

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BY

CHARLES W. PEALE,

TO THE

CORPORATION AND CITIZENS

OF

PHILADELPHIA,

ON

**The 18th Day of July, 1816, in Academy Hall, Fourth
Street.**

PHILADELPHIA:

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1816.

INTRODUCTION.

FRIENDLY READER,

WHEN I had heard that the Corporation of the City of Philadelphia, had purchased the State House and the garden annexed, I was much rejoiced, as there then appeared but little doubt in my mind that the Museum would obtain a permanent situation, and be a lasting benefit to the city; knowing that many of the inhabitants had seen how it had been conducted for a series of years, and that I had retired with the view of showing that my children could increase and improve it in the case of my decease.

Great was my surprise when I met a committee on the ultimo, that was appointed to settle the terms on which I should have my Museum continued in the upper part of the State House, to hear that I must pay an annual rent, which amounted to a total expulsion. Under the impression that the councils of the city would shortly have a meeting, I hastily drew up the following address to the honorable the select and common councils and other citizens, which I delivered in the College Hall in Fourth Street, on the 18th ult. Had I taken more time, the discourse might have been better arranged; but as it is a simple statement of my feelings on the rise and progress of my Museum, I hope the courteous reader will overlook all its faults.

C. W. PEALE.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

I HUMBLY beg your kind indulgence and patience, to hear my feeble attempt to illustrate the importance of the study of Natural History, by the aid of a Museum.

Many of this polite assembly have seen the rise and progress of my Museum; have known under what difficulties I have reared it up to its present magnitude: yet doubtless there are many others, who having seen the Museum only in its latter stages of advancement, are unable to conceive, how laborious, how arduous a task it was; so new in all respects in this country, and, withal, promising so little recompense to the author. To them the following information may not be unacceptable.

At the conclusion of the revolutionary war of this country, many British officers from New York, visited Philadelphia; among them was a German surgeon, who at the request of his father (a man of great science in Germany) endeavoured to collect as many of the bones of the mammoth as he could get. He obtained the aid of General Washington to explore a morass in Ulster and Orange Counties in the state of New York; and employed a number of men in digging, and had wagons prepared to transport the wonderful relics they were in search of. But, after obtaining only a few

bones, a tremendous storm of rain put an end to their labours, by overflowing all the grounds; thus blasting all further hopes of success, to the no small disappointment of numerous spectators collected on the occasion.

Doctor Morgan, formerly of Philadelphia, by the aid of his brother, a colonel in our army, obtained a considerable number of mammoth bones from the Salt Lick in Kentucky, near the Ohio river, and among them some very interesting pieces.

The German surgeon endeavoured to purchase those bones of Doctor Morgan, but he would not part with them: he, however, permitted drawings to be made, and I was employed for that purpose.

While those bones were in my possession, they excited much wonder as to what sort of animal they could belong: so large and weighty!

My visiting friends could make only vague conjectures; but all agreed in the same sentiments, that the sight was highly interesting. Therefore my brother-in-law, Colonel Nathaniel Ramsay, proposed that they should be placed in my gallery of portraits of distinguished characters. Thus it was that the idea of a Museum was first suggested.

That the bones of the mammoth should be, sixteen years after, first put together and mounted into a skeleton by my labours, is a striking incident.

The newspapers published in 1801, gave an account of a considerable number of bones that had recently been discovered in another part of Ulster and Orange Counties; and, by the great exertions of a number of men, whom curiosity had brought together, a considerable number of bones were dug up. I hastened to the spot to see them, and I found them in a loft of a

farmer's house, as it were lost to the public view; only some few curious visitors giving a five-penny bit to see them. The farmer contemplated sending his son with them to public places, to endeavour to get money by their exhibition. I knew that very little could be obtained in that way, and it certainly would lead his son into habits of idleness, and probably into a life of dissipation. I therefore advised the disposal of them; and after Mr. Masten had consulted his friends, he accepted an offer I made. He sold me also the right of exploring the morass to discover the remaining bones, which from the overwhelming waters, had discouraged the united exertions of the inhabitants of the surrounding country; and they had given over every idea of further search. When behold! as if heaven had deigned to favour my enterprize, I was blessed with a seven weeks season without scarcely a drop of rain, and I had only to contend with the springs of forty acres of morass.

