The First Art Schools at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

From its inception in 1805, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts had as one of its primary objectives the education of artists. Long before the appointment of Thomas Eakins as head of its schools in 1879, there were repeated efforts, either initiated by the Academy itself or triggered by the demands of Philadelphia's artists, to provide art instruction on a professional level within its walls.

The short-lived Columbianum, founded in December, 1794, by Charles Willson Peale and a group of Philadelphia artists, set a precedent for the type of art instruction eventually offered at the Pennsylvania Academy. Conceived by its artist-members as an association for "the protection and encouragement of the Fine Arts," the Columbianum had as one of its goals the establishment of "a school or academy of architecture, sculpture, painting, &c within the United States." Modeled on the Royal Academy in London, it was, from the outset, beset by internal dissension. Almost immediately, a splinter group of English artists formed a rival institution of the same name which lasted only a few months. Peale's group ceased to exist not long after its first exhibition in May, 1795. Before its demise, however, the Columbianum had inaugurated, at least on

1 See the manuscript "An Association of Artists in America for the Protection and Encouragement of the Fine Arts," Dec. 29, 1794, in the records of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts on microfilm in the Joseph Downs Manuscript Collection, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Shelf Number M776, cited hereinafter as PAFA Records, Downs with shelf number. These records, the originals of which are at the Pennsylvania Academy, are also on microfilm at the Archives of American Art. The appropriate Archives' reel number, in this case P50, will be set inside parentheses after the Downs number.

a limited scale, part of its extremely ambitious program of training, which included drawing from casts and from life.

The story has been repeatedly told how Charles Willson Peale partially disrobed to serve as “the first Academical model in America”\(^3\) when the hired model, a baker, becoming aware as he stripped of the staring eyes of the artists, made a hasty retreat. In an earlier, less romantic version of the story, Rembrandt Peale described how, on finding it difficult to procure a model, his father “volunteered himself to begin with.”\(^4\) The phrases “to begin with” and “first Academical model” suggest there may have been other models during the school’s short life,\(^5\) a supposition that seems to be corroborated by newspaper advertisements.

Having announced the commencement of “the Schools for drawing from plaister and natural figures” in the *Aurora* on April 8, 1795, the spokesman for the Columbianum (probably Charles Willson Peale) notified the public in the same paper on May 1 that “the academy for Drawing from living figures is closed.” Presumably within that month more than one drawing session had taken place. The promise that due notice would be given of the school’s reopening was not kept since by the fall the institution was no longer in existence. As far as is known, there was no further attempt in Philadelphia to establish an academy with professional schools for aspiring artists until the formation of the Pennsylvania Academy ten years later. In the meantime, however, artistic instruction was available in Philadelphia through the many drawing schools conducted by artists.

Unlike the Columbianum, whose members were predominantly artists, the Academy was brought into being primarily by businessmen, even though Charles Willson Peale and his son Rembrandt were involved in its creation.\(^6\) Undoubtedly, its establishment was


\(^5\) James Thomas Flexner in “The Scope of Painting in the 1790’s,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB)*, LXXIV (1950), 77, raised the question as to whether a model was used a second time.

stimulated by the founding three years earlier of the American Academy of Art in New York (originally called the New York Academy of the Fine Arts), which had also been financed by businessmen and amateurs. The desire to have a comparable institution in Philadelphia could well have been an expression on a cultural level of the general rivalry that existed between these two major commercial and population centers in the early years of the nineteenth century. But the catalyst was probably the presence in Philadelphia of a collection of casts, formed by Joseph Allen Smith and specifically intended for a museum.\(^7\)

The nonartistic background of the majority of the Academy’s founders, as well as the existence of the Smith collection, led the directors, quite naturally, to stress initially the Academy’s function as a museum serving the community at large. This emphasis eventually produced a serious rift between the Academy and the artists who believed the directors had lost sight of the institution’s other avowed purposes—the encouragement and training of local artists. Nevertheless, from the beginning, the founders had, at least on paper, envisioned the Academy as a center of artistic stimulation.

