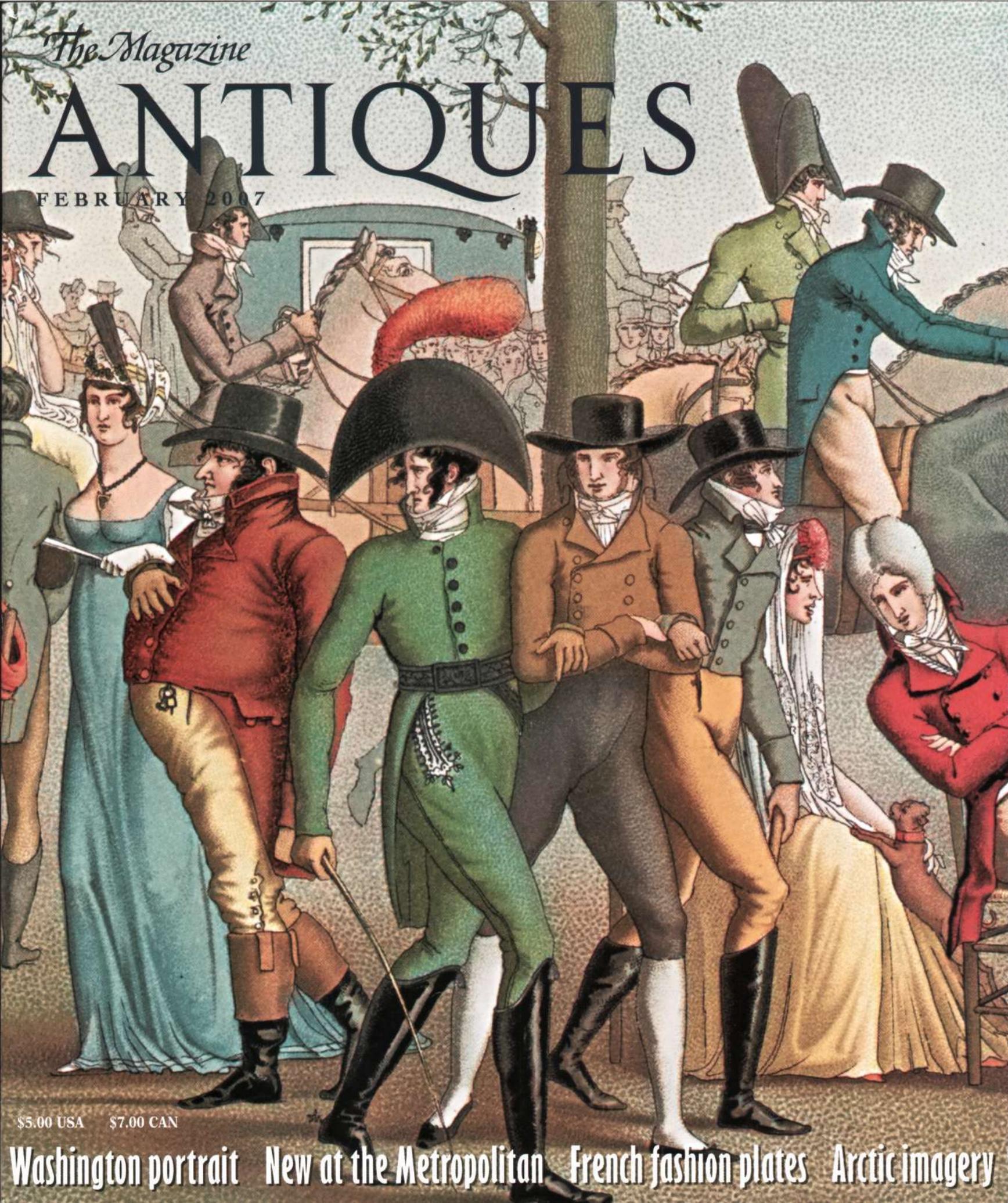


The Magazine

ANTIQUES

FEBRUARY 2007



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Washington portrait New at the Metropolitan French fashion plates Arctic imagery

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Cover: Detail of *Consulat—France*, unnumbered plate in Auguste Racinet (1825–1893), *Le Costume historique* (Paris, 1888). New York Public Library, New York City. Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs.

