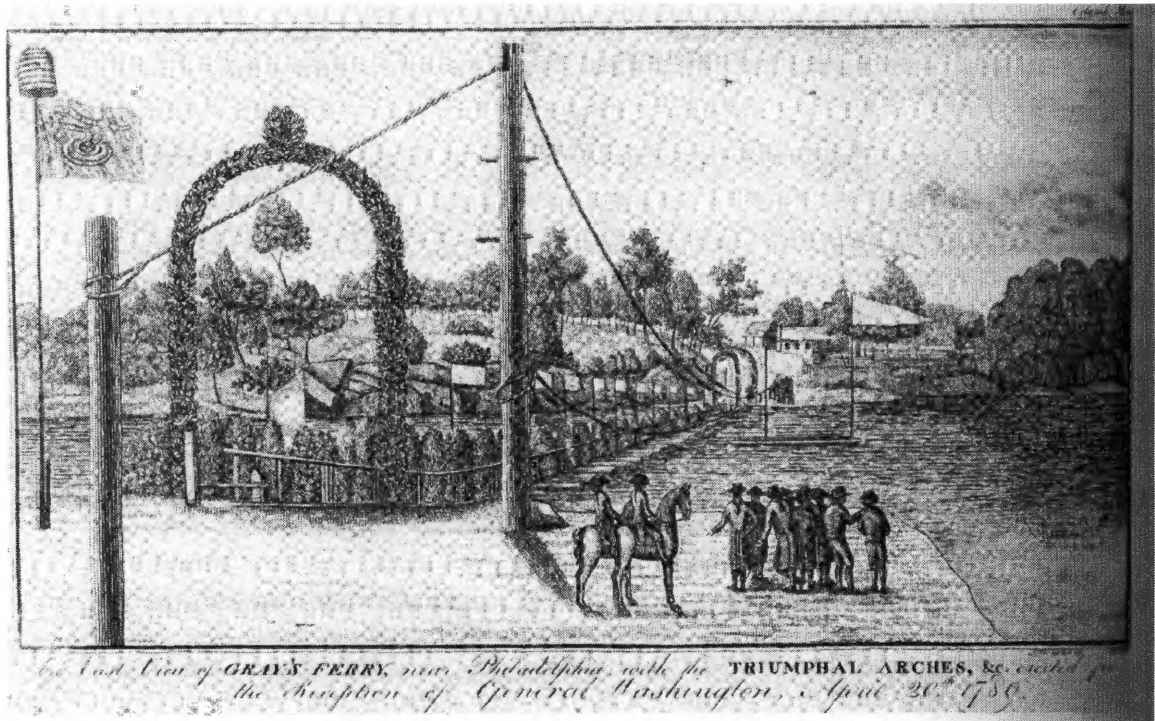


Figure 8: Triumphal Arches erected for the Reception of George Washington, April 20 1789. (Library of Congress)³⁴

a machine to be worked by his daughter, Angelica, which lowered a crown of laurel onto Washington's head as he passed through the arch.³⁵

Just as he worked to bolster support for the country and its leaders outside the museum, Peale also used the venue of his museum to promote patriotic sentiments among its visitors. As a talented and well-known colonial artist, he became well acquainted with many leading revolutionary figures when commissioned to paint their portraits. Wanting to display his portrait collection and encourage feelings of patriotism, Peale opened a

³⁴ Engraving taken by J. Trenchard after a drawing by Charles Willson Peale. *Columbian Magazine* 3 (May, 1789), *Peale Papers*, 1: 560.

³⁵ Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), 425-426, 605.

small picture gallery in a new addition to his house in Philadelphia in 1784.³⁶ Peale's reverence for these men led him to utilize his home as a venue for the public to view portraits of men who held special meaning for American citizens. Understanding well the popular appeal of the iconic paintings, the display consisted of men who had distinguished themselves in politics and military action during the American Revolution.³⁷ Visiting in 1787, Manassah Cutler described the portrait gallery in his journal, noting "the walls of this room are covered with paintings both portrait and historic. One particular part is...of the principal American characters who appeared on the stage during the late revolution... I think he [Peale] had every one, most of the members of Congress and other distinguished characters...At the upper end of the room General Washington at full length and nearly as large as the life..."³⁸

Twenty years later the portrait collection still remained a popular attraction for many Americans, including Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, who wrote in the spring of 1807 that he found "natural curiosities arranged with genera and species upon the Linnaean system" admirable, but worth only a glance in contrast to the portraits. Preferring to study the paintings, he declared "these were to me a feast. I forgot birds, beasts, fishes and insects, to gaze on man. I was engaged in etching the outlines of genius, when, perhaps, I ought to have been surveying the impalpable down of an insect,

³⁶ Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 1.

³⁷ Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, 191.

³⁸ "Extracts from the Journal of Manasseh Cutler: New York and Philadelphia in 1787," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 12, (1888): 106-7.

or the variegated plumage of a bird.”³⁹ Thus, Philadelphia’s first public exhibition on the American Revolution, which opened even before the war ended, enthralled visitors and continually renewed the public’s reverence for their cultural heroes.

As visitors observed the individual facets of science and patriotism in both Du Simitiere and Peale’s exhibits, they may not have noticed the delicate way in which both proprietors’ collections promoted a greater admiration for America. Both museums’ collections portrayed America as extraordinary in nature and culture. The natural history collections portrayed the wonders of nature, while Du Simitiere’s collections of patriotic writings as well as Peale’s portrait collection revealed to visitors what each proprietor wanted the public to remember about the American Revolution. Yet, both science and patriotism, present within each museum, worked concurrently to instill national pride and confirm scientific legitimacy. The displays of North American scientific specimens became one way scientists and intellectuals could validate their new homeland and legitimate their independence from England. The opportunity to offer proof that their new country, as well as its inhabitants, was equal to Europe’s prompted many exhibits and scientific expeditions, thus reinforcing notions of national pride for those who viewed the exhibits.

