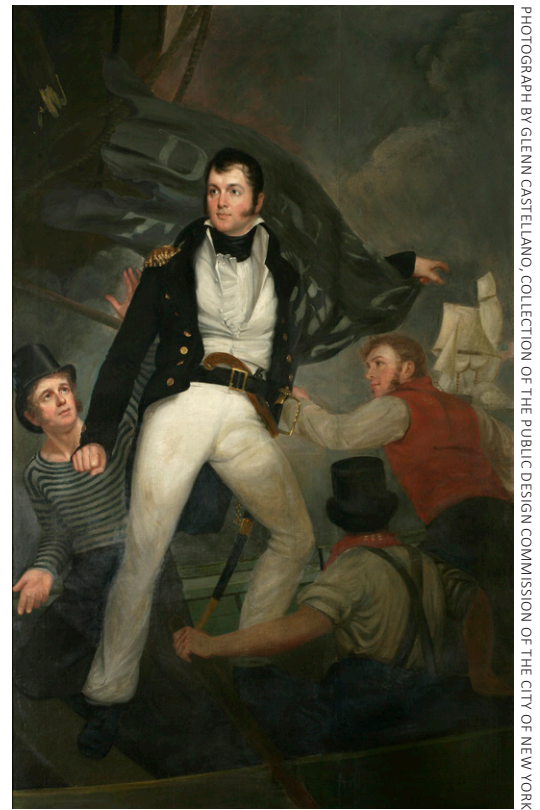


occupies the west staircase in the House wing of the Capitol (figs. 9a, 9b). With regard to *The Battle of Lake Erie*, we can surmise that Powell concurred with Leutze's assertion that "the anecdote should not be the subject [of the image], but the means of conveying some clear idea, which is to be the inspiration of the picture."²⁴

Subject to what would now be termed "artistic license," detail and anecdote become the means to a larger end rather than an end in themselves. For example, it is known that Perry took with him to the *Niagara* his battle flag—which is clearly visible in other images of his transfer (fig. 10a, 10b)—rather than the American flag that flew on the *Lawrence*. So why did Powell make the Stars and Stripes a central feature of his painting?²⁵ While perhaps recalling Francis Scott Key's composing of *The Star Spangled Banner* during the War of 1812, the more direct reference at the time of the painting's commissioning in 1865 was surely to the recent Union victory in the Civil War and the reuniting of the nation under one flag. As for the inclusion of Alexander Perry, the boy's distraught expression and frantic gesture, echoed by the African-American oarsman behind him, serve to emphasize his brother's bravery in the face of danger by calling attention to his refusal to "avoid the terrible exposure of which he seems unaware . . . collar loose, hair flying in the breeze, and brave heart absorbed in the fight . . . he has sprung into the boat to save the day."²⁶ Like other aspects of *The Battle of Lake Erie*'s form and content, Powell's emphasis on Perry's heroism and determination recalls one of the most iconic and widely-known paintings of his era, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*.²⁷

Most obviously, both are large-scale, epic, complex multi-figure compositions that literally and figuratively elevate the subjects they picture. Reflecting



PHOTOGRAPH BY GLENN CASTELLANO, COLLECTION OF THE PUBLIC DESIGN COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fig. 10a. This portrait of Oliver Hazard Perry (John Wesley Jarvis, 1816) hangs in New York City Hall. Perry's battle flag flutters over his arm.



ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

Fig. 9b. Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way, Emanuel Leutze, 1862

In Grand Manner-derived history painting, the proper relationship of imagination to fact is difficult to settle upon. Quite apart from William H. Powell's deliberate choices in the matter, a complex composition like his *The Battle of Lake Erie* invited innumerable opportunities for confusing fact and fiction. The painting's historical accuracy may not bear close scrutiny in certain respects, but at least one contemporary critic celebrated the artist's due diligence in ensuring "there are no flights nor soarings away from the bare facts."¹ One eerie coincidence was a striking demonstration of this.

While ransacking the Brooklyn Navy Yard for props, Powell inadvertently stumbled upon the very type of rowboat that had carried Perry from the *Lawrence* to the *Niagara* a half century earlier, although the model had been discontinued by the Navy in 1820. "When the stern was turned to the light, lo! the name of Perry [was] scrawled on it in chalk!" Understandably, "the artist and the officer accompanying him were completely mystified for a time." But a quick search of the records revealed that it was actually a rowboat from the USS *Perry*. The navy brig had not even been commissioned until 1843—fully 30 years after the battle whose victor it honors. But the rowboat's authenticity, coupled now by the romantic association of its namesake, proved irresistible. "Mr. Powell had the old relic repaired and made seaworthy, and then choosing his men he manned her." And according to the Washington correspondent W.J. Vance, writing shortly before the painting's unveiling, "herein lies the great value of Mr. Powell's picture. It is true to history. While the drawing and coloring are artistic and unexceptional, the picture would have been of but little value if it had been a production of the imagination."

On another occasion, Powell was visited by one of the four surviving crewmen from Perry's fleet. Stephen Champlin (1789–1870) was said to have fired both the first and last shots of the engagement from his command aboard the schooner *Ariel*, which lived up to its name by being the swiftest vessel on the lake that morning. He was later a naval paymaster stationed at Buffalo, NY. According to Vance,

[*Captain Champlin*] came on to New York during the progress of the work and found that Mr. Powell had misplaced the ships, and the result of six months [sic] work was at once rubbed out, and the vessels were put on again in their proper order. When this was done, the gallant captain assured the painter that it could not have been better done or more accurately drawn if Mr. Powell had been at the engagement in person. . . . It is fortunate that we are able to have everything just as it was instead of being compelled to rely on the imagination of the artist.

—William diGiacomantonio

¹"Washington Correspondence [W.J. Vance]. *Perry's Victory*," 10 January 1873, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, House of Representatives, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., pp. 153-54.



Fig. 10b. Percy Moran's *Battle of Lake Erie* (1911) also depicts Perry's trip from the *Lawrence* to the *Niagara*. Here the battle flag is draped along the side of the boat.

the visual legacy of Romanticism, both emphasize the drama, motion, and emotion of the historical event they portray. Accordingly, the difficulties their protagonists face are shown in minute detail: the human and naval wreckage around Perry's small boat, the glacier-like ice floes and other hardships that Washington and his men confront, and the presence of the enemy lurking just beyond the haze that envelopes the background of each image. Both picture a distant goal—for Perry, the *Niagara*; for Washington, the New Jersey shore—as well as the effort required to reach it, but these impediments make each hero's success all the more notable and worthy of emulation. And by placing their subject in the midst of his followers, but elevated slightly above them, each canvas projects an ideal image of leadership, unity, and democracy.²⁸

In the mid-nineteenth century, the imagery of boats—understood as a metaphorical "ship of state"—carried particularly resonant political meanings, as illustrated by these lines from an 1850 poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "Sail on, sail on, O ship of state/Sail on, O union, strong and



Negative by T. H. O'SULLIVAN. Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1866, by A. Gardner, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Columbia. Positive by A. GARDNER, 317th St., Washington.

A HARVEST OF DEATH, GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA.

Fig. 11. *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania*, taken by Timothy Sullivan in 1863 and published by Alexander Gardner in 1866, is one of the most famous images of the deadly aftermath of battle. Although Civil War photographers would often physically rearrange scenes for maximum effect, the images they captured effectively convey danger, horror, and other aspects of waging war.

great.”²⁹ During a period of increasing national discord, political instability, and finally, civil war and reconstruction, publicly visible images such as *The Battle of Lake Erie* and *Washington Crossing the Delaware*—made available to a wider audience through tours, prints, folk art, and other formats—reminded viewers of past leaders who had steered the ship, won the battle, secured the state, and in the troubled present, offered instructive if idealized lessons from the nation’s past.

Although it was not placed in the east staircase of the Senate wing until 1873, *The Battle of Lake Erie* was commissioned in 1865. Like other works of art in the Capitol, it represents an official narrative of American history and politics and so presents a telling contrast to other visual imagery of the period. The American Civil War was the first to be recorded through the new medium of photography, and images like those produced under the auspices of the Matthew Brady studio—which were widely circulated in a variety of mediums—revealed the true face of war to a civilian population for the

first time, as seen in images such as *Field at Antietam* (1862) and *Harvest of Death, Gettysburg* (1863) (fig. 11). Referring to “The Dead of Antietam” photographs exhibited at Brady’s New York gallery, a reporter for the *New York Times* noted that “If Mr. Brady has not brought the bodies of the dead and laid them at our doors... he has done something very like it.”³⁰

The war also changed the tone and subject matter of American history painting, as its “unofficial” practitioners, such as Winslow Homer, shifted attention from the “great men and heroic events” narratives of the past to a less idealized and more egalitarian view that privileged the soldier’s experience of war over that of the general, portrayed its effects and outcomes realistically, and advanced new perspectives on American history and its visual representation (fig. 12).

