T. R. Peale

CASSINIA

PROCEEDINGS OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

No. XIX. PHILADELPHIA, PA. 1915.

Titian Ramsey Peale

BY WITMER STONE

To the naturalist the name of Peale is probably more closely associated with the museum, conducted by members of the family in Philadelphia during the early part of the last century, than it is with the personality of the individuals to whom the museum owed its existence.

To the artist and historian on the other hand the name at once recalls the portraits of Washington and other revolutionary heroes which were painted by Charles Willson Peale, the founder of the museum. The artistic associations of the name are further emphasized in the surnames of some of the sons of Charles Willson Peale, who were christened: Raphael, Rembrandt, Rubens and Titian. The second of these was probably a better artist than his father, while all seem to have shared the gift in greater or less degree.

Titian, the youngest son, was the naturalist of the family, his father's interests in this line being always those of the preparateur rather than of the scientific investigator. The life of the son was however so obviously influenced by the environment of the museum, and the history of the museum so closely

interwoven with the life of the father, that any biography of Titian Peale must of necessity be prefaced by a brief sketch of Charles Willson and the famous institution which he established.[1]

Charles Willson Peale was born at Chestertown, Queen Anne County, Maryland, April 15, 1741. His father Charles Peale had emigrated from England about 1726 and taught school in Maryland until his death in 1750. Charles Willson and his mother then removed to Annapolis and we find him at the age of thirteen apprenticed to a saddler, while at twenty-one he is married and engaged in the saddlery business on his own account.

At the age of twenty-four he discovered his talent for portrait painting and after studying under several masters, including Benjamin West of London, he established himself in Philadelphia in 1774 and began his professional career as an artist. Service in the Pennsylvania militia during the Revolution interrupted his work, but at the close of the war he reestablished himself at Third and Lombard streets, adding to his house a large room to serve as a studio and art gallery. Here were placed as ornaments various natural curiosities presented to him by friends; and as this display increased, he conceived the idea of converting his gallery into a museum of natural history. Peale worked diligently to carry out his idea and for a time, owing to neglect of his portrait painting, he was in sore straits financially. He accumulated many specimens mainly "large and striking to the sight", as he tells us in his unpublished autobiography,[2] while he devoted much time in devising methods of preserving them from decay and the ravages of insect pests. His museum was opened in 1784, and at once attracted much attention. It soon outgrew its quarters and was transferred to the hall of the American Philosophical Society of which Peale

[1] For the data upon which this sketch is based the writer would make especial acknowledgment to a biographical sketch of Titian R. Peale by Dr. A. C. Peale (Bull. Philos. Soc. Washington, xiv, pp. 317–326), and to an account of Peale's Museum by Dr. Howard Sellers Colton (Pop. Sci. Monthly lxxv, pp. 221–238). *Cf.* also an article by Witmer Stone (Auk., 1899, pp. 166–177).

[2] *Cf.* Colton.

had been chosen curator and librarian. He rented the part of the building required for his museum and apparently made his residence there also. The transfer of the collection was effected in a spectacular manner. He says: "To take advantage of public curiosity, I contrived to make a very considerable parade of the articles, especially those which were large. As boys are generally very fond of parade, I collected all the boys of the neighborhood. At the head of the parade was carried on men's shoulders the American buffalo, the panthers, tiger cats, and a long string of animals carried by the boys. The parade from Lombard Street to the Hall brought all the inhabitants to their doors and windows to see the cavalcade. It was fine fun for the boys. They were willing to work in such a novel removal and saved me some expense in moving the delicate articles."[1]

Later on a board of twenty-five directors was formed with Thomas Jefferson as president in an effort to make the museum a great national institution and to obtain legislative aid for its improvement. In 1802 it was moved to Independence Hall which had been vacated by Congress. The whole second floor and tower were devoted to housing the collections, while Rembrandt Peale had his studio on the first floor. By 1805 and probably earlier the name, "Philadelphia Museum", had been adopted and in subsequent years there has often arisen a confusion between this museum and that of the Academy of Natural Sciences. Many types and historic specimens, recorded as being in the the "Philadelphia Museum," have been erroneously credited to the Academy.