Study of museums in this era confirms that the American Revolution fundamentally and thoroughly altered the character of American society. After winning independence, Americans wanted to illustrate the legitimacy of their nation and the people who and processes that created it. The transformed American society possessed a

³⁹ Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, April 20, 1808, *Peale Papers* 2: 1073, and William W. Story, *Life and Letters of Joseph Story* (Boston, 1851) 1:146-7, Sellers, *Mr. Peale’s Museum*, 193.

new understanding of the arts and iconography; something museum proprietors played a major role in creating and perpetuating. Through their avid passion for collecting and displaying works of art or significant scientific artifacts they contributed to Americans' images of their nation. Museums played a vital role in depicting those images as early national leaders linked ideas of freedom and liberty to the growth of science and the arts.

Chapter 3

“To Amuse and in the Same Moment Instruct”:

Venues for Entertainment and Education

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a transformation took place shifting extraordinary collections of objects from the eyes of elites into a more readily accessible venue for many citizens. Immediately following the American Revolution, a great expansion of educational opportunities took place, sustained by the belief that success of the republican experiment demanded a well-educated citizenry.¹ While early collections in Philadelphia addressed the accumulation of scientific specimens and patriotic memorabilia, proprietors also sought to entice visitors to their museums by providing education and entertainment. By attracting both serious students of science and a popular audience eager for diversions, museums and their lessons could penetrate further into the populace. Incorporating personal touches such as individually-led tours of the facilities, published museum guides, and the option to take home souvenirs (in the form of one’s own silhouette) proprietors such as Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere and Charles Willson Peale appealed to potential visitors on both an educational and pleasurable level. Using

¹ For readings on education in early America see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

the press to his advantage, Peale promoted his museum using phrases such as “useful knowledge” and “rational amusement” in his promotional literature. This language makes clear to the public his desire to convey that his museum was a place of learning as well as leisure. Thus beginning with Du Simitiere and blossoming with Peale, the boundary between education and recreation in early museums was blurred, as attending exhibits became a popular leisure activity.

As early as the 1720s, intellectual Americans had been interested in the proliferation of scientific scholarship. At that time, several organizations for the promotion of scientific knowledge and worldly understanding were established in Philadelphia, beginning with Benjamin Franklin’s Junto, Library Company, and American Philosophical Society. These organizations, while established at various times during the first half of the eighteenth century, all exemplified the commonly held belief that an educated populace would lead to a stronger and more resilient society. However, while purporting educational concerns for all members of society, several of these early institutions limited their audience primarily to intellectual elites.² By the 1780s, following the European model for forming elite intellectual societies, as had been done earlier in the century, seemed contradictory to Revolutionary ideals. In 1787, Dr. Benjamin Rush, the distinguished Philadelphia physician, wrote an article in which he

² The literate class was comprised primarily of white, upper and middle class men, who had the ability as well as the leisure time to devote to study and reading. Women who participated in this group were from upper class backgrounds with the education and leisure time to devote to study.

stated, “there is nothing more common than to confound the terms of American Revolution with those of the late American war. The American war is over, but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution.” As the article progressed, Rush went on to explain the Revolution would not be complete until the United States had perfected its “new forms of government,” and prepared “the principles, morals, and manners of our citizen for these forms of government.”³

The initiatives Dr. Rush and other Founding Fathers advocated came in the form of education. Educating the public, they believed, would encourage patriotism and unify the nation. Thus as the century wore on, and sentiments of equality and republicanism spread, intellectuals encouraged the expansion of educational opportunities beyond the privileged few to the whole of society. Desiring to reach vast numbers of people, intellectual leaders sought venues capable of dispersing knowledge to the public. Although founding a national university was a popular solution, the same sentiments may certainly be used to understand the enthusiasm behind establishing museums as well. Believing that an educated public was imperative to the success of republican government, early museums were seen as one way to spread knowledge and advance patriotic feelings. Thus, following closely on the heels of the Revolutionary War, the culturally charged, “American Revolution,” as Rush described it, incited a transition from private intellectual society to open venues of education and entertainment, such as museums.

³ Albert Castel, “The Founding Fathers and the Vision of a National University,” *History of Education Quarterly* 4 (December 1964): 280-81.

At precisely the same time as many intellectuals realized the need for some form of public education, curator of the American Philosophical Society and long-time private collector Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, with the “encouragement of friends” decided to arrange his various collections and open an “American Museum.”⁴ The museum, located in his home, made his collection of scientific specimens and art the central focus. Thus Du Simitiere, prompted in part by interested individuals who frequently requested permission to view his growing collection in the 1770s, became the first to share his collection of natural history, Americana, and the arts to a curious, and paying, American public. Richard Smith, the first recorded patron, visited in 1775. Taking advantage of a day of adjournment from Continental Congress deliberations, the New Jersey representative requested to call upon the Swiss. Pleased with his visit, Smith recorded the excursion in his diary stating, “Thursday 28 Sept. No Congress.... I amused myself all the morning in M. Du Simitiere’s museum.”⁵ While not offering the reader much of a description of what he saw, and erring prematurely in his pronouncement of Du Simitiere’s collection as a museum, Smith’s journal does indicate that the cabinet must have been quite extensive and engaging, if able to amuse him for an entire morning.

Following Smith’s visit, Du Simitiere’s collection increasingly came to resemble a public institution. Interested members of the respectable class often called upon the Swiss, and Du Simitiere welcomed many prominent Americans as well as foreign

⁴ Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere to Clinton, November 27, 1782, *Letter Book*, p. 25b, quoted in Sifton, 35. As previously stated, Du Simitiere’s museum opened to the public in April 1782.