Writing to his son Raphaele on June 6, 1805, Charles Willson Peale optimistically described the Academy’s multiple purposes:

We have now 1600 [dollars] subscribed and expect 2000 will be made up soon, and the Subscribers will be called together to form a constitution. The proposal is to import casts and begin a Gallery of figures and Paintings, beginning with an exhibition. To receive paintings that may be offered for sale and if sold to take a commission on such sale... out of this will arise the Academy of drawing from the Models and afterwards from the life. Rembrandt is preparing a general sketch to be considered at the next meeting, so that the whole of the business will be ready cut and dried before a general meeting is called.\(^8\)

\(^7\) E. P. Richardson makes a convincing case for the importance of this collection in launching the Pennsylvania Academy as a museum rather than as an art school in “Allen Smith, Collector and Benefactor,” *The American Art Journal*, I, 2 (1969), 5–19.

In outlining these same plans to Thomas Jefferson seven days later, Peale mentioned that revenue from the exhibitions would be used "to defray the expense of a keeper who [like the Royal Academy's] shall be capable to give instruction to the Pupils" and that the pupils would be expected to pay a reasonable fee for the use of the school.\(^9\)

A more modest statement of the Academy's educational objectives was incorporated in the plan of association:

The object of this association is to promote the cultivation of the Fine Arts in the United States of America, by introducing correct and elegant copies from works of the first Masters in Sculpture and Painting and by thus facilitating the access of such Standards and also by occasionally conferring moderate but honourable premiums to excite the efforts and Studies of the Artist and gradually to unfold, enlighten, and invigorate the talents of our Youth.\(^10\)

It was two years before a suitable home for the Academy was built. Meanwhile, Nicholas Biddle, secretary to General Armstrong, American minister to France, was asked to purchase in Paris casts like those in the New York Academy.\(^11\)

On March 28, 1806, the Board was informed that the casts had arrived in Philadelphia.\(^12\) Biddle had included in the shipment "as auxilliary to young designers the feet & the hands of the Farnese Hercules, two casts of mouths & noses from the antique & two ears by a modern artist" as well as a full-length statue by Houdon, showing the muscles in the human subject, which was "so highly esteemed, & seemed so well calculated for the purposes of an academy that it has been added with a conviction that it would be acceptable."\(^13\) These supplemented the Smith casts, some of which were damaged and in need of repair.

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\(^9\) Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, June 13, 1805, *ibid*.

\(^10\) See a copy of the "Plan of Association" dated June or July 21, 1805, in the Minutes of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (cited hereinafter as Minutes PAFA), PAFA Records, Downs M770 (Archives P44).

\(^11\) Committee of the Pennsylvania Academy to Nicholas Biddle, July 8, 1805, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63).

\(^12\) Minutes PAFA, Mar. 28, 1806, PAFA Records, Downs M770 (Archives P44).

\(^13\) Nicholas Biddle to the Pennsylvania Academy, Nov. 20, 1805, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63).
The cost of the building and the importation of casts taxed the resources of the young Academy, whose financial difficulties were probably intensified by the general economic decline that came in the wake of the enactment of Jefferson’s embargo in 1807. As a result, the Academy’s educational activities were limited to permitting the art student to draw from its collection of casts. Nevertheless, a move was afoot as early as 1807, spearheaded by Charles Willson Peale, to expand the Academy’s facilities to include an exhibition room for paintings and a studio for drawing from the living model. Although Peale continued to be optimistic about the project, two years later he could still only report to his son Rembrandt that architect Robert Mills’s plan for the addition “very nearly” met his idea.

With admission receipts amounting to $1,000 a year, the Academy, under control of its businessmen-directors, appeared reluctant to expend its income on establishing a school and providing exhibition space for contemporary works. By 1810, however, Joseph Hopkinson, the Academy’s President, reported in his annual discourse:

After five years of experiment we now begin to find ourselves sufficiently at leisure to look to those parts of the scheme which are calculated to give character to the undertaking and to extend its utility. Among the most important of these is the establishment of schools for the improvement of young artists.

He added that the original building had been enlarged to include “ample room for the exhibition of works of art, and convenient apartments for necessary schools.” This move came too late to satisfy the city’s artists who banded together early in 1810 in protest against the Academy’s inactivity.