If official works commissioned for the Capitol in the Civil War period—*Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, *Apotheosis of Washington*, and *The Battle of Lake Erie*—could not erase the images of America captured in Brady’s photographs or Homer’s paintings, perhaps they could, at least



Fig. 12. Prisoners from the Front, Winslow Homer (1866)

theoretically, mediate their impact by continuing to suggest an alternative vision that upheld historical narratives of the past in accord with the conventions of academic history painting. As commemorations of the 1876 Centennial would show, and as is visible in the breadth of today's Capitol art collection, the nation's historical memory encompasses many diverse components and points of view and is the richer for continuing to do so.



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NOTES

1. For an overview of the War of 1812 and on the issue of impressment see, among other sources, Walter Rybka, *The Lake Erie Campaign of 1813* (London, 2012), pp. 11-31; Liz Sonneban, *A Primary Source History of America's Second War* (New York, 2003); and Theodore Roosevelt, *The Naval War of 1812* (New York, 1887).
2. Rybka, *Lake Erie Campaign*, pp. 32-55.
3. For a biography of Perry, see David Skaggs, *Oliver Hazard Perry: Honor, Courage, and Patriotism in the Early U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, MD, 2006).
4. Quoted in Rybka, *Lake Erie Campaign*, p. 69.
5. Quoted in Rybka, *Lake Erie Campaign*, p. 70.
6. "Don't Give Up the Ship" was the dying command of Capt. James Lawrence (1781-1813), whose ship *USS Chesapeake* was attacked and captured by the British just three months before the Battle of Lake Erie. Perry had the words stitched onto his personal battle flag (also known as naval ensign), which later flew over his flagship *Lawrence*, named for his friend and fellow officer. The flag is now in the collection of the U.S. Naval Museum in Annapolis.

7. Rybka, *Lake Erie Campaign*, p. 88.
8. Rybka, *Lake Erie Campaign*, p. 86. On this topic see also David Skaggs and William Welsh, "The Battle of Lake Erie: A Narrative," in *The War on the Great Lakes: Essays Commemorating the 175th Anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie* (Kent, OH, 1991) and Diane Skvarla and William Kloss, eds., *U.S. Senate Catalogue of Fine Art* (Washington DC, 2002), pp. 34-37.
9. Quoted in Gerry Altoff, *Oliver Hazard Perry and the Battle of Lake Erie* (Put-in-Bay, OH, 1990), p. 29.
10. Quoted in "1812: A Nation Emerges" <http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/1812/> (accessed 15 July 2016).
11. S. Putnam Waldo, *Tour of James Monroe* (Hartford, CT, 1818), p. 233.
12. Christopher McKee, "An Aerial View of Put in Bay: Historians Scrutinize a Campaign," in *The War on the Great Lakes*, pp. 87-99.
13. <http://www.neh.gov/humanities/2013/septemberoctober/feature/roosevelt-the-revisionist> (accessed 10 July 2016). Note Roosevelt's use of the word "almost." Elliott had begun limited engagement with the enemy, albeit from a greater distance, at the time of Perry's arrival at the *Niagara*. Roosevelt's account of the battle in his *Naval War of 1812* was also critical of Perry's actions. Roosevelt felt that too much emphasis had been placed on Perry's battle heroics while his more important contribution to the victory on Lake Erie had been his supervision of the fleet's construction, manning, and equipping. This resulted in the U.S. force's superior firepower that Roosevelt viewed as the most crucial factor in the victory.
14. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists, Comprising Biographical and Critical Sketches of American Artists* (New York, 1867), p. 458. We can surmise that by "rank" Tuckerman meant Powell's standing among artists of his day.
15. *Putnam's Monthly* 3(January 1854):118-119. See also Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the U.S. Capitol, 1815-1860* (New Haven, CT, 1992), p. 225.
16. On this topic see Irma Jaffe, *John Trumbull: Patriot-Artist of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1975); Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (Ithaca, NY, 1978); Joseph Ellis, *After the Revolution: Profiles in Early American Culture* (New York, 1979), and more recently, Stephen Murray, *John Trumbull: Painter of the American Revolution* (2009; reprint, London, 2015).
17. Michael Devine, "The History Paintings of William Henry Powell," *Ohio History Journal* 89(Winter 1980):68.
18. Devine, "History Paintings," pp. 68-69.
19. U.S. Congress, Joint Resolution 25, 38th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2 March 1865.
20. Skvarla and Kloss, eds., *Catalogue of Fine Art*, p. 34.
21. "Powell's Picture for the Capitol in Washington," *Watson's Art Journal* (1 June 1872), quoted in the "Speech of Hon. J.E. Stevenson, of Ohio, in the House of Representatives, March 1, 1873," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, House of Representatives, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., pp. 152-153.
22. Charles Lewis, "Powell's 'Perry's Victory on Lake Erie,'" *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 51(Aug. 1925):1473.
23. Lewis, "Powell's 'Perry's Victory on Lake Erie,'" pp. 1477-79. James Alexander Perry (1801-24) rose to the rank of lieutenant before dying—like his older brother—off the coast of South America, while trying to save a drowning fellow officer. Powell used the face of the commodore's grandson as his model for Midshipman Perry ("Washington Correspondence [W.J. Vance]. *Perry's Victory*," 10 January 1873, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, House of Representatives, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., p. 153).
24. Quoted in "Return of Mr. Leutze," *Bulletin of the American Art Union* (Sept. 1851), p. 95.
25. Skvarla and Kloss, eds., *Catalogue of Fine Art*, p. 34.
26. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, p. 459. Tuckerman was referring to the painting in the Ohio Statehouse, but the depiction of Perry is the same in both images.
27. Skvarla and Kloss, eds., *Catalogue of Fine Art*, p. 36.
28. Although Tuckerman identifies the black oarsman as Perry's manservant Hannibal (*Book of the Artists*, p. 459), information in the *U.S. Senate Catalogue of Fine Art* suggests that "his inclusion is more likely to be dictated by the date of the painting—immediately post-Civil War and emancipation—than by the reality of 1813" (pp. 34-35). Another historian points out "it is known that many of Perry's crew were black, but how many cannot be determined because the muster rolls did not list race. The official policy was to limit recruitment to free white males [but] each commander was responsible for recruiting for his own ship . . . what can be said is that black seamen served in all theatres of the war, often with distinction" (Rybka, *Lake Erie Campaign*, p. 52).
29. *Writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2007/03/09* (accessed 18 July 2016). The "ship of state" metaphor dates to ancient Greece when, in Book IV of *The Republic*, Plato compares civic governance to command of a naval vessel.
30. "Brady's Photographs: Pictures of the Dead at Antietam," *The New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1862.

“DINGY” OR “VERY HANDSOMELY FURNISHED”?

A GLIMPSE AT A CONGRESSIONAL BOARDING HOUSE, 1801

BY PAMELA SCOTT



Fig. 1. James Greenleaf by Gilbert Stuart, 1795. The painting, owned by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, has hung in the Pennsylvania Capitol for many years.

From First Lady Abigail Adams to Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Jr., a handful of New Englanders—all Federalists—wrote family and friends about their early impressions and experiences in Washington. Between 1800 and 1805 fledgling communities were still developing around the President’s House and Capitol to accommodate part-time legislators. Some of these correspondents were disenchanted with the city while others reassured their kinsmen that civilization was alive and well in the southern clime maligned in so many newspaper accounts. While all agreed on the capital city’s beautiful setting, none realized its major faults as the national capital—wide-spread habitations and halting development—were largely caused by the actions of northerners, including a Bostonian.¹

Capitol Hill’s earliest major property developers—local resident Daniel Carroll of Duddington and English investor Thomas Law—lost fortunes in the collapse of the private real estate developments initiated in 1793 by James Greenleaf (fig. 1), a relative of Adams. Greenleaf took as partners Pennsylvanians Sen. Robert Morris and John Nicholson; their financial syndicate was bankrupt by 1795. Carroll and Law (also Federalists) largely ignored the pleas of federal officials in the mid-to-late 1790s to build private accommodations and services on Capitol Hill or Congress would not leave Philadelphia. In the view of these Washingtonians, until Congress agreed to guarantee loans to complete the public buildings—and to appropriate monies to continue their erection—the future of the Federal City was uncertain at best. Neither Carroll nor Law was about to throw good money after bad. At the same time, Congress was monitoring the progress of both public and private build-

ings in Washington. Although the Residence Act of 1790 decreed a site on the north shore of the Potomac River would become the national capital in December 1800, the law could be repealed. Congress did act, and so did Carroll and Law. Together they immediately built a large hotel directly east of the Capitol while Carroll independently erected substantial boarding houses and a hotel—Carroll Row—on the site of the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress. Law turned his own house on New Jersey Avenue SE into a hotel and quickly built several structures, some to accommodate small businesses.²

On 4 July 1800, Wolcott wrote his wife that unless Members of Congress “will consent to live like scholars in a college, or monks in a monastery, crowded ten or twenty in one house, and utterly secluded from society” to be near the Capitol, they had better find lodgings in Georgetown.