⁵ Edmund J. Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* (Washington, 1921), I, 209; quoted in Hans Huth, “Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere and the Beginnings of the American Historical Museum,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 69 (January 1945): 316.

aristocrats into his home.⁶ American John Adams expressed an interest in Du Simitiere and his collection in a letter to his wife written in 1776. Adams had called upon the Swiss in Philadelphia regarding design ideas “for a Great Seal for the confederated States,” and wrote, “Mr. Du Simitiere is a very curious man. He has begun a collection of materials for [an] history of the Revolution.”⁷

After fully transforming his semi-private collection into a public museum in 1782, a transition encouraged by mounting debts and the desire to continue collecting, Du Simitiere announced his opening on a broadside. Listing many of the items available for viewing, Du Simitiere indicated the wide variety of “natural and artificial curiosities” he possessed. His broadside presented his collection of items in an organized and modest format, apparently feeling the objects did not need a more showy presentation. Only in existence two and one-half short years, Du Simitiere’s museum nonetheless left favorable impressions on two visitors who wrote about their experiences after touring the exhibit. German soldier Baron Ludwig Von Closen expressed his genuine liking for the

⁶ Visiting Frenchman, the Marquis Du Chastellux, expressed an uncomplimentary opinion of Du Simitiere’s cabinet. This unusual opinion stands out as he expressed that the cabinet of curiosities “was rather small and paltry [but] very renowned in America because it has no rival there.” François-Jean, Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, 1782* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 145; quoted in Paul Semonin, *American Monster: How the Nation’s First Prehistoric Creature Became A Symbol of National Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 187, n. 1. Chastellux (1734-1788) was a man of science and a member of both the French Academy and American Philosophical Society. He was a general in the French army in America.

⁷ John Adams to Abigail Adams, August 14, 1776, *The Adams Papers, Series II: Adams Family Correspondence*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963), 96.

collection, noting the many “fine things” displayed by his host.⁸ Likewise, a German physician, Johann David Schoepf praised Du Simitiere’s museum, remarking “Mr. du Simitiere of Geneva, a painter, is almost the only man in Philadelphia who manifests a taste for natural history. Also he possesses the only Collection, a small one, of natural curiosities – and a not inconsiderable number of well-executed drawings of American birds, plants, and insects.”⁹ Schoepf’s praise is significant because as a scholar he presumably received education in natural history and would have expressed disdain for a collection that disappointed his knowledge on the subject.

Four years after Du Simitiere officially opened his home and collection to the public, Charles Willson Peale organized his collection and welcomed visitors to his “Philadelphia Museum.” By this time, members of the respectable and learned class hoped that museums would become one of the answers they sought for efficient ways to enlarge the scope of public knowledge and artistic appreciation in the young United States. Peale hoped his museum would suppress public corruption by offering rational amusement and pleasurable instruction. In January 1802 he wrote Thomas Jefferson, articulating his belief that a collection of interesting subjects “would enlighten the minds of my countrymen...and humanize the mind, promote harmony, and aid virtue [better] than any other School yet imagined.”¹⁰ Less than a month later Peale again pronounced

⁸ Evelyn M. Acomb, “The Journal of Baron Von Closen,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 10 (April 1953): 206-07. Baron Ludwig Von Closen (ca. 1752-1830) was a German who served as an aide-de-camp to General Rochambeau, commander of the French army in America.

⁹ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784]* (Philadelphia, 1911; reprint ed, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968), 85-86. Schoepf (1752-1800) was a physician in America from 1777 to 1784 as a surgeon with troops from Ansbach.

¹⁰ Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, January 12, 1802, *Peale Papers*, 2: 386.

the virtues of his museum to Isaac Weaver. He noted the museum would highly amuse every visitor, “yet their morals are not contaminated, and they cannot leave such a place without carrying with them powerful lessons of morality.”¹¹ By maintaining his plan as affirmed to his fellow intellectual elites, Peale created a compromise between the worlds of science and popular entertainment and succeeded in maintaining a lucrative museum well into the nineteenth century. Elites hoped that by offering solid educational material as well as entertaining spectacles, museums would succeed in attracting both the serious students of science as well as a popular audience eager for diversions.

Although both Du Simitiere and Peale did ultimately collect, examine, and display items they came to possess, establishing a museum for the purpose of educating the public was not the initial aim of either man. In each instance the idea of opening a museum to the public was a gradual process advanced by various factors. The necessity of earning a living and continuing to finance their collecting habits compelled both to display their assemblages to a paying public. Du Simitiere charged fifty cents to each visitor who enjoyed an hour-long, personally narrated tour through his collection. Peale on the other hand, initially charged twenty-five cents for the privilege of viewing his portrait and natural history collections. However, in 1802 he chose to maximize his profits by dividing his core exhibit of portraits and most of his natural history specimens from the popular mastodon exhibit. This allowed him to charge separate admission prices, the Philosophical Hall/mastodon exhibit being fifty cents and the State

¹¹ Charles Willson Peale to Isaac Weaver, February 11, 1802, *Peale Papers*, 2: 396. Isaac Weaver was a former schoolmaster from Chester County, and representative in the Pennsylvania House and Senate. In 1802 he was serving as Speaker of the House. “Memoirs of a Senator from Pennsylvania: Jonathan Roberts, 1771-1854,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62 (1938): 219-21.

House/various natural history specimens and portraits for the standard twenty-five cents.¹² Peale, seeking to make the museum a profitable venture, utilized two spaces in hopes of enticing visitors to see both exhibits. Offering a combination of intellectual instruction and, as we shall see shortly, a variety of interesting entertainments, enabled Peale to run a successful and popular institution in the heart of Philadelphia.

Keen on utilizing his museum as space for public “instruction,” Peale incorporated this idea into every aspect of his exhibit, reflecting on his first displays, “to arrange them classically is absolutely necessary to promote a knowledge of the[ir] qualities to make them useful.”¹³ Desiring to advance the notion of “useful knowledge,” the proprietor devised a twofold mission for his establishment. First he established a school of natural history to educate people in the field of science. Second, he sought to “open the eyes of an Ignorant people” to the appropriate manner of respectable behavior.¹⁴ Thus, the museum itself became a school.¹⁵ Visitors, or “students,” could observe each carefully preserved specimen that Peale placed in his exhibit through the thoroughly systemized hierarchical system of plant and animal categories developed by naturalist Carl Linnaeus. Peale’s interpretation of the Linnaean ordered arrangement of specimens consisted of preserved animals grouped by their environment and presented as

¹² Charles Willson Peale, “Guide to the Philadelphia Museum” (Philadelphia: Museum Press, April 1805), *Peale Papers* 2: 759-66, and Charles Willson Peale, “Skeleton of the Mammoth” Broadside (Philadelphia: Museum Press, 1801-1802), *Peale Papers*, 2: 378.