The extent of Peale's collection, especially for that early period, was really astonishing. Not only were the series of birds, mammals and reptiles reasonably complete in the then known species—even to the "Platipus" and "Orang Outang" but there were specimens which would attract attention anywhere today, notably two mounted skeletons of the Mastodon. Many museum methods which we associate with comparatively recent years were practiced in Peale's exhibits. Groups of birds and mammals with painted backgrounds illustrating their habits

[1] Colton.

or habitats were installed, while framed copies of published matter descriptive of certain exhibits were mounted near them. Other frames contained, what we should now call, synoptical collections of certain groups with full descriptive labels ; while microscopes with insects etc. arranged under them were available to the visitor. Special exhibits included a wolf tearing a lamb to pieces and we are told that the papier-mache entrails of the latter from the skilled and realistic hands of Rubens Peale bulged out so naturally that they appeared living and in motion. There was also a "South American Mermaid"—half fish and half hairless, dried monkey. [1]

This was about 1820, but a catalogue of the museum published in 1805 gives us an idea of its extent at a much earlier date. "There are now in the collection", it states, "perhaps all the birds belonging to the middle, many of which likewise belong to the Northern and Southern States and a considerable number from South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and New Holland and the recently discovered islands in the South Seas. The number exceeds 760 without the admission of any duplicates, contained in 140 cases." The mammals included "the Orang Outang or wild man of the woods. The Crested Porcupine, some of whose quills measure 18 in., the American and New Holland ditto, Madagascar Bats (measuring 4 ft. from tip to tip). The Lama or Camel of South America, the untameable Hyaena and fierce Jackall, American Elks, the Picary, remarkable for a secretary organ on its back. The slow-moving Bradypus or Sloth, Antelopes from Africa, the Indian Musk of astonishing agility and the Kangaroo or Opossum from Botany Bay etc."

The ornithological specimens of most importance in Peale's museum were Wilson's types of North American birds, the originals of the descriptions in his "American Ornithology." Some of these were apparently collected and presented by him and under each species in his work is given the catalogue number of a specimen exhibited in the museum. There were also some types of George Ord, Bonaparte and Say. Fortunately

[1] Colton.

many of these have been preserved and are now in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge, while two others, the types of the Broad-winged Hawk and Mississippi Kite, are in the Philadelphia Academy and one, the Cape May Warbler, is in Vassar College.[1]

Charles Willson Peale withdrew from the active management of the museum in 1808 and retired to his home "Belfield" in Germantown, leaving his sons in control. He died February 22, 1827.

In 1821 he had had the museum company incorporated, the five trustees being with one exception members of his family. Following his death the museum moved in 1828 to the Arcade building on Chestnut Street above Sixth, and in 1838 to a fine building at Ninth and Chestnut, where the Continental Hotel now stands. Here in 1846 financial depression resulted in the failure of the concern which in strenuous efforts to maintain an existence had added vaudeville and other attractions. The collections were sold at auction, the natural history material being largely kept together and exhibited until 1850, when P. T. Barnum and Moses Kimball secured it at sheriff's sale and it went to museums which they maintained in New York and Boston. Most of the specimens were later destroyed by fires which consumed several of Barnum's establishments.

Thus ended an enterprise which during the days of its prosperity exerted a wonderful influence on the development of science in America and to which Charles Lucien Bonaparte refers as "an enterprise, accomplished alone and unaided, that could hardly have been exceeded under the fostering hand of the most powerful government."[2] The details of the museum's history are fascinating reading and are well worthy of detailed study, but this brief outline will suffice to show us the nature of the environment which surrounded young Titian Ramsay Peale, the subject of the present sketch, and the influence which it must have exerted in shaping his life.

He was born in 1800 in the Hall of the Philosophical Society.

[1] *Cf.* Faxon. Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool. LIX, No. 3, pp. 119–148.

[2] Amer. Ornith., vol. ii.

His mother was the second wife of Charles Willson Peale, Elizabeth de Peyster, a descendant of Johannes de Peyster, who came over to New Amsterdam about 1645. Titian was named after his half-brother who had died at the age of eighteen after giving great promise as a naturalist. He was educated at Germantown and Montgomery County schools, though it seems probable that he derived quite as much inspiration and knowledge from the great museum and its founder as from his schoolteachers. At the age of seventeen he was elected a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences and in the autumn of the same year was one of a party to visit the Sea Islands and adjacent coast of Georgia and east Florida. His associates were William McClure, Thomas Say and George Ord.

