
As 1976 draws near, each month brings announcement of lists of books on the American Revolution and biographies of its great men. Among these is Charles Willson Peale, the story of an eighteenth century portrait painter, a "true Whig," and the founder of a pioneer museum in Philadelphia. Like his friends, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, he possessed the earnest hope of his times for a brave new world.

Peale believed that by leading a temperate, cheerful life, he would reach the age of two hundred years. Eventually, he changed the figure to one hundred twenty-four years — really not time enough to finish all of his projects. In his eighties, he wrote to Thomas Jefferson, "I frequently think that my Pensel ought not to lay Idle. I still fancy that I could produce things worthy of notice, more valuable than my mechanic labors. By a diversity of objects, time flies like a dream."

Business debt was the catalyst that determined Peale to become an artist. Forced to flee from Maryland, he left his young wife, Rachel, with one of his family, and fled to Boston. Here he met and talked with John Singleton Copley, analyzed his pictures, and learned how to paint miniatures.

Through the generosity of Maryland planters, Peale was able to study in London under Benjamin West, and to visit Joshua Reynolds' studio. While in London, he perfected the art of miniature painting, bought equipment, and acquired a small but choice library of art books. Here he became an exhibiting member of the Society of Artists. Benjamin Franklin sat for his portrait. Sir William Pitt, in consular robes, was depicted as defender of the claims of the American colonies.

After Peale's return to Maryland and his beloved Rachel, his influential friends arranged an amnesty for his debts; his happy household buckled down to paying off the debts, and Peale set up a routine pattern of visits to plantation owners, and to the well-to-do in Philadelphia and Baltimore to paint portraits.

Peale was destined to have three wives in his lifetime. His second wife was Miss Betsy De Peyster of New York, and the wife of his last years was Miss Hannah Moore, a Quaker nurse who was a few years younger than he. All three were excellent wives. Peale was indeed a fortunate man.

Peale's children were handsome and intelligent, many of them
artists and scientists, and all of them employed in their father's museum at one time or other. Family birth records were not kept in a Bible, but in Pilkington's *Gentlemen and Connoisseurs*, a dictionary of painting, which, alas, became the inspiration for many of the children's names: Rembrandt, Angelica Kauffmann, Raphaelle, Rubens, and Rosalba Carriera. Aldrovand was firmly renamed "Franklin" at the age of four months by the Philosophical Society!

The American Revolution found Peale on military committees. He also led his militia contingent through the New Jersey campaign, with his miniature equipment and sketch pads carried with the rest of his gear. He conscientiously performed his military duties. Many times, he bought food for his men; he once bought hides, spending the day making moccasins for them. When possible, he sketched battle scenes which later served as muted backgrounds for pictures of Washington and other officers, sixty-five or more pictures in 1776. However, miniatures were more in demand than paintings, because they could be carried in a pocket, or sent home through a messenger.

Many of these pictures, or copies of them, later became part of the portrait section of the museum. The portraits of Washington, commissioned by friends, were the most numerous. One regrets, however, that Peale failed to paint a "wild Irish" private from Western Pennsylvania, one of Washington's Marines from Marblehead, or a Pennsylvania German. But in all fairness to Peale, he needed the money to support a big family.

After the war, Peale worked hard to organize his Philadelphia Museum. He wanted to present "the natural form and environment of American life, and as much as possible of the rest of the world." To paraphrase Browning, his reach exceeded his grasp, for what he had in mind was something like the Smithsonian. Many contributed — from members of the Philosophical Society, pioneer clipper captains returning from the Orient, to Thomas Jefferson. Peale himself loved the bird section best; ultimately he had over 20,000 birds. Visitors could find bears, monkeys, and eagles outside; and inside, he could sketch his own profile with a physiognograph, admire illuminations, watch the "moving" pictures, look at birds, insects or snakes, revel in the whale-oil lighting, enjoy music, or inspect the Mammoth which Peale secured in the state of New York. All these, and a thousand more items.

Peale retired from the Museum in 1809, the same year as Jefferson, to buy a farm near Germantown. "Belfield" was a source of joy, every day presenting a problem to be solved — a non-spilling milk-
cart, a windmill, a perfect currant wine, a flower garden, a cotton factory. At seventy, he had to plan a future for his four youngest children.

As time passed, Peale worried over the Museum's increasing emphasis on entertainment under his sons' management. He solved the problem by spending his last ten years at the Museum, reluctantly selling "Belfield" in 1826.

The old man never attained his hoped-for one hundred twenty-four years, dying from exposure to cold and complete exhaustion at the age of 86. Philadelphia's silver-haired, quick-stepping, pink-cheeked old man with the silver ear trumpet, passed from the scene, honored by a funeral procession blocks long.

This biography is more than the story of a man. It is at once the story of an era, and of a man's interrelations with his talented family. The author, Charles Coleman Sellers, a descendant of Charles Willson Peale, inherited the artist's papers, and it is apparent that he researched widely in the period. The book is filled with excellent reproductions of Peale's paintings.

Pittsburgh

Florence C. McLaughlin


Was the American Revolution a revolution? Moreover, was it a social revolution? In each generation historians have delivered a verdict from the nineteenth century Whig historians such as George Bancroft who portrayed the revolution as a step in the inexorable triumph of democracy, to Charles Beard and J. Franklin Jameson in the "Progressive Era" who pictured colonial populists triumphing over a mercantile aristocracy, and finally to contemporary historians Edmund Morgan, Daniel Boorstin, and Robert Brown who view the events of 1776 in terms of a "middle class democracy-consensus" theme.

British historian J. R. Pole, author of *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic* (New York, 1966), has edited a volume of almost 600 pages of documents, *The Revolution in America,* which purports, rather pretentiously, to excise the historiographical cataract befogging our vision and lay bare the unencumbered record of the American Revolution. This piece of his-