¹³ Charles Willson Peale, *Autobiography*, *Peale Papers*, 5:134.

¹⁴ Charles Willson Peale to the America Philosophical Society, March 7, 1797, and Charles Willson Peale to Ambroise Palisot de Beauvois, June 16, 1799, *Peale Papers*, 2: 176-77, 244.

¹⁵ For more information on the democratization of knowledge and the shift from abstract tutelage to useful knowledge for the masses, see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: the National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

though alive.¹⁶ To further the educational experience, Peale “attach[ed] to each piece a label with such particulars as are necessary in a concise manner...” to explain its significance.¹⁷ Above the shelves containing the animal habitat exhibit, as seen in Peale’s painting of his museum *The Long Room* hung Peale’s portrait collection (Figure 9). Containing the images of some of the most eminent persons in American civil and military history, the portraits depicted the highest class of natural beings in the Linnaean system. Wanting to be consistent in everything he did, Peale also provided

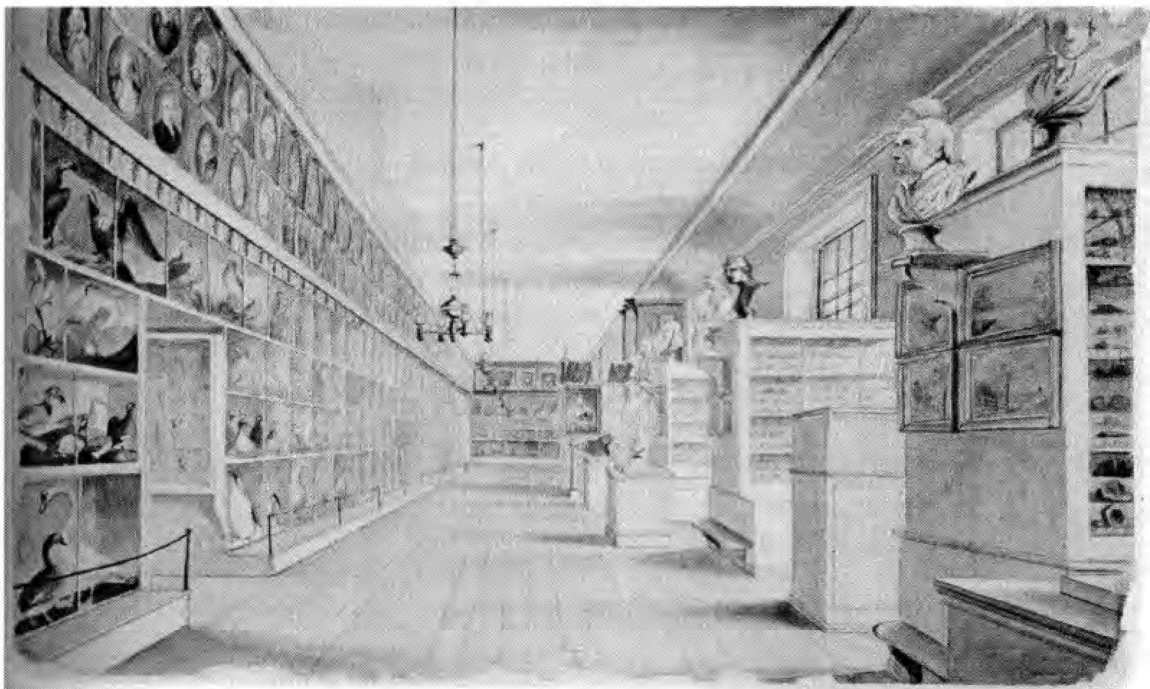


Figure 9: Charles Willson Peale: *The Long Room*. 1822 (Detroit Institute of Arts)¹⁸

¹⁶ Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 36, 46.

¹⁷ Charles Willson Peale to John Beale Bordley, Philadelphia, August 22, 1786, *Peale Papers*, 451.

¹⁸ Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 121.

labels for visitors to read with biographical information about the painting's subjects.

Aside from the intellectual stimulation museum patrons received, visitors were also exposed to suggestive social and moral instruction throughout their visit. Peale ensured that patrons would depart having been exposed to interesting objects that provided instruction on the natural world as well as having been instructed how to comport themselves in a public environment. Initially, concerned with the behavior of museum visitors and the safekeeping of his collection, as well as the health of visitors, Peale posted signs reading "Do not touch the birds for they are covered in arsenic Poison"¹⁹ around the facilities. The message served the dual role of attempting to protect each specimen from human handling as well as guard the health of visitors. In doing so, the sign also conveyed messages about proper comportment in society. Also attempting to protect the artifacts, Peale placed glass in front of the natural history displays again "to prevent the abuse of fingering," and added low railings around the glass to prevent people from "dirty[ing] the glass's and destroy[ing] the brilliency (sic) of the gilding."²⁰ Taking these actions also protected the preserved specimens and attempted to communicate the message of looking, but not touching.

These preventative actions clearly did not stop each visitor from taking some actions that Peale found inappropriate. Complaining to his son, Rembrandt, the elder

¹⁹ Charles Willson Peale, *Autobiography*, *Peale Papers*, 5: 223. In 1788 Peale discovered the usefulness of arsenic in taxidermy. The extremely hazardous poison, would become the standard preservation technique into the nineteenth century.

²⁰ Charles Willson Peale to Ebenezer Hazard, July 26, 1787, *Peale Papers*, 1: 486, and Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale, October 28, 1809, *Peale Papers*, 2: 1237.

