

ATHENAEUM ANNOTATIONS

Fall 1984

Walter Portraits

Among the most significant acquisitions by The Athenaeum in recent months have been three oil portraits—two by John Neagle and one by Emanuel Leutze—of Thomas Ustick Walter and his first and second wives. These portraits were known to have been executed but had long been lost. Recently rediscovered and acquired by The Athenaeum from the Walter family now living in Colorado, the paintings have just been conserved by Joseph Amarotico of The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and are on exhibition in the ground-floor hall of The Athenaeum.

Thomas Ustick Walter (1804–1887) was born in Philadelphia, trained by William Strickland, and went on to be widely recognized as America's leading mid-nineteenth-century architect. Walter's many Philadelphia buildings include Moyamensing Prison, Girard College, Andalusia, and Portico Row. He is best remembered as the architect of the dome and wings of the United States Capitol—the most symbolically important and controversial building in the United States. Late in life he made major contributions to the design and decoration of the Philadelphia City Hall.

In 1834, Walter commissioned John Neagle (1794–1865), one of Philadelphia's outstanding nineteenth-century portraitists, to paint both his wife, Mary Ann Walter, and himself. Neagle recorded in his diary on October 25, 1834, "made a pencil study of Mr. & Mrs. Thos. U. Walter . . . preparatory to two portraits 25 x 30." The paintings appear to have been finished the following year. T. U. Walter's is inscribed on the back in Neagle's hand, "painted by John Neagle, 1835, Philadelphia," and his receipt survives in the Walter papers at The Athenaeum: "received July 7, 1835 of Thomas U. Walter One Hundred and Eighty Dolls. in full for Portraits of Wife and Self" (figs. 1 & 3).

The first Mrs. Walter, Mary Ann Elizabeth Hancocks (1806–1847), was also born in Philadelphia, the daughter of Robert and Marian Hancocks. She married Thomas Ustick Walter in 1824 and died twenty-three years later following the birth of their elev-

(continued on page 2)



FIG. 1. *Thomas Ustick Walter (1804–1887) by John Neagle, 1835. Detail of restored oil on canvas portrait now in The Athenaeum of Philadelphia Collection.*

SPECIAL CONSERVATION ISSUE

Libraries and museums are often called "conserving" institutions because they identify, acquire, preserve, and make available for research, exhibition, and publication the cultural artifacts of the past. An essential step in this process is the arresting of deterioration or the restoration of previous damage. In some cases this intervention may be simple cleaning and stabilization, but occasionally "heroic" measures may be necessary if an object is to survive or be available for study and exhibition. This issue of the Annotations documents the conservation of a range of objects that recently have come into The Athenaeum's collection.



FIG. 2. *Amanda Gardiner Walter (1821–1892) by Emanuel Leutze, 1852. Detail of restored oil on canvas portrait now in The Athenaeum of Philadelphia Collection.*

PORTRAITS (continued from page 1)

enth child. According to her husband, "she was a lady of estimable qualities of mind, and of genial and engaging manners, fulfilling her duties to society with exactness, and propriety, and to her family with tenderness and love. She managed well the affairs of her household, and trained her children with prudence and affection."

A year after the death of his first wife, Walter married a woman seventeen years his junior. Amanda Gardiner (1821–1892), who had been born in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Richard and Hannah Gardiner, bore two children by Thomas U. Walter and raised six of his children by his first wife. The second Mrs. Walter was painted by the German-born allegorical-historical artist Emanuel Leutze (1816–1868) who is best known for his "Washington Crossing the Delaware" (1850). He was brought to Philadelphia as a child where he ultimately studied with John A. Smith. In the 1840s Leutze studied and worked in Dusseldorf,

returning to the United States to work for Walter at the Capitol where he executed the great mural "Westward the Course of Empire." Walter recorded in his diary (preserved at The Athenaeum) on April 1, 1852, "worked at plans of Washington . . . took Mrs. W & children to Capitol to see Leutze's picture . . . dined at the Presidents with Mrs. Walter." Leutze boldly signed the canvas of the beautiful Amanda Walter, "E. Leutze 1852" (fig. 2).