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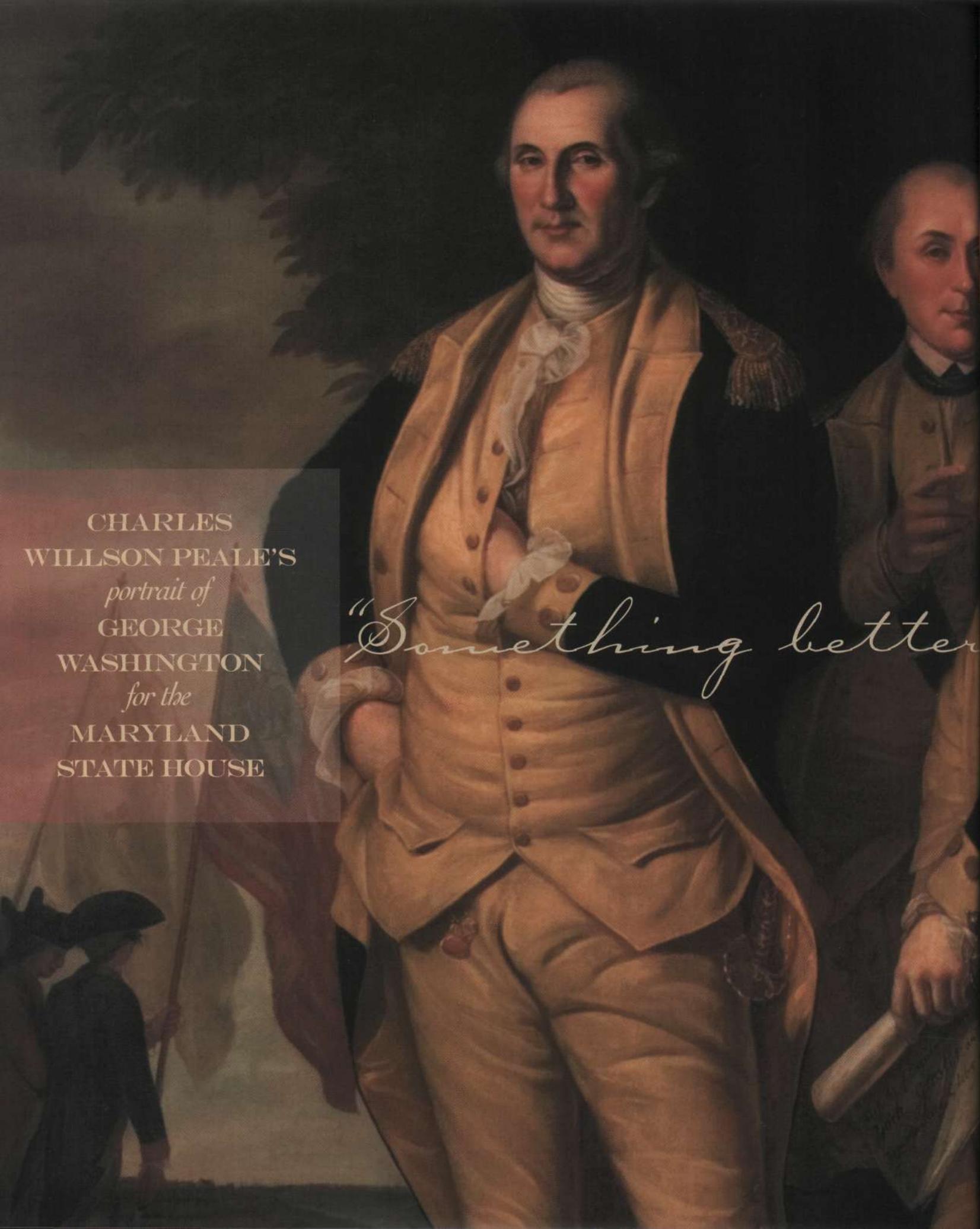
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BRANT PUBLICATIONS, INC.: 575 Broadway, New York, NY 10012 TELEPHONE: 212-941-2800 FAX: 212-941-2897 E-mail: info@brantpub.com