Peale noted his annoyance at the “dirty custom” of “standin[g] on our covered benches.” Instead of chastising the perpetrator, Peale chose to “prevent it as I sometimes do” by “taking out my Handkerchieff and wiping & brushing after them, without uttering a syllable.” He further attempted to prevent disruptive behavior and teach manners by posting signs such as one that stated, “None but the Rude and uncultivated ring the Bells going down.”²¹ Apparently a disruptive and ongoing annoyance, Peale used the sign to discourage patrons from pestering the proprietor with false announcements of visitors. Peale hoped that these efforts would protect his collection and preserve it for future generations while clearly defining proper social etiquette. Peale and other likeminded intellectuals hoped that socially directive actions would convey the message to patrons that touching fragile objects and standing on furniture were socially inappropriate modes of behavior. As well as being useful for traditional forms of education, Peale found his facility useful for teaching socially acceptable conduct.

While incorporating moral and social lessons into his museum, Peale also interwove his religious ideology. As deism and its emphasis on “natural theology” gained favor among particular intellectual elites in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, religious leaders and devout laymen viewed science with skepticism. The debates carried over into political circles. The Federalists accused proponents of natural history of departing from Biblical truths, while the Jeffersonians charged Federalists and clergy alike of harboring animosity to all new learning.²² Peale,

²¹ Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale, October 28, 1809, *Peale Papers*, 2: 1237.

²² George H. Daniels, *Science in American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 126-127, 154-155; Editor's Notes, *Peale Papers* 2: 259-61.

who depended upon patronage from both groups, could not jeopardize provoking either camp, and sought to avoid both extremes. Rather, he maintained that through the study of nature, to “shew the wonderful hand of an allwise & providential power” the individual could obtain a sense of God and His deeds, which worked to reinforce religious beliefs and reveal truths about the Bible. Peale sought to observe God through the study of His creations, and utilized the medium of his museum to facilitate the discovery.²³

Not all religiously devout persons condemned Peale’s ventures. Swedish minister and student of natural history Reverend Nicholas Collin supported Peale’s lecture series and the study of natural history as a “religious duty.” Between 1800 and 1801, Collin wrote a six-part essay entitled “Remarks on the utility of Mr. Peale’s proposed Lectures in the Museum,” in which he discussed the religious and secular advantages that may be derived from the exhibit space and upcoming lecture series.²⁴ Collin noted “the direct promotion of Religion” found in Peale’s exhibits and proposed that the natural hierarchy (Linnaean system) evident in Peale’s displays conveyed the lesson that greater beings carried the Christian burden of helping lesser beings.²⁵ Furthermore, Collin used passages from the Bible, such as “Ask the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls

²³ Charles Willson Peale, *Autobiography, Peale Papers*, 5: 272, 427-8.

²⁴ Nicholas Collin, “Remarks on the utility of Mr. Peale’s proposed Lectures in the Museum,” part 1, *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*, December 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 1800; Charles Willson Peale to A.M.F.J. Palisot de Beauvois, December 24, 1800, *Peale Papers*, 2: 293n.

²⁵ Collin, “Remarks on the utility of Mr. Peale’s proposed Lecture in the Museum,” part 3; Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 62-63.

of the air, and they shall tell thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee,” to support his belief that the Bible calls upon the faithful to learn from nature.²⁶

A decade later Moravian sister, Catherine Fritsch, also expressed delight in Peale’s exhibits “since he [Peale] has hung on the walls scripture texts - in oval frames – beautifully engrossed – as silent reminders to the unthinking that there is a God who has created all things.”²⁷ As she meandered through the State House exhibit Fritsch “observe[d] ...the wisdom of God in His creation, as we viewed, with astonishment, the many different animals, birds, and fish, and the infinite varies of exquisite butterflies and insects.” She understood Peale’s museum as an opportunity for visitors to behold how God and nature worked together. Using the Linnaean binomial classification system, previously praised by Collin, Peale displayed his animal exhibit in ascending order, from the meekest creature to the most complex, expressing his belief in the essentially rational order of nature. This system of classification dovetailed with Peale’s desire to be precise and scientific in the presentation of objects, while also affirming his beliefs about God’s role in nature.²⁸ By studying the precise layout of specimens using this hierarchical system, visitors such as Collin and later, Fritsch clearly could see God as the creator of nature’s extensive hierarchy. Thus, both minister and Moravian Sister, through the thoughtful viewing of the museum’s arrangements, better understood God and His influence over nature.

²⁶ *Holy Bible*, Job 12.7 in Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 61.

²⁷ A. R. Beck, trans., “Notes of a Visit to Philadelphia, made by a Moravian Sister in 1810,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 36 (1912): 359-60.

²⁸ Sifton, “Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere: Collector in Revolutionary America,” 302.

Just as the proliferation of knowledge served religious interests, it also aided in generating cultural and intellectual endeavors as well. Prominent patriot, Dr. David Ramsey, of Charleston echoed many intellectual's thoughts when he stated the "arts and sciences, which languished under the low prospects of subjection, will...raise their drooping heads...Even now, amidst the tumults of war, literary institutions are forming all over the continent, which must light up a blaze of knowledge, as cannot fail to burn, and catch and spread, until it has finally illuminated with rays of science the most distant retreats of ignorance and barbarity."²⁹ Firmly committed to the spread of knowledge, Peale found himself aligned with other prominent intellectuals in believing that educating the general public could combat civic disorderliness. Thomas Jefferson firmly advocated the spread of knowledge throughout the population of America. The statesman and founder of the University of Virginia proclaimed in 1814 that "the continuance of republican government...absolutely hang[s] on...public education."³⁰ In Jefferson's mind "knowledge among the people [was] to be the instrument by which... the human condition will ever advance to a state of perfection...in the world."³¹ Peale, sharing these beliefs, and firmly committed to the notion of knowledge as the foundation of republican virtues believed "in a county where institutions all depended upon the virtue of the people, which in its turn is secluded only as they are well informed, the promotion of

²⁹ David Ramsey, "An Oration on the Advantages of American Independence," *United States Magazine*, I (1779), 54, quoted in Brook Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1956), 250-251.

³⁰ Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, January 31, 1814, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 14 (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), 84-5.