Say, describing this trip in a letter to Rev. John F. Melsheimer[1] under date of June 10, 1818, says: "I accompanied the president of our Academy, Mr. Wm. McClure (a gentleman well known in Europe and America for science and beneficence) in his carriage by easy journies as far as Charleston; we then took the steamboat to Savannah and sent on the carriage by land. At Savannah we met our companions, Messrs. Ord and Peale, who had arrived a day or two before us from Philadelphia by sea. Here the carriage and horses were sold and we chartered a sloop of about thirty tons burden and after laying in our stores and necessarys we commenced our journey toward the promised land."

They stopped at each of the Sea Islands and ascended the "St. Juan" river as far as Picolata, crossing from there to St. Augustine on foot where they presented their passports to the Governor, for Florida was then a Spanish province. Finding it impossible on account of the hostility of the Indians to follow out their plans, the party was forced to return to Charleston, stopping again at the Sea Islands and embarking in the spring of 1818 on a packet ship for Philadelphia. Unfortunately Say's letter makes no mention of the vertebrate collections and the only ornithological results of the trip were two papers pub-

[1] In library Acad. Nat. Sci. See also publication in Entom. News, 1901, pp. 234–236 *et seq.*, by W. J. Fox.

lished by Ord on the Florida Jay and Boat-tailed Grackle,[1] and a number of specimens secured by Peale and deposited for the most part in his father's museum.

The year after their return Say, then thirty-two years of age, was selected as zoologist on Major Long's expedition to the Rocky Mountains, and Peale, a youth of nineteen, was engaged as his assistant. Say writes to Melsheimer on March 13, 1819: "Mr. T. Peale will accompany me to prepare skins of such animals as may be discovered." Long's instructions to Peale show more explicitly what was expected of him. He says: "Mr. Peale will officiate as assistant naturalist. In the several departments above enumerated his services will be required in collecting specimens suitable to be preserved, in dating and delineating them, in preserving the skins etc., of animals, and in sketching the stratifications of rocks, earths, etc., as presented on the declivities of precipices." He received $1.50 per day and Say $2.00 each being allowed one ration per day until they left Council Bluffs.

Peale's half-brother Rembrandt, who was twenty-two years his senior, wrote him at this time: "I suspect that you will be the only draughtsman; I therefore recommend you to practice immediately sketching from nature. I know how well you draw when you have the object placed quietly before you; but if you practice sketching from human figures as well as animals and trees, hills, cataracts, etc., you will be able to present us with many curious and interesting representations. Get into the habit of making notes of everything as it occurs, no matter how short. Memoranda written at the moment have always an interest of accuracy that distant recollections never have." This last sentence is admirable advice and as true today as when it was written, even though the camera has in a great measure removed the necessity for sketching.

Long's expedition followed the regular highway to the frontier—the Ohio river; down which Lewis and Charles had gone in 1803 to join their men; down which in 1808 went Audubon and his bride to establish himself in business in Kentucky; and

[1] Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila. Vol. I.

down which in 1810 Alexander Wilson had guided his little row-boat the "Ornithologist" on his trip to New Orleans. They left Pittsburgh on May 5, 1819, reaching St. Louis June 9 and Council Bluffs (near the present city of Omaha) in the early autumn, and here passed the winter. The summer of 1820 was spent in exploring the eastern base of the central Rocky Mountains, returning to the mouth of the Ohio by November. The Rocky Mountain party consisted of twenty persons with twenty riding animals and eight pack-horses, each man carrying his personal belongings. Peale was one of a side party under Dr. James which made the first ascent of Pike's Peak; Pike after whom it was named having merely viewed it from a distance. To Peale would seem to belong all the credit for the discovery of the many new birds, which date from this expedition, since we have Bonaparte's word that he procured them and drew them on the spot.[1]

Say in a letter to Melsheimer under date of August 29, 1821 speaks of the task of describing the new birds and quadrupeds having been added to his duties in connection with the preparation of the report of the expedition. One would infer that he had expected Peale or some one else to attend to this work as his interests were mainly with the invertebrates. Possibly this fact may account for the meager treatment of the vertebrates in Long's report, or possibly Say was aware that Bonaparte in his forthcoming continuation of Wilson's Ornithology proposed to publish full accounts of all the birds, as well as colored plates of them, engraved from Peale's sketches. Bonaparte's work appeared in 1825 and he does full honor to Peale's labors on the Long expedition at the same time praising him as a "painter-naturalist."

