THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA has received as the gift of T. Morris Perot, 3rd, Henry F. Perot, and Mrs. John P. Bracken, a notable collection of family silhouettes which includes (in the artist's own phrase) thirty-four "physiognomical sketches" from the brush of Joseph Sansom, painted for the most part in Philadelphia in the early 1790's. It is an important acquisition, immediately identifying this young Quaker amateur as one of the masters of the delicate art of the profile, and it is memorable also for the prominence of some of his subjects and the engaging qualities of others. Here are original portraits of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris, James Madison and numerous other public figures sharing the company of private friends and family. Young Joseph had originally brought them all together, these and about an equal number more, in a book with the following explanatory title page:
AN OCCASIONAL COLLECTION
of
PHYSIOGNOMICAL SKETCHES
Chiefly North Americans, and drawn from the life;
designed to preserve
the characteristic features, personally, mentally, or officially
[of]
REMARKABLE PERSONS,
and the endeared Memory of
PRIVATE FRIENDS OR PUBLIC BENEFACTORS,
with professional Notices &c.
PHILADELPHIA,
1790, 91, & 92.

There was also a formal “Preface by the Author”:

The following Collection is not considered as a regular or compleat Series,
der under any of the heads into which it is divided in the title page, it being
for the most part occasional, as the persons presented; and still wanting
many Fellow Citizens of each character who would have been a valuable
addition to it. It is also defective in regard to relative proportions, being
drawn from memory, without the use of a scale, the first stroke that con-
veyed a resemblance necessarily determined the size of the figure, as it was
dangerous to retouch. This however is in some degree obviated by the table
of contents, where the height of each is noted in general terms, with other
personal data.

It is principally intended as a memorial of particular Friends and remark-
able Contemporaries; for though a few of the sketches record nothing more
than personal peculiarity, or professional eminence, many of them will long
be dear to their Connections; and some perhaps interesting to posterity.—
If my pencil may be thought to have owed this small tribute of attention
to their various merits, it has been one of the amusements of my youth
partly to discharge the obligation.

Joseph Sansom.

Philada. 1792

This unusual statement, if leaving us in some doubt as to where
his work was “drawn from the life,” and “drawn from memory,” at
least reveals a profound respect for precision and method. Sansom
compiled other manuscript books with similar title pages. Whether or
not his *Occasional Collection of Physiognomical Sketches* was intended
for publication is open to conjecture. It may have been such a
purpose which brought it eventually into the possession of the
Woodsides, Philadelphia painters and engravers, where, two genera-
tions later, we find it in the hands of the Misses Josephine and
Margaret Woodside. These ladies, toward the end of the century,
were selling individual pieces to descendants of the subjects, and,
finally, sold the thirty-four remaining silhouettes to T. Morris Perot,
father of the present donors. The Perot family is liberally represented
in the group; the Perots, too, are descendants of a sister of Joseph
Sansom. After acquiring them, Mr. Perot mounted the profiles in a
new book, copying into it title page, preface, table of contents (the
whole original list including missing pieces),¹ and added a statement
of his own:

Silhouettes
Purchased in 1899 from the Misses Woodside (1853 North Twenty-first St.,
Philadelphia, Pa.) being balance of a collection left them by their grand-
father, an artist, who had received it from Joseph Sansom. As the collection
contained no likenesses of the family of the Misses Woodside, they sold
part of the collection to others, and the balance to me.

The grandfather to whom, by this account, the collection had been
given, was probably John Archibald Woodside, Sr. (1781–1852).

Joseph Sansom’s death occurred on October 4, 1826, and his wife’s
on September 28, 1837. They had no children. During his lifetime, it
may be assumed, the collection was seen and enjoyed by many.
Thomas Gilpin filled a book with carefully painted copies from it.²
The silhouette was a form of portraiture acceptable to Friends, who
rejected the show and vanity of painted pictures. Here was simple,
direct statement, a record of likeness and character shorn of pretence
and costing little. Joseph Sansom satisfied this interest supremely
well. Yet in his silhouettes there is more than the plain record. There
is in evidence the hand of young Joseph himself.

