

Lee L. Schreiber  
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

## THE ACADEMY: SCHOOL FOR ARTISTS OR PRIVATE ART CLUB?

DURING RECENT years many historians have given their attention to the Philadelphia artist, Thomas Eakins, usually lauding his devotion to principle when he resigned his professorship at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1887. Other cultural historians have studied the role of the artist during the early years of the republic and have usually deplored the generally conservative outlook of Academy directors. However, nearly all have characterized the role of the Academy as an institution which helped artists to master their technique and elevate their prestige and status in society.<sup>1</sup> These same historians have often implied that disagreements voiced between artists and Academy directors were momentary and usually a spirit of compromise was easily obtained.<sup>2</sup>

Deeper investigation shows that while compromise was forthcoming on the part of both artists and the directors of the Pennsylvania Academy, it was *not* easily obtained. Concessions to the artists by Academy spokesmen were sometimes years in the making. Mostly they were forced upon a reluctant board which seemed to resent the professional artists' intrusion into the operation of their private club. It can be shown that the formative years of the Academy,

1. Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Washington, 1961), pp. 15-21; Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston, 1967), pp. x, 7, 24-25, 90-95; Fairfield Porter, *Thomas Eakins* (New York, 1959) p. 9; Edward J. Nygren, "The First Art Schools at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 95 (April 1971): 238; Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism* (Chicago, 1966), pp. 107-110. One notable exception to this consensus is Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society* (New York, 1966), pp. 90-97.

2. Charles Coleman Sellers, "Rembrandt Peale, Instigator," *Penna. Mag. of History and Biog.*, 79 (July 1955): 336-341; hereinafter PMHB; L. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism*, p. 110; Nygren, "First Art Schools", p. 238; Frank H. Goodyear, "A History of the PAFA, 1805-1976", in *In This Academy* (Phila., 1976), pp. 12-45.

from its founding in 1805 through at least the next four decades, were marked by bitter disputes between professional artists and laymen directors. The conflict between the artist Eakins and the Academy board of directors was not an unusual occurrence. It was not an isolated happening. It was, instead, another battle between adversaries in a continual war between two groups who had always viewed the role of the artist in society, or in the Academy, from different vantage points.<sup>3</sup>

Although the PAFA was not the first academy devoted to fine arts in America, it was the first to achieve lasting success. Private art schools had been in existence in Philadelphia since colonial days, and a community of artists had developed in the city before the War of Independence. In 1780, Alexandre Quesnay had advertised his drawing academy, and in 1783 the English artist Robert Edge Pine had begun teaching serious students from his collection of antiques and plaster casts. On 29 December 1794 the famous Philadelphia artist and patriot Charles Willson Peale had welded, almost singlehandedly, twenty-eight professional and amateur artists of varied nationalities and conflicting political viewpoints into "an association of Artists in America for the protection and encouragement of the Fine Arts." The Society adopted the name Columbianum and vowed to promote the fine arts in America and establish a school to teach architecture, sculpture and painting.<sup>4</sup>

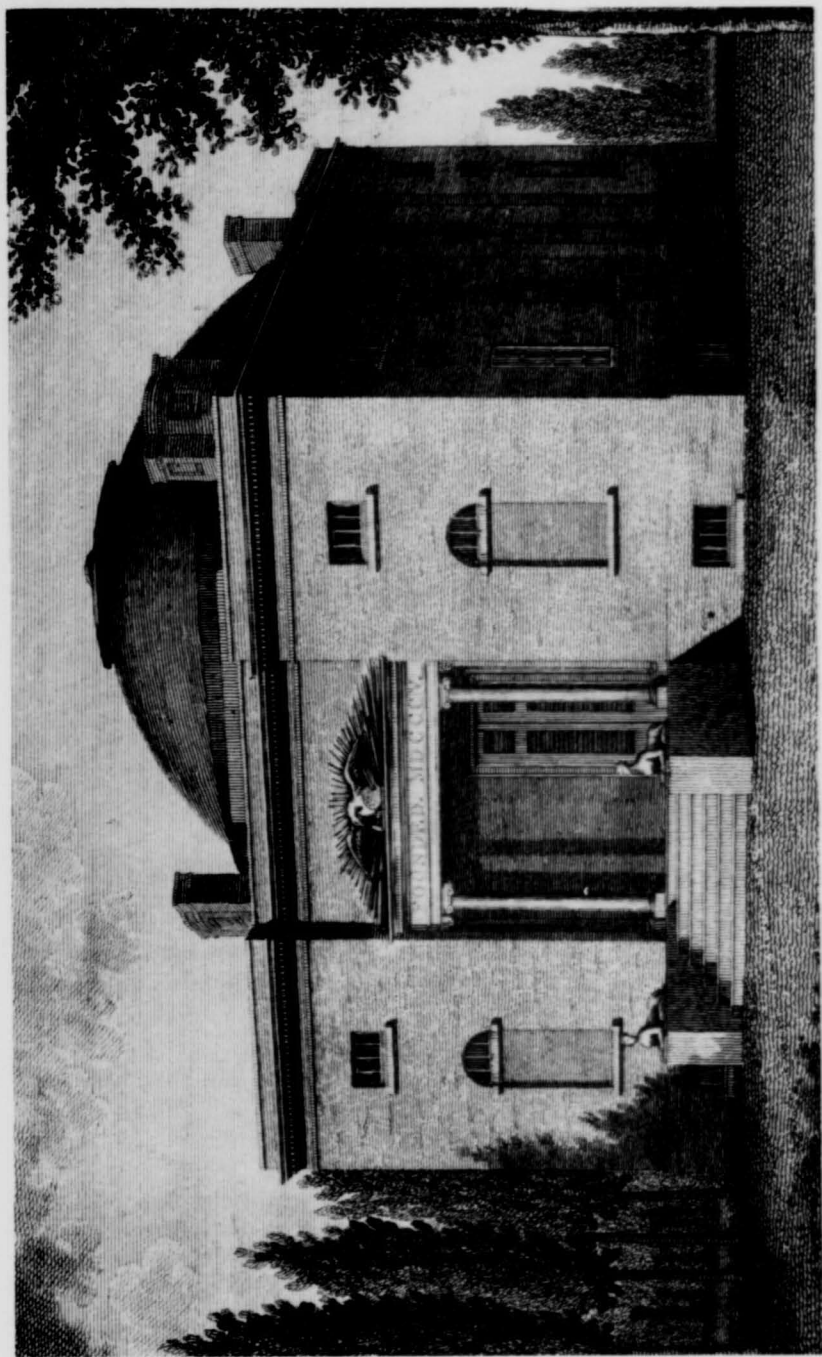
Unfortunately Peale had misjudged both the intensity of the current political debate and the antipathy to art at the time. After prolonged squabbling between French and English artists and their partisan supporters within the organization, nationalist factionalism proved too strong, a mass resignation resulted, and the Columbianum slowly withered away.<sup>5</sup>