In late November Abigail Adams decried the inefficiency of the Southerners. “In the city there are buildings enough, if they were compact and finished, to accommodate Congress and those attached to it; but as they are, and scattered as they are, I see no great comfort for them.” These bleak views were partially countered by Connecticut Rep. John Cotton Smith, who recounted his experiences as a member during the second session of the Sixth Congress, the first to convene in Washington in the autumn of 1800. He and several compatriots occupied separate beds and were fed a varied and substantial diet by “active and faithful servants” in Law’s elegant former home.³

*“Mr. Read and myself have, I think,
the pleasantest room in the house or in the whole
city. It is on the third story, commanding a
delightful prospect of the Capitol, of the President’s
house, Georgetown, all the houses in the city and a
long extent of river and the city of Alexandria.”*
— Manasseh Cutler, in a letter to his daughter

Another of the embryonic city’s astute observers from the north was Massachusetts Rep. Manasseh Cutler (1742-1823, fig. 2). One of his era’s polymaths, the Connecticut-born and Yale-educated man (Class of 1765) turned his hand to a variety of professions and avocations beginning with teaching school before trying the whaling business. Cutler was a perennial student; he studied law, then theology (ordained in the Congregational Society in 1771), and served as a chaplain in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. In 1778 he began to study both medicine and navigation. This range of skills, in addition to his wide knowledge of astronomy and botany, equipped Cutler to be not just a typical American frontiersman, but one of its leaders. In 1786 Cutler was one of four New England projectors of the Ohio Company of Associates, their belief in the country’s westward expansion born of their collective experiences during the Revolution.

Cutler’s correspondence and journal entries written while in Washington during the Seventh and Eighth Congresses (December 1801 to March 1805) reveal his Federalist point of view on the political turmoil during Thomas Jefferson’s first term. The president, a Republican, sought more parity in the appointment of federal officials in both the executive (predominately Federalist department heads and clerks) and judicial branches (all Federalists) when he took office. (Jefferson quipped about them that few died and none resigned.) Cutler also cited the role of congressional actions on the local population. Local property values



Fig. 2. Manasseh Cutler by Nathaniel Lakeman, c.1787

briefly plummeted after passage of the Judiciary Bill on 4 March 1802, which repealed the Judiciary Act of 13 February 1801 that had expanded the system of federal circuit courts with judges, all Federalists, appointed by President John Adams near the end of his administration. Cutler and other Federalists maintained passage of the 1802 Judiciary Bill by the majority Republican Congress subverted the Constitution and would lead to the dissolution of the government.⁴

Cutler also noted problems associated with meeting in the Capitol while it was still under construction. He attributed the illness of many of his colleagues, and the death of Narsworthy Hunter, a delegate from the Mississippi Territory, to the malfunctioning of the ventilation system in the House chamber. On 20 February 1802 Cutler first noted the ventilation system on the roof of the House’s temporary chamber, the “Oven,” needed to be repaired (fig. 3). Partisan politics intervened over celebrating Washington’s Birthday as a holiday; workmen did not repair the ventilation system on 22 February as planned. Members were forcibly confined to their seats for as many as fourteen hours a day during the Judiciary Bill’s debates because the lobby, visitors’ gallery, and even the House floor were so overcrowded with spectators. As the chamber’s insalubrious air worsened daily several congressmen fell seriously ill from “bilious fever;” some were confined in their lodgings when the vote came up (including some of Cutler’s messmates) while others fled Washington before the session ended.

My Dear Betsy:

It shall be the subject of this letter to give you some account of my present situation and of occurrences since I left home. The city of Washington in point of situation is much more delightful than I expected to find it. The ground, in general, is elevated and mostly cleared, and commands a pleasing prospect of the Potomac River. The buildings are brick, and erected in what are called large blocks—that is, from two to five or six houses joined together, and appear like one long building. There is one block of seven, another of nine, and one of twenty houses, but they are scatted over a large extent of ground. The block in which I live contains six houses, four stories high and very handsomely furnished. It is situated east of the Capitol, on the highest ground in the city.⁷ Mr. King, our landlord, occupies the south end, only one room in front, which is our parlor for receiving company and dining, and a room in back, occupied by Mr. King's family, the kitchen is below. The four chambers are appropriated to the eight gentlemen who board in the family. In each chamber are two narrow field beds and field curtains, with every necessary convenience for the boarders. Mr. Read and myself have, I think, the pleasantest room in the house or in the whole city. It is on the third story, commanding a delightful prospect of the Capitol, of the President's house, Georgetown, all the houses in the city and a long extent of river and the city of Alexandria.⁸

The air is fine and the weather, since I have been here, remarkably pleasant. I am not much pleased with the Capitol. It is a huge pile, built, indeed, with handsome stone, very heavy in its appearance without, and not very pleasant within. The President's house is superb, well proportioned and pleasantly situated.⁹

But I will hasten to give you a more particular account of our family, which, I presume, will be more interesting to you than the Geography of the District. Mr. King's family consists only of himself, his lady, and one daughter, besides the servants, all of whom are black. Mr. King was an officer in the late American Army, much of a gentleman in his manner, social and very obliging. I have seen few women more agreeable than Mrs. King. She almost daily brings to my mind Dr. Lakeman's first wife[.] [S]he [Mrs. King] was the daughter of Mr. Harper, a respectable merchant in Baltimore; has been favored with an excellent education, has been much in the first circles of society in this part of the country, and is in nothing more remarkable, than her perfect freedom from stiffness, vanity, or ostentation. Their only daughter, Miss Anna, is about seventeen, well formed, rather tall, small featured, but is considered very handsome. She has been educated at the best schools in Baltimore and Alexandria. She does not converse much, but is very modest and agreeable. She plays with great skill on the Forte Piano, which she always accompanies with a most delightful voice, and is frequently joined in the vocal part by her mother. Mr. King has an excellent Forte Piano, which is connected with an organ placed

Cutler's 21 December 1801 letter to his daughter (see p. 26–27) after arriving in Washington to take his seat in the first session of the Seventh Congress, that had convened two weeks earlier, described his living conditions, very different from the “dingy” and overcrowded wood shacks Members of Congress expected because of negative propaganda about meeting in Washington. It is published here in its entirety for the first time since two of Cutler's grandchildren compiled and published his most significant writings in 1888.⁵ The “family” atmosphere created for and by eight New England Federalists as boarders in the best of Carroll's rowhouses proved to be not just comfortable but an antidote to the stresses of the political arena in a place where the only source of public entertainment were Sunday sermons in the House chamber by the chaplain or a variety of visiting ministers.⁶

When Cutler returned to Washington in early December

1802 for the second session of the Seventh Congress, the Kings were no longer operating a boarding house. “[F]inding it very difficult to get lodgings, went to the point [Greenleaf's Point in Southwest] to [Samuel] Speake[.]. . . The house is small. Mr. [George B.] Upham [of New Hampshire] and I can take a room, but it is small, otherwise a good one. The family appear agreeable.” Cutler's weekly board was \$6.50 at Speake's; he begrudged both the long, uphill walk to the Capitol as well as the lack of agreeable society among his four fellow New England members of the House. “At Mr. King's last winter, we had frequently very agreeable family in the company; here we have none. I very much miss the amusement Miss Anna King used to afford us with her Forte-Piano, and excellent voice.”¹³

Congressional Directories are not known to survive for either session of the Eighth Congress, but Cutler noted in his diaries that he continued to board with the Speake family for

under it, which she fills and plays with her foot, while her fingers are employed on the Forte Piano (fig. 4).¹⁰

The gentlemen, generally, spend a part of two or three evenings a week in Mr. King's room where Miss Anna entertains us with delightful music. After we have been fatigued with the harangues of the Hall in the day, and conversing on politics, in different circles, (for we all talk nothing else) in the evening an hour of this music is truly delightful. On Sunday evenings she constantly plays psalm tunes, in which her mother, who is a woman of real piety, always joins. We have three gentlemen in the family (General Mattoon, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Perkins) who are good singers and extravagantly fond of music, and always join in the Psalmody. Miss Anna plays 'Denmark' remarkably well, and when joined with other singers, it exceeds what I have ever heard before. But the most of the psalm tunes our gentlemen prefer are the old ones, such as 'Old Hundred,' 'Canterbury,' which you would be delighted to hear on the forte-piano, assisted by the organ and accompanied with the voice.¹¹