Determined to be as expeditious as possible, I hired thirty-five labouring men, and, by extraordinary exertions of mental as well as bodily labour, I have given knowledge to the world, what species of animal these huge bones belonged to.

But to return to the beginning of the Museum.—Mentioning to Mr. Robert Patterson, the idea that had been suggested to me, of adding natural curiosities to my picture gallery, he much approved the plan, and said he had an article which was considered interesting; a fish found in the Allegany River, near Pittsburgh, called a paddle-fish; the like had not been known for many years.—To this fish is attached the donor's name, and the date of the commencement of the museum, 1785.

I feel my obligations to that gentleman for sundry articles; nor ought I here omit to state, that the generous donations of numerous amateurs of a museum, have greatly aided me in bringing the Institution to its present state of magnitude and improvement; and I have the fond hope, in the close of this address, to meet their full approbation of my conduct.

With harmony, little things become great.—From small beginnings, by industry and a steady perseverance in the same pursuit for a series of years, what immense collections may be brought into view! In short, as mountains are composed of grains of sand, so a museum, if put on a good foundation, will increase to a magnitude far surpassing our imagination. I little knew the task I was about to undertake. At the first sight it was pleasing, and while there was no difficulty in the preservation of articles, it was smooth and easy; it was amusing to collect some things, although at the cost of time.

My late friend, the ingenious David Rittenhouse, told me, he had no doubt that I would find pleasure in my views of natural history; “but while collecting and preserving subjects, you will neglect your pencil, and consequently it will be a great injury to your interest in a pecuniary point of view.” Experience has proven the justice of this warning. The Museum, so far from being a source of wealth to me, has been a constant drain upon the profits of my profession as a portrait painter: for at the time that Mr. Rittenhouse made the remark, I was in the full tide of celebrity; very successful in pleasing my employers, and had scarcely a competitor. But the fascinating beauties of boundless nature, the infinite varieties of animal life, on land, in the air, and in the waters, surpassing the

most exuberant fancy of man to conceive; and, to know the order in which all these beings are maintained; the support of each class in its proper sphere; the dependence of each on others, displaying a wisdom in the great Creator, astonishing to the mind of every one who reflects a single moment on the subject. But, to extend this view a little further, and contemplate the vegetable, the mineral and fossil kingdoms; and lastly, the planetary order; the elements which sustain, vivify, and enliven the scene; and, comparing great with small things, like unto light and shadow in a fine picture.

The contemplation of any part of what I have here but barely hinted at, must call forth ejaculations of praise, wonder, and gratitude to the First Great Cause.

Then, my friends, when I commenced this pleasing task, of collecting subjects to form a museum; when in every step I met with objects new, and as it appeared to me, not discovered before, can any one wonder that I should undertake so assiduously a work of such magnitude as the bringing into one view a world in miniature? When I had the fond hope to diffuse a knowledge of the wonderful works of creation, not only of this country, but of the whole world. Also to show the progress of arts and science, from the savage state to the civilized man; displaying the habits and customs of all nations;—to show the progress of arts and manufactures, from the raw materials to their finished fabrics.

To form such a school of useful knowledge, to diffuse its usefulness to every class of our country, to amuse and in the same moment to instruct the adult, as well as the youth of each sex and age,—with a zeal

far surpassing the bounds of fatigue, did I exert every nerve, by increasing labours, for fifteen years: by day and by night, as long as I could keep my eyes open, did I labour to preserve animals, common as well as those more rarely met with.

I will not fatigue you by detailing my first unsuccessful efforts in preserving subjects; how often the labours of the year were lost by the depredations of the worms; and how I made bonfires of the subjects, on replacing them with more perfect preservations.