The first ornithological novelty of the expedition was apparently the Lark Sparrow procured near the mouth of the Missouri while at the camp near Omaha were secured the first specimens of the Orange-crowned Warbler and Yellow-headed Blackbird. In Douglas County, Colorado, not far from the present site of Denver were discovered the Band-tailed Pigeon and Rock Wren

[1] Bonaparte's Amer. Ornith., preface to vol. i.

and at Colorado Springs as they turned southward they obtained the Dusky Grouse. The Lazuli Bunting and Cliff Swallow were secured near the present Canyon City and reaching Pueblo on the return march the House Finch and Arkansas Goldfinch were added to the collection of novelties. Near La Junta in southeastern Colorado they secured the type specimen of the Arkansas Flycatcher and not far away Say's Phoebe. Several other birds previously known only from Mexico were added to our fauna through Peale's energy on this expedition. The scientific collections, as reported, consisted of 60 skins of animals rare or new to science, several thousand insects, 500 species of plants, a large collection of shells, many minerals and 122 sketches by Peale, all of which were deposited in the "Philadelphia Museum."

In 1824 Peale was engaged by Bonaparte for a trip to Florida to secure additional novelties to be published in the later volumes of his "Ornithology." Interesting specimens were obtained and copious notes, which appear in Bonaparte's work, but the only novelty secured seems to have been the so-called "Peale's Egret", now regarded as a dichromatic phase of the Reddish Egret, *Dichromanassa rufescens*. It is unfortunate that the name given by Bonaparte in Peale's honor could not have been perpetuated. A manuscript diary kept by Peale on this trip was picked up by Mr. S. N. Rhoads some years ago in the shop of a dealer in old metals and miscellaneous curios in Philadelphia and is now in the possession of Col. John E. Thayer, of Lancaster, Mass.

In 1831, according to Dr. A. C. Peale, Titian accompanied an expedition to the Magdalena River in Columbia, which was financed through the liberality of Dr. Marmaduke Burrough, after whom the much-disputed Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes burrovianus* of Cassin, was named. The collections obtained were presented to the Philadelphia Museum, though later Dr. Burrough presented many specimens to the Philadelphia Academy.

On September 6, 1836 the Academy, apparently in conjunction with other similar societies, received a letter from the Secretary of the Navy requesting an outline of fields, which it would be desirable to cover in the scientific investigations of the

proposed United States Exploring Expedition, as well as suggestions as to the personnel of a scientific corps. The matter was referred to a committee, the results of whose deliberations are not clear, but, whether through their recommendation or not, Titian R. Peale was eventually selected as one of the naturalists of the expedition, his field covering ornithology and mammalogy.

He had, since his return from South America, become director of the Philadelphia Museum and had published the first part of a work on American butterflies which was never completed. He had also prepared a number of plates for various scientific works, and his reputation both as a naturalist and draughtsman had evidently increased.

The exploring expedition, under Captain Charles Wilkes was gone about four years. The vessels left Norfolk, Virginia, August 18, 1838 going in turn to Madeira, Brazil, Chili, the South Sea Islands, New Zealand, the Sandwich Islands, the west coast of North America, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and Cape of Good Hope, and returning to New York in June 1842. A river in one of the Fiji Islands was named after Peale, who had been zealous in collecting material and making sketches. His vessel the *Peacock* was wrecked at the mouth of the Columbia River, May 18, 1840 and he with others of the crew traveled overland to San Francisco, through the then Mexican province of California, to join another of the fleet, the *Vincennes*. The collection of Hawaiian birds and much other invaluable material was lost in the wreck.

Peale wrote the report on the birds and mammals of the expedition which was issued in 1848, but without the atlas of plates which he had prepared. This was his only ornithological work, indeed almost his only scientific contribution, which seems remarkable, when we consider the opportunities that he had and the really great part that he played in advancing our knowledge of American ornithology.