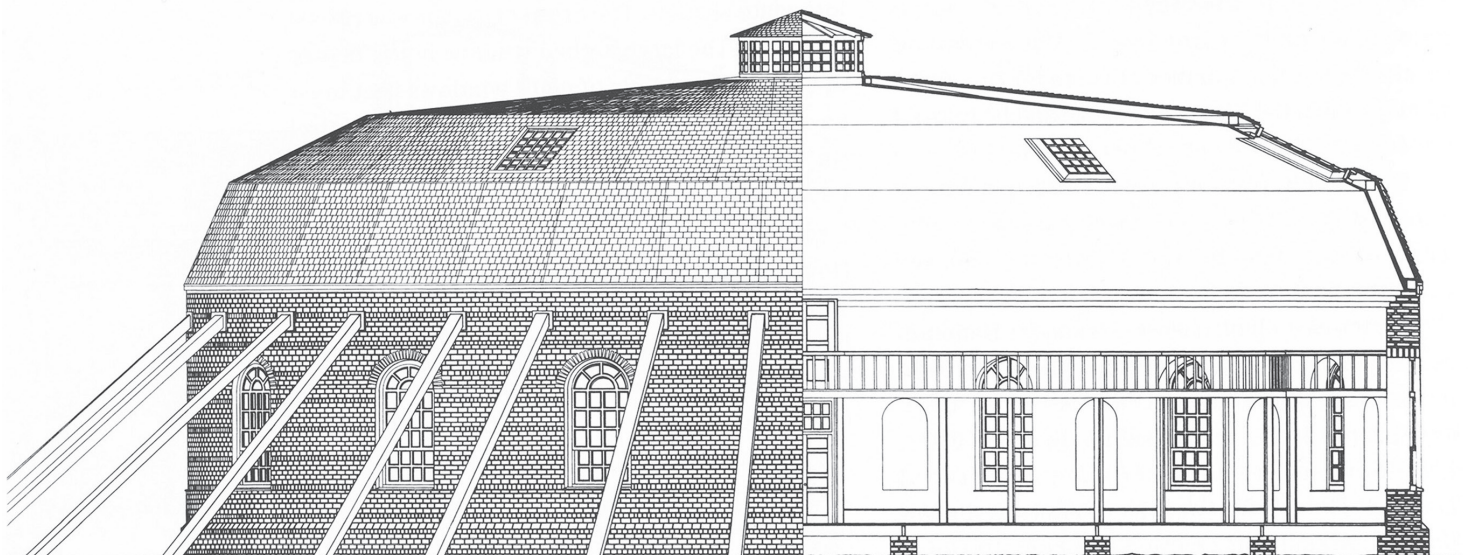
We breakfast at 9, dine between 3 and 4. If we happen to be in the parlor in the first of the evening, at the time Mrs. King makes tea in her own room, she sends the servant with a salver of tea and coffee and a plate of toast, but we never eat any supper.

I can not conclude without giving you some description of our fellow-lodgers, with whom I enjoy a happiness which I by no means expected. We have Mr. Hillhouse, of New Haven, and Judge Foster, of Brookfield, two of the most sensible and respectable members of the Senate; Mr. Davenport, of Connecticut, who is a deacon and a very pleasant, agreeable man: Mr. Smith, who is the son of a clergyman, of very sprightly and distinguished talents; Mr. Perkins, of New London, a man of very handsome abilities; and Mr. Read and myself. It is remarkable that all these gentlemen are professors of religion, and members of the same churches to which they respectively belong. An unbecoming word is never uttered by one of them, and most perfect harmony and friendliness pervades the family.

Colonel Talmadge came here with the hopes of boarding with us, and tarried two or three days, but, when the other gentlemen came, who had previously applied to Mr. King, he was obliged, much to his regret and mine, to take lodgings in another house.¹²

I must add that I am exceedingly happy with Mr. Reed. Were I to have made my choice among all the members of Congress for one to have lived in the same chamber with me, all things considered, I should have chosen Mr. Reed. But, after all I have said to you, it is not home, it is not where I wish to be, and I long for the day when I shall set my face eastward, to return to our family.

Your affectionate parent,
M. Cutler.



ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

Fig. 3. This conjectural reconstruction of the "Oven" appeared on page 46 of *History of the United States Capitol* by William Allen (Washington, DC, 2001). The room was so poorly built that exterior braces were added in 1803, as was the roof lantern.



Fig. 4. Anna King would have played an organized piano similar to this one in the collection at Colonial Williamsburg (see footnote 11 for more information). (Museum Purchase. Conservation of this instrument is made possible by a gift from Constance Tucker and Marshall Tucker in memory of N. Beverly Tucker, Jr.)

the remainder of his congressional service, although they had moved by October 1803 to 13th Street NW either a block north or south of Pennsylvania Avenue. As he had done with the King family, Cutler became concerned about the private lives of the Speake family, commenting on Mary Ann Speake's poor health after the death of her son. Cutler seemed to understand that his concern for other humans on the periphery of his life in Washington was a manifestation of his emotional separation from his family and isolation from his congressional colleagues during his second term in Congress. "Here I feel myself interested in the little concerns of families, neighborhoods, and the town, which, if I were at home, would never occupy a second thought," he wrote his son-in-law. He rejoiced when he was sent news of his Massachusetts neighbors.¹⁴

Pennsylvania Sen. Jonathan Roberts (Twelfth Congress, November 1811 to August 1812) had a similar experience at the boarding house kept by former Pennsylvania Rep. Samuel Smith, also in Carroll Row. "It may be right to say, that my residence in Mr. Smith's family, was the most agreeable, I ever spent in public life. No where else, could I have gotten so profitable schooling, at the commencement of my career in Washington. We liv'd like a family, bound by stronger ties, than a mere chance meeting. Mr. Frost's family lived next door, & the youngest daughter Charlotte, hardly at woman's estate, had a piano, & a fine gift as a per-

former. She was at all points a very fine girl. Mrs. Smith used to have the instrument brought into her house."¹⁵

Cutler's commentary about the Capitol itself is informative. After "the Oven" was dismantled and beginning with the Second Session of the Eighth Congress (5 November 1804 to 3 March 1805), members convened back in the North wing, in the long rectangular room intended for the Library of Congress, overlooking the Mall. (B.H. Latrobe's House chamber was not finished until 1806). In their temporary quarters, they were "cooped up in a chamber...which has afforded no room for ladies to attend the debates." He joked that he was thus unable to describe for his daughters the latest fashions in "head-dresses, shawls, [and] bonnets." In February 1804, as part of the celebration for Washington's Birthday, seventeen cannon were installed on the north side of the Capitol. "The air being very serene, the reports were extremely loud and heavy. Our seats trembled, and the whole

Capitol shook. Many members wounded (not corporeal but mental wounds), who hate the name whose memory is honored.” Cutler noted every occasion he dined with his “Democratic Majesty,” but also commented on how graciously President Jefferson habitually treated him, as well as his other guests.¹⁶ On 20 March 1804 the Senate passed a bill sponsored by Sen. Robert Wright of Maryland to move Congress to Baltimore. Cutler recounted the vociferous protest of Washingtonians in the Senate when it met on Monday, 26 March. “Galleries extremely full of people. Caricature of Wright, with the Capitol on his back, travelling off, and calling to [Sen. Jonathan] Dayton [of New Jersey] to help; reply ‘I will see you hanged first.’ People crying from the windows, ‘Stop, thief.’... Great fuss. President there...The head men [instigators], it was said, were arrested by the order of the Senate.”¹⁷

In late February 1804, Cutler “Agreed with Jess, a black man, to go to Hamilton [Massachusetts] to live with me; at \$8 a month. Wages begin today; paid him \$10.” Cutler’s grandchildren included a lengthy (and rather paternalistic) footnote on Jess Shorter, a freedman who had apparently worked at Speake’s boarding house. Cutler educated Shorter, who soon married, worked as a gardener, and raised his family in Hamilton. Shorter lived and died in the cottage Cutler built for him next to his parsonage. Shorter returned to Washington with Cutler in the fall of 1804 to serve him again at the Speake’s boarding house during his last term in Congress. While a member of the Seventh Congress, Cutler commented in his correspondence and diaries on the excitement of being an eye witness and participant in history. His remarks about his life in Washington during the Eighth Congress were cursory about his attendance at the House, more fulsome about his botanical interests and social life, especially among the diplomatic community. He was not a candidate for the Ninth Congress in the 1804 election. Perhaps Cutler became convinced that being a member of the minority party in Congress was either too tiresome or an exercise in futility, or possibly both.¹⁸



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1. “Viator” [Joseph B. Varnum, Jr.], *The Washington Sketch Book* (New York, 1864) quoted several authors on the physical conditions in early Washington. This author’s essay, “Capitol Neighbors,” in a forthcoming book to be published by the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, delves into property development near the Capitol from the 1790s until 1829.

2. James Greenleaf’s speculative ventures in Washington are recounted widely, but most cogently and accurately in Robert D. Arbuckle, *Pennsylvania Speculator and Patriot: The Entrepreneurial John Nicholson, 1757-1800* (University Park, PA, 1975), pp. 113-199. For the reproduction of many documents see Allen C. Clark, *Greenleaf and Law in the Federal City* (Washington, DC, 1901). Bob Arnebeck, “Tracking the Speculators: Greenleaf and Nicholson in the Federal City,” *Washington History* v. 3, 1(Spring/Summer 1991):112-125 is one modern account of a multi-faceted and rapidly evolving situation.

