

The Maryland State Art Collection and The Commission on Artistic Property of the Maryland State Archives

The state of Maryland possesses one of the most historic collections of art in the nation. It dates from 1774 when the portrait of *William Pitt, Earl of Chatham*, was presented to the state by Charles Willson Peale. Maryland's collection has grown over the centuries with portraits of leaders of the state, history paintings, and important fine and decorative arts. In 1996, the state acquired the Peabody Art Collection from the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, thus adding an invaluable collection of paintings, sculpture, and works on paper to the state's ownership.

Many of the most significant portraits in the collection are on public display in the Maryland State House, where they have been since the 18th century. The monumental portraits of *William Pitt* and *Washington, Lafayette and Tilghman at Yorktown* have been completely conserved and the portrait of William Pitt has been given a new, period-appropriate frame.

Maryland's art collection is overseen by the Maryland Commission on Artistic Property which is an entity of the Maryland State Archives.

The mission of the Maryland Commission on Artistic Property is to serve the public as the official custodian of the state-owned art collection, as well as fine and decorative arts owned by or loaned to the state. The collection is comprised of those works of art and decorative objects that document the history of Maryland through subject, maker, or provenance. The Commission endeavors to make the collection accessible to the public through preservation, conservation, display and interpretation. Totalling more than 4,000 items, the collection is rich in portraiture of Maryland governors, legislators, and other public officials, as well as people associated with Maryland government and history. The collection also contains exceptional examples of decorative arts, including furniture and silver.

Conservation of *Washington, Lafayette and Tilghman at Yorktown*

Over 29 weeks, the highly skilled team at Olin Conservation worked to restore the painting of *Washington, Lafayette and Tilghman at Yorktown* as close to its original 1784 condition as possible.

The treatment revealed details in Washington's uniform and sword and clarified his facial features, as well as details in the other two figures in the painting. They also uncovered details of the historic action in the fore and middle ground, revealing hidden details and altered insignia, and what may be the artist's self portrait in one of the background figures. They found elements of Washington's field tent which had been hidden and subsequently misrepresented by repaint. Cleaning also revealed the original signature and the original date, both of which had been obscured. Viewers may now, and for generations to come, look upon this painting as Peale intended, and as the man who became this nation's first president did in 1784.

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And the Friends of the Maryland State Archives, with special thanks to
Emily A. Baker, Jennifer B. Baker, Teresa M. Baker

The Friends of the Maryland State Archives is a volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the Maryland State Archives by furthering the knowledge and understanding of Maryland's rich history. An understanding of the past is vital to planning and preparing for the future. Promoting such insight and knowledge, especially through educational and outreach programs for students and teachers, is central to the work of the Friends. An important activity of the Friends is the publication of books and pamphlets relating to Maryland history and culture.

The Friends of MSA website can be found at:

<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/homepage/html/friends.html>

COVER IMAGE:

Washington, Lafayette and Tilghman at Yorktown, 1784
by Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827)
Oil on canvas
Dimensions: 93" x 64"
MSA SC 1545-1120



*Washington, Lafayette and Tilghman
at Yorktown*

AN ICONIC IMAGE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

JANUARY 2016

Senate Committee Room of the Maryland State House

“...in grateful remembrance...”

Maryland Pays Tribute to George Washington

In October 1781, British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered to General George Washington at Yorktown, Virginia, effectively ending the Revolutionary War. Cornwallis wrote to General Sir Henry Clinton, commander-in-chief of the British forces in America, on October 20 with the news: *I have the mortification to inform your Excellency that I have been forced to give up the posts of York and Gloucester, and to surrender the troops under my command, by capitulation on the 19th instant, as prisoners of war to the combined forces of America and France.*

Following the victory, Washington dispatched his aide-de-camp, Marylander Tench Tilghman, to Philadelphia to deliver the Articles of Capitulation to Congress. Washington then headed north himself and stopped in Annapolis from November 21 – 23, where he stayed with Governor Thomas Sim Lee. The entire town turned out to honor him with dinners, dances, and entertainments.

The esteem with which the beloved general was regarded prompted the Maryland House of Delegates, on the day Washington left Annapolis, November 23, to request that Governor Lee “write to Mr. Peale, of Philadelphia, to procure, as soon as may be, the portrait of his Excellency general Washington, at full length, to be placed in the house of delegates, in grateful remembrance of that most illustrious character.”

Peale accepted the commission, anticipating it would increase his artistic stature and likely lead to further public commissions. It took the artist about three years to complete the portrait, as he wished to make it “something better than a mere Copy.” In the end, Peale produced a large-scale painting that exceeded the delegates’ request.