Peale never gave up his dream of an American academy and when he felt the time propitious for another attempt he enlisted the

3. Lee L. Schreiber, "The Philadelphia Elite in the Development of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts", Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pa., March 1977, pp. 84-132.

4. Ibid; Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (New York, 1969), p. 268; Helen W. Henderson, *The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and other Collections of Philadelphia* (Boston, 1911), p. 31. Peale Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, hereinafter cited as HSP.

5. For a fuller explanation of the Columbianum and the social climate at the time see Lee L. Schreiber, "The Changing Social Climate, 1790-1810, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts", *Journal of American Culture*, 2 (Fall 1979).



THE PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS (FIRST BUILDING). (Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts).

support of the most active members of the defunct Columbianum. Among those approached was the enthusiastic young lawyer, Joseph Hopkinson, a member of one of Philadelphia's most prestigious families.<sup>6</sup>

Peale had envisioned an academy modeled somewhat after the British prototype, a school controlled by artists for the benefit of artists. He planned an institution where students could learn from established masters, develop their technique by copying casts of classics, study anatomy from real life, and sell their completed works. But this dream was doomed once he turned over the actual organizing of the enterprise and the raising of funds to Hopkinson, who naturally drew upon his family, business and social connections for financial support.<sup>7</sup>

These newcomers, investing their money in shares, tended to agree, instead, with the model already established by the Academy in New York. Their version of an academy was a privately chartered institution, led and controlled by "gentlemen" who were interested in the fine arts. The academy was seen not so much as a school or as a venture to promote the interests of artists, but more as a society designed to advance artistic values and improve public taste.<sup>8</sup>

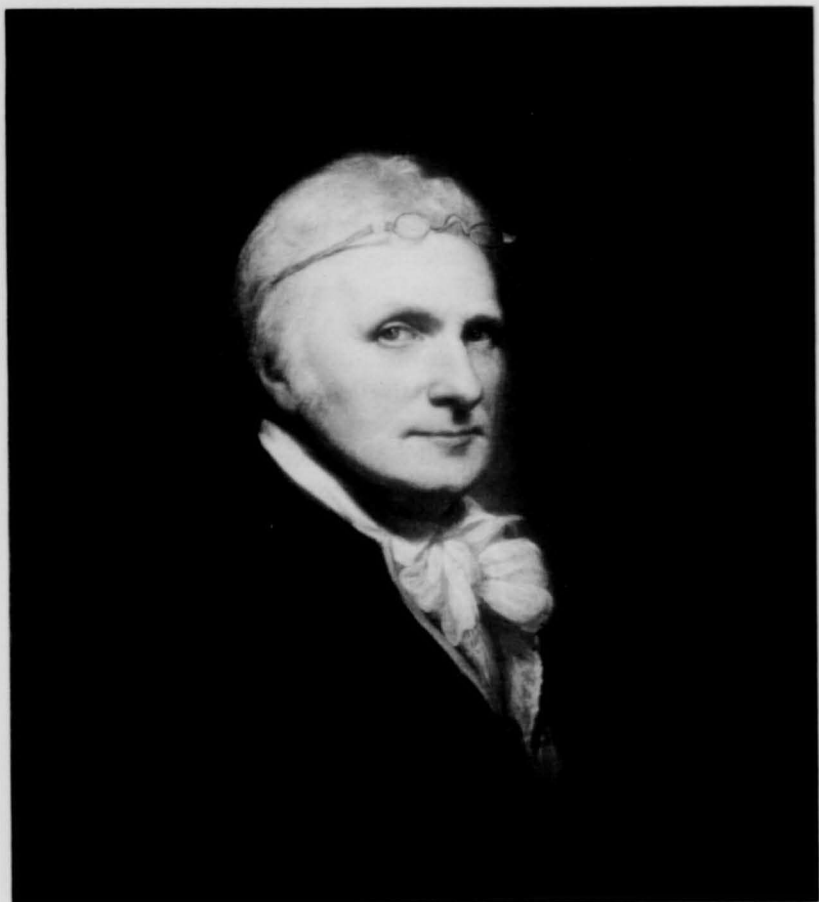
The initial board of directors of the PAFA consisted of the president plus twelve directors. Nearly all were individually wealthy and of prominent family. Six of the group were lawyers, two were physicians, three were merchants or merchant-brokers, and two were artists. Of course, since the two artists were also well-established businessmen, it would not be entirely incorrect to say that the board was made up of eight lawyers and physicians plus five businessmen. For the next forty years or more, the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts consistently followed the pattern set by the initial board in its occupational composition.<sup>9</sup>