3. “Viator,” *Washington Sketch Book*, pp. 91-3 for the quote from Wolcott’s letter; p. 94 for Abigail Adams’s letter to her daughter Abigail (Nabby) Adams Smith; and p. 97 for Smith’s account of life in his boarding house. John Cotton Smith, *The Correspondence and Miscellanies of the Hon. John Cotton Smith, LL.D.* (New York, 1847), pp. 205-06.

4. Jerry W. Knudson, “The Jeffersonian Assault on the Federalist Judiciary, 1802-1805: Political Forces and the Press Reaction,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 14(January 1970):55-6.

5. William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler, eds., *Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.* (2 vols.; Cincinnati, OH, 1888), pp. 50-3. An edited version of Cutler’s letter was published in Allen C. Clark, “Daniel Carroll of Duddington,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 39(1938):32-3, hereafter cited as RCHS.

6. Cutler’s fellow lodgers were Rep. John Davenport (1752–1830), Sen. James Hillhouse (1754–1832), Rep. Elias Perkins (1767–1845), and Rep. John Cotton Smith (1765–1845), all of Connecticut; and Sen. Dwight Foster (1757–1823), Rep. Ebenezer Mattoon (1755–1843), and Rep. Nathan Read (1759–1849), of Massachusetts.

7. King’s boardinghouse was the southernmost building in Carroll Row, Duddington’s investment of \$24,000 to provide elegant accommodations for Members of Congress. King’s house at the corner of 1st and A Streets SE was about 25 feet in width. The creation of a viable neighborhood near the Capitol beginning in the late 1790s is the subject of the author’s forthcoming essay “Capitol Neighbors.”

8. Josias Wilson King (d. 1833) from Port Tobacco, MD, was an engrossing clerk in the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives. His parentage has not been established. On 11 November 1799 Josias Wilson King of the City of Philadelphia sold his 115-acre tract of land, "Hawkins Barrons," in Charles County for £300; his wife Letitia surrendering her dower rights at the same time (Michael R. Marsh, ed., *Charles County, Maryland, Land Records* [Millsboro, DE, 2015]). King was reimbursed \$390 for expenses of moving his family and household goods from Philadelphia to Washington in 1800 ("Reprints," RCHS 9[1906]:232). When King was not elected Clerk of the House, he took a position as a clerk in the State Department and soon built a substantial house on 17th Street NW on square 170 between New York Avenue and F Street. King later became a minor celebrity when on 24 August 1814 he removed the Declaration of Independence (in his charge for a quarter century), all the treaties, and many other important State Department documents to Montgomery Court House, MD, thus saving them from destruction by British troops ("A Reminiscence," *Alexandria* [Va.] *Gazette*, 5 Sept. 1840). Katherine Elwes Thomas, "The Long Lost Washington Drawing by Major L'Enfant and the Historic McKean House," RCHS 39(1938):110-2, 119-23 is an unreliable historical account. Dr. Patrick Snadon, a specialist in the history of interiors, speculates that the term "camp beds" denoted military usage, probably demountable for easy storage and portability, possibly even Revolutionary War salvage (email from Patrick Snadon to author, 6 Aug. 2016).

9. The Capitol Cutler knew was the stone North, or Senate, Wing, its exterior design by William Thornton but its interiors largely built by Stephen Hallet and George Hadfield. The House chamber he first knew was designed and built by James Hoban, architect of the President's House. Its exterior stone walls were carried as far as the entablature of the oval House chamber roofed in wood. It was quickly dismantled in 1804 when its structure was deemed unsafe.

10. Letitia Harper King (1758–1845) was not the daughter of Robert Goodloe Harper (1765–1865) but his elder sister, born in Spotsylvania, Virginia. Letters from her signed "Letty" survive in Harper's papers in the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. Their father Jesse Harper (1728–1800) was a prominent builder in Virginia and North Carolina; his surviving letters sent to Robert while a student at Princeton College furnish ample evidence of his own level of education, as of his piety. In 1800 Harper married Catherine Carroll, daughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton and thus a distant cousin of Daniel Carroll of Duddington. It was probably this family connection that led to the Kings becoming short-term landlords in one of

Duddington's boarding houses.

11. Historian Michael R. Harrison considers that Anna King played from commercial hymnals, as Episcopal liturgical ones were not yet available. The piano-organ Anna played was called an "organized piano," the two steps of organ pipes probably added by John Sellers, a Germantown, Pennsylvania, musical instrument maker active there until about 1803 before he moved to Alexandria, Virginia. Only three of Sellers's organized pianos survive (John Watson, "Another Organized Piano?" <http://makinghistorynow.com/2014/06/another-organized-piano/>, accessed 17 Aug. 2016). The author thanks Harrison and music historian Anne Acker for this information.

12. Rep. Benjamin Talmadge of Connecticut lodged with John T. Frost, one of Law's boarding house keepers on New Jersey Avenue. Perry M. Goldman and James S. Young, *United States Congressional Directories, 1789-1840* (New York, 1973), p. 39. Members probably were aided in finding boarding houses by the clerks of their respective chambers.

13. Goldman & Young, *Congressional Directories*, p. 42; Cutler and Cutler, *Life of Manasseh Cutler*, pp. 112-3, 132; "Genteel Boarding," [Washington, DC] *National Intelligencer*, 13 Oct. 1803; "Will be sold at auction," *National Intelligencer*, 9 Oct. 1807. Speake (d. 1817) served in the First U.S. Regiment from 1785 until 1790, and kept a boarding house at the same time that he operated an auction house specializing in the sale of Washington real estate (*Ancestry.com*, U.S. Compiled Service Records, Post-Revolutionary War Volunteer Soldiers, 1784-1811).

14. Cutler and Cutler, *Life of Manasseh Cutler*, pp. 136-7, 153, 171.

15. Jonathan Roberts and Philip S. Klein, "Notes and Documents: Memoirs of a Senator from Pennsylvania: Jonathan Roberts, 1771-1854," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62(April 1938):241. John T. Frost was a clerk in the House of Representatives who ran Capitol Hill boarding houses between 1801 and 1819.

16. Cutler and Cutler, *Life of Manasseh Cutler*, pp. 154, 170.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 168, 170, 189-90. This composition seems to have been the favored trope for cartoons mocking the removal of the seat of government. In the summer of 1790, New York City streets were blanketed with a (non-extant) cartoon showing Pennsylvania Sen. Robert Morris carrying the capitol ("Federal Hall") on his back to Philadelphia (Kenneth R. Bowling, *The Creation of Washington, D.C.: The Idea and Location of the American Capital* [Fairfax, VA, 1991], pp. 200-01).

18. *Ibid.*, 155.



THE SPEAKER'S OFFICE IN SUMMER DRESS (1861), 36" x 48" oil on canvas

I am fascinated by the decorative schemes of the Capitol in the nineteenth century, especially how they changed from winter to summer with the addition of slip covers and changes of drapes and floor coverings. This painting shows two of the Union soldiers billeted in the Capitol during the Civil War—country boys amazed by the luxury of the Speakers Office into which they have strayed. All the images accompanying this article are paintings by Peter Waddell.

AN ARTIST'S EYE FOR HISTORY: PETER WADDELL

The U.S. Capitol Historical Society's Chief Historian William diGiacomantonio interviewed Peter Waddell on 16 September 2016, in the studio he occupies as Artist-in-Residence at Tudor Place, in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, DC.

William diGiacomantonio: So my first question has to be: why? Why did you initially feel drawn to history painting, out of all the different genres of painting you could have gone into?

Peter Waddell: I would say because it's difficult. That would be one reason. There is something about the power of being able to recreate the past that's irresistible. The only other option would be to make movies, which I've also done. But movie making is incredible complex and expensive. Whereas paint-

ing compared with movie making is very simple and straightforward although still complex.

WdG: Where did this desire to "recreate the past" come from?

PW: When I was a kid I used to look around and think, what were things like before? That was a constant question and it still is. It wasn't history so much that I was interested in; it was archaeology and things connected with history. I like old stuff. New Zealand was not like the United States. It was not



THE PINK AND WHITE TERRACES AT TARAWEA NEW ZEALAND (1886), 24" x 36" oil on canvas

The Pink and White Terraces were huge silica volcanic creations destroyed and buried in a huge eruption of Mount Tarawera in 1886. For a brief time it was one of the wonders of the world and a popular if very remote tourist destination.

awash with things and certainly not old things; they were quite rare and unusual and I can remember from the earliest age being fascinated by them.

WdG: So it's the very rarity of historical objects. . . .

PW: Yes, the objects. There was a sensuality about old things that there wasn't about manufactured goods. Everything was made in New Zealand; there was very little imported. They had an import substitution policy for things that were made. They were well-made and quite interesting, I mean my father's furniture for example, which now I discover is a cult item because it's that mid-century teak.

WdG: So this leads from the comment about New Zealand history: what exactly got you interested in the history of the United States?