³¹ Thomas Jefferson to Monsieur DuPont De Numours, April 24, 1816, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 14 (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), 491-92.

knowledge is the First of duties.” He soon came to believe the best weapon in this pursuit of social harmony was his museum, for it would “...diffuse a knowledge of the wonderful works of creation, not only of this country but of the whole world.” Moreover, his goal “to form a school of useful knowledge, to diffuse its usefulness to every class in our country,” taught public virtue by demonstrating the harmonious order and beauty of nature as well as providing appropriate social instruction.³² Combating the degradation of democracy, museums would be a well-ordered model working to uplift society and defend against societal turmoil, confusion, and disarray. The museum thus became a multifaceted answer to the educational needs of the average American citizenry.

To Peale, the museum had become a critical link in the chain of education, yet it also served as a form of entertainment to many patrons who seemed curious about his many interesting and unusual exhibit pieces. In an address two decades after his opening he confirmed the goals and responsibilities of his museum were “to amuse and in the same moment to instruct the adult of each sex and age...”³³ By 1816, when Peale delivered this address in Philadelphia, he had devoted many years to assembling a museum that would appeal to the intellectual and curious mind. Now he sought to merge the ideal of learning with opportunities for entertainment.

Employing education and science as a major component in the presentation of his materials seemed not enough to Peale, who found he needed to incorporate elements that

³² Sidney Hart and David C. Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal: Charles Willson Peale’s Philadelphia Museum, 1790-1820,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (Winter 1988): 396; Address delivered by Peale to the Corporation and Citizens of Philadelphia, July 18, 1816, in Academy Hall, Fourth Street (Philadelphia), 9-10, *Peale Papers*, 411-22.

³³ Address delivered by Charles Willson Peale to the Corporation and Citizens of Philadelphia, July 18, 1816, in Academy Hall, Fourth Street (Philadelphia), 9-10, *Peale Papers*, 411-22.

would entice the public to come for entertainment purposes as well. Thus he began to promote museum going as a leisure activity. David Brigham points out Peale's desire to classify the museum as a leisure activity was professionally hazardous during the 1790s, because the confines of morally acceptable leisure activities were still being negotiated. When in 1774 the Continental Congress prohibited certain nonproductive activities as extravagant, restrictions were placed on expensive diversions and entertainments. While the Congress had implemented these restrictions as a means of preventing economic scarcity, religious groups such as Quakers and most other Protestant denominations soon adopted the laws.³⁴ By engaging language to promote his museum as "rational amusement" or "rational entertainment," Peale successfully avoided critics who deemed other leisure activities such as the theater sinful and extravagant.³⁵ Employing language that signaled a form of socially beneficial recreation permitted Peale to maintain his commitment to the traditional education and moral programming of the day.

Peale's lecture series then, an attraction offered between 1799 and 1802 bridged the gap between education and entertainment as well as kept him abreast of the latest

³⁴ For a thorough explanation of the debate over public entertainment in Philadelphia and the language employed to defend leisure activities see Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 20-4. The Continental Congress discouraged activities such as horse racing, gaming, cockfighting, plays and other expensive diversions. In 1779 and again in 1786 the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed laws limiting the number of taverns, banning cursing, gambling, drunkenness, dueling and controversially, the theater. In 1789 the ban on the theater was lifted after power was taken away from the Quakers. However, the 1790s bore witness to more controversy over the theater. Brigham, *Public Culture*, 20-2.

³⁵ For Peale's advertisement, see *General Advertiser*, August 22, 1794, quoted in Brigham, 20. During the mid-eighteenth century, the phrase "rational entertainment" was identified with the theater, a most contested form of entertainment, drawing prohibitive laws in Pennsylvania in 1779. However, by 1789 the opinion about theatre going was reversed, permitting citizens to enjoy "rational and innocent amusement." By using this phrase to promote his museum, Peale was promoting the museum as a combatant against social evils.

customs in museum practices (Figure 10). Both instructive as well as amusing, Peale mimicked the Muséum in Paris and Royal Institute of London by offering a series of lectures discussing various specimens in his collection.³⁶ He assumed the lectures would “open the eyes of an Ignorant people” by offering scientific instruction while providing an engaging and enjoyable listening experience.³⁷ Including forty lectures, the series sought to summarize known knowledge of natural history by offering verbal

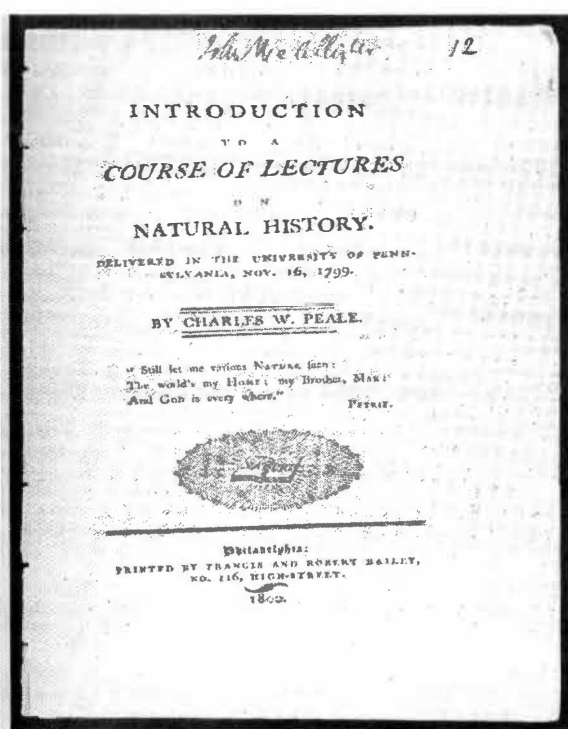


Figure 10. Charles Willson Peale’s *Introduction to a Course of Lectures on Natural History*. Philadelphia, 1800. (American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia)³⁸

³⁶ Sellers, *Mr. Peales Museum*, 100, 196-197; Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 289-290.

³⁷ Charles Willson Peale to the America Philosophical Society, March 7, 1797, and Charles Willson Peale to Ambroise Palisot de Beauvois, June 16, 1799, *Peale Papers*, 2: 175-177, 244.