By long experience, having acquired a good mode of preservation, the succeeding years were less toilsome; and I found that the Museum would become highly useful, in various points of view,—by combining instruction with amusement, and harmonizing with every profession: for here, men of every religion or political sentiment, may meet and converse on the interesting objects that surround them, without jarring in their opinions; and where it will often be found that those, when viewed more closely, could harmonize much better, if known to each other.

Thus in a political point of view, a well organized museum must be an important establishment in a republic.

But now permit me to say, that my Museum, in a pecuniary point of view, is a public benefit to Philadelphia. Strangers have often been heard to declare, that the greatest inducement they had to come to Philadelphia was to see the Museum; and some have said that it was the first place that they came to. Consequently, it certainly in some degree must be the means of bringing wealth into our city. They could scarcely pass our shops and stores without stopping to purchase something, that might strike their fancy;

they must spend money at places of entertainment; and, finding our city more agreeable by its inducements to social intercourse; by the liberality of its various religious societies; by its numerous places of education; by its several institutions of science and of arts; by its increase of elegant manufactories; and also by the abundance and variety of our markets; they may thus be induced to make this their residence.

I am fully persuaded that the inhabitants of Philadelphia are benefited by my Museum in many other respects. We all know that relaxation from labour is often salutary, and we know that amusements will be sought for. Are the morals vitiated by visitations here? I believe not in the least degree, but certainly improved. And in some instances, I have seen young men in a rattling manner enter the rooms, where sentiments of a pious and reverential tendency have caught their view; which, with the sight of a wonderful variety of preserved animals, have arrested their mad career, and in an instant it produced serious reflections. For who can view a well stored museum, displaying every species of animals in a connected chain of arrangement, from the huge mammoth down to the smallest quadruped the shrew; from the largest of birds, the ostrich, vultures, &c. down to the beautiful humming-bird; in the amphibia, large alligators, &c. through all the variety of colours and size in lizards; also turtles of numerous kinds; the boa, in size like unto the trunk of a large tree, and all the varieties of serpents down to the harmless black and garter snakes; of fishes innumerable varieties, more curious in form than the most fertile fancy could conceive; in insects, some large, many of colours as various and more vivid than the rain-bow, of every curious

form, and some so minutely small as to escape our sight without the aid of a microscope; and why need I add to the astonished beholder, the class of minerals, enriched with every prismatic colour, and now made known by its crystallized form, to the greatest certainty, by the acute observations of the indefatigable industry of the good and amiable Abbe Hauy.—I repeat, who can view a well stored museum, such as I have but slightly touched on the great heads, and not be inspired with an adoration and reverence of the great Creator, and exclaim with the Psalmist, “O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all!” Glory be unto thee!

My friends, I have mentioned the name of the Abbe Hauy, as immediately connected with mineralogy, which reminds me, with a feeling of gratitude, of the many able labourers in the science of natural history. It would take too much of your time, was I to attempt giving the names of several learned authors; and to mention only a few, I might justly offend by the neglect of others; some now living, whose merits exceed my feeble praise, and to whom we are greatly indebted for the light they have diffused on this pleasing subject. Ought we not to be thankful for their labours in exploring and describing the various works of Creation; in some instances at the risk of their lives, to find out the mysteries of nature? Surely, in proportion as we receive knowledge and benefit, in like proportion we should revere and honour their names.

I feel my obligations to the Library Company, who very obligingly lent me the use of their books while I was classically arranging my Museum, and also when I was composing my course of lectures on natural history. To the gentlemen who compose that board,

I now gratefully present my sincere thanks; and also to the Philosophical Society, for the use of their library, and the aid which they have on several occasions so generously given, in bringing to maturity my infant labours in the establishment of an Institute, which I may be allowed to call a great school of nature, which speaks a language intelligible to all mankind; where all classes of men, from the most learned to the most illiterate, from the aged down to the tender youth, all may read and be happily amused, and certainly instructed.

I have often heard visitors say, that in this Museum could be acquired a better knowledge in natural history, than could be obtained in ten years travelling round the world.

Natural history implies a knowledge of the earth, air, water, and all their qualities and productions; and also all the changes that material things undergo.