The Society of Artists of the United States was born at a special meeting held by Philadelphia artists on March 13, 1810, to discuss how the Academy could best accomplish the original purpose for

14 Minutes PAFA, Oct. 8, 1807, PAFA Records, Downs M776 (Archives P50).
15 Charles Willson Peale to Benjamin West, Dec. 16, 1807, Peale-Sellers Papers, CWP Letter Book VIII.
16 Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale, Oct. 28, 1809, Peale-Sellers Papers, CWP Letter Book X.
17 Ibid.
which it had been founded.\textsuperscript{19} Out of this meeting came a series of resolutions which were submitted to the directors of the Academy for consideration. The artists recommended that the Academy establish a body of not more than forty artists to be called the Pennsylvania Academicians, obviously patterned after a similar group at the Royal Academy. In their capacity as an artistic advisory board to the Academy, the Academicians were to determine the branches of art to be taught in the projected schools, although the power to elect the professors, masters, and keeper was to reside with the directors.

From the outset, the artists hoped that the Society would merge with the Academy. The first attempt in May, 1810, to unite the two organizations failed due to the Academy's insistence on strict conformance to its charter requiring all members to be stockholders and to an unspecified "variety of other circumstances."\textsuperscript{20} However, an agreement between the two groups was achieved on August 24, 1810, by which the Society subscribed $2,000 to the capital stock of the Academy in exchange for certain privileges, including free access for all its member artists to the Academy's collection for study purposes and the use of the building for an annual six-week exhibition. In addition, the Academy promised to furnish the Society with rooms for schools, the students of which were also to have free use of the Academy's facilities. Finally, medals of merit were to be awarded at the annual show as encouragements to artists.\textsuperscript{21}

These four practices—providing objects for study, holding exhibitions, conducting schools, and awarding medals—which formed the basis of contemporary European and English academies of art, were ultimately derived from the academies established by Vasari and Zuccari in sixteenth-century Florence and Rome. Planned on a more modest scale than its continental counterparts, which received governmental support, the Pennsylvania Academy differed, as did the

\textsuperscript{19} Charter and By-Laws of the Columbian Society of Artists, Instituted, May, 1810 (Philadelphia, 1813), 17.

\textsuperscript{20} 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), 8, cited hereinafter as Report SOA (1812). The other circumstances probably included personality conflicts which eventually caused a split in the Society.

American Academy in New York, from its English model in that it was controlled primarily by businessmen, the Royal Academy completely by artists. The Society of Artists was an attempt by the artists of Philadelphia to create an organization that approximated in its membership the British institution.

Many of the Society’s members undoubtedly expected the artists would dominate the Academy once the merger was achieved and mold it into something like the Royal Academy. This dream failed to take into account the simple reality that the directors of the Academy, predominantly business and professional men, were not likely to turn over their institution to artists who had not contributed financially to its creation. Since most of the artists would accept merger on no other terms, subsequent efforts to unite the two organizations were doomed to failure. Nevertheless, the appearance of the Society boded well for the future of the arts in Philadelphia if for no other reason than it made art an issue in the cultural life of the city.22

The first exhibition sponsored by the Society in 1811 proved so successful that another attempt was made at union, but it floundered on the same shoals of self-interest. The Society felt that on transfer of its funds and stock to the Academy, all member artists should immediately be given full membership with all rights and privileges including voting. The Academy countered with the proposal that forty artists be chosen as members, representing the Society’s $2,000 investment in the Academy’s capital stock. The other artists would be admitted as full members upon payment of fifty dollars each; in the meantime, they were to have free access to the paintings, statues, and models of the Academy. After union, the schools, exhibitions, and disbursement of medals would be managed by committees of artists, appointed annually by the directors of the united organizations.23

This proposal was turned down by the artists who, probably in anticipation of even more successful exhibitions, felt they would be better off alone. The War of 1812 punctured this dream, making a separate organization economically unfeasible; but in November, 1811, the future undoubtedly looked bright to an association whose

22 Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale, Nov. 18, 1810, Peale-Sellers Papers, CWP Letter Book XI.