Web site: www.themagazineantiques.com

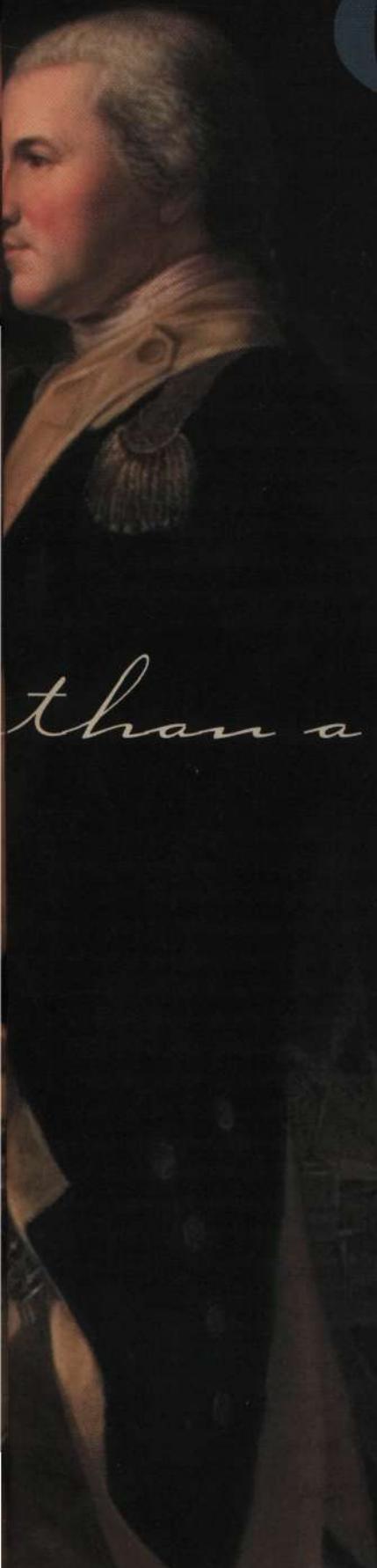
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A full-length portrait of George Washington in military uniform, standing with his hands on his hips. He is wearing a buff waistcoat and breeches over a dark blue coat with buff lapels and cuffs. To his right, another man in a buff uniform is partially visible, holding a scroll. In the lower left, two men in dark uniforms are seen from behind, holding a large flag. The background is dark with some foliage on the left.

CHARLES
WILLSON PEALE'S
portrait of
GEORGE
WASHINGTON
for the
MARYLAND
STATE HOUSE

"Something better"



On November 23, 1781, scarcely a month after the British surrender of General Charles Cornwallis (1738–1805) at Yorktown fulfilled American hopes for independence, the members of Maryland's General Assembly gathered in the State House in Annapolis and unanimously resolved to commission a portrait of the victorious commander in chief, George Washington. Inspired by their zeal to honor the man who had become the first true American hero, the legislators directed Governor Thomas Sim Lee (1745–1819) "to 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."¹

Charles Willson Peale waited three years to begin the portrait. By doing so, he was able to create a new image of Washington that was particularly designed for the building where it would be displayed. When it

House.² This building, and its two predecessors, had been home to the Maryland legislature since 1695 and was at the heart of the city's political and commercial life.

In choosing to commission a formal image of Washington for the State House, the legislators were following in the tradition of their colonial predecessors, whose work was often conducted under the gaze of royal portraits, or those of the colony's early proprietors, the Lords Baltimore.³ However, the resolution of 1781 marked the first time the state legislators acted to procure an image of one of their contemporaries for the express purpose of commemorating an individual's role in Maryland's, and indeed, America's, history.⁴ And while it would become fashionable for state governments to commission portraits of Washington after his death in 1799, when his role as the country's Founding Father was clearly established, only the legislatures of Maryland and Pennsylvania ordered his portrait to be displayed in their respec-

than a mere Copy" By Elaine Rice Bachmann

was finally delivered to Annapolis in December 1784, *Washington, Lafayette and Tilghman at Yorktown* fulfilled not only the legislators' request to honor the victorious general but also Peale's own desire to present an image to the citizens of his home state that would be a meaningful record of the triumphant final chapter of the American Revolution.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the most notable public buildings for the display of works of art, aside from churches, were America's statehouses, which often acted as social and cultural centers. This was certainly the case in Maryland, where the capital city of Annapolis, chartered in 1708, had grown into one of the country's busiest ports and was home to a diverse population of gentry, farmers, merchants, and artisans. Its proximity to larger cities along the East Coast made it a stopover for travelers and contributed to its selection as the venue for the Continental Congress in 1783 and 1784, which met in the State

House while he served as commander in chief of the Continental Army.⁵

It is not surprising that the gentlemen lawmakers in Annapolis simply specified "Mr. Peale" as the recipient of their commission. By 1781 Charles Willson Peale had established a reputation as a skilled portraitist, receiving the patronage of some of the colonies' most prominent families. He was particularly well known in Annapolis, where his family had moved in 1751 when he was a child and where he lived and worked until transplanting his own growing family to Philadelphia in 1776. His earliest self-taught efforts at limning were enhanced by the opportunity to observe the technique of John Hesselius (1728–1778), who had settled nearby and with whom Peale famously traded a saddle and bridle in exchange for painting lessons. Peale's growing proficiency in portraiture gained the attention of several prominent local residents, among them Charles