When Leutze's picture was completed, Walter ordered three identical Rococo Revival gilt frames. Since the earlier Neagle portraits were slightly larger than Leutze's, Walter had them reduced to a uniform 25 × 21 inches. Some idea of the loss caused by this resizing can be obtained by comparing T. U. Walter's portrait with the lithograph after the portrait drawn by Albert Newsam and published by Lehman and Duval in 1836 (fig. 4). Prominent in the background is a draped classical column suggesting Girard College (1833–1848). Beneath this (and now hidden

by the frame liner) is the Egyptian Revival Moyamensing Prison, begun in 1831 and completed in 1835, the year the canvas was executed. According to the lithograph, Walter originally held a drawing scale or slide rule in his left hand.

For one hundred thirty years these portraits hung together in Walter's home and the homes of his daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter where they suffered the ravages of benign neglect. When the portraits reached Amarotico's lab, the unlined canvases were found to be brittle and weak. Each painting had suffered minor punctures and the paint film showed signs of cleavage and minor losses. Minor repainting (dating from when the paintings were exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Art in the 1930s) was evident and a layer of dirty, yellowed, natural resin varnish covered the surfaces. There was bronze spray paint along the edges of the canvases where someone had attempted to retouch the frames and there were small drops of white paint that indicated the portraits had not been protected at some time when the ceiling above them had been painted!

A close examination by Athenaeum staff and conservators prior to acquisition revealed that the portraits could be conserved and returned to their original, handsome appearance for a relatively modest expense. Fortunately The Athenaeum's conservation fund was adequate immediately to restore the paintings and frames. Each portrait was faced with tissue and a wax adhesive and then removed from its stretcher. The original canvases were then impregnated with a non-aqueous, wax-resin adhesive on a vacuum hot table and lined with new Belgian linen using a sheet of fibermat interleave material. Then the surface wax was dissolved and removed and the facing tissue peeled away from the paint film prior to reapplying the canvases to their original stretchers. Mild hydrocarbon solvents were used to dissolve and remove the old varnish and paint spatters. Losses were filled with inert white pigments ground in an acrylic emulsion binder, the surfaces coated with a retouching varnish, and the paintings photographed to record the minor losses. These losses were then carefully in-painted using pigments ground in a non-yellowing, synthetic resin binder, and a protective coat of varnish consisting of Rohm & Haas resin B-72 in toluene was sprayed on the paintings. Fomecor panels attached to the reverse sides protect the canvases from accidental punctures.

With the Rococo Revival frames restored by Howard S. Serlick at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Walter portraits make a handsome and appropriate addition to the permanent exhibition at The Athenaeum.