23 Report SOA (1812), 17.
membership more than doubled in its first year of existence. Ironically, when the Society was dissolved in 1820,\textsuperscript{24} the artists agreed to an arrangement which in its broad outline was identical to that proposed by the Academy nine years earlier. The artists in 1811, however, decided that it would be “of more benefit to the arts for both to remain distinct and independent institutions; and to cooperate with each other according to the original agreement. . . .”\textsuperscript{25}

Several months later, in 1812, the Academy initiated another attempt at merger. Basically the same, the new proposals provided that all members of the Society would be admitted to full membership without voting privileges and that the Society’s money would be set aside in annual installments of $120 for the benefit of artists.\textsuperscript{26} When this attempt met the same fate as the others, a number of the Society’s most renowned members—William Rush, Thomas Sully, Rembrandt Peale—resigned in protest against the repeated rejection of the Academy’s proposals.\textsuperscript{27} A subsequent attempt later in the year also failed.

In the midst of these discussions on union, progress was being made toward the establishment of schools. In its constitution, adopted June 8, 1810, the Society proposed, among other things, to teach elementary artistic principles and to encourage competition and facilitate the exchange of ideas through exhibitions. Article X stated: “Schools for the instruction of pupils in the various branches of the fine arts, shall be opened as soon as practicable—suitable teachers shall be procured, and students shall be admitted on such terms as may be provided by the by-laws.”\textsuperscript{28} In addition to paying students, not more than twenty-five foundation scholars were to be instructed free of expense. The schools would be run by those members designated as first-class artists or Fellows. In the meantime, students and artists drew from the Academy’s fine collection of casts.

\textsuperscript{24} Minutes of the Board, Pennsylvania Academy (cited hereinafter as PAFA Board Minutes), Feb. 12, 1820, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63).

\textsuperscript{25} Report SOA (1812), 19.

\textsuperscript{26} Minutes of the Society of Artists (cited hereinafter as Minutes SOA), Feb. 12, 1812, PAFA Records, Downs M771 (Archives P45).

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., Mar. 4, 1812. Others who resigned were Gideon Fairman, Talbot Hamilton, John and Frederick Eckstein.

Toward the end of 1811, a committee composed of John James Barralet, Gideon Fairman, George Murray, Edward Miles, and Thomas Sully was appointed by the Society to draw up regulations for the schools.\(^{29}\) The report of the committee, dated December 28, was adopted on January 11, 1812.\(^{30}\) First among its many provisions was the establishment of three branches of study: the elementary, which would include the human figure, architecture, and landscape; the antique, or drawing from plaster casts; and a life class. Regulations affecting students specified the cost of instruction (eight dollars per quarter plus fire and light), set down the rules for selecting foundation students, and provided that pupils of members would, if approved by the Board of Fellows, have the privilege of instruction in the schools free of charge.

In regard to teachers, candidates were to execute as proof of their qualifications a drawing of an object to be selected by the board. Once chosen, the professor was to be paid a salary of not less than $400 a year for teaching at the school three times a week for two hours each session. A year earlier, the Society’s constitution had been amended so that there would be four vice-presidents who could serve as “professors of Sculpture, Architecture, Painting and Engraving,”\(^{31}\) giving periodic lectures. These professor-officers were not, however, the same as the teachers of the three proposed schools.

A living model was to be supplied by the Society but selected by the teacher of the life school in conjunction with a committee of artists. The government of that school was delegated to six artists, chosen by ballot. They were to attend the school, a month in rotation, fix the model, preserve order, and instruct the students.

At the January 11 meeting, Miles, Sully, and Denis A. Volozan were appointed a committee to confer with the Academy on the availability of its books and other property for use in teaching. Although at this session an advertisement calling for artists to apply for teaching positions in the Society’s schools was devised, it was never sent to the papers, probably because most if not all of the artists in Philadelphia were members of the Society. Therefore, on January 29, Barralet was elected Professor in the Antique depart-

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29 Report SOA (1812), 19.
30 Ibid.
31 Minutes SOA, Dec. 5, 1810, PAFA Records, Downs M771 (Archives P45).
ment and Volozan, Professor in the Elementary.\textsuperscript{32} In the following year, Dr. John S. Dorsey\textsuperscript{33} was chosen Professor of Anatomy.