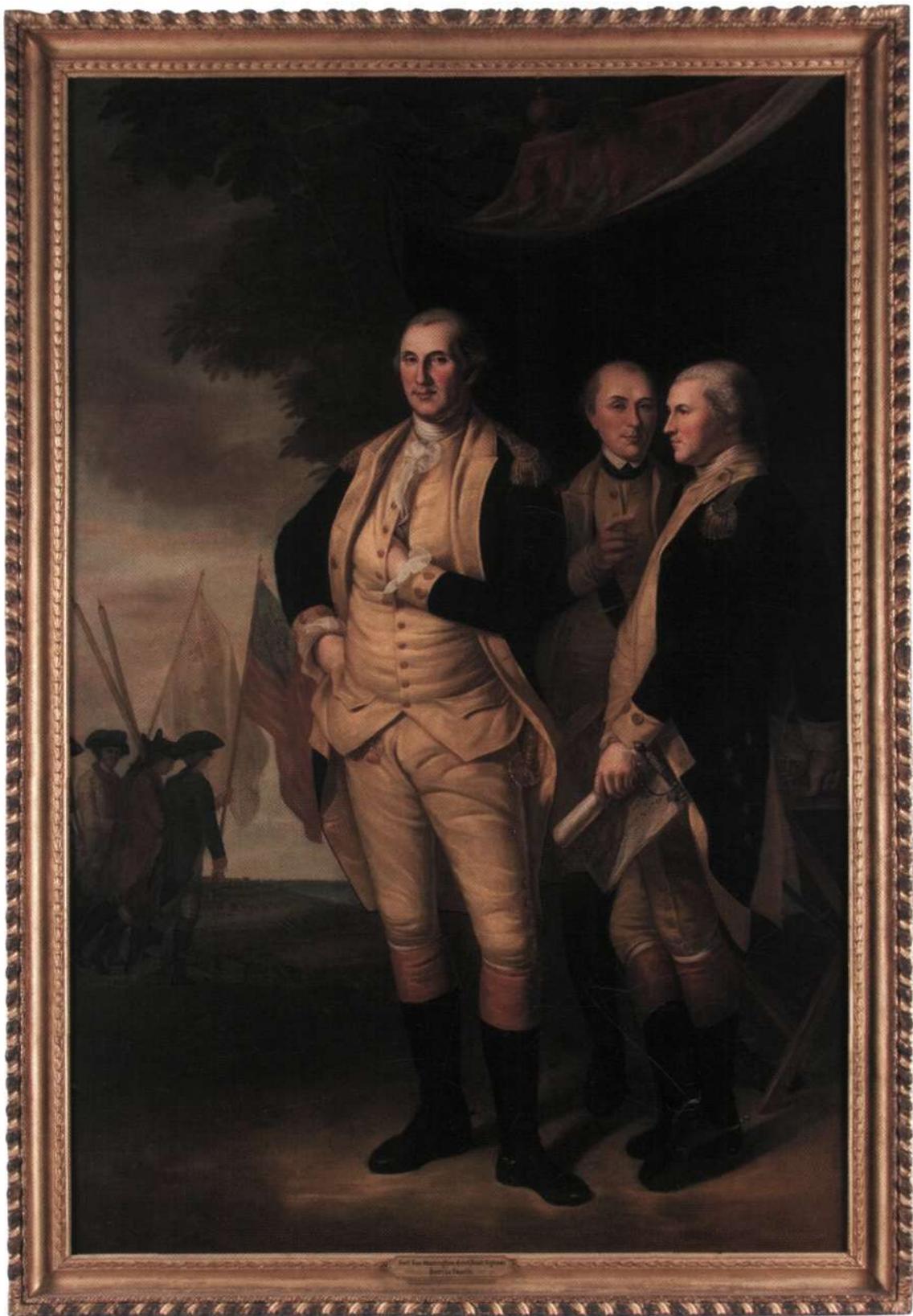


Fig. 1. *Washington, Lafayette and Tilghman at Yorktown*, by Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827), 1784. Signed “C. W. PEALE PINXT 1782” at lower left. Oil on canvas, 96 by 63 ½ inches. *State of Maryland, State House, Annapolis*; photograph by Will Kirk, *Homewood Photographic Services*.