Joseph Sansom was born on February 13, 1767, a younger brother
of William, whose success in business is commemorated in the name

¹ Sansom’s manuscript copy is enclosed in a pocket on the inside back cover of the Perot
book.
² Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.
of the Philadelphia street. On his self-portrait Joseph describes himself as "merchant," but his life was largely one devoted to travel, literature, and the arts. His profiles come at the beginning of the career of a sophisticated antiquarian and connoisseur. Even earlier, at the age of nineteen, he manifested his respect for the record by taking down in shorthand the sermons of William Savery, whose portrait is included in the Perot Collection. Yet there is soon manifest also a warm romantic imagination not wholly in keeping with the solid Quaker virtues. In painted portraiture it is commonplace to see the artist breathing something of himself into his characterizations, and under this young man's brush even the silhouette proves not immune. One can sense that gentle exuberance in his fixing of the essential line—a long jaw just a trifle lengthened, the important features given, one would judge, just a shade more importance than nature warranted. In the line of the bust, where a profilist has his chief opportunity to declare a personal style, the Sansom flamboyance is marked again, varying from a severely straight line to circle or upsweeping curve.

Joseph Sansom the romantic, the seeker for the wild and the picturesque, is revealed to us in the opening sentence of the journal of his trip to the Indian council at Painted Post in the summer of 1791:

On first day morning, the 12th of the Sixth Month, I took leave of my friends, and mounted on a high trotting horse, with a large portmanteau and a buffalo blanket, to accompany my Friend John Parrish, who had been for some time religiously engaged to attend a Treaty to be held by commission of the United States to Timothy Pickering Esq. of Wilkesbarre, for the purpose of renewing our alliance with the Five Nations. . . .

The writer, from his high trotting horse, had an eye only for the wild strangeness of the scenes he encountered, the funeral cortege of a murdered soldier moving through the shadows, or the "gloomy wood of spruce pines which the Soldiers during the late war used to call the Shades of death because the Indians frequently lay there in ambush."

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4 Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library.
Gen. George Washington

"Standing for the last time, in the midst of the Representatives of the People of the U.S."

Pres. Jan. 1796
James Madison Esq. Representative in Congress for the State of Virginia
Aged 30
At the close, John Parrish's speech, Colonel Pickering's and Red Jacket's, are duly reported; the silhouettes of Parrish and Red Jacket are preserved in the Perot Collection.\(^6\)

Sansom attended a Quaker-sponsored conference with the Five Nations in 1796.\(^6\) In 1798, after his marriage to Beulah Biddle, they set out together on a three-year tour abroad, recorded by both in collections of letters.\(^7\) There followed, 1806–1807, his series of medals commemorating great events of American history, executed by John Matthias Reich after Sansom's designs.\(^8\) A dignified recognition followed with his election to the American Philosophical Society and the placing of his portrait by Charles Willson Peale in the gallery of the Philadelphia Museum. The remaining years continued the pattern of travel, collecting, connoisseurship.\(^9\)

The Perot gift to the Society includes also a similar volume filled with family silhouettes cut in the early days of Peale's Museum, and forming an interesting contrast to the other in the exact uniformity imparted to them by the physiognotrace and the unimaginative accuracy of Moses Williams, who scissored them out. Equally, they reveal what had so fascinated Peale himself when the rage for silhouettes first overtook him, the striking value of the "plain profile" as a revelation of character.\(^10\)

The Sansom silhouettes are painted in black ink on paper approximately \(4\frac{3}{4}'' \times 3\frac{3}{4}''\) in size. Delicate shading in a gray wash is used occasionally to indicate hair or appropriate parts of costume. With a single exception, the artist himself has written an identification, in ink, under the profile. A pencilled number at the upper right hand corner (not reproduced) is probably a Woodside addition and

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\(^5\) Sansom's account of the "treaty" is somewhat at variance with that of William L. Stone in his *The Life and Times of Sago-ye-wat-ha, or Red Jacket* (Albany, 1866), 160–163. Although not in the Perot Collection, there are copies of Sansom's silhouette of Thomas Pickering. See list of Sansom portraits below.

\(^6\) Recorded in "A Series of Letters written on a Journey to the Oneida, Onondago, and Cayuga Tribes of the Five Nations . . . undertaken by Isaiah Rowland, James Cooper, John Price, and Joseph Sansom. . . ." Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library.

\(^7\) Joseph Sansom, *Letters from Europe during a Tour through Switzerland and Italy in the Years 1801 and 1802* (Philadelphia, 1805), 2 vols. Beulah Biddle Sansom's letters from Europe, 1798–1801, are in the Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library.


has no significance other than to tell us the number of pieces in the collection at one time or another.

Listed below are the subjects of all Sansom portraits known to the writer at this time. Included are the originals in the Perot Collection, those others listed in Sansom’s table of contents, and a few additional ones attributable to him. Some lost originals may be identified through the copies by Thomas Gilpin, already mentioned. George Vaux of Bryn Mawr, who has been most helpful in pursuing this study, is the owner of three originals purchased by his grandfather, George Vaux (1832–1915), from the Misses Woodside in 1897, and a number of copies made at about the same time. Augustin Edouart, who in 1843 both inscribed a bust profile to Thomas Gilpin and made one of his group compositions of the Sansom family, copied a number of Sansom profiles. The existence of Gilpin, Vaux, or Edouart copies is noted below.