Meanwhile, in March, 1811, the Pennsylvania Academy had established a body of artists called the Pennsylvania Academicians,\textsuperscript{34} giving them the power to control the Academy’s schools and to determine the branches of art to be taught. Responsibility for election of professors and masters resided, however, with the directors of the Academy. Thus, the Academy as well as the Society was simultaneously investigating ways to provide professional training for artists, but when the Society launched its school in the space provided at the Academy, the latter probably did not follow through on its plans.\textsuperscript{35}

It appears that the services offered by the two organizations seldom overlapped. One exception was the appointment by each organization of a professor of anatomy. On May 11, 1812, the Academy, on the recommendation of the Academicians, selected Dr. Nathaniel Chapman\textsuperscript{36} as Professor of Anatomy, whose duty was "to deliver annually a course of lectures adapted to the use of the artists."\textsuperscript{37} This appointment was made six months before the Society picked Dr. Dorsey for a comparable position. What the nature of their lectures were if, indeed, they were delivered, is not presently known. On February 8, 1813, the Academy established a committee to tell Dr. Chapman to "proceed as soon as possible to the performance of the duties of the professorship,"\textsuperscript{38} but there is no further reference to the proposed lectures after May 10 when the committee,


\textsuperscript{33} Minutes SOA, Jan. 6, 1813, PAFA Records, Downs M771 (Archives P45). John Syng Dorsey (1783-1818), a Philadelphia doctor and amateur artist, illustrated his own book, \textit{Elements of Surgery} (1813). Just prior to his death, he served as professor of anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{34} Minutes PAFA, Mar. 13, 1812, PAFA Records, Downs M770 (Archives P44).

\textsuperscript{35} Dunlap, II, 108, claimed that both institutions opened similar schools, but I have found no documentary evidence to support this.

\textsuperscript{36} Nathaniel Chapman (1780-1853) was a leading physician and prominent figure in Philadelphia. The author of several medical works, he was connected with the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania from 1810 to 1850.

\textsuperscript{37} Minutes of the Pennsylvania Academicians, Apr. 9, 1812, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63).

\textsuperscript{38} Minutes PAFA, Feb. 8, 1813, PAFA Records, Downs M770 (Archives P44).
having reported Dr. Chapman ready, was ordered to fix a time and place.\textsuperscript{39} Years later, in 1823, Dr. Chapman resigned his situation as Professor of Anatomy and was succeeded by Dr. John Bell,\textsuperscript{40} who lectured on the history of the arts as well as anatomy.\textsuperscript{41}

Although professors in the Society’s schools had been appointed at the end of January, 1812, classes apparently were not launched for several months after that. On April 9, a notice appeared in \textit{Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser} stating that the schools of the Society at the Pennsylvania Academy were opened. According to the announcement, the elementary school under Volozan met on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings from seven to nine while Barralet’s antique school had two-hour sessions, from six to eight in the morning, on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

The schools met with only moderate success. In his report of October 7, 1812, George Murray, speaking for the Committee on Schools, stated that the artists had been overly optimistic in their estimate of the demand for classes.\textsuperscript{42} He reported that enrollment in the antique and elementary divisions had never in the previous six months exceeded twenty-seven, and that only a small part of this number had paid either entrance fee or quarterly tuition. The Society apparently could not force payment until incorporation, which did not occur until February 16, 1813, when its name was changed to the Columbian Society of Artists. As an interim measure, the committee recommended that the fixed salaries of the teachers be discontinued and that they receive instead all of the tuition paid by the pupils. In addition, it was proposed that there be day as well as evening classes, since evening attendance was objectionable to certain gentlemen who wished to have their sons taught at the schools.