PW: Well my father was interested in history. He was self-educated and my mom was a "blue stocking." But he was interested in the history of technology particularly, and mechanical things, which I have a passion for myself. But he was also a Civil War buff, which was highly unusual in New Zealand. So he had a grasp of history and he had been in WWII and had gone to Egypt and then fought his way out of Italy after he'd finished fighting in Egypt. He saw history as well as being a part of history. I mean, he saw [the opera] *Aida* being done down at the Colosseum, and if you knew the little town my dad came from then, you can't think of anything less likely than an opera. Certainly not *Aida* in the Colosseum or climbing the great pyramid, which he did. So he had these very sharp memories because it was recent times to him and by far the most interesting thing that had happened to him in his life apart from marrying my mother.



THE GRAND ILLUMINATION (1891), 54" x 74" oil on canvas

This painting of the entry hall of the White House in 1891 shows the great Tiffany glass screen installed by Chester Arthur. I had to recreate this legendary object, which was destroyed and lost from written accounts, by examining other windows created by Tiffany about the same time. The great difficulty was making it appear illuminated from the behind. The moment I have painted was during the installation of electric light in the White House.

WdG: And he passed that on to you.

PW: Yes, this sort of interest. Yes, absolutely.

WdG: So the fact that it was *American* history is just because you were in the U.S.?

PW: Yes, I think so. The moment I came here, I found that I was intoxicated by the U.S. There was always magic about American things in New Zealand. I mean, American cars were rare; it was like Havana. Because of import substitution, new cars were just not brought in. . . . [And] my mother got American magazines. She got *McCall's* and *The Ladies Home Journal* and then later on a California one, *Sunset*. And these magazines were a revelation to me as a little boy. I read anything. I just read things. So, you know, there were people with jugs full of orange juice and four door convertibles playing

record players in the country. It was just an amazing place, the United States.

WdG: I think I recorded accurately something you said during your recent talk at the Society: you said that you're especially interested in "great things of history happening while ordinary people are going about their lives." Does that sound like something you would say? This is your chance to elaborate: is there a takeaway message that you hope to impart by this kind of approach? I mean, is there something unique and advantageous about this approach to capturing the past?

PW: I mean, the key there is that ordinary people are witness to history and that history is going about us all the time. We are in the midst of it. We are in the midst of what happened before, and we're also in the midst of what's happening now. There is something about the lives of ordinary people that I

find persuasive—or the ordinary lives of famous important people.

WdG: Ok, this also alludes to something else you said very specifically [at that lecture]: as your starting point for determining the look and the feel, the composition and mood of a history painting, you mentioned “first person voice—stories—moments.” So, how do you actually start to envision the composition?

PW: I am at my best when other people want something—when they choose something or they know something they want—because that saves me having to think up what the subject is. I’m not very good at guessing what people want, what the public wants, but I am very good at giving people what they want if they know what they want. Once I’m commissioned, that’s what I am best at. Which is pretty unusual for artists. I like the constraints; I find them freeing. So, provided I have the subject . . . next, there is an impulse—an irresistible impulse to do a painting. And once I have that impulse, which I can feel in my body, it’s visceral. Then if I’m lucky, I walk around with that feeling. It’s a real pleasant feeling—this impulse, this urge. Kind of slightly blinding, like other overwhelming urges. Then I usually have what I can only describe as a visionary moment; it comes to me, what I’m going to do.



LIBRARY FOR THE WHOLE AMERICAN PEOPLE (1821),
36" x 60" oil on canvas

I am fascinated by how things are made, especially buildings when they were built by manpower alone. Fittingly, the means and crafts used to build the Library of Congress in the center block of the Capitol were largely unchanged from ancient Rome.

Now, my dad studied philosophy by correspondence, and one of the things he learned—and I don’t know which philosopher said it, but he believed this, he used to tell me this—is that we have the answers to all our questions in us. It’s just a matter of getting access to them. And there does seem to be a certain

truth to that. Suddenly, and when the answer comes, you recognize it as though you are recognizing something familiar; it’s not like some random crazy thing. Like, I’m working on this “bird’s eye view”—this L’Enfant’s “bird’s eye view” [of early Washington, D.C.]—and I’ve been struggling . . . But last night, it wasn’t enough of what I thought of to make it *compelling*, because a painting doesn’t just have to tell a story and everything else. It has to be a compelling painting. It has to succeed as a visual image, which is gripping to the public and memorable, so it will stick in people’s minds. But then it came to me last night, how I was going to do it or how I might do it. It just came, and I immediately wrote it on the back on an envelope because sometimes those things are very ephemeral. I’m sure you as a historian, when you’re writing something, say “Oh yes, of course, a connection” . . . and then the phone rings.

WdG: How do you convey the “ring of truth” in the details of your paintings?

PW: Oh, the “ring of truth.” That is a very complicated thing, making things seem real and not false. There are a couple of things. I like all kinds of paintings; I have a very catholic taste in art. But the key, I feel, that makes a painting interesting or uninteresting is whether it was done sincerely, whether the artist was truly committed to what he was doing or whether it was just something he knocked out. I don’t know, maybe he was a designer and thought he would become an artist. Perhaps actually being sincere about what you’re doing gives authenticity. I try to be sincere. There is no irony in my work. It is not ironic. I have no interest in irony and I don’t get it.

WdG: What does that mean, irony in art?

PW: You know, you try to take the piss out of whatever it is you’re pretending to do. It’s all ironic, nothing is sincere. You don’t actually mean anything. I mean, I understand it in speech because I come from that English tradition of saying the opposite of what you mean. But in painting, I have no interest in that. I think the other thing that gives it authenticity is trying to think that I’m in the painting. I’m immersed in the painting and every aspect of the period and whatever it is that I am painting. And I am also an art historian and I have worked as a copyist and I understand the way things work, that are represented in the period I am presenting. Often you will find history painting, in the 1850s or 1900s, 1950s, 70s, looks like paintings of those periods. Like, the terrific *National Geographic* illustrations from the 1950s and 60s, when they were doing historical books. Those illustrators were fantastic, but there’s no way of showing the sense of the real period. I mean,



GEORGE WASHINGTON, ARCHITECT, 36" x 48" oil on canvas

This painting was commissioned to explain the expansion and development of George Washington's Mount Vernon, for which he was the architect. Washington was a man of extraordinary and diverse talents and great taste, as exemplified in his home.

Betty Crocker could pop out and be right at home there. Illustrators were taught what was the common parlance in the period. I never learned illustration. I would have made much more money if I was an illustrator. But I have a passion for painting particularly of the 18th and 19th centuries, and of popular prints. Particularly I'm very interested in how events were presented to the public and how they understood them and what amused the public.

WdG: You said something that I want to pick up on: you see yourself in the painting. You've said before that artists don't have a luxury that more academic historians have, because you have to fill in every square inch of your "text," your canvas.

PW: Indeed. I have to think about things that would be . . . for example, if you were writing a book about George Washington or someone important, the drainage system would be certainly of no importance. But if you're doing a picture, maybe the drainage system is in a central part of what you're painting. You can't just smudge it or go impressionistic and hope for the

best. That's the sort of tension—it's like the struggle between good and evil. You have to keep painting what you want, but you have to want what's real and what was real in the period.

WdG: Tell me what kind of sources you consult to create this perfect surrounding? "Perfect" in the sense of complete.

PW: There was no TV in New Zealand; it didn't start until I was ten. I was the last kid raised without TV. So books were extremely important to me. Architectural plans—those were incredibly helpful because it's an essential part of so much of my work. I had quite a technical education, so I did drafting and I can read plans. I got a good education for what I finally ended up doing. It was, like, perfect—but who would have guessed?

I consult historians. I have extremely knowledgeable friends and people I can call up. Almost without exception, they are incredibly generous sharing their thoughts and knowledge, because I am not in competition with writers. In fact, I feel like

I am adding to what they are doing. Most of the public in general are not going to read a Ph.D thesis, but there is a chance they will look at a painting.

WdG: When we first talked, you said to remind you about the gasolier. Was that one of your research questions?



ENTRY HALL TUDOR PLACE, 60" x 48" oil on canvas
Some important Washington historic interiors remain intact and perfectly preserved. That is the case of the entry hall designed by William Thornton (first architect of the Capitol) at Tudor Place. The Peter family did a remarkable job of preserving not only the physical space but also the atmosphere of the house. The spectacular enfilade of rooms is almost unchanged from when Lafayette visited the house in 1824.

PW: It's connected to research. I was working on a project about the history of the Capitol and I was working with Diane Skvarla, who was Senate curator, and I was examining some ancient photos she had given me of Senate hallways for one of the paintings. And I recognized that the gasolier in the stereoscopic photo looked identical to one in the boiler room here at Tudor Place.¹ So I told Diane, and she came over and looked at

it. Eventually, they decided it was in fact absolutely identical. I find that, when you're an artist, you're not always taken with the same authority as a historian. I mean, I make mistakes. But I'm usually pretty accurate if I stick it in a painting. Anyway, they decided it was [the same gasolier]. It's now hung in the Capitol in the Trophy Room.