** Indicates original Sansom profiles in the Perot Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

* Indicates an entry in Sansom’s table of contents, the original removed from the collection before its purchase by Mr. Perot.

Sansom’s inscriptions on the profiles are quoted exactly. Data, often incomplete, from his methodical table of contents (“Short” or “Tall”; native place; dates) are given in substance.

It should be noted that where Sansom gives a subject’s age in a round figure he is often incorrect; his other figures are apparently accurate. His use of “M. G.” to denote Quaker ministers of the Gospel was puzzling to the writer, and to Friends whom he consulted, until Willman Spawn gave the correct answer, explaining the use, and abandonment, of the formal designation.

** “Susanna Penelope Abington, of Philada. only daughter of the late celebrated Dr. Abraham Chovet; aged 49.” London. 1742–.


“David Barclay, Grandson of the Apologist. 1728–1809.” (Vaux copy, presumably after Sansom.)

William Barton. (Edouart copy, presumably after Sansom.)


** "Philip Benezet, of Philada. Gentn. Aged 69." Short. London. 1722-1791. (Also a copy in Gilpin collection.)

* B. Biddle. (Presumably the artist’s wife, before their marriage. See Beulah Sansom, below.)


* "Catharine Callender, Relict of Wm. Calr. Esqr. drawn about the age of 75 years." Tall. Burlington. 1711-1789. (Original inscribed by George Vaux: "Bought 11/5, 1897 of Margaret V. Woodside." A copy also in Vaux collection.)


* "Benjamin Chew, Esqr. of Philada. Sometime Chief Justice of Pennsylvania. Aged 70." Tall. (Sansom original reproduced as frontispiece in Burton Alva Konkle, Benjamin Chew, 1722-1810 [Philadelphia, 1932], as the property of Benjamin Chew, Radnor, Pa. Also copies in the Gilpin collection and by Edouart.)

* Abraham Chovet. Short. London. 1704-1790. (Copy in Gilpin collection.)


** "Guillaume Comte de Cockburn. Sometime Commandant at Cape Francois descended from the Royal House of Stuart. Aged 84." Short. (Edouart copy, presumably after Sansom.)

* Miers Fisher, Junr. (Copy in Gilpin collection, presumably after Sansom.)

** "George Delwyn [Dillwyn], of Burlington M. G. Aged 50." (Also a copy in Gilpin collection.)

William Dillwyn. Aged 57. 1743-1824. (Copy in Vaux collection, presumably after Sansom.)

* Henry Drinker. Tall. Philadelphia. 1734- . (Reproduced in Frederick B. Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House [Chapel Hill, 1948], 98, after original owned by Henry S. Drinker, Esq., Philadelphia. Copy in Vaux collection is inscribed: "Original owned by Amelia M. Gummere. She gave this to me 2/20/1908—made by herself." Copy in Haverford College Library recorded as Henry Drinker, Jr., 1734-1809, "Drawn from memory by Joseph Sansom.")


Miers Fisher, Junr. (Copy in Gilpin collection, presumably after Sansom.)

** "Dr. Benjamin Franklin, F. R. S. Sometime Governor of Pennsylvania. Aged 84." Boston. 1706-1790. (Also a copy in Gilpin collection.)

** "Thomas Harrison, Taylor. The fourth successive & unwearied Advocate for the Blacks at Phila. Aged 51." (Also a copy in Gilpin collection.)


** "Joshua Hutton, of Phila. Silver Smith; a native of the City of New York; aged 107." New York. 1683-1792. (Also a copy in the Gilpin collection.)

* Owen Jones. Tall. 1712-1793. (Copies in the Gilpin and Vaux collections.)

** "Rebecca Jones, of Phila. M. G. Aged 50." (Also a copy in the Gilpin collection.)

Richard Jordan [?], 1756-1826. (A copy in the Vaux collection is inscribed in ink under the bust: "From the original by J. Sansom"; and in pencil: "Probably Richd. Jourdan.")

* W. Lewis. Tall. (Copy in Gilpin collection inscribed: "William Lewis Esqr. Counsellor at Law.")

** "James Madison Esqr. Representative in Congress for the State of Virginia. Aged 30." Short. (Also a copy in the Gilpin collection.)

* J. De Marsillac.

** "Robert Morris of Phila. Merchant, Minister of Finance during the American Revolution &c. Aged 50." (Also a copy in the Gilpin collection.)


* E. Pennington. Tall. 1796. (Copy in the Vaux collection.)