Carroll (1723–1783) the Barrister and John Beale Bordley (1741–1827), whose benefaction enabled the emerging artist to travel to England and study with Benjamin West (1738–1820) in 1767.⁶ While in London, Peale received his first official commission—to paint a portrait of William Pitt for some gentlemen of Westmoreland County, Virginia. This full-length allegorical likeness of Pitt, depicted in the robes of a Roman orator and surrounded by symbolic imagery, was Peale’s first attempt at portraiture on a grand scale. Having received some criticism for his first canvas, Peale abandoned it and completed a second, slightly altered version, which was sent to Virginia in 1769.⁷

When Peale returned to Annapolis that same year, he vigorously advanced his new career, pursuing commissions throughout the region. Jonathan Boucher (1738–1804) of Annapolis arranged a sitting for him at Mount Vernon in 1772 to paint George Washington, then a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses and a colonel in the Virginia militia. It was a meeting that would prove extraordinarily beneficial to Peale’s future.

In Annapolis the government was thriving, employing many of the local artisans and shopkeepers in a variety of work related to maintaining the business of government. The most visible sign of this was the construction of a new statehouse, begun in 1772, on State Circle. Peale was undoubtedly aware of the progress on the building and knew that it was to be ready for occupancy in 1774.⁸ It was then that he completed the first version of his portrait of Pitt, which he called “the first Fruit of his Science,” having brought the abandoned canvas back with him from London. Citing his gratitude to “his native Province,” yet no doubt seeing an opportunity to advance his career, he wrote to Maryland’s colonial governor, Robert Eden (1741–1784), on March 31, 1774, offering the portrait for public display “in the State House or such other conspicuous place as shall be thought most fit and Convenient.”⁹ Not only did the General Assembly accept Peale’s offer, they voted to give him one hundred pounds as a “Compliment” for his efforts.¹⁰ The portrait of Pitt (Fig. 2) was hung above the fireplace in the Senate Chamber, where it remained in November 1781, when, among the regular business of the legislative session just underway, the lawmakers set about to honor General Washington, who was expected in town within a few days’ time.¹¹

A joint committee was formed to write a message of thanks to be presented to Washington upon his arrival in the city on November 22.¹² The members of the committee, all of whom Peale had painted,¹³ were a panoply of Maryland’s most wealthy and socially prominent gentlemen, including Edward Lloyd, Lloyd’s brother-in-law John Cadwalader, William Fitzhugh, and Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Just before Washington’s gracious response to

the General Assembly’s message was read aloud, the secretary of the House of Delegates recorded that a unanimous resolution had been passed to commission Peale to paint Washington.¹⁴ Writing to the artist on December 7, Governor Lee asked him to “consider a satisfactory payment” and further directed that “the Picture is desired as soon as may be, but, as I wish to have it as perfect as possible I beg you will not regard time trouble or expense in the execution.”¹⁵

It is likely that the image of Washington the lawmakers had in mind for their statehouse was similar to one secured by their contemporaries in



Fig. 2. *William Pitt [1708–1778]*, by Peale, 1768–1774. Oil on canvas, 94 by 57 inches. *State of Maryland State House; Kirk photograph.*

Philadelphia for the Pennsylvania statehouse, now Independence Hall. This portrait, *George Washington at Princeton*, painted by Peale in 1779, reflected Peale’s proximity to Washington during the early years of the Revolutionary War as a member of the Pennsylvania militia.¹⁶ Washington sat for Peale on two occasions during the war, which, together with Peale’s own eyewitness to the battle, allowed the artist to portray Washington at Princeton realistically, creating the iconic full-length portrait.¹⁷ It became the basis for at least a dozen replicas, establishing Peale as what today might be called the official artist of the American Revolution.¹⁸ However, rather than produce another likeness based on the 1779 sitting, Peale chose to wait and offer something more original to his home state. Before he began to execute a canvas, a new gover-

nor was in place in Annapolis, the war had ended, and Washington had resigned his commission as commander in chief of the Continental Army to retire to private life.

Peale wrote to the new governor and his longtime friend, William Paca (1740–1799), from Philadelphia on September 7, 1784, letting him know that he had finished the painting and that the legislature was going to get more than it might have bargained for: “The likeness of Col Tilghman & the Marquis de la Fayette I have of my own accord introduced in the same piece with his Excellency, which I hope will give pleasure to my Countrymen.”¹⁹ By including images of the marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834) and Marylander Tench Tilghman (1744–1786), Peale created a composition different from that of any of his previous portraits. Washington stands at the center, in a slightly altered stance from the Princeton portraits, with his left hand resting inside his waistcoat rather than on a cannon. Although based on a 1783 sitting, Washington’s face and direct gaze at the viewer are little changed from the Princeton paintings. Placed between Washington and the right edge of the canvas are the figures of Lafayette and Tilghman. The inclusion of Lafayette honored the French nobleman’s role in supporting the American cause and his close friendship with Washington; in addition it pays homage to the tremendous support of the French forces at Yorktown, led by Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur (1725–1807), comte de Rochambeau. Initially Peale based his likeness of Lafayette on the portrait he made of him in 1780, but Lafayette fortuitously visited Peale in Philadelphia in September 1784 and offered to sit for him so that the portrait might be more accurate.²⁰