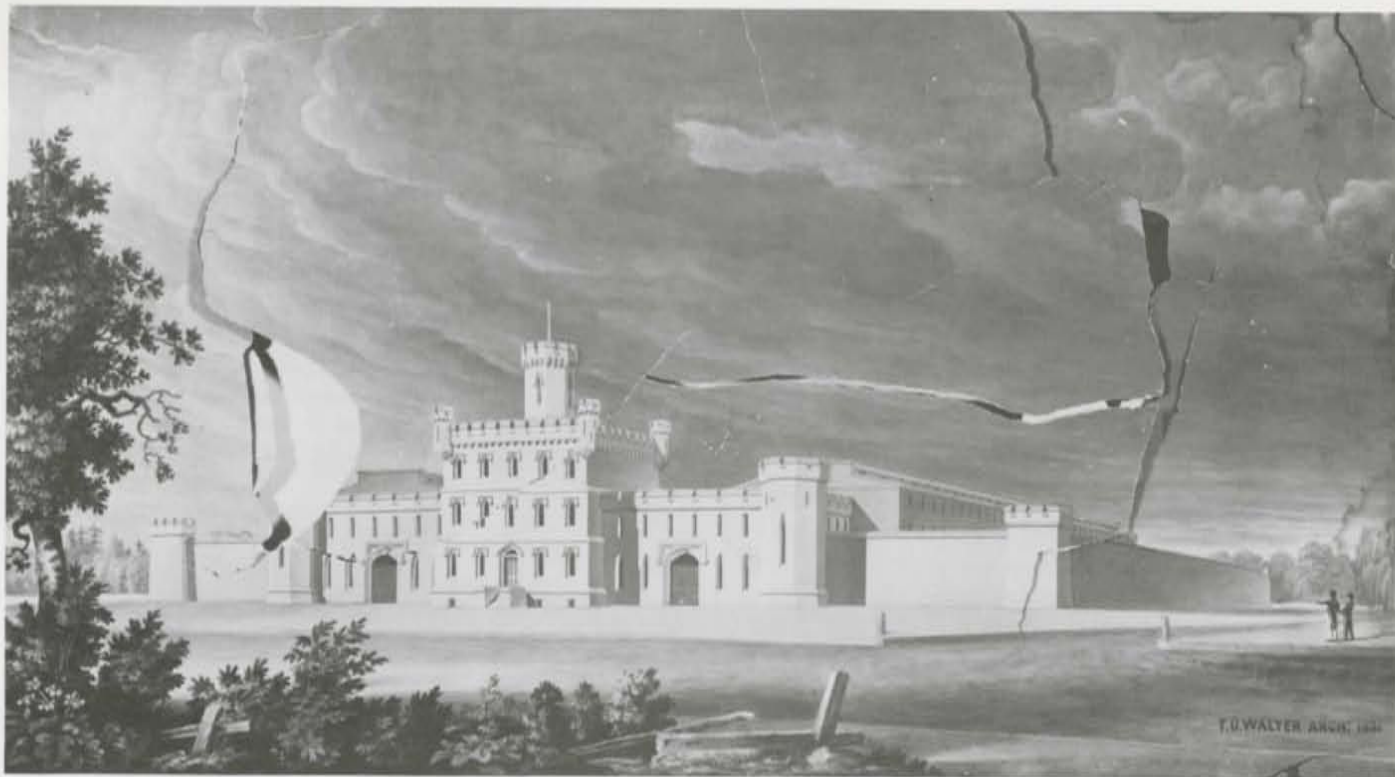


FIG. 5. *Philadelphia County Prison (called Moyamensing), landscaped perspective, Thomas Ustick Walter, architect, 1831. Pre-restoration photograph showing damage resulting from improper storage prior to acquisition by The Athenaeum.*

Restoration of Walter Drawings Continues

When The Athenaeum purchased 450 drawings from the heirs of the Philadelphia architect Thomas Ustick Walter in 1982, most were found to be in excellent condition. The majority of the drawings had been stored in two boxes that Walter designed for them when he left Washington early in the 1860s. Those same boxes preserved the drawings as the family moved from Philadelphia to Baltimore and then west, ultimately coming to rest on a ranch in Colorado. Unfortunately, fate was not so kind to a dozen watercolor renderings that Walter particularly admired and had stretched into glazed frames for public exhibition and then display at home. Several years ago these framed drawings were soaked in a flood. Since they were under glass, mold formed in the humid atmosphere. As the drawings dried, the paper shrank, cracked, and split.

When Walter biographer Robert B. Ennis and Athenaeum Executive Director Roger Moss packed the collection for shipment to Philadelphia, it was obvious that five of the drawings were too fragile to make the trip east. In addition to flood damage, the glass had been broken during subsequent storage, causing abrasions and losses to the surface of the drawings. Through the good offices of Eleanor M. Gehres and Bonnie Hardwick of the Western History Department of the Denver Public Library, the five large watercolor

renderings were stored at the Library until being transferred into the care of Constance Rae Wanke, conservator of the Colorado Conservation Center in Denver, Colorado.

Writing to The Athenaeum after examining the Moyamensing Prison watercolor (fig. 5), Ms. Wanke remarked, "The object has been mounted to a wooden strainer, gotten wet and shrunk, and broken away from the stretcher bars. The paper is quite dark and desiccated due to age. Water staining occurs along the right edge and in the upper right corner. Insect damage occurs in numerous areas of the surface. There is surface dirt on the recto with major areas of loss in the design." Following the conservation (fig. 6), Ms. Wanke admitted that she had despaired for the drawing when she first saw it. "This piece was in the worst condition of the five," left behind by The Athenaeum as being too fragile to move, "with major (uneven) shrinkage to the paper after it was wet, and numerous areas of abrasions and losses to the surface of the paper from broken glass. The object was removed from the stretcher bars. Adhesive residue was removed from the edges of the object on both the recto and verso. Light dry cleaning was done to both sides using opaline. The object was humidified and flattened. Insect incrustations and foreign matter were removed from the surface manually with the aid of a scalpel. The object was

washed in consecutive baths of distilled water until clear. Tears were repaired using Japanese tissue and rice starch paste containing methyl cellulose. The tears were brought together a bit awkwardly because of the unevenness of the shrinkage. A triple backing was placed on the object for stability and strength again using Japanese tissue and rice starch paste containing methyl cellulose. Inserts were made using 100% acid-free rag papers. In-painting was done to inserts and areas of the surface were abraded and thinned using a variety of materials: colored pencils, watercolors, magna colors, and pastels. The object was flattened under blotters and weights, and matted in a 100% acid-free rag mat."

