

GEORGE WASHINGTON. (FROM THE ATHENÆUM PICTURE BY GILBERT STUART.)

ORIGINAL PORTRAITS OF WASHINGTON.



HIS may appear to many a trite subject to discuss at this comparatively late day, and it is a trite subject; but it is hoped that the manner of its presentation at this time will take it out of that category.

In some respects there may be no new and important facts presented, but many so-called facts, and misleading facts too, will be omitted. Tuckerman was the first to write upon the theme in a comprehensive manner, but his monograph is more from the artist's standpoint than from the historian's. Mr. W. S. Baker touched upon the subject in his work on the engraved portraits so far only as was necessary for the elucidation of his title theme. Miss Elizabeth Bryant Johnston issued a superb quarto volume in 1882 with the same title

as this article, but it was so crude and ill digested and filled with errors that its value is *nihil*. The most recent contribution to the general subject is in the latest published volume of Mr. Justin Winsor's "Critical History of America"; but the editor who prepared the notes placed too much reliance upon Miss Johnston's statements to make his notes much better than her volume. It will be the aim in the present article to sift facts from fancies and to give, as fully as can be in the limited space allotted, a comprehensive study of the subject.

It would seem as though it should not be necessary to define what is meant by an original portrait; yet so much confusion exists in the writings of others upon this subject from not clearly comprehending at the start the meaning of the term that it may be better to begin by its definition. An original portrait is one painted

from life, where the artist and the sitter have been opposite to each other and the result is a complete picture. A replica is a copy of the original picture by the same artist who painted the original; and it is often very difficult, nay, sometimes impossible, to determine which is the original and which the replica. To the practiced critical eye there is usually a freedom about an original not found in the replica, and which in turn assumes rigidity in the mere copy by another hand. In the present paper it will be the endeavor to treat of only the authenticated original portraits of Washington, and these, so far as satisfactorily ascertained, are, in their chronological order, by Charles Willson Peale, Pierre Eugene du Simitière