6. Sellers, *C. W. Peale*, p. 321; Peale to Raphael Peale, 6 June 1805, Peale Correspondence, HSP; Peale Papers, HSP.

7. Ibid.

8. Sellers, "Rembrandt Peale", p. 336.

9. "Original Rough Minutes of Meeting," 2 June 1806, PAFA Archives; *Philadelphia Medical Museum*, 2 (1805): 74-75; unless otherwise credited, the biographical material used either narratively or statistically in this article has been taken from the *Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography*; *Dictionary of American Biography*; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*; *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography*; *Biographical Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania of the Nineteenth Century*; also see Schreiber, "The Philadelphia Elite" Appendix B.



CHARLES WILLSON PEALE: SELF PORTRAIT WITH SPECTACLES.  
(*Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*).

Directors of the new Academy, unlike the organizers of Peale's earlier attempt, were not idyllic dreamers but practical men-of-affairs experienced as officers in other institutions. They had also a financial investment in the newly created Academy to protect and thus their view of the Academy was similar to that of the other shareholders: an institution to advance the arts and to promote public virtue and taste. So ended Peale's dream. Peale himself realized what had occurred and began "gradually, in his gentle way. . . assuming a role of dissent in Academy affairs."<sup>10</sup>

The difference in viewpoint helped set the stage for a future marked by continual debate between practicing artists and academy owners. Underlying all disputes in the years to come was the question of the role of the artist in the Academy, and that role could not be defined without answering another question. Was an academy of fine arts designed for the benefit of artists or for laymen?

Artists felt an art academy was for artists and could not exist without them, and therefore, it was obvious that they should be the Academy leaders and their welfare and aspirations should be paramount. To the directors, however, it was equally obvious that an academy should benefit those who owned it, and that it was unnatural for anyone to relinquish control over any business once owned.<sup>11</sup>

Another factor involved was the social status of the shareholders. The gentlemen directors of the Pennsylvania Academy came almost entirely from the city's wealthy upper class. The patrician outlook at that time was one of social control including the control of artistic values and so-called "good taste." There was no doubt in the minds of the wealthy that they should determine the standards of good taste and be responsible for its dissemination among the lower orders of society. The fact that professional artists did not share this concept bore little weight in the Pennsylvania Academy where fifty-five of the original seventy-one shareholders came from the richest families of Philadelphia, most of whom were interconnected by business and marriage.<sup>12</sup>

10. Sellers, "Rembrandt Peale," p. 341.

11. *Report of the Committee Appointed to Examine into the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Society of Artists of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1812), pp. 4-14. Hereinafter cited as *Report of Artists*.

12. David Hackett Fisher, *The Revolution of American Conservatism* (New York, 1965), p. 29; George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965), 9; *Monthly Anthology* (May 1807), p. 243; *American Museum*

As self-appointed judges of good taste, conscious that they were society's cultural leaders, they wished also to be considered leaders of a cultured nation. Thus they viewed the Academy as an institutional rival of the Royal Academy in London, as a *locus* to foster claims of American genius, and as an example of American culture. The Academy also became a cultural symbol because a nation which could boast of an academy was also recognized as a cultural leader in the Western World. No longer, then, could the United States be regarded as culturally inferior.<sup>13</sup>

There was also the factor of city rivalry. Competition between cities was intense, especially between Philadelphia and New York. Philadelphia, until recently the capital city of the nation, was unhappy over its loss of prestige and pretentious international society. Leading citizens were also acutely aware of the rapid growth of New York in population, commerce, and finance. Fearful of further loss in importance as the nation's leading city, civic leaders often responded passionately in endorsement of any endeavor that would enhance the reputation of their city. In the areas of learning, gentility and culture, Philadelphians were convinced that their city was still supreme, and they intended that it would so remain. It was for all these reasons and not for any particular concern over the status or well-being of the professional artist that the professional and business leaders of Philadelphia responded so enthusiastically to Hopkinson's subscription drive.<sup>14</sup>

When Hopkinson was selected as spokesman for the "First Annual Discourse" delivered in 1810, he admitted proudly that he spoke not

(March 1787), p. 207; John Adams, *Selected Writings*, pp. 199-200; Nicholas B. Wainwright, ed., *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834-1871* (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 29; passim. Hereinafter cited as *S. G. Fisher Diary*; Russel Blaine Nye, *The Cultural Life of the New Nation* (New York, 1960), pp. 104-105; Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* (New York, 1949), p. 5; *Port-Folio*, 2 November 1805; Henry D. Gilpin, *An Annual Discourse Before the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Philadelphia, 1827).

13. L. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism*, p. 5; Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century* (1803; rpt. New York, 1970), pp. 407, 428.