While Ms. Wanke was taking heroic measures to save the Moyamensing Prison watercolor, the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia was surveying several hundred of the Walter drawings under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. As funds became available (see, "Profile of Project Funding," page 5), drawings were sent to the Conservation Center. The first to go was Robert Mills's 1812 watercolor of the Pennsylvania State House (Independence Hall), one of the earliest surviving drawings by an architect of that national shrine. By the time the Mills drawing returned, funds were available to conserve



FIG. 6. Philadelphia County Prison (called Moyamensing), landscaped perspective, Thomas Ustick Walter, architect, 1831. Post-restoration photograph of drawing on left page.

a bound portfolio of eighty-nine c. 1854 drawings for the United States Capitol by Walter.

This portfolio posed several problems. First, Walter had combined in one leather and marbled board binding (that had since deteriorated) sixty-nine watercolors on heavy wove paper with ink graphite and red ink notations, thirteen tracing paper drawings (also with graphite and red ink notes), and seven drawings on architect's linen. These different papers and media, some of which had been pasted onto each other, required great skill and care to conserve. Since it was appropriate to maintain the original relationship of the drawings within the portfolio, it was determined to encapsulate every drawing in 3 mil polyester film with the leaves then bound into two-post binders and each binder placed in a two-tray rare book box.

After testing the stability of the paper, inks, and adhesives (fig. 7), this procedure was followed: "the volume was collated and disbound by cutting through the linen guards at the spine. The drawings on architect's linen found on the verso of several leaves were removed by inserting a teflon spatula. The drawings on tracing paper were removed using the enzyme protease in a gel medium to dissolve the protein-based adhesive adhering the tracing paper to the verso of several leaves. The leaves of the book were surface cleaned using solid eraser. Those with soluble red lines were fixed with parchment size. All

of the leaves were washed by first wetting them with denatured alcohol and then floating them on calcinated deionized water. The paper and linen guards were peeled away while the drawings were wet. The remaining adhesive was removed later using methyl cellulose poultices. The leaves were humidified and flattened between polyester web and

blotters in a press. Adhesive was removed from the verso of the drawings on architect's linen using hot water. The stains left by the adhesive were somewhat reduced but could not be removed. These drawings were humidified and flattened between polyester web and blotters in a press. Adhesive was removed (continued on page 5)



FIG. 7. Lois Price, Conservator, Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, Philadelphia, conducts a prototype treatment on a Thomas Ustick Walter United States Capitol mantel design c. 1854. (Photo courtesy of CCAHA.)

RESTORATION (continued from page 4)

from the verso of the drawings on tracing paper using hot water. Tears and detached pieces were mended with Japanese paper and wheat starch paste. Each drawing was deacidified by spraying it with a non-aqueous deacidification agent to deposit magnesium carbonate in the paper."

Now maintained at a constant temperature and humidity—and protected from ultraviolet light—these drawings may be expected to survive for centuries to come. As funds permit, drawings for the United States Capitol, Girard College, and other important Philadelphia buildings such as the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul will be given similar treatment.



FIG. 3. *Mary Ann Elizabeth Hancocks Walter (1806-1847) by John Neagle, 1835. Detail of restored oil on canvas portrait now in The Athenaeum of Philadelphia Collection.*



FIG. 4. *Thomas Ustick Walter, lithograph drawn by Albert Neusam after the Neagle portrait published by Lehman Durval, 1836. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia Collection.*

Profile of Project Funding

ROGER W. MOSS,
Executive Director

Recently a member asked, "How can The Athenaeum afford to acquire—let alone conserve—expensive objects such as the Walter drawings and portraits? Even with generous annual giving, don't we run narrowly in the black? There can't be extra money for major purchases in the budget, no matter how appropriate they may be."

Especially at the time of year when The Athenaeum appeals to its members for special giving to close the gap between income and expenses, this is a fair question. The Thomas Ustick Walter drawings and manuscripts were the most expensive purchases for the collection in the 170-year history of this institution. *And I am delighted to report that not one cent of the acquisition or conservation costs came from dues, endowment or program income of the society.* The entire project was funded by special contributions and foundation grants.