This is too great a field to be explored at present. By a cursory view of the natural world we may consider as the first creation, earth, next minerals, then vegetables, then animals of every order and species up to man. To him it is said is given a spark of divine intelligence, which makes him approach nearer to the Creator in his attributes than all other creatures. Where much is given much will also be required. This should urge him diligently to cultivate those faculties with which he has been endowed. He should learn to know himself, and by studying his relationship to other beings, know the chain by which the whole is held together and preserved in the distinct order in which they have been created.

This study may teach him humility, perhaps humanity, certainly will enlarge his views, and extend

his adoration of that divine artist, who formed and connected the whole.

Though man is infinitely superior to all other animals in his intellectual capacity, yet it is principally by education that his superiority becomes apparent. In Africa it would require almost an army of Hottentots, to cope successfully with the lion and tiger of their forests; while the European, with his own implements of war, and his superior address in their use, would seldom fail, singly to retire victorious from the combat. And who that has seen, can compare the canoe of the Indian with the immense naval fabrics of our own and European countries, without being astonished at the amazing disparity between the savage and cultivated mind. But in this enlightened age, it cannot be necessary to multiply proofs in favour of the advantages of improving the mind by education.

An elevated knowledge of arts, of science, and of natural history, diffused through all classes of society, it cannot be contested, is of the highest importance, when it continually leads them to a sweet humanity, and makes them feel the charms of gratitude to their pastors, to their parents, to their compatriots, and to the author of every good gift. If I am correct in my ideas, I think that we ought to give every aid in our power to assist and promote the best systems of education.

With these ideas I address this polite assembly in behalf of an institution, in its nature calculated to become the most unerring school of wisdom; for under proper patronage it will be the receptacle of every article by which the bounds of knowledge can be extended.

To diffuse a knowledge of chemical properties, my

son Rubens has long made exhibition of experiments, at regular stated times, of a philosophical nature, to the visitors of the Museum. Can there be a better mode to instruct multitudes of the people, many of whom otherwise would never have the opportunity of such information? Had we more room, lectures of a more extended nature would be given, as beneficial and congenial to the institution.

Expense has not been spared to enrich and render it an ornament and an honour to the state that gave it birth; and because it has become exceedingly useful; which is fully proved by its attraction lately of much company, especially since the gas-lights have been used, which has now given it the semblance of enriching the proprietor.

If we were to calculate the cost of thirty-one years' labour, with constant attendance, cost of glass cases, paintings and gilt frames, and also the numerous alterations in the arrangements of an increasing Museum, can any one suppose that I am compensated for my trouble and expense? Do not many of the present assembly remember visiting the Museum, and having been almost alone? Will it not be granted that with the same industry and steady perseverance for thirty-one years in my profession, that I might have acquired much wealth? Now the fact is, that my attention to the Museum, with the maintenance of a large family, have always kept me poor. I have made no money by it, but rather spent a fortune to support it, and every thing I have got has been acquired by my talent of portrait painting. These facts are well known by my intimate acquaintance; many can testify to the verity of this statement.

But let us for a moment suppose that I have be-

come rich by the establishment; and if at the same time, it is considered a public advantage to my country, ought this to be a cause of envy? Will not the judicious, if they exercise their judgment, say, that it deserves encouragement by liberal contributions? The inhabitants of all polished cities have delighted to encourage the establishment of institutions which have conferred celebrity or distinction on their places of residence. Is a museum, presenting an expanded view of nature, less an embellishment to a city than trees, or gravel walks, or elevated steeples?

For many years it was an Herculean task to keep it going; it was like unto rolling a heavy stone up a steep hill, that continually pressed back against my shoulders; and now that it fast approaches to the summit, where it may be seen and admired throughout all the surrounding plain, and thus become a monument of the wisdom and liberality of the people of this era, it loudly calls for your aid.