14. *Philadelphia Medical Museum*, 1 (1805): 90; Richard Rush to Joseph Hopkinson, 16 February 1805. Hopkinson Papers, HSP; Harris, *Artist in Society*, pp. 108-109; Neil Harris, "Four Stages of Cultural Growth: The American City in History and the Role of the City in American Life", *Indiana Historical Society Lectures* (N.P., 1972), p. 31; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt* (1955; rpt. London, 1971), p. 405; C. J. Ingersoll, *A Discourse Delivered Before the Society for the Commemoration of the Landing of William Penn* (Philadelphia, 1825), p. 15; *The Hampden Patriot and Liberal Recorder* (Springfield, Mass.), 13 June 1821; Alva Burton Konkle, *Joseph Hopkinson* (Philadelphia, 1931), p. 47.

as an artist but as "a layman addressing other laymen." From this perspective his ensuing praise of the Academy was well deserved. Similar self-appreciative euphemisms were echoed often by other laymen selected to deliver the Annual Discourse during succeeding years. However, Philadelphia artists did not agree with the pretty picture painted by Academy spokesmen.<sup>15</sup>

The differences between professional artists and Academy stockholders were usually looked upon as minor and sometimes petty annoyances by the directors but to artists these differences were symptoms of a basic disagreement. Artists, disillusioned with the Academy and its lofty pronouncements, still awaiting life classes and exhibitions of their own works, recognized that those who owned the Academy were aristocratic gentlemen who looked down upon the craftsman who sold his product much as a shopkeeper will sell goods over a counter. On the other hand, the artist struggled to defend the dignity of his profession and establish his proper rank in society.<sup>16</sup>

From the beginning, the Philadelphia Academy and the contemporary New York Academy shared one common handicap: conflict between the ideology of the artist and of the layman stockholder. In both cities, the result was the early appearance of artist-led rival institutions. In New York, Samuel F. B. Morse founded the Drawing Association which quickly evolved into the National Academy of the Arts of Design. Philadelphia, by 1810, saw the formation of the artist-sponsored Society of Artists of the United States.<sup>17</sup> This ideological conflict was to cause continual strife in the coming years. The disputes over artists' rights and the correct path for the development of American art, questions concerning good taste, and particularly the status of the artist in the Academy all stemmed from the difference in social outlook. The patrician view of social control, including control of art and taste, was a view which artists refused

15. Joseph Hopkinson, "Annual Discourse delivered before the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts on the 13th of November, 1810 in Philadelphia," *First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Artists of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1811); Gilpin, "Annual Discourse"; *Report of Artists*, p. 4; "Memorial of the Artists of Philadelphia", 17 March 1820, Archives of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, hereinafter cited as PAFA.

16. *The Constitution of the Society of Artists of the United States Established at Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia, 1810), hereinafter referred to as *Constitution of Artists*; *Report of Artists*, p. 4; "Memorial of the Artists of Philadelphia", 17 March 1820, Archives, PAFA.

17. Oliver Larkin, *Art and Life in America* (1949; rev. New York, 1960), p. 114; *Constitution of Artists*.



to share. Yet the laymen directors, drawn almost exclusively from the city's upper class, could not think in other terms.<sup>18</sup>

As noted previously, the number of artists at any one time on the board of directors was usually two or three. This situation remained fairly constant for forty years or more. There were some exceptions, for example, there were more than three in 1820, 1831, and 1832.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, no artist was ever elected to membership on the board of directors who was not noted as one of the foremost living American painters, engravers, or architects and usually welcomed in the highest social circles of Philadelphia, even if not a fully accepted member of that caste. In nearly every case, these artist board members enjoyed considerable annual income and in a few instances had amassed considerable wealth. Much more numerous on the board were those who sometimes called themselves "amateurs" or "artists", but were known to contemporaries more as physicians, lawyers, or businessmen.<sup>20</sup>

One of the 112 men who were either charter or board members from 1805 to 1840, only nine could be properly designated as professional artists: the painters Charles Willson Peale, Rembrandt Peale, Thomas Sully, John Neagle and Henry Inman; the sculptor William Rush; the architect William Strickland; and the engravers John Vallance and Cephas G. Childs. Each of the painters was during his PAFA tenure a leading portraitist with a substantial annual income. Inman, during the three years he lived in Philadelphia, was a partner in the lithographing establishment of Cephas G.

18. Alan M. Zachary, "Social Disorder and the Philadelphia Elite Before Jackson," PMHB 99 (July 1975): 288-308; M. J. Heales, "From City Fathers to Social Critics: Humanitarianism and Government in New York, 1790-1860," *The Journal of American History*, 43 (June 1976): 21-24; Lynes, *Tastemakers*, p. 5, *passim*.

19. Election Tallies, Archives, PAFA.

20. In addition to biographical sources previously given, also see (By a member of the Philadelphia Bar), *Wealth and Biography of the Wealthy Citizens of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1845); (By a merchant of Philadelphia), *Biography of Some of the Wealthy Citizens of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1846); *Philadelphia City Directories* (1803-1842); "Philadelphia City and County Tax Lists", Microfilm, HSP; "Philadelphia County Will Books, Microfilm, HSP; "Records of the Board of Health and Register of Wills", Archives, City of Philadelphia; "Collections of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania", HSP; Horace Binney, "The Leaders of the Old Bar of Philadelphia", PMHB 14 (1890): 1-27; *Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates of the College and University of Pennsylvania 1794-1893* (Philadelphia, 1894); "Biographies of Philadelphians", Ed. Thompson Wescott, 4 vols., 1860, HSP; Nathaniel Burt, *First Families* (Boston 1970); Frank Willing Leach, "Genealogies of Old Philadelphia Families", 4 vols. HSP; plus appropriate family papers and manuscripts, HSP; E. S., "The First American Art Academy, First Paper," *Lippincott's Magazine*, 9 (February 1872): 144-145.