Tilghman’s inclusion in the scene was appropriate for a painting that was intended to hang in Maryland. Born in Talbot County, he studied in Philadelphia and began a career there as a businessman. In 1776 he volunteered his services to Washington and became his military secretary and aide-de-camp, serving without pay until May 1781, when Washington was able to arrange a regular commission for him in the Continental Army. Washington called him a “zealous Servant and slave to the public, and a faithful assistant to me for near five years.”²¹ To reward Tilghman’s service, Washington chose him to formally deliver the news of Cornwallis’s surrender to the Continental Congress, which was meeting in Philadelphia. Appropriately, Peale painted Tilghman with the 1781 Articles of Capitulation received at Yorktown in his left hand. In addition, Tilghman is portrayed wearing his ceremonial officer’s sword, which Peale painted faithfully, as a careful comparison with the original (now displayed next to the painting in the Old Senate Chamber of the Maryland State House) shows.²²



A Front View of the State-House &c. at ANNAPOLIS the Capital of MARYLAND.

The background and ancillary figures of the Annapolis portrait depict the final major battle of the war at Yorktown. Peale described the scene in his letter to Paca:

I have made in the distance a View of York & Gloucester with the British army surrendering in the order which it happened. and in the middle distance I have introduced French & American officers with Colours of their Nation displayed, between them the British with their Colours Cased. These figures serve to tell the Story at first sight which the more distant, could not so readily do.²³

The larger soldiers in the Annapolis portrait, compared with those in the distance in the Princeton ones, not only “tell the story at first sight” but also serve to balance the two figures of Lafayette and Tilghman, who are only slightly smaller in scale than Washington. In case there was any doubt in Paca’s mind as to the quality of the work, Peale added in a postscript, “I ought for your satisfaction inform you that those who [have] Seen this picture think it best I have done.”²⁴

Peale probably embarked on the Annapolis portrait at the same time as he was fulfilling a request for a Washington portrait from the governor of Virginia. The Virginia legislature had just commissioned a sculpture of Wash-

ington for their capitol, and Peale was asked to provide a full-length picture that could be sent to Thomas Jefferson in Paris and used as a model for the sculptor Jean Antoine Houdon (1741–1828).²⁵ That portrait, now at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, is nearly identical to the Annapolis version, only lacking the figures of Lafayette and Tilghman.

With the portrait complete, Peale set about to secure payment from the Maryland legislature and to plan for delivery of the canvas to Annapolis. In a second letter to Paca, informing him that he had had a frame made for the portrait, Peale wrote:

I can pack up the picture & Frame in two packing cases not very large, & send such directions as Messrs. Shaw & Chisholm may put them together, and place the picture were you wish to have it, without my being at the expence of a journey to your City.²⁶

There is little doubt that Peale knew John Shaw (1745–1829), the best-known cabinetmaker in Annapolis, from his time in the city. In addition to operating a cabinetmaking shop directly across from the State House, Shaw was employed there as the caretaker during the war and until 1819. His responsibilities were wide ranging, from supervising structural repairs to the building and grounds to illuminating

the public rooms for ceremonial occasions, in addition to providing furniture.²⁷ Peale was presumably aware of Shaw’s role at the State House, so it is completely logical that he would have suggested working directly with him.

As to the matter of setting a price for the painting, and securing payment from the legislature for a portrait that exceeded the initial commission, Peale was less confident. The only record of the cost of the painting is a bill he produced in December, when he delivered the portrait to Annapolis, stating a price of £175, or as he converted it on the receipted bill, one hundred guineas.²⁸ Lillian Miller notes that Peale’s usual price for a full-length portrait at this time was forty guineas for an original and thirty guineas for a replica. The one hundred guineas accounted for the three figures in the painting. Conscious, however, that his commission was for only one portrait, he expressed apprehension about the cost in his letter to Governor Paca, acknowledging that it might be necessary for Paca to get approval from the General Assembly in order to pay him

Fig. 3. *A Front View of the State-House etc. at Annapolis the Capital of Maryland*, engraving after a drawing attributed to Peale, in the *Columbian Magazine*, vol. 3 (February 1789). *Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis.*

and suggesting that his friend Samuel Chase (1741–1811), a member of the General Assembly, would support his application.²⁹ On the chance that Chase might indeed be asked to stand up for him, Peale wrote to him a week later to request assistance in settling his account: “This picture was ordered in Gov:r Lee’s time and I...delayed the finishing of it with a view of making it an original, as I wished to give to my Countrymen something better than a mere Copy.”³⁰