I think I understand now how it came to be in Tudor Place, which is, in itself, a good story. Paul Bartlett, the sculptor, was married to a Peter family relative and he did the sculptures on the east portico of the Capitol in about 1900. When he died, a lot of his sculpture stuff ended up here in storage at Tudor Place. They have since moved on to another museum. But I believe that it came with Paul's stuff after he died, and I think he got it while he was working on the Capitol, and that was about the time it was pulled out and thrown away. Now I don't have historical evidence for that but I am just about certain that that is the connection, and no one has offered a better one.

It's the kind of thing an artist would grasp. . . . It was a mystery I was interested in. It took thirteen years to get it hanging in the Capitol, and it's been immensely satisfying to see it restored and returned to the Capitol.

WdG: And it had nothing to do with painting per se. Just your visual memory. . . .

PW: . . . And it didn't gain me one cent. [laughter]

WdG: What's your favorite topic that you have ever painted? Is there a favorite period, favorite setting, favorite episode?

PW: I guess anything to do with Washington. I am in love with Washington. There is no doubt. I wake up and squeal with joy.

WdG: Was that true from the first time you came to DC?

PW: Oh, yes, I knew I was coming; I think it was in 1991. Just before [President Bill] Clinton. It was such a diverse city and so fascinating. I have never been bored in Washington. It's just gripping.

To get back to your original question: anything with ladies and beautiful clothes, I have a weakness for. Especially, clothing of the 1860s and 70s, because it is so extreme. I like pretty ladies. I like painting things, I like representing surfaces, textiles, furniture. It's taken me years and years to develop the skills to actually describe surfaces, and doing it gives me great satisfaction. Like shiny brass . . . I mean, you can say "Oh, it's a parlor trick." But I tell you, it's not nothing to have learned how to do it. In recent years we are in a Dadaist revival and



SPIRIT OF WASHINGTON (1842),
60" x 60" oil on canvas

Recreating long-lost interiors is especially satisfying. This is Charles Bulfinch's original Capitol Dome with the open oculus and viewing area. When the Washington family refused to part with the first president's body, which had been planned for the crypt beneath the Rotunda, Horatio Greenough's massive neoclassical sculpture was commissioned instead. The nudity proved problematic, however, and it was moved outdoors.

PW: Yes. I mean irony like, "we'll put a manhole cover in the middle of the floor, and there's my art." As long as it's sincere, any type of art grips me. But how can you tell if a manhole cover lying on the floor is sincere?

WdG: What is the favorite painting you've done?

PW: I am so critical of my own work. Frequently it takes years before I really take satisfaction in my own work, because I see the flaws or things I could have done more perfectly or better. Years ago, my first studio in DC was with this old couple—Evelyn and Gardner Patterson—who lived in Logan Circle. He was many things, and was in charge of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton.

I came downstairs one day and I said to him, "I am just not satisfied with what I am doing. I am never satisfied with what I am doing," and he said, "that's how it should be." And that was my lesson on that. People who are satisfied with what they

skill is not part of Dada.² So skill has been played low but I am the son of craftspeople; I put a lot of store in skill.

WdG: Does that speak to the irony in art, that you were talking about?



THE GREAT CHEESE (1837), 48" x 108" oil on canvas

The East Room of the White House was not decorated at all until Andrew Jackson took on the job, creating one of the most extraordinary interiors in the building's history, full of color and magnificence. The painting shows the reception Jackson held for eating the 1000-pound cheese he had been given.



are doing are usually doing things that aren't terribly good. So it's years before I like my own paintings.

But the painting of Nathan Hale³ for the National Veterans Shrine at the American Village in Montevallo, AL pleases me because it has helped lots of children understand important things about American history. I did it in the form of a nineteenth-century parade banner, and surrounding the figure of the boy-hero, I painted a series of vignettes telling his story, like a graphic novel. History painting is an excellent way to tell stories, which is the key to teaching history.

I also like the painting of John Quincy Adams going for a swim—well, his servant going for a swim, in the [Tiber] creek, south of the White House. I

ONE LIFE TO LOSE: NATHAN HALE, 96" x 48" oil on canvas

I am fascinated by the popular arts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and how patriotic symbols and stories were used to inspire. This painting tells the story of Nathan Hale, the boy hero, who was one of the first American spies recruited by General Washington. (left)

TIBER CREEK: THE BATHERS (1825), 48" x 72" oil on canvas

This painting, which tells the story of how John Quincy Adams nearly drowned during a swimming outing, also gives the fullest account of the environment about the White House in 1825. The plants and animals in the foreground are all detailed in early accounts by naturalists of the area around Tiber Creek (now covered over by Constitution Ave, NW). It also shows Thomas Jefferson's ha ha (a wall below ground level) and his magnificent gate onto Pennsylvania Avenue. Most importantly, it shows that the area was not the swamp as is now popularly believed, but part of the idyllic landscape selected by George Washington for the Federal City. (below)



like it because it's big and has a lot of things in it that amuse me. It took a long time and the longer you take on things, the more time there is to . . . I mean, some great art work is created very quickly. But it tends to be more like the cover of a newspaper: it can be immediately arresting, but it's not much for long-term reflection. The things that we want to look at for a long period, often took a long time to make. It takes a long period of time to sort out and decode what the maker thought and did, and how it was done, and all the rest. . . .

WdG: And the JQA does that for you. Well, there is a lot going on: there's architecture, weather, animals, human activity . . .

PW: There's a good story.

WdG: This isn't something I thought of before, but is there a way for artists of historical paintings to make sure . . . I mean, do you create a "caption," a discursive caption, for every painting you do, in case people don't know what they are looking at?

PW: It depends on the painting but, yes, writing has an important part in art. Now, for a painting, one of my tests [for] if it's art is, if it was found on the street, would it be recognized as art, would someone pick it up? There was a famous case in Oakland, New Zealand, where I am from, where an art collection was stolen and much of it laid on the street and was thrown away. Someone recognized something and got it, but much of the art had lain on the street for some period. In 1000 years no one will be interested in what was written [as a caption]. The writing will disappear. Art must survive entirely on its own strength. So even if you don't know it's John Quincy Adams and the White House, the beauty and skill of the work, I hope, will keep it saved from the bin. But certainly if you are doing a history painting, people will read and believe what they read before they look and believe what they see. So you have to give them something to read.

WdG: When I'm in an art museum, I notice that the first thing people do is go up and look at the caption.

PW: And that has an advantage, because it gets them up close to the painting. And they're more likely to look into the painting. Because a lot of people don't use their eyes very successfully or very skillfully. It's like swiping through things on your phone: "like that...don't like that...like that...don't like that..." There's such a plethora of images.

WdG: What would you still want to paint about the Capitol?

PW: Oh, there are so many things I haven't touched on. I am extremely interested in construction, in how things are built,

and building, both for itself and also as a metaphor. Everything that's connected with the Capitol is so intimately . . . it's the physical expression. I mean, I think that if George Washington . . . he fought the [Revolutionary] war and created the United States. He really created the documents that got us going, or was central to them, and he created the Federal City and most importantly the Capitol itself. He stopped work on the White House in order to work on the Capitol. So we know the Capitol was the most important thing. So it has almost magical significance to me. And there's so many early parts of the Capitol I really haven't touched on: the Latrobe staircase, I started to fiddle with . . . the Brumidi corridors are worth recording, although they're kind of recorded in themselves. I mean, there's just so many great spaces in the Capitol.

WdG: What's your favorite space in the Capitol?



THE MARBLE ROOM: AN EVENING'S WORK (1871),
48" x 48" oil on canvas

I loved Sen. Robert Byrd's story of the Senate pages shooing bats out of the Marble Room before they could invade the Senate Chamber. The boyish antics in this grand columned space seemed emblematic of life in the early Capitol.

PW: The Marble Room is very good. I'm particularly fond of it. . . . There's quite a few offices and utilitarian spaces. One of the most interesting spaces is the old baths—baths that Senators used to use, giant marble baths—still there in the basement.

WdG: Are you waiting at this point for commissions for these works, or would you do them on your own? Is there a market for them?



TAD LINCOLN ON THE WHITE HOUSE ROOF, 36" x 48" oil on canvas
My friend Fran White found this great story about how Tad Lincoln was given a Union uniform during the Civil war and had a fort on the White House roof, with a toy cannon to repel potential invaders. The story allowed me to recreate the bucolic landscape around the White House at that time, with the half-finished Washington Monument in the background.