In late 1812 and early 1813, the Society advertised “drawing in all its various branches on the most approved principles and at the moderate rate of $8 per quarter,”\textsuperscript{43} but now instruction was available three days a week for two hours each meeting, both day and night.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., May 10, 1813.
\textsuperscript{40} PAFA Board Minutes, Apr. 16, 1823, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63). John Bell (1796-1872) came to Philadelphia from Ireland in 1810. Trained at the University of Pennsylvania, he taught medicine in Philadelphia and Ohio and authored several books.
\textsuperscript{41} William Dunlap, \textit{Diary of (New York, 1929-1930)}, III, 711.
\textsuperscript{42} Minutes of Fellows SOA, Oct. 7, 1812, PAFA Records, Downs M771 (Archives P45).
\textsuperscript{43} Poulson’s \textit{American Daily Advertiser}, Oct. 20, 1812. The advertisement, dated October 10, first appeared on the 20th.
Professors Volozan and Barralet remained in charge. Artist-members of the Society, Messrs. Trott, Murray, Mills, and Tanner, had been appointed to assist these professors. Later in the year, the Committee on Schools recommended that the pupils of artists and children of members be admitted to instruction at half-price, obviously an effort to increase the income of the schools since tuition had been free for this group before. Furthermore, they advised the professors of the antique and elementary schools to alternate duties every other month in order to equalize the work of each and perhaps also equalize their share of the tuition.

At the same time that these problems involving the conduct of the elementary and antique schools were requiring adjustments in the original program of instruction, work was in progress to establish a life school. As early as February 10, 1812, the Pennsylvania Academy had resolved to bring immediately into operation a life academy and on April 9, the Academicians selected Rush, Volozan, and Sully as a committee "to carry into effect the Life Academy." Nothing concrete was accomplished, however, until the end of 1812 or the early part of 1813.

On January 8, 1813, the following notice appeared in Poulson's American Daily Advertiser:

A Person Qualified to serve as model in the Life Academy of the Society of Artists in the United States is wanted. He must be athletic, well proportioned, with no bodily defect, steady, and temperate. To attend twice a week during the winter months from seven to nine in the evening. Apply to George Murray, No. 220 Pine Street, Between Seventh and Eighth Streets.

This advertisement probably was the result of the motion entertained at the Society's meeting two days earlier that arrangements be made for a living model to be used by its members. The Society's attempt to procure a model may merely have been in anticipation of completion of the room for a life school in the Academy, or per-

44 Minutes of Fellows SOA, July 15, 1813, PAFA Records, Downs M771 (Archives P45).
45 Minutes PAFA, Feb. 10, 1812, PAFA Records, Downs M770 (Archives P44).
46 Minutes of Pennsylvania Academicians, Apr. 9, 1812, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63).
47 This was the first appearance of an advertisement that ran off and on through January.
48 Minutes SOA, Jan. 6, 1813, PAFA Records, Downs M771 (Archives P45).
haps it was independent of the efforts being made simultaneously by the Academy. In any event, a few days later, the Academy reported to the Society that it had "at a very great expense prepared an apartment in the Academy, suitable for the purposes of a Life Academy, which is amply sufficient for the accommodation of all the artists qualified to use it."49 At the same time, the directors informed the Society that the life academy was in operation, and that "such artists as are disposed to avail themselves of it are invited to do so."50

On January 15, the Council of Academicians invited the directors to see the life school,61 probably the "first regular academy for studying the human figure"52 in America if one discounts the efforts almost twenty years earlier of the short-lived Columbianum. Composed of Wiliam Rush, Rembrandt Peale, Thomas Sully, and Gideon Fairman, the Committee appointed to establish the school judged the quality of the installation as "equal in every respect to any institution of the kind in Europe except in the size of the Room, which in a few years will probably be found too small."53 In their invitation, the Academicians indicated that the life class met Tuesday and Thursday evenings from six to eight, the length of time if not the exact hours specified in the Society's advertisement. Undoubtedly, it was scheduled so as not to conflict with Volozan's elementary course.

How long the life school remained in operation has not yet been determined but it probably was no more than one year. On February 8, 1813, the Academy agreed to assume its expenses,64 which probably meant the cost of the model as well as heating and lighting the room. Receipts for July and October, 1813, show that John and H. Voorhees were paid a total of forty dollars "on account of

49 Minutes PAFA, Jan. 13, 1813, PAFA Records, Downs M770 (Archives P44).
50 Ibid.
51 Letter of the Council of Academicians to the Directors of the Pennsylvania Academy, Jan. 15, 1813, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63). Improperly dated Jan. 13, 1812, in another hand on the cover, the letter was signed by William Rush, Robert Mills, Gideon Fairman, and Thomas Sully.
52 Report of Committee to found the Life Academy, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63). Although not dated, the report probably was submitted sometime in January, 1813.
53 Ibid.
54 Minutes PAFA, Feb. 8, 1813, PAFA Records, Downs M770 (Archives P44).
attendance at the life academy as models." Another July receipt to Thomas Sully was for twelve dollars paid to George Bridport "for the hire of a model in the life academy." The receipted fifty-two dollars probably represented more than fifty two-hour sessions of posing considering that the average daily wage was about one dollar. But there may also have been other models in addition to those for whom receipts exist, if one can accept as accurate the estimate made by the directors of the Academy in 1828 that $300 a year were spent on models, light, and heat.