Say, my friends,—shall this Museum be supported? Will you say that it shall have a permanency in the city of Philadelphia?—If such is your determination, then I promise to put it on the best footing, so as to become a lasting benefit to the city; to give all the advantages of delightful instruction, in various branches of useful knowledge, and at the least possible expense; by a well regulated system to support, keep in complete order and preservation, the numerous articles of an increasing museum, by a very small premium to the superintendant; thus to encourage and secure his constant care and attention, preserving a reciprocity of interest with duty; and in this way to give credit, honour and interest to the city without

drawing on its funds; as individuals will give the necessary support for the benefits received.

To return again to the foundation of the Museum. With the beginning of our independence, I began making portraits of men distinguished for their patriotism, and other extraordinary talents. I had then an idea (as we naturally desire to know the physiognomy of noted characters) that I would make prints of them, which I supposed would remunerate me for the expense, and also gratify me by the possession of a gallery of eminent men.

This is the gallery alluded to in the former part of this address, when the mammoth bones were proposed to be deposited with this collection of original portraits, which I painted from the life, in such moments as I could best spare from my other business, to support an increasing family; these being esteemed valuable, by their number, in a collective view, and by the exit of many, of whom no other traces of likeness had been left. The memory of very many of these men, for their united efforts to obtain our independence, deserve our grateful remembrance; and of late I have seen many spectators examining them with much seeming pleasure.

The value of a series of portraits of eminent men, induced a desire to possess also portraits of such characters, from every portion of the globe; and my son Rembrandt showing extraordinary talents in portrait painting, and also possessing strong desires to improve himself, determined me to encourage him as far as my pecuniary funds would admit. I therefore sent him into France, as then the fountain head of arts and science, to make for my Museum a collection of portraits of her most distinguished men; and from thence

it was proposed that he should travel into other parts of Europe for the same important purpose; with the fond hope that such an opportunity would enable him highly to improve himself in the art, by seeing the works of ancient as well as modern artists; and also enable him to bring back to his country much useful knowledge. As it was not in my power to advance him a sum sufficient to defray the expense of such an undertaking, I negotiated bills of credit with a gentleman connected in trade between France and America; by which means, from time to time, to give my son the necessary support, where much economy was exacted.

By his labours many highly valuable portraits have been added to the Museum: but unfortunately rumors of a war between France and this country alarmed my son, and fearing our correspondence would be cut off, he returned to America with our ambassador General Armstrong. And now we have lost all chance of much further aid from his talents, as he has been encouraged to establish a museum in the city of Baltimore in Maryland, where I am glad to know that his talents are in high estimation, and his prospects flattering, by the liberal encouragement he meets with in that city.

Several times have I made application to the legislature of Pennsylvania, to intreat their aid to this infant of our republic.

In 1802 they had, with a liberality honourable to themselves, granted to me the use of all the upper rooms of the state-house, and also the use of the two lower rooms at the east end thereof.—The latter, on application of the judges of the supreme court, I freely relinquished for their better use. The names of those gentlemen composing the legislature at that period,

with my grateful thanks, have a place in the Museum, to be handed down to posterity.

In the year 1811, by petition I asked them to grant liberty to the city and county of Philadelphia to build fire-proof offices at each wing of the state-house, for the safe keeping of the public records; and also to permit the Museum to be extended over the offices; this petition was supported by the signatures of many hundred persons of the first respectability in the city and county of Philadelphia.

A committee was appointed to report on the expediency of the measure. To that committee I communicated my willingness to pay the additional expense to be made for the accommodation of the Museum, in case the city and county should not be willing to give their aid in so important a work as the extension and fixed establishment of the Museum. It is unnecessary to state whence the failure in that session.

In 1815, the legislature enacted a law authorising the county commissioners to let the Museum be continued in the state-house, provided I would pay a rent of four hundred dollars per annum. This rent has been paid, and I have considered it sufficiently high, and quite as much as an Institution so useful to individuals as well as to the public in general ought to pay.

At the sitting of the last legislature, they sold the state-house and the public garden annexed, to the city of Philadelphia. The select and common councils having appointed a committee to report the amount of rent I should pay for that part of the state-house now occupied by the Museum; the said committee have proposed that I should give one thousand six hundred dollars per annum, and insure the upper part of the state-house, &c.