Childs. William Rush was a prosperous businessman, William Strickland was the leading architect-engineer of his period and Childs in addition to his large lithographing business was also a publisher, editor and owner of a "posh" engraving firm.<sup>21</sup>

Like the elite in other cities, with whom they intermarried and shared economic connections, the PAFA directors were usually exceedingly wealthy, well educated, civic minded, and influential in business and politics. They were mainly traditionalist in social thought and conservative in politics. Trained by family, schools and the uncoded laws of their society to be social, cultural and political leaders, they were self-conscious of their status, their inherited position and their attendant obligations.<sup>22</sup>

In keeping with the hopeful outlook of the nineteenth century, the Academy officers were generally optimistic about the future of American society. Although they did sometimes warn the public of the dangers of uncontrolled democracy and resulting "mobocracy," they were for the most part confident and secure. Secure also in the accuracy of their class tenets, they feared the specter of the mob only if the "better sort" were excluded from giving advice and direction.<sup>23</sup> They were so confident of their abilities to promote correct taste and to govern correctly that they were consequently surprised and bewildered when the city artists challenged their leadership in 1810.<sup>24</sup>

In May of that year, disgusted beyond endurance by the Academy's failure to operate a school or organize exhibitions of contemporary works, Philadelphia artists established the Society of Artists

21. Ibid.

22. Meredith Papers, HSP; Hopkinson Papers, HSP; S. G. Fisher *Diary*, pp. 150-171; Fischer, *Conservatism*, pp. 1-43; Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, p. 405; Zachary, "Social Disorder", pp. 288-293; Heale, "City Fathers", pp. 21, 24, 28; Harris, "Four Stages", p. 30; Nye, *New Nation*, pp. 103, 151; Lynes, *Tastemakers*, p. 5; Sidney George Fisher, *The Making of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 209, passim.

23. Crane Brinton, *Ideas and Men: The Story of Western Thought* (New York, 1950), p. 427; Charles Chauncey, in *Speeches of Joseph Hopkinson and Charles Chauncey on the Judicial Tenure*. . . (Philadelphia, 1831), pp. 59-61; Hopkinson Papers, vol. 13, HSP; C. J. Ingersoll, *A Discourse . . . on the Mind* (Philadelphia, 1823), p. 30; Joseph Hopkinson, *Eulogium in Commemoration of the Hon. Bushrod Washington* (Philadelphia, 1830), pp. 24, 29; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address" and "Self-Reliance" in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Reginald L. Cooke (San Francisco, 1969), pp. 56-71, 72-93; Carl Bode, *Antebellum Culture* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1970), p. xiii. James Gibson, *A General Outline of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1824), pp. 94, 95; Archer Butler Hulbert, "The Habit of Going to the Devil," *Atlantic Monthly*, 138 (1926): 804-806.

24. Harris, *Artist in Society*, p. 92.

of the United States. The preamble to their constitution indirectly criticized the Academy by commenting on "other societies rent by schisms" and added it was clear that *something* was needed to encourage artists and display their works to best advantage. The "something", it seemed, was the establishment of a society which would admit only artists. Such a society would teach the elementary principles of fine arts, encourage emulation by comparison and communication of ideas, correct and improve public taste through regular exhibitions, raise funds for the relief of members or their families where required, and most important, would establish a school of drawing, with respected teachers, in all branches of the fine arts.<sup>25</sup>

The Society soon discovered that it took more than words and good intentions to institute and operate a school. Realizing the Academy possessed the building, art and equipment they needed, the artists quickly proposed a merger of the two organizations. The merger was never accomplished although the Academy did make certain concessions. After the directors demanded and received the sum of \$2000 from the Society for stock certificates, an Academy-appointed committee agreed to give Society members free admission to the Academy building with the right to examine specimens, the use of certain Academy rooms for an annual six-week exhibition and space for the Society's school. The Academy board of directors, however, repudiated its own committee and failed to ratify the agreement while retaining the \$2000.<sup>26</sup>

A little more than one year later, beset by financial difficulties and internal problems, the artists again tried to effect a merger. This time their demands were indeed *naïve*. Did they really expect the directors to give up their authority over expenditures, divide the Academy into two separate bodies of professional artists and amateurs, retain all present provisions favorable to artists, make all present members of the Society paid-up members of the Academy, and while they were at it, change the Academy's name?<sup>27</sup>

As one might expect, the directors rejected this proposal also, emphasizing in their answer that they saw no reason why property of

25. "Preamble" in *The Constitution of the Society of Artists of the United States Established at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1810).

26. "Minute Book" (1805), Archives, PAFA; "Minute Book" (1810), Archives, PAFA; "Report of the Committee," 20 August 1810, MSS, Archives, PAFA.