According to this later statement, nearly fifteen artists attended the school, but their names were not given. As members of the committee, Fairman, Peale, Rush, and Sully probably attended, and, if the artists of the Society used this facility, George Murray may have been a member of the class along with Volozan and Barralet, the professors of the two other schools, and also Charles Bird King, who was then in Philadelphia. Thomas Birch, keeper of the Academy, probably numbered among those in attendance, and John Lewis Krimmel as well. Before long, however, this number dwindled down to three, of which Sully was one. Still the Academy supported the school until the remaining artists, whose identities remain a mystery, not wishing to put the Academy to so much expense on their account, requested the directors to resume possession of the room and close the school.

The directors attributed the failure of the school to the disinterest of the artists. Although there appears to be some justification for the Academy's accusation of apathy, this could hardly be the whole reason. Certainly only a few American artists, like Rembrandt Peale, Rush, Sully, and Vanderlyn, were interested in representing the nude on their canvases or in sculpture, but many more wished to
increase their knowledge of human anatomy in order to improve their handling of portraiture and history painting. The progression from drawing from casts to drawing from life was known to be the established European method of training an artist. Sully and King, for example, had just returned from London where drawing from the nude was an integral part of the Royal Academy's program. Moreover, Sir Joshua Reynolds in the first of his *Discourses on Art*, a book well known to Philadelphia artists of the early nineteenth century, had emphasized the importance of life drawing in the development of an artist.60

Although it is possible that the Society conducted its own life class and thereby reduced the number of artists willing to take advantage of the Academy's facility, the financial problems of its other two schools make this highly unlikely. It is more probable that there was only the Academy's life class. The gradual decline in attendance could well have been the direct result of a decrease in the number of artists working in Philadelphia. Amidst the economic instability that accompanied the closing years of the War of 1812, Philadelphians were undoubtedly less inclined to commission portraits or buy pictures. Artists, with the exception of someone like Sully, and even he complained about unemployment at the end of 1814,61 were forced to take to the road in search of patronage, as Benjamin Trott did, or move, like Rembrandt Peale and Charles Bird King, to other more promising cities.

No documentary evidence has been found indicating when the life class stopped, but it probably was sometime late in 1813 or early in 1814. The other schools at the Academy, run by the Society of Artists, did not long survive the life school. On December 28, 1814, the Society's education committee reported that the schools were closed "on account of the Professor Mr. Volozan finding it inconvenient to attend."62 This undoubtedly meant that Mr. Volozan no longer found his association with the Society's school profitable for he had advertised, early in November, a drawing and painting academy for ladies and gentlemen.63 A week later, on January 4,

61 Dunlap, *Diary*, 473.
63 Sellin, 127.
1815, it was announced at a meeting of the Society that the schools had been closed for the present "from the circumstance of their encroaching too much upon the funds of the Society necessary to be appropriated to Benevolent purposes."^64

As far as is known, this marks the end of the first attempt on the part of the Academy either to provide educational facilities on a professional level to artists or to make its resources available to another organization, in this case the Society of Artists, to do so. Although at the same meeting in January, 1815, the Society petitioned the government of Pennsylvania for aid to construct a building for its schools and exhibitions, arguing that "all their exertions to establish a school of arts in Philadelphia will prove abortive unless they are enabled to erect a suitable building,"^65 the requested support was not forthcoming. Five years later the Society ceased to exist.\textsuperscript{66}

Any evaluation of this first, partially successful attempt to create in the United States an academic program of art instruction should not only focus on those aspects that make it significant in the development of artistic training in America but also place it in the general context of existing western European practices. Although instruction in the basic fundamentals of art, including drawing from casts, had long been available to would-be artists, amateur or professional, at one of Philadelphia's many private drawing academies, a formal academic program designed to take the student from basic concepts to life drawing was new to the American art scene.