This report has not yet been made to the councils; therefore I do not know whether that honourable board will adopt said report. I hope not; for that sum is far exceeding my abilities to pay, and consequently will bring me into extreme distress, and also take from me all the means of improving the Museum and supporting the necessary attendance thereon.

I am now in my seventy-sixth year of age, and I have spent the better part of my life in the formation of this Museum. Therefore, is it matter of astonishment, that I have still desires to improve and increase its usefulness?

I have again resumed my pencil, in a belief of my improved judgment; and having a remembrance of the colours I made use of formerly, this, added to the advantage of my son Rembrandt's essays, discoveries, and practical knowledge of colours, gives me the chance of painting in a more natural manner, hoping thereby to give many valuable portraits to this already large collection.

Pardon these traits of egotism; perhaps it is the last time I shall speak of my labours in a public manner. Permit an old man, the indulgence of speaking of himself, when, by doing so, he hopes to obtain the united aid of men capable of relieving him from much anxiety.

I have ten children; several of them are married. I have very little property to bestow on them. The Museum, as I have before said, has absorbed all my earnings. I wish to leave my children, in equal shares, the profits, if any, arising from its visitation; and to the city of Philadelphia all the advantages which its establishment on a permanent foundation can afford.

My ten children, and their wives, and husbands,

will scarcely agree in measures to support its durability, if some provision is not made, during my life, to perpetuate the establishment. For as personal property, a division might, and probably will take place; consequently the destruction of the Museum. To divide, is to destroy it.

In the year 1792, by my request, a number of gentlemen, then in the city, associated together, as visitors and directors of my Museum. They formed a constitution, and enacted rules and regulations, such as they thought best calculated to promote its advancement.

In that early period, very little could be done, while the whole of my time was absorbed with excessive labour, in collecting and preserving animals, &c.; and the Museum had not advanced to a state of much usefulness, being barely sufficient to keep alive the interest which some of those gentlemen wished to bestow on it; and having no further demands on the public, the meetings, by degrees, became less frequent.

The removal of several of those gentlemen, and the death of many others, have now nearly obliterated that association.

Some of those gentlemen, I hope, are now present, and will claim their right to act. And let me intreat such other gentlemen as are friends to the Museum, to associate together; and who may be willing to enter on some active measures—such as in their united wisdom, on mature deliberation, they may think advisable to preserve the Museum for the general benefit of this city. For this purpose I have provided the book before me, for such gentlemen to enter their names therein as may think proper to do so.

I have now, my respected friends, finished the remarks which I wished to have made before you—a

view of the rise and progress of the Museum, from its earliest commencement to the present moment. In doing this I have not magnified the labours or difficulties with which I had for many years to struggle. I have endeavoured to point out the motives which prompted its formation; and these at least I trust will be thought laudable, and entitled to the approbation of the wise and good; and I have finally given a candid statement of the difficulties which at present hover over the institution, and seem to threaten to destroy its usefulness, perhaps its existence as a museum.

Many of the gentlemen present have heard of Sir Aston Lever's Museum in London, and some probably have seen it, the collecting of which cost Sir Aston forty thousand pounds sterling. It was the most splendid museum in Great Britain. What has now become of it? Wanting a good foundation, it is lost; it was divided, it was sold, and is scattered abroad; and some of its articles are now in my Museum.

With you, my respected auditors, it will probably remain to determine, whether the establishment of my Museum shall continue to afford a store of valuable information to the citizen and stranger, and a fund of rational and agreeable amusement to all; whether it shall remain to be numbered amongst the national ornaments or useful improvements which Philadelphia has given to the western world, or whether it shall be driven like an outcast, who has forfeited his birth-right, from the place of its nativity, to some more liberal or opulent city, in search of the patronage and support which had been denied to it by its countrymen.

Under these circumstances of embarrassment, I have chosen to address the more enlightened portion

of my fellow citizens, and to solicit the aid of their talents and advice, in devising some plan by which the Museum may be rescued from its difficulties, and which, at the same time, may insure its advancement to perfection, and perpetuate its usefulness to the city and to the world.