In addition to Washington, whose likeness Peale based on a 1783 sitting that took place in Philadelphia, Peale added two figures to his composition. To Washington’s immediate left is the Marquis de Lafayette, representing the pivotal alliance between colonial America and France that led to victory in the Revolution. Peale initially relied on a bust of Lafayette to produce

his painted image, although Lafayette saw the painting as it was nearly finished, and offered to sit for Peale so the artist could tweak his likeness.



Detail of Tench Tilghman's Sword
MSA SC 1545-3476

Two swords that belonged to Tench Tilghman are on display in the State House to the left of the painting, including the one that is depicted in the painting.

The second figure, shown in profile, is Lieutenant Colonel Tench Tilghman, a Marylander who served as Washington’s military secretary and aide-de-camp. Tilghman’s portrait was painted from life; his inclusion was appropriate for a painting that was intended to hang in Maryland. Born in Talbot County, Tilghman studied in Philadelphia and began a career there as a businessman. In 1776, he volunteered his services to George Washington and served without pay until May 1781 when Washington was able to arrange for him a regular commission in the Continental Army. Washington called Tilghman a “zealous Servant and slave to the public, and a faithful assistant to me for near five years.”

To reward Tilghman’s service, Washington sent him to deliver formally the news of Cornwallis’ surrender to the Continental Congress, which then was meeting at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Appropriately, Peale painted Tilghman with the 1781 Yorktown Articles of Capitulation in his left hand. In addition, Tilghman is portrayed wearing his ceremonial officer’s sword. Peale faithfully painted the sword, which is on exhibit to the left of the painting.

The portrait includes important historical details, with Yorktown from the southeast in the background. In the left middleground are soldiers of various nationalities carrying flags. On the far left is a French soldier, holding the royal Bourbon flag of France, with its white field and fleur-de-lis. In the center of the group are two British soldiers with their flags cased. To the right is an American soldier holding a regimental standard, identifiable with its red and white stripes and a blue field on which is painted an American eagle. As Peale described the setting:



Detail of view of York and Gloucester
MSA SC 1545-1120

traveled from Philadelphia to deliver the painting to the State House in December 1784.

I have made in the distance a View of York & Gloster with the British army surrendering in the order in which it happened. And in the middle distance I have introduced French & American officers with Colours of their nations displayed, between them the British with their Colours cased. These figures seem to tell the story at first sight, which the more distant could not so readily do.

Upon nearing the completion of the painting, Peale wrote to then-Governor William Paca in September 1784, reporting on his progress and appealing to the governor to compensate him for painting the three full-length figures. The legislature agreed to Peale’s request, paying him £213.4.8 for both the painting and its frame, which Peale designed and Annapolis cabinetmakers John Shaw and Archibald Chisholm assembled. The artist

Charles Willson Peale Artist of the American Revolution



Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827)
by Adrian Lamb (1901-1988) after Benjamin West
Oil on canvas MSA SC 1545-1032

Charles Willson Peale was born in Queen Anne’s County, Maryland in 1741. He arrived in Annapolis at the age of nine as an apprentice to a local saddler. As a youth, Peale taught himself to paint by observing the techniques of portraitist John Hesselius. He also acquainted himself with the work of John Singleton Copley and won the patronage of the Annapolis gentry, some of whom financed his 1767 trip to London to study with renowned painter Benjamin West. Returning to America in 1769, Peale lived in Annapolis and traveled throughout the Middle Colonies painting many portraits of colonial leaders.

In 1775, Peale moved to Philadelphia where, as an enthusiastic patriot, he joined the city militia as a private. A man “determined to do his utmost in the common cause of America,” Peale took the rank of first lieutenant, and accompanied his unit to the front in December 1776. He crossed the Delaware River from Trenton into Pennsylvania just as the remnants of Washington’s army arrived on the river bank and later described their crossing as “the most hellish scene I have ever beheld.”

Back in Philadelphia, Peale served on a number of revolutionary committees as well as in the General Assembly of Pennsylvania. In 1802, he began a deliberate effort to provide a pictorial record of the Revolution for future generations. To this end, Peale established a museum at Independence Hall to display the portraits he had painted throughout the War.

Although Peale continued to paint, his later years were dominated by a growing interest in natural history and science. Ingenious exhibits of stuffed animals and birds, as well as the reconstructed skeleton of a mastadon that Peale himself unearthed, shared the space at Peale’s museum with his renderings of American heroes and other notables.

A true “universal man” who plunged with equal enthusiasm into taxidermy, “moving pictures,” making false teeth, and designing mechanical farm equipment, Charles Willson Peale is best remembered as the “Artist of the American Revolution.” He was the patriarch of what became an extraordinary family of American painters which included his children Raphaele (1774-1825), Rembrandt (1778-1860), Rubens (1784-1865), Titian Ramsay (1799-1885), with niece Sarah Miriam Peale (1800-1885), and nephew Charles Peale Polk (1767-1822).