The establishment of a true academy in Philadelphia was prompted by more than a wish to provide better training for would-be artists, however. As in sixteenth-century Italy, its conception undoubtedly was linked with the artists' desire for professional recognition by the community. This desire manifested itself in the creation of a life class. Life drawing not only distinguished the training offered at the Academy from that available in private drawing schools in Philadelphia, but, as the capstone in European artistic education, it represented the successful transplantation of academic practices to America.

The significance of the life school transcends its historical importance as the first sustained effort to provide American artists with

\textsuperscript{64} Minutes SOA, Jan. 4, 1815, PAFA Records, Downs M771 (Archives P45).

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} PAFA Board Minutes, Feb. 12, 1820, PAFA Records, Downs M789 (Archives P63).
the same kind of training then enjoyed by their European counter-
parts. Its existence dispels the myth that there was an objection in
American to nude models on moral grounds. The documents offer
conclusive proof that neither the businessmen-directors of the Acad-
emy nor the artists found the use of models, at least of male models,
immoral or shocking, but rather considered it essential to the
development of artistic skills.

As for the absence of female models, this was not peculiar to the
Pennsylvania Academy. With the exception of the Royal Academy,
females were not found in most European academies much before
mid-nineteenth century, although they had been used by individual
European artists and studio academies since the fifteenth century.
And even in America, female models may well have been obtainable
as early as 1805, or before William Rush carved the “Water Nymph
and Bittern” (c. 1809), if the remark by Rembrandt Peale that “in
1805 no female could be obtained here who would consent to serve
before more than one artist” can be interpreted as meaning that
women could be found who would pose before one artist at a time.

There was an objection to the nude in America, but the objection
was to the depiction of the nude in a work of art meant for public
exhibition and not to the use of nude models as a part of an artist’s
training. This dualism is embodied in the attitudes and actions of
Charles Willson Peale. Writing to Benjamin Latrobe in May, 1805,
about Adolph Wertmüller’s “Danae” (a painting which James Peale
and other members of the family traveled to Marcus Hook to see),
Peale recommended it to the architect’s attention but said “such
subjects may be good to shew [sic] artists talents, but in my opinion
not very proper for public exhibition. I like no art which can raise
a blush on a lady’s cheek.” Peale, who had served briefly as a model

67 Although the extent to which models disrobed is not known, it can be assumed on the
basis of the enthusiastic response of artists like Sully that the European or English practice was
followed as closely as possible, which would mean the models were completely or virtually nude.
68 Nikolaus Pevsner, Academies of Art Past and Present (Cambridge, 1940), 231.
69 Rembrandt Peale, Reminiscences, 4, Dreer Collection, Painters and Engravers, Historical
Society of Pennsylvania.
70 E. McSherry Fowble, “Rinaldo and Armida: An Example of Classical Nudity in
Eighteenth Century America,” Winterthur Portfolio 5 (1969), 49–58, argues convincingly that
nude subject paintings were acceptable to those Americans (the educated elite) who had
taken the Grand Tour and were familiar with contemporary artistic currents.
71 Charles Willson Peale to Benjamin Latrobe, May 13, 1805, Peale-Sellers Papers, CWP
Letter Book VI.
for the Columbianum in 1795, was then working to establish an Academy that would offer life drawing. He and his contemporaries saw no contradiction in distinguishing between nude subjects and accepted academic practices.

In summary, it can be said that the effort from early in 1812 to late in 1814 to establish an academic program of significant proportions at the Pennsylvania Academy was important for several reasons. First, while based on an eighteenth-century model, the program provided a precedent for later educational developments at the Academy, including those which ultimately served as the foundation for Eakins' innovations. Second, it helped forward the artists' claims to professional status in the community. Third, despite the short life of the schools, this first successful attempt in American to house all training facilities, except painting, in one institution initiated the American phase of the "academization" of art instruction, a movement that has been called "one of the most important developments in the education of the artist during the nineteenth century."³³

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72 Painting classes were just beginning to be offered in some European academies at this time. Pevsner, 232.
73 Ibid., 224.