27. Thomas Sully to George Clymer, Portfolio IV, (1811), Archives, PAFA; *Report of Artists*, pp. 13, 14.

the Academy should be shared with people who had no financial interest in that property. Furthermore, they insisted that no person could be given shareholder rights without first having become a stockholder through payment of \$50 per share.<sup>28</sup>

Spirited exchanges followed. The artists accused the board of being crass businessmen who professed to be enamored of the fine arts but in reality were more concerned with the ownership of property.<sup>29</sup> The directors answered "*artists were neither men of business nor acquainted with the world, and consequently, ill calculated to manage their own affairs.*" To this the Society replied that there *was* some truth in this statement, because "artists search for truth," and "state their facts with candor". Moreover, they warned that as an organization made up of 130 respectable artists "who are . . . the bees that make the honey" without which the Academy could not exist, their desires *must* be given careful attention. Nevertheless, the Academy insisted on the \$50 per share requirement and merger proposals were once again defeated.<sup>30</sup>

But the dialogue did lead to minor concessions by board members and these concessions permitted artists to "save face" and to continue to work with, and within, the Academy. Continued pressure exerted by artists caused the Academy at the close of 1810 to finally initiate the awarding of the title "Fellow of the Academy", and in 1811 the first exhibition of contemporary paintings was held under the auspices of the Society at the Academy galleries. Of the 507 exhibits, 235 were by American artists.<sup>31</sup>

The following year's exhibition, now jointly sponsored by the Academy and the Society, "excited great admiration" and led to the Academy's creation of "a fund for the future encouragement of American Artists, and to excite them by suitable rewards".<sup>32</sup> This resolution, greeted enthusiastically by artists at the time, remained merely a paper resolution and so became another source of future

28. "Report of Committee of Conference," 16 December 1811, Archives, PAFA; *Report of Artists*, pp. 13, 15.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18; *First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Artists of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1811); *Second Annual Exhibition of the Artists of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1812); "Resolution of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts," 13 March 1812, Archives, PAFA.

32. "Minute Book," 22 June 1812, Archives, PAFA; "Minute Book," 9 March 1812, Archives, PAFA; "Minute Book," 13 April 1812, Archives, PAFA.

friction. Meanwhile, this unusual Academy of Fine Arts which since its founding had not ever appointed a single Academician, finally, after continual agitation by artists agreed to institute a body of up to forty artists to be styled "Pennsylvania Academicians". This body, in turn, would elect a council of five who would be permitted to attend but not vote at Academy board meetings.<sup>33</sup> The council would also conduct all business pertaining to the Society and its school (which was not given over to Academy special committees) but the directors retained the right to appoint the necessary professors and the building "Keeper" (the name given at the time for the combination custodian-curator). They also retained the right to determine all salaries and purchases.<sup>34</sup>

Up to this point the resolution seemed to be most magnanimous—a real concession to long-standing demands of the Philadelphia artists, but the artists at the time did not realize the inherent dangers of "the Directors of the Pennsylvania Academy shall elect the necessary Professors, Masters, Keepers, &c — — . . .," and that the directors of the Academy would also determine "all salaries, pensions, and purchases . . ." These two points were to lead to bitter disputes within a short period of time.<sup>35</sup>

In June 1812, the artist John Vallance, who had been employed as the Keeper of the Academy for some time, informed the board that he no longer wished to continue as Keeper without an increase in salary. Vallance, who was also secretary of the Society of Artists, had in the past been praised frequently by the directors for his performance of tasks beyond normal duties. After receiving his communication the board again voted him a commendation but no salary increase. Consequently, Vallance resigned and was replaced by the accomplished landscape and portrait painter Thomas Birch.<sup>36</sup>

Shortly after this appointment, and for the first time in the history of the Academy, artists began to complain to the board concerning the new Keeper's neglect of duties and grudging performance.

33. "Minute Book," 13 March 1812, Archives, PAFA; although the number given at the time was "five," William Rush reported that the council members elected were "Mills, Fairman, Sully, Rush and \_\_\_\_\_." A motion by Rush later reduced the number to four. ("Minute Book," 4 April 1812, Archives, PAFA); Thomas Sully to the Directors of the Academy of Fine Arts, 18 February 1824, Archives, PAFA; "Academicians Elected 18 Feby. 1824," MS bound in *Standing Resolutions of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts* (Philadelphia, 1831), p. 25.

34. "Minute Book", 13 April 1812, Archives, PAFA.

35. Ibid.

36. "Minute Book", 22 June 1812, Archives, PAFA.

The artists had become accustomed to the "zeal and fidelity" of Vallance, and objected to the carelessness and sometimes argumentative response of Birch to their requests. Birch saw himself as little more than a custodian, hence in a position below his true station, but Vallance had been active in many phases of Academy management, even acting as negotiator for the first picture the Academy purchased. But custodial duties were abhorrent to Birch—the artist.<sup>37</sup>

Philadelphia winters were cold and the marble columns and stone walls of the neo-classical building designed by PAFA shareholder John Dorsey contained gallery halls and workrooms heated only by fireplace warmth. The question of who would light and attend the fires soon became an issue. Artists expected to enter into warmed chambers while Birch felt that fires should be laid by the students. The board supported the Keeper stating that they did not conceive of the lighting of fires as being among his duties.<sup>38</sup> But the continual complaints of the artists and Birch's carelessness finally caused the board, in 1816, to replace him. The replacement, James Thackara, an engraver and owner of a stationery shop in Philadelphia, was to prove more intractable than his predecessor.<sup>39</sup>

Although neither complete understanding nor agreement resulted from the discussions between the Academy and Society spokesmen, the cooperation promised by Academy directors continued to keep the Philadelphia artists from boycotting the institution. Probably most significant in keeping the artists from complete withdrawal was the opening of the long awaited Life Academy where students could sketch from "real life" models. The launching of the long overdue Life Academy marked a new stage in the development of American artistic technique, but left unsettled other differences between the artists and the Academy, the result being that for the next several

37. John Vallance to Mr. E. [Ezra] Ames, 16 July 1812, Portfolio V (1812), Archives, PAFA. The portrait referred to was of the Academy's president, George Clymer, and helped to establish the reputation of the painter, Ezra Ames; John Vallance to Hopkinson, Glentworth and Rush, 14 December 1812, Portfolio V (1812), Archives, PAFA.