Peale need not have suffered any anxiety that his price would meet resistance. The House of Delegates resolved on November 26, 1784, to pay him for the entire cost of the painting, frame, delivery, and installation.³¹ Peale left for Annapolis on December 2, arriving on the tenth, when he presented a bill to Governor Paca totaling £213 4s 8d.³² After Paca signed the bill it was presented on December 20 to the office of the auditor general, Christopher Richmond, himself a longtime friend and advocate of Peale. Peale recorded receipt of payment on that same day.

Coincidentally, just two days later Peale’s most famous subject arrived again in the capital city, this time to lobby the legislature on behalf of the state of Virginia to negotiate commercial navigation of the Potomac River.³³ It seems most likely that during Peale’s ten-day stay in the city he was able to supervise the assembly of the frame and oversee the installation of the portrait in the House of Delegates Chamber in time for Washington’s appearance before that body during the week of December 22. The magnificent new image of Washington in full military regalia was surely an asset to his testimony.

Peale continued his relationship with the Maryland legislature for the rest of his life, ultimately painting portraits of several of the state’s early governors and other historical figures in his quest to become a “founder of a collection of Portraits for the state.”³⁴ He recorded at least two other visits to the State House in Annapolis during his lifetime, including one in 1823, when he would have had the opportunity to see *William Pitt*, as well as *Washington*, *Lafayette* and *Tilghman at Yorktown*, displayed, as they are today, in adjacent rooms. The two portraits offer a striking comparison of Peale’s development during the fifteen years that separate them.

The Maryland legislature itself continued to commission portraits and historical paintings for the State House well into the nineteenth century, not only from Peale but also from others, establishing a tradition that continues to the present day. Peale’s *Washington*, *Lafayette* and *Tilghman at Yorktown* proved to be the foundation for a large and historically important collection of art on view throughout Maryland’s public buildings. More than 220 years later, it remains a vivid expression of the legislature’s desire to honor a hero

and of an artist’s commitment and imagination in translating that wish to canvas.

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Mimi Calver, Sasha Lourie, Jennifer Hafner, and Edward C. Papenfuse, all of the Maryland State Archives.

¹ *Journal of the House of Delegates*, p. 9, November 23, 1781, Early State Records Collection, Special Collections 4872, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis. Published in the Archives of Maryland Online, Legislative Records Series (<http://aomol.net/megafile/msa/speccol/sc4800/sc4872/html/legislative2.html>).

² The Maryland State House was the first peacetime capitol of the United States and is the only statehouse ever to have served as the nation’s capitol.

³ The colony of Maryland was founded in 1632 through a charter granted to Cecilius Calvert (1605–1675), second Lord Baltimore. There were ultimately six Lords Baltimore who administered the colony. Leonard Calvert (1606–1647), brother to Cecilius, served as the first proprietary governor of Maryland.

⁴ In 1766 the Maryland legislature commissioned a sculpture of William Pitt, Lord Chatham, which did not come to fruition. See the later discussion in this article of Charles Willson Peale’s 1768–1774 portrait of Pitt that ultimately did come to reside in the State House at Annapolis (Fig. 2).

⁵ I conducted a survey of the earliest commissions for works of art by legislators in the original thirteen colonies. In 1779 the state of Pennsylvania commissioned Charles Willson Peale to paint a portrait of George Washington (see n. 17).

⁶ Charles Carroll was a barrister, businessman, and planter in Annapolis who also served in the Lower House and Senate of Maryland periodically from 1756 through 1783. As a youth, John Beale Bordley was a student of Charles Peale, Charles Willson Peale’s father, in Chestertown, Maryland. He was a lawyer and merchant and served as a judge in several courts, among other appointed posts, in Maryland. See *A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature, 1635–1789*, ed. Edward C. Papenfuse et al., 2 vols. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, 1985).

⁷ Today this portrait of Pitt is on display at the Westmoreland County Museum and Library, Montross, Virginia. See Eric Langford, *The Allegorical Mr. Pitt, A Bicentennial Biography* (Eric Langford, Montross, Virginia, 1976).

⁸ See Morris L. Radoff, *The State House at Annapolis* (Hall of Records Commission, State of Maryland, Annapolis, 1972). The distinctive dome of the State House, as seen in Fig. 3, replaced an original cupola, and was constructed between 1785 and 1797.