This report of Peale's is one of the rarest of books and its history is involved in obscurity. It has been claimed that he was not afforded opportunities to properly study and compare his specimens; but it would seem that at that time neither

specimens nor books adequate for his work were to be found in this country. It was not until 1846 and 1847 that Dr. T. B. Wilson began to accummulate his great collection and library at the Philadelphia Academy and there was none elsewhere. At all events of 109 new birds that Peale described scarcely one third were really new. Only about 90 copies of his report were actually distributed by the government, the remainder having been destroyed by fire, while Peale seems not to have availed himself of the opportunity to have an edition struck off for himself as authors of the other volumes had done.[1] Whether Peale refused to have anything more to do with the report, owing to the failure to publish his illustrations, or whether those in charge realized the shortcomings of the work cannot be determined; but John Cassin after a long and stormy correspondence with Wilkes, as is shown in his letters to Baird, was finally engaged to publish a new report, which appeared in 1852 along with a folio volume of colored plates comprising most of the Peale drawings. Peale is said to have considered himself very badly treated in the matter.

On May 17, 1848 the Philadelphia museum, having passed out of existence, Peale was appointed assistant examiner in the United States Patent Office in Washington and was later promoted to principal examiner in the division of Fine Arts and Photography, an office which he held until June 30, 1873 when he resigned and returned to Philadelphia.

During his twenty-five years residence in Washington he was active in organizing the "Saturday Club", which later became the "Philosophical Society of Washington." He was also one of the first amateur photographers of this country and made many photographs of great historic value. His scientific interests seem to have been mainly centered in his collection of butterflies, which he had gathered together on the various expeditions in which he took part, and after his return to Philadelphia he spent the time in completing the manuscript and plates of a work on butterflies based upon his collection. While he had practically succeeded in this, the publication was never begun, as he died of pneumonia on March 13, 1885.

[1] *Cf.* Jardine's Contr. to Ornith., 1852, p. 89.

When the Academy of Natural Sciences moved to its present location on Logan Square in 1876, Peale was given a room opening off of the library, where his collection of butterflies was housed and which in 1888 the writer occupied and began the care and development of the Academy's study collection of bird skins. Peale was also given a room on the entresol floor which he furnished, and here his wife used to come and sit with him during the day. This room he was forced to vacate when the Wm. S. Vaux collection of minerals was received and this and the adjoining rooms were required for its arrangement. Curiously enough, when the Vaux collection was removed to the new wing of the museum in 1896, the collection of bird-skins was placed in the old Peale room; and here for thirteen years the Delaware Valley Club held its meetings.

In 1889, after the death of Mrs. Peale, the collection of butterflies and quantities of books, letters, sketches and relics of the Exploring Expedition were removed from the cases where they had been stored. The collection was presented to the Academy and the other things distributed among relatives or destroyed. The writer regrets his failure to realize the fund of historical information which was no doubt available at this time and which is now lost forever. Many books etc. from Peale's library have turned up in second-hand stores and "junk shops" from time to time, showing that they had been disposed of by those who had inherited them. Peale's manuscript journals of the Exploring Expedition were picked up by Mr. Rhoads along with the Florida journal already referred to and have now been secured by the Library of Congress where their preservation is assured.

Dr. Edward J. Nolan and Dr. Spencer Trotter both remember Peale in his later days as a genial, entertaining old gentleman with interesting reminiscences of his long and varied career. He was twice married; first to Eliza Cecilia La Fogue in 1822 and in later life to Lucy McMullin. He had eight children by his first marriage, a daughter being named Florida in remembrance of his trip of 1824 and one of his sons, George Ord after the ornithologist. Only one son reached manhood and both he and his only son are now dead, leaving four great-

grandchildren as the only descendants of Titian R. Peale. There is something pathetic in the history of the natural history interests of the Peales. There was great ability in matters scientific and tremendous energy and zeal manifested in scientific exploration and exploitation; and yet there are today no adequate results to stand forth as a monument to the earnest efforts of this notable family.

The great museum which the founder felt that he had established on a permanent foundation, crumbled and was destroyed. And Titian Peale, the naturalist, whose travels and opportunities fitted him for a place in the first rank, has left us not one completed work; while his collections, with the exception of his butterflies and the Exploring Expedition material[1] are scattered and destroyed. Only a few of his manuscripts, snatched by chance from oblivion, have been saved—a single memorial to his worth.

[1] *Cf.* also Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci., Phila., 1915, p. 199, for notes on the ethnographic material.