38. "Sketch and Plan of the Proposed Building," Archives, PAFA; Charles Willson Peale to Col. Johnathan Williams, 1 August 1805, Archives, PAFA; *Paulson's Daily Advertiser*, 9 August 1805, hereinafter cited as *Paulson's*; "Benjamin Trott, George Murray, Benjamin Tanner, and Edward Miles of the Society of Artists to the President and Directors of PAFA," 12 December 1812, Archives, PAFA; "Minute Book," 13 January 1813, Archives, PAFA.

39. "Rough Minutes of Draft Resolutions by Mr. Meredith," 7 February 1816, MSS, Archives, PAFA; "Minute Book," 13 March 1816, Archives, PAFA.



THOMAS EAKINS. (*Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*).

years, Academy directors were bombarded with messages from the Society. The messages alternated between ireful demands and formal, sometimes wistful, requests for a merger of the institutions.<sup>40</sup>

The conflict between student artists and the Academy Keeper was not mitigated but exacerbated by the appointment of James Thackara in 1816. In a "Memorial" written in 1820, artists complained that "at the door of the Academy" they were treated more like "servile dependents" of the Academy than as "independent and honorable" men. The Memorial concluded that "It is needless to inform you that most of us have heretofore exerted ourselves in sustaining your institution," adding that they never had received nor had asked for any emolument for their efforts. "But," they proclaimed, "when we consider that your revenue is in a great measure derived from the annual contribution of our works," then, they continued, "we think it unreasonable that privileges are withheld from us."<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the artist's cry that they were "the bees that make the honey" was voiced again. This time, however, the slogan was only a preamble to far more serious charges against Academy policies. The Memorial's first complaint stated that the Academy had violated the agreement made with the Society of Artists by prohibiting artists from exercising any voice in the management of exhibitions. Furthermore, although Academicians together with Academy directors were to select those who were to be awarded prizes, no artist had ever been given any medals, prizes or awards.<sup>42</sup>

Next, the Memorial pointed out, the charter approval given by the state legislature in 1806 was based on an Academy which was "to promote the cultivation of Fine Arts in this Country," but to date "in the main this object has been neglected." For example, they continued, Annual Discourses called for in the Academy's "Rules and Orders" were not given annually; premiums to be given regularly had never been awarded; and many an annual exhibition has been held without the Academy even "breaking silence . . . on a subject of such great importance to the practicing Artist."<sup>43</sup>

40. "Minute Book," 29 November 1815, through 13 November 1822, Archives, PAFA; Portfolio VII, Archives, PAFA.

41. "Minute Book," 27 March 1816, Archives, PAFA; "Memorial of the Artists of Philadelphia," 17 March 1820, MSS, Archives, PAFA.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.



The Memorial closed with another list of complaints about the Keeper. In addition to their indignation over his attitude at the door and his seizure of allotted rooms the artists protested that the Keeper kept information from them concerning their own works deposited for sale. Also, the Memorial concluded that the use of the library, graciously granted by the board, was a meaningless gesture because the Keeper demanded a written order signed by a board member for each admittance to the room.<sup>44</sup>

The board's answer to the lengthy indictment was merely to have the Keeper prepare two catalogues separating belongings of the Academy from those merely deposited there. At the same time they stated that the other proposals made by the Society could not be arranged.<sup>45</sup>

Two more years passed before the directors acknowledged that there were, perhaps, valid complaints concerning Thackara's treatment of artists at the Academy entrance. But not until 1824, one month short of four years from the time of the Memorial publication, were artists permitted free access to the library without a special order.<sup>46</sup>

A consequence of the oft-apathetic response of the directors to the day-to-day business of the Academy and their tortoise-like pace in answering questions raised by the Memorial of 1820 was another attack by the Society after eight more years of frustration. During this time the Society had changed its name to the Columbia Society of Artists, and in 1828 a group within the Society, calling themselves the Resident Artists of Philadelphia, issued another Memorial directed against Academy policies. Once again the chief complaint was the conduct of the Keeper.<sup>47</sup>

The Academy Committee appointed to study this latest list of artists' grievances voted to share the information and their answer with the chief object of complaint, James Thackara. It may appear

44. Ibid.

45. "Minute Book," 15 May 1820, Archives, PAFA.

46. "Minute Book," 7 March 1822, 18 March 1822, 24 June 1822, Archives, PAFA; "Minute Book," 24 June 1822, 18 February 1824, Archives, PAFA.