PW: I am very interested in amusing the public, but the public by and large is not greatly interested in buying art and things that are for popular amusement. Someone has to buy them for the public. So therein lies the quandary of the history painter: you need a public-spirited patron or organization that really wants to bring the message or tell people what they have, to tell the public, because the public isn't going to get together and chip in and say, "what we really need is a picture of the Capitol." I mean, artists in olden times, [Samuel] Morse for instance,⁴ painted huge paintings on spec [speculation], and they toured them and charged admission. But poor old Morse's *The House at Night* didn't make any money. If anyone ever deserved to make money off a painting, it was Morse off that one. I mean . . . the way you've got the chandelier down to light it, all the things going on in that painting. . . . It works as a painting; it's gripping.

WdG: It kind of fits your definition of painting "ordinary history." I mean, it's not the House in actual session. . . .

PW: Yes, you have to interpret it. It's not someone giving their famous speech. Those histrionic paintings often appeal only to the person giving the speech.

WdG: The "Grand Manner" of history paintings, are those days over? Is painting like that ever coming back?

PW: Until irony is over a bit. We have such a distrust of great leaders, that I think a painting in the Grand Manner would probably be perceived as being mocking or in some way ironic. It would be very difficult to do with a straight face. Whereas painting ordinary people, no one thinks that's ironic because ordinariness is . . . ordinary.



NOTES

1. Occupying an estate covering several square blocks in the heart of the Georgetown, Tudor Place is a landmark neo-classical mansion built in 1816 by merchant-planter Robert Peter and his wife Martha Custis Peter, granddaughter of Martha Washington, according to designs by Dr. William Thornton, the initial architect of the Capitol. The Peter family continued to reside there until 1983, since which time it has been opened to the public.

2. Dada was an international movement arising from the wreckage of WWI, characterized by extreme anti-bourgeois political engagement and the rejection of prevailing cultural standards and the elevation of nonsensical art.

3. Nathan Hale (1755-76) was a Connecticut schoolteacher who was commissioned a lieutenant in the Continental Army at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, but accepted an assignment spying on British troop movements during the campaign for New York, when he was captured and hanged.

4. Samuel F.B. Morse (1791-1872) completed his masterpiece painting of a night session of the House in 1822, but his commercial failure as an artist led him to inventing. His other great achievement also had a vital Capitol connection: in 1844 he tapped out the first message on his new invention, the telegraph, from the Old Supreme Court chamber.

SOCIETY NEWS

CAPITOL COMMITTEE UPDATES

USCHS thanks those who renewed, upgraded, or joined the Capitol Committee (June–October 2016).

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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Altria Group, Inc.
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National Restaurant Association
Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association
Volkswagen Group of America, Inc.

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The Aluminum Association
American Beverage Association
BASF Corporation
General Mills, Inc.
Proctor & Gamble
Northwestern Mutual
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Toyota Motors North America, Inc.

The Society deeply appreciates all the Capitol Committee members for their continued involvement and support of its educational mission.

For more information about the many terrific benefits available to you as a Capitol Committee member, please contact Marilyn Green, Director, Corporate Giving at (202) 543-8919 x21 or mgreen@uschs.org, or Jennifer Romberg, Manager of Development and Outreach at (202) 543-8919 x23 or jromberg@uschs.org.

Society Hosts Annual Summer Brown Bag Series

During an extended 2016 August brown bag lecture series, six presenters examined topics ranging from art in the Capitol to DC around the turn of the twentieth century. C-SPAN covered several of the talks; to see them online, visit www.c-span.org and search for the speaker's name (then click on "person" to see all videos featuring him or her) or for "U.S. Capitol Historical Society."

As always, each noon lecture was free and open to the public, and attendees enthusiastically questioned speakers after their talks. Looking ahead to 2017, USCHS is already planning the annual Black History Month lecture and spring symposium on the history of Congress. Recordings of past versions of those events can also be found on C-SPAN.



USCHS Fellow Dr. **Debra Hanson** and Chief Historian **William diGiacomantonio** introduce her presentation on William Powell's painting *The Battle of Lake Erie*. The research behind that talk also produced the article on the painting that begins on p. 13 of this issue of *The Capitol Dome*. Powell painted during the rise of photography as medium to depict war; this work shows Commodore Oliver Perry at a crucial moment during the 1813 battle on Lake Erie. (left)



Artist **Peter Waddell** spoke about his process for painting moments from history, both on traditional canvases and in murals and old police callboxes. USCHS interviewed him and covered some additional facets of his work; see p. 31 of this issue of *The Capitol Dome*. C-SPAN recorded this event. (above)



Dr. **Kathleen Bartoloni-Tuazon** spoke about her recent book, *For Fear of an Elective King: George Washington and the Presidential Title Controversy of 1789*. Her presentation included some of the proposed titles for the new office of president of the United States and noted George Washington's relief when, after a prolonged and public debate, a simple version was chosen. Bartoloni-Tuazon signed copies of her book after the talk and Q&A. (left)



Author **Mark Ozer** returned to discuss his latest book, *Washington DC, the National Shrine: 1890-1940*. His talk focused on the early part of this period, especially the construction of Union Station. Ozer signed books afterward; C-SPAN also recorded this talk. (above)



Sometime USCHS board member (and author of the article on p. 11) Dr. **Ken Bowling** spoke about the ways that the idea of a westward empire influenced thinking about the American Revolution and debates about building the capital city. C-SPAN was on hand for this event, which included audience questions on slavery, Latin America, western exploration, economics, and more. (left)

USCHS's own William C. diGiacomantonio wrapped up the six-part series with a visual tour of depictions of George Washington. C-SPAN recorded his survey of the various ways artists have portrayed Washington (and their various purposes in doing so). (right)



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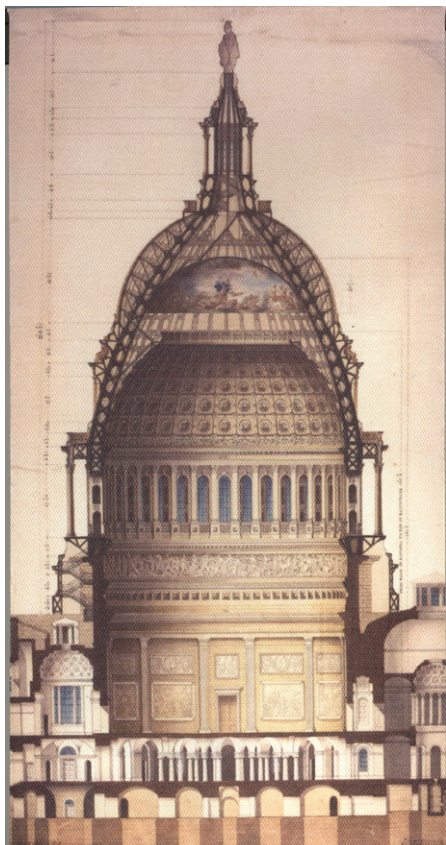
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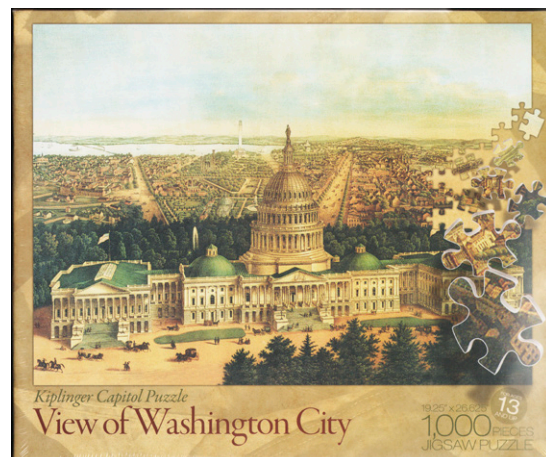
CANVAS CROSS SECTION ARCHITECTURAL PANEL



This 1859 U.S. Capitol Dome Section is a drawing by the Philadelphia architect Thomas U. Walter, who was also the architect of the House and Senate extensions. Stretched canvas on frame gives the appearance of an original art piece (6" x 12"). Perfect for alcoves and small areas.

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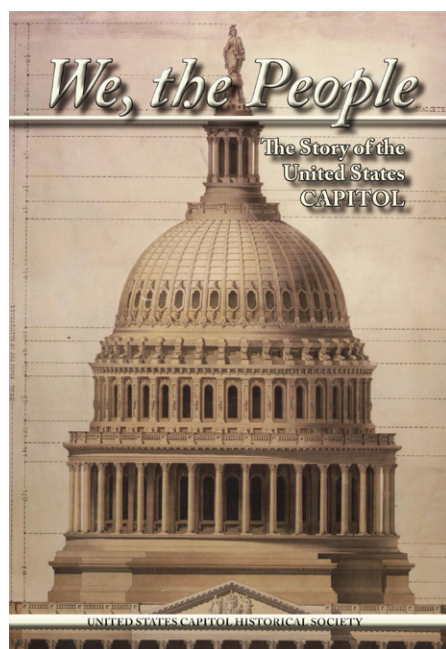
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EAST FRONT COVERLET

This 3-ply cotton coverlet is a very stunning reproduction of the east front of the U.S. Capitol based on the photography of noted Washington, DC, photographer Carol M. Highsmith. 100% cotton. (54" x 70")

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