⁹ Peale’s letter was sent to the General Assembly by John Ridout (1732–1797) on March 28. Proceedings of the General Assembly Upper House, Liber 37, p. 7, MSA S977–57, MdHR 3916, Maryland State Archives.

¹⁰ Proceedings of the General Assembly Lower House, 1769–1774, pp. 371–372, MSA S974–63, MdHR 3977, Maryland State Archives.

¹¹ This portrait remained in the Senate Chamber until March 1834, when Andrew Slicer was paid eight dollars for hanging a newly acquired portrait of Charles Carroll of Carrollton by Thomas Sully (1738–1872) and for taking down and rehanging the portrait of William Pitt. The portrait remained on display in various locations throughout the building until it was installed in the Old Senate Committee Room in 1983, where it remains today.

¹² *Journal of the House of Delegates*, pp. 5–6, and *Journal of the Senate*, pp. 3–4, October 17, 1781, to February 2, 1782, Early State Records Collection.

¹³ Individual portraits of these subjects, or family portraits including them, are cited in Charles Coleman Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale* (American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1952).

¹⁴ See n. 1.

¹⁵ Thomas Sim Lee to Charles Willson Peale, December 7,

1781, as published in “Revolutionary Mail Bag: Governor Thomas Sim Lee’s Correspondence, 1779–1782,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 50, no. 2 (June 1955), p. 104.

¹⁶ Peale joined the militia of the City of Philadelphia in 1776; in 1777 he was commissioned captain of the Fourth Battalion or Regiment of Foot, Pennsylvania militia. See *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, ed. Lillian B. Miller (Yale University Press, New Haven, for the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D. C., 1983) vol. 1, pp. 192, 228–229.

¹⁷ *George Washington at Princeton*, the original portrait commissioned by the Pennsylvania legislature, was first displayed in the Assembly Room of the statehouse, now Independence Hall. It later hung in the Supreme Executive Council Chamber on the second floor of the same building. In 1802, after the state government moved to Lancaster, Peale included the portrait in his museum in Independence Hall. It is now in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (author’s communication with Karie Diethorn, supervisory museum curator, Independence National Historical Park, May 2006).

¹⁸ The Princeton portraits have most recently been documented in “Charles Willson Peale: Artist, Soldier, and Patriot,” *George Washington at Princeton: Property from the Collection of Mrs. J. Insley Blair* (Christie’s, New York, 2006), pp. 18–26.

¹⁹ Peale to William Paca, September 7, 1784, as published in Miller, *Selected Papers*, vol. 1, p. 417. Paca served as governor of Maryland from 1782 to 1785 and was one of Maryland’s four signers of the Declaration of Independence.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Lafayette visited the United States from August to December 1784, traveling throughout the Northeast.

²¹ George Washington to John Sullivan, May 11, 1781, General Correspondence, 1697–1799, Series 4, George Washington Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

²² Two swords belonging to Tench Tilghman, including the one depicted in the portrait, were donated to the Maryland State Archives in 1997 through a bequest from Judith Goldsborough Oates, a direct descendant.

²³ Peale to Paca, September 7, 1784, as cited in n. 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The correspondence between Virginia governor Benjamin Harrison (c. 1726–1791) and Peale in July and August, 1784, is in Miller, *Selected Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 413–414.

²⁶ Peale to Paca, November 15, 1784, Joseph Downs Manuscript Collection, Winterthur Library, Delaware. John Shaw and Archibald Chisholm were partners in business from 1772 to 1776 and again from 1783 to 1784.

²⁷ The role of Shaw and his shop in the furnishing and maintenance of the State House is documented in Alexander Lourie, “‘To Superintend the Necessary Repairs’: The Careers and Work of William and Washington Tuck,” in *American Furniture*, 2006, pp. 138–183.

²⁸ The receipted bill is MS1935, Peale Family Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

²⁹ Peale to Paca, November 15, 1784, as cited in n. 26. Samuel Chase, lawyer and statesman, was one of Maryland’s four signers of the Declaration of Independence and a United States Supreme Court justice.

³⁰ Peale to Chase, November 23, 1784, as published in Miller, *Selected Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 424–426.

³¹ Votes and Proceedings of the House of Delegates, p. 5, November 26, 1784, Early State Records Collection, Special Collections. Published in the Archives of Maryland Online, Legislative Records Series.

³² See n. 28.

³³ Edward C. Papenfuse, “George Washington, Lobbyist Extraordinaire,” *Baltimore Sun*, February 25, 1989, p. 9A.

³⁴ Peale, Diary 24, June 9–July 4, 1824, as published in Miller, *Selected Papers*, vol. 4, p. 412.

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