47. See "Minute Books," 1808-1810; With the exception of business pertaining to the Exhibitions little was accomplished during the 1820s. "No quorums" were the rule and no meetings were held from 27 November 1824 until 14 December 1825, with the exception of a "Special Meeting" with the Academicians to arrange the Annual Exhibition, plus a very short meeting 12 August 1825, "Minute Books," 1824-1825, and "Minute Book," 1829, Archives, PAFA; John Neagle to Joseph Hopkinson, 10 March 1829, MS, Archives, PAFA.

singular, on the surface, that the “gentlemen” leaders of the Academy would continually advise and meet with their building custodian on a generally equal basis rather than as employers and employee.<sup>48</sup> However, to the Academy directors Thackara was much more than a mere employee, he was also a gentleman businessman, and as William Dunlap, the contemporary chronicler and art historian described him, a “respectable citizen”. Formerly a partner in an engraving firm, he now headed his own business, and his association with the Academy directors was much closer than that of a building custodian. He often acted as teller at board elections and was a proxy holder among the very select group of electors at annual election meetings.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, the directors’ patience came to an end and Thackara was at last dismissed. The dismissal led the artists’ leader John Neagle to comment that the main cause of the artists’ complaints was ended and he hoped that the board’s action would result in “happiness and uninterrupted harmony and a cordial cooperation in the future.”<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, he admitted there were some artists who were still not satisfied, but concluded that most of the city artists were willing to go along on a “wait and see” basis.<sup>51</sup> However, the number of “malcontents” kept increasing so rapidly that by 1834 William Dunlap claimed that *most* of the city artists were dissatisfied. Dunlap, who often allowed his pro-artist bias to color his work, must have been quite pleased with the account submitted to him signed “By an Artist of Philadelphia:”

The “Academicians,” a body of artists, were organized and were attached to the academy on the 13th March 1810. I do not know how long they acted in concert with the academy, but Mr. Edwin, who was one of the original academicians, told me that *diplomas* were promised by them by the board of directors, and at some public meeting, where ladies were invited, each academician received, with great pomp and

48. “Answer to Artists” (rough draft), April 1828, MSS, Archives, PAFA; “Report of the Committee on the Memorial of the Resident Artists of Philadelphia,” 23 April 1828, Archives, PAFA.

49. William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834; rpt. New York, 1965), 3:222; “Annual Election for President and Directors held at the Academy,” 4 June 1827, Archives, PAFA.

50. John Neagle to Joseph Hopkinson, 10 March 1829, MS, Archives, PAFA.

51. Ibid.

ceremony, a paper tied with a pink riband, which were thought to be the diplomas, until they reached home and went to exhibit the honors conferred upon them to their families and friends; when, lo! to their disappointment and chagrin, each had a piece of *blank paper*! I believe this was the death blow of all zeal on the part of the artists of that day. This fact I never knew until after I had become an academician.

When the artists complained of the trick played off upon their credulity, they were promised soon "*rightly dight*" ones, but to this day no one has ever been thus honored by the board.<sup>52</sup>

Recent investigation appears to prove that the author quoted in the above account was the artist John Neagle.<sup>53</sup> It is clear that by 1834 Neagle had very definitely changed his mind about Hopkinson and the board of directors, and Dunlap, bias notwithstanding, was correct in stating that the directors professed to give satisfaction but little was actually accomplished. Once the artists awoke, after being lulled to sleep by the sweet melody of concession, they saw that the only actual accomplishment was the removal of Thackara as Keeper. However, since Thackara was the most blatant symbol of the Academy's disdain and a constant irritant, his dismissal was seen as a resounding victory at the time.<sup>54</sup>

Yet the dismissal of the Keeper was perhaps just as much a victory for the Academy, for this act drove a wedge into the newly-found unity of artists and divided them, at the time, into either believers or "malcontents". Again a single concession formed the basis of a compromise within a list of many grievances. But viewed in the light that there was a basic difference in thought between professional artist and layman director, it was praiseworthy that the directors possessed that ability to compromise; an ability which permitted the Academy to continue where others had failed.

It can be argued that the Academy often acted capriciously and arrogantly and that the continued intense struggles between artists and directors were often caused by the Academy lagging behind the artistic community's more progressive views. It can be demon-

52. Quoted in Dunlap, *History of Arts*, 3:110-111.

53. See the remainder of this quotation in Dunlap, *History of Arts*, 3:110-111; Schreiber, "Philadelphia Elite", p. 148.

54. Dunlap, *History of Arts*, 3:110-111.

strated that the Academy could not see from the artist's viewpoint, much less agree to foster actions stemming from that viewpoint, and that the director's perspective led inescapably to such acts as the forced resignation of Thomas Eakins.

Guilty of many obviously unfair practices, such as the mixing of contemporary works with that of Old Masters, treating artists as servants, denying artists rights already won and violating agreements, yet, when they were forced to, the directors did compromise. The directors of the American Academy in New York refused to do so and the institution failed.<sup>55</sup> The Pennsylvania Academy, on the other hand, used compromise successfully and survived. This, in fact, was the hidden strength of the Academy directors: the ability to meet and discuss with artists' committees in a calm and gentlemanly manner, to permit a select few major artists who were already accepted in better class circles to sit on the board of directors, and to deny most requests in such polite language (after sympathetic discussion) that small concessions were viewed by many artists as great triumphs.

Academy directors acted always in their own interests, yielded only when pressured sufficiently and never relinquished control of their property. However, the Academy did aid artists by providing at least a place for exhibitions, in the face of what must have seemed to the board of directors as outside interference in their private club.<sup>56</sup>

55. Ibid.

56. Harris, *Artist in Society*, p. 94.