³⁸ “Introduction to a Course of Lectures on Natural History,” *Peale Papers*, 2: 257.

descriptions of mammals and birds.³⁹ However, the lectures were not the wild success Peale had anticipated. This left him wondering what might be done to entice visitors to the museum.⁴⁰ The accommodation of people's schedules became key when he realized that more patrons would be apt to visit the museum if nightly hours were added. With the installation of the argand lamp, a new invention brought from France by Benjamin Franklin, the opportunity to accommodate more Philadelphian's schedules became possible.⁴¹ In January 1797, regular evening hours were set "to Accommodate those who may not have leisure during the day light to enjoy the rational amusement which the various subjects of the MUSEUM afford." The lamps permitted Peale to remain open at night by "handsomely LIGHT [ING] on TUESDAY and SATURDAY evenings." It allowed Peale to extend the hours of operation on certain nights of the week, placing the museum on the forefront of contemporary progress. When the main part of the museum moved to the State House several years later, Peale again remained on the forefront of scientific invention, when in 1816 he installed gas lights, a much safer and cleaner way to light the facilities.⁴² The lamps also maximized interest in his facility because many patrons, amazed at the phenomenon of so much light indoors, visited in order to see the lighting fixtures themselves as a form of novel entertainment. However, the main benefit became Peale's freedom to schedule evening events, such as offering readings of his

³⁹ Charles Willson Peale to Ambroise Palisot de Beauvois, June 16, 1799, *Peale Papers*, 2: 244.

⁴⁰ Richardson, Hindle, and Miller, *Charles Willson Peale and His World*, 156.

⁴¹ Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum*, 95.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 228-231.

otherwise noontime natural history lectures, or scheduling demonstrations of his static electricity machine.⁴³

Thanks to the remarkable lamps, visitors now had the option to stop in during evening hours to take in the wide variety of other interesting attractions and devices Peale kept on display. His first step toward expanding the initial picture gallery with amusing items occurred in 1785 with the installation of the “Eidophusikon” or “Perspective Views with Changeable Effects; or Nature Delineated, and in Motion.” The invention, known to show “moving pictures,” presented the viewer several scenes, which by turning multiple lights on and off and moving those lights and several other components gave apparent motion to otherwise flat, painted surfaces.⁴⁴

Also appealing to the senses, but this time to a person’s ears, was the evening organ recitals visitors could attend after 1803. Often Peale hired musicians to perform at stated hours or “at other times we shall occasionally get Ladies and Gentlemen [to play] that will not dislike shewing their Talents behind the Curtain.”⁴⁵ With visitors

⁴³ For announcement of evening lighting, see *Aurora. General Advertiser*, February 25, 1797. For announcement of evening lectures on natural history, see *Aurora. General Advertiser*, November 1, 1799, quoted in Brigham, 5. Peale’s electrical machine used rotating glass to produce static electricity. He noted his acquisition of the machine in January 1799; CWP to Ambroise Palisot de Beauvois, June 16, 1799, *Peale Papers*, 2: 245-48. During his first year of lecturing, Peale lectured twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, offering each address once at noon and again at 7:30 p.m. in the parlor of his home in Philosophical Hall. *Aurora. General Advertiser*, November 21, 28, 1799.

⁴⁴ Peale, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Mr. Peale’s Exhibition of Perspective Views with Changeable Effects; or Nature Delineated and in Motion*, Broadside, Philadelphia, 1785, described in Richardson, Hindle, and Miller, *Charles Willson Peale and His World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 150-151.

⁴⁵ Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale and Rubens Peale, May 31, 1803, *Peale Papers*, 2: 531.

accustomed to evening hours (made possible by the installation of lamps), visitors had the freedom to call when their schedules permitted, and they were treated to a variety of delightful evening entertainments.

But perhaps the most popular thing one could do when visiting Peale's museum was to have a silhouette made by the physiognotrace. The device, derived from a French invention, was successfully used in the museum and primarily operated by Moses Williams, a former black slave given to Peale prior to his settlement in Philadelphia. Williams charged eight cents for four copies of a guest's silhouette, and he precisely cut each silhouette from a single sketching.⁴⁶ These personal likenesses thus quickly became popular souvenirs for visitors to take home. By incorporating into his museum the most current scientific devices and amusing entertainments, Peale's museum prospered as a well-known locus of entertainment.

Unlike Peale's Philadelphia Museum, which incorporated new elements of interest over its long history, Du Simitiere's American Museum did not integrate such popular amusements into its exhibit. Perhaps this occurred because the proprietor died suddenly, only having opened his museum for just a short while. Or perhaps Du Simitiere would always have remained a proprietor devoted to presenting items in a simple manner, choosing to let the material speak for itself. Scholars only know that while proprietor he concentrated on creating a unique and objective exhibition of natural history and Americana. Rather than continue collecting exotic specimens, Du Simitiere shifted his focus to the more traditional concerns of nationalism inherent during the

⁴⁶ Richardson, Hindle, and Miller, *Charles Willson Peale and His World*, 151.

revolutionary era. Remaining true to his presentation style, he never engaged showy and expensive exhibits to attract patrons. By not offering sensational entertainments, Du Simitiere's focus remained on the items themselves and their importance to the study of science and the newly formed nation.

This unpretentious museum Du Simitiere established stood in sharp contrast to fellow Philadelphian Charles Willson Peale's museum of instruction and entertainment. Although both museums were formally established within four years of each other, they served very different purposes. Du Simitiere concentrated on the maintenance of his collection for scientific or national study, while Peale continually expanded the spectrum of items he presented to an eager public, simultaneously creating and adopting new methods of presentation to ensure his museum would remain a popular success.

One cannot know what the success of Du Simitiere's American Museum might have been. The death of the museum's sole proprietor caused an abrupt end to its existence in Philadelphia. The more fortunately long-lived Peale did change and expand his Philadelphia museum to fit the values of society and attract more patrons. Peale, then, is remembered for his innovative efforts to incorporate both education and entertainment into one popular public attraction. For better or worse, his model is the one that persisted through the nineteenth century and down to today.