Once the decision had been made by the Board of Directors to negotiate for the drawings and manuscripts, several members volunteered to provide a "war chest" of interest-free loans. When the collection was purchased, the loans floated for six months until gifts and grants could be raised specifically for the project. It pleases me to acknowledge publicly the assistance of the following persons and foundations in making the acquisition possible:

Barra Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Mr. Nathaniel Burt, Princeton, NJ
Mrs. Kenneth W. Gemmill, Bucks County, PA
Dr. Richard H. Howland, Washington, D.C.
Mrs. George C. Keiser, Washington, D.C.
Mrs. Edward S. Lower, Newtown Square, PA
Mrs. John W. McPherson, Bryn Mawr, PA
William Penn Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Mr. George Vaux, Bryn Mawr, PA

It is one thing to raise acquisition funds when objects as important as these are endangered. It is something else to raise *conservation* funds when the drawings and manuscripts are happily secure in a fireproof, humidity-and-temperature-controlled vault. Nonetheless, local and national foundations were approached over a six-month period for conservation grants. The response was gratifying, particularly among foundations outside Philadelphia. Grants ranging from \$500 to \$10,000 were received from the following foundations toward the estimated \$130,000 conservation costs:

Atlantic Richfield Foundation, Los Angeles, CA
Arcadia Foundation, Norristown, PA
Helen Clay Frick Foundation, Pittsburgh, PA
Girard Trust Bank Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Chicago, IL
Knight Foundation, Akron, OH
McLean Contributionship, Bryn Mawr, PA
Oxford Foundation, Oxford, PA
Quaker Chemical Foundation, Conshohocken, PA
Rittenhouse Foundation, Philadelphia, PA
Walden Trust, Pittsburgh, PA

During the past year nearly one hundred Walter drawings have been conserved, most of which are original plans and elevations for the United States Capitol. Without the support of the above-listed foundations, The Athenaeum would not have been able to conserve these national treasures.

Bouvier Armchair Acquired

Through the generosity of Mrs. Richard Darling Patterson of Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, The Athenaeum has acquired an armchair by the Philadelphia *menuisier ébéniste* Michel Bouvier (1792–1874) for display with the often published *secrétaire à abattant* attributed to Bouvier already in The Athenaeum's collection. The chair descended in the Bouvier family through the cabinetmaker's last surviving granddaughter to the late Mr. Patterson in whose memory it has been presented to The Athenaeum.

In 1962, Athenaeum Secretary and Librarian, Francis James Dallett, first published the chair in his article, "Michel Bouvier, Franco-American Cabinetmaker," *Antiques* (February, 1962). Prior to Dallett's research little was known of Bouvier who served in the army of Napoleon I and then emigrated to Philadelphia where he enjoyed the patronage of Joseph Bonaparte—elder brother of Napoleon, sometime King of Spain, and Comte de Survilliers—at his Delaware River estate "Point Breeze" near Bordentown, New Jersey. Through his work for Joseph Bonaparte, Bouvier came to the attention of Stephen Girard and quickly prospered. The young cabinetmaker became the middle-aged merchant; by the 1830s Bouvier was manufacturing less furniture and dealing more in wholesale mahogany and marble.

The Bouvier-Patterson armchair (accession no. 83.3) probably dates from the late 1830s. It has a rare, slip-in, upholstered, scrolled back with scrolled arms and covered arm rests. The most extraordinary feature of the chair is the eagle-head terminals of the arm scrolls (fig. 8). Otherwise the slip seat, curved and veneered front and rear rails with conforming rail directly beneath the slip-in back, and cabriole legs are fairly typical of the



FIG. 8. Armchair by Michel Bouvier, c. 1835–1840, a gift of Mrs. Richard Darling Patterson in memory of Mr. Patterson, 1983. This chair recently has been conserved, reupholstered, and placed on exhibition at The Athenaeum.

period. The chair is primarily of mahogany with secondary wood of tulip poplar.

When the chair arrived at The Athenaeum it was inappropriately upholstered and the fabric had been nailed over the rail below the slip-in back to cover an old repair. Restoration involved regluing all joints with hide glue after replacing the earlier patch and removing several reinforcing screws and nails. The original finish was spot patched and the entire piece polished. Family tradition holds that the chair had originally been covered in horse hair, and this popular and appropriate material has been reinstalled.

Year in and year out more persons come to

The Athenaeum to see the building and the society's handsome collection of fine and decorative arts than come for special lectures and exhibitions. For this reason we continue to acquire appropriate paintings, sculpture, and furniture for the collection while conserving what is already here. During the past two years more objects have been conserved than in any equivalent period in The Athenaeum's history. This has largely been the result of special gifts from those members and foundations that have taken an interest in this little published but vitally important aspect of The Athenaeum of Philadelphia's programs.



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