** "Elliston Perot, Mercht. of Philada. aged 40." Bermudas.


* S. Perot. Philadelphia. 1764- .

* Timothy Pickering. (Copies in the Gilpin and Vaux collections, and by Edouart.)
* M. Pleasants. Philadelphia. 1736- .
* Robert Proud. Tall. (Copy in the Gilpin collection.)
* E. Randolph.

** [Red Jacket.] “Tsekuyeaathaw. Or the Man that keeps you awake, Chief Speaker of the Five Nations; Aged 30.” Senekaa. 1761- (Copy in the Gilpin collection.)
* John Redman. Short. Philadelphia. 1722- . (Copies in the Gilpin collection and by Edouart.)
Richard Reynolds, 1735-1816. (Copy in the Vaux collection, presumably after Sansom.)
Sarah Rhoads. (Copy in the Gilpin collection, presumably after Sansom.)

** “Mary Ridgeway Widow, M. G. of Mountmelick in the Kingdom of Ireland aged 63.” Short. 1727- . (Also a copy in the Gilpin collection.)
Beulah Sansom, aged 28. (Copy in the Vaux collection inscribed: “From the original by her husband Joseph Sansom in 1796.” Beulah Sansom was born in 1765. See B. Biddle, above.)

** “Hannah Sansom aged 50.” (Faces right. The inscription not in Joseph Sansom’s hand.)

** “Hannah Sansom, of Philada. aged 52.” (Faces left. Dated 1789 by the age of the subject.)


** “William Savery, Tanner; M. G. at Philada. Aged 40.” Philadelphia. 1750-1804. (Copies in the Gilpin and Vaux collections.)

* B. Shoemaker. Tall. Philadelphia.

* B. Smith. Tall. Burlington. 1762-1793.
* D. Smith. Tall. Burlington. 1729–
** "Richard Smith Esqr. of Burlington. A Member of the Revolutionary Congress; aged 50.” Short. Burlington. 1803. (Also a copy in the Gilpin collection.)

** "James Sproat, Senr. Presbyter of the Presbyterian Church at Philada. aged 70.” Tall. 1721–1793.

** Tsekuyeaathaw. See Red Jacket.


** “Genl. George Washington ‘Standing, for the last time, in the midst of the Representatives of the People of the U. S.’ Pres. Sp. 1796.” Tall. 1731–1799. (One of the medals designed by Sansom commemorates the retirement of Washington. A copy of this profile is in the Gilpin collection.)

Daniel Wheeler, 1771–1840. (Copy in the Vaux collection, possibly after Sansom.)


** Unidentified.
Sarena Penelope Abington, of Philadelphia, only daughter of the late celebrated Dr. Abraham Chavert; aged 19
Dr. Moses Bartsam of Philad.
aged 23
Philip Benezet, of Phila. Gent.

Fig. 69
Guillaume Comte de Choiseul

Sometime Commandant at Cape Francois

Descended from the Royal House of Stuart

Aged 81
George T. Delano of Burlington, M.G.

Aged 50
John Drinker of Philad. March 5
Aged 60
Dr. Benjamin Franklin, F. R. S.

Sometime Governor of Pennsylvania

Aged 84
Thomas Harrison, Esquire
The fourth successful & unwearyed Advocate for the Black at Law.
Aged 51
Joshua Howell, of Phila., Gent.

Aged 65
John Hector, of Peladó: Silver Smith;
a native of the City of New York;
aged 107.
Rebecca Jones, of Philadelphia, M. G.
Aged 50
Minister of Finance during the American Revolution.
Aged 50
John Darnish, of Phil. M. G. Brush-Maker
Aged 61
John Perot, of Philad. March.  
Aged 40
Samuel Conot, of Phila., aged 2 years & 10 months

Elliston C. Conot, jun't, aged 18 months
Tschnyaathaun.
Or the Man that keeps you awake, Chief Speaker of the
Five Nations.

Aged 30
Mary Ridgeway Wife, M. G.
of Mountmelick in the Kingdom of Ireland
aged 63
Hannah Sansom, of Phila.

*aged. 52*
Joseph Sansom, of Philadelphia, Merchant
aged 24
Samuel Sansom, junr. of Phila.  
aged 18
(Thomas Say of Phila. Druggist
Aged 82)
Richard Smith, Esq. of Burlington.
A Member of the Revolutionary Congress;
aged 50.
James Sprat, Sen. Presbyry of the Presbyterian Church at Phila; aged 70
Daniel Williams, Capt. of Ships.

Aged 70
Isaac Jane, of Philad. M. F.
aged 80 1710 - 1794