Conclusion

In January of 1995 the National Air and Space Museum, a division of the Smithsonian Institution, announced the cancellation of an original exhibit that they had been planning since 1988 entitled, “The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II.” In its place the museum displayed a smaller exhibit devoid of controversy and “interpretation.”¹ The original plan was abandoned because veterans’ groups, political commentators, social critics, and politicians accused the exhibition script of dishonoring American veterans who fought in the war by questioning the motive for using atomic bombs, portraying those weapons as unnecessary to end the war, and by sympathizing too much with the Japanese killed by the bombs.² Thus, the Smithsonian Institution, the United States’ foremost museum system, bowed to political pressure and surrendered its scholarly authority to external forces. In canceling the exhibit the museum lost an opportunity to inform the American public and international community about the causes and consequences of dropping the atomic bomb. Although tension between outside commentators and museum planners had hardly reached such dire proportions in the United States up until that point, the issues that plagued the

¹ David Thelen, “History after the *Enola Gay* Controversy: An Introduction,” *The Journal of American History* 83 (December 1995): 1029.

² Richard H. Kohn, “History and the Culture Wars: The Case of the Smithsonian Institution’s *Enola Gay* Exhibiton,” *The Journal of American History* 83 (December 1995): 1036.

Smithsonian at the close of the twentieth century have been pervasive through the history of American museums, reaching back to their very inception some two hundred years ago.

The *Enola Gay* controversy thus presents an extraordinary opportunity to actively examine the persisting tensions plaguing museums from late eighteenth to the close of the twentieth century. Many issues surrounding the *Enola Gay* controversy parallel those of the earliest museums in America. Questions of museum's obligations to their audiences, their intended messages, and the emphasis they place on notions of patriotism and education have consistently been leveled at museums. The intended audience of museums shifted following the American Revolution to incorporate the general public rather than simply the intellectual elite, as had been the case for much of the eighteenth century. This availability of museums for average citizens in the early national era drastically altered society by allowing many more men and women access to knowledge they otherwise would not have encountered. Today's controversy more specifically focuses on the intended audience. The open accessibility of museums has prevailed, but museum specialists now must find the correct balance in their exhibit designs between intellectual and publicly accepted interpretations of history - something the *Enola Gay* exhibit failed to fully consider.

Following the decision to open museums to the public, museums in early America needed to negotiate their purposes. Proprietors who opened museums to the public after the Revolution did so because they believed that a more educated public would lead to a stronger nation. Thus intellectual leaders intended to utilize museums in the promotion of patriotism as well as instruct the public in subjects of science and natural history.

Today museums must negotiate purposes as well. In the case of the *Enola Gay* exhibition, museum curators crafted a script in line with scholarly interpretation, but contrary to popularly held beliefs. The educational exhibit thus provoked public outrage.

Finally, early museums in America used two incentives to draw people to their facilities. First, numerous natural history and scientific specimens on display would fulfill the educational and inquisitive desires of visitors. Secondly, the public's request for entertainment and leisure activities would be met through the interesting assortment of pleasing items to look at, to hear, or to take home. Similarly, the *Enola Gay* exhibition, as indicative of other museums exhibits today, planned to present an educational display made up of the actual plane itself and pictures of the devastating effects of the bomb, while presenting the argument against the necessity of using the weapon to end the war. However, curators hoped that through this educational experience visitors would be dazzled with entertaining exhibit techniques, interesting artifacts, and state-of-the-art multi-media displays. But balancing public entertainment expectations, intellectual innovations, and patriotic sentiment proved to be exceedingly complex.

The Smithsonian Institution became in 1840 the successor of Du Simitiere and Peale's efforts and in time went a long way to bringing their visions to fruition. The Smithsonian Institution was the country's first national museum founded with the dedication to "the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men" as specified by Englishman James Smithson's establishing bequest.³ Both Du Simitiere and Peale had

³ Leonard Carmichael and J. C. Long, *James Smithson and the Smithsonian Story* (New York: Putnam, 1965), 14.

pushed for this idea much earlier, and both hoped to obtain permanent funding as well as bring a higher status to their repositories of natural history and science. However, leading intellectuals and government officials turned down each man's appeal. Peale, wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1802, about his desire that his labors be "crown'd in a National Establishment of my Museum." Peale was keenly disappointed when Jefferson replied that the government was too new and Congress too unsure of its powers to "apply the public money to any but the purposes specially enumerated in the Constitution."⁴ Not to be deterred, Peale again in 1817 and 1818 approached the government about "making an offer of the Museum to Congress." Fearing that upon his death the museum would be "divided and thus destroyed," Peale wished to have "made a National Establishment" of his museum so that his years of labor and study would be protected.⁵ His numerous efforts to establish his museum as a national institution failed. Thus not until the 1840s with the bequest from James Smithson did the United States acquire a national museum.⁶

Peale's self-portrait, *The Artist in His Museum*, represents much more than the achievements of Peale and other early American museum proprietors. It also symbolizes the controversies swirling around the ever-evolving debate over what to include in museum space. Each item carefully preserved, painted, or assembled in Peale's museum represented a choice – to educate, to entertain, and/or to inspire. Peale molded popular

⁴ Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, January 12, 1802, *Peale Papers*, 2: 386-387; Thomas Jefferson to Charles Willson Peale, January 16, 1802, *Peale Papers*, 2: 389-390.

⁵ Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, May 20, 1817 and January 15, 1818, *Peale Papers*, 3: 483, 565; Charles Willson Peale to John Trumbull, February 14, 1818, 3: 571-73.

⁶ For the founding of the Smithsonian Institution see Leonard Carmichael and J. C. Long, *James Smithson and the Smithsonian Story* (New York: Putnam, 1965).

perceptions by what he displayed and by what he excluded. And he always kept his audience in his plans. This notion of pleasing an audience continues today just as it did two hundred years ago.

The American museum developed out of, and matured with, the American democratic culture. As the importance of more egalitarian forms of education became widely accepted following the revolution, museums became one method of distributing that knowledge among the general population. Although today's museums are plagued with such matters as presenting history in an "unbiased" manner, the permanence of museums in American society demonstrates the resounding success leading intellectuals and early American museum proprietors had upon our scientific, patriotic, educational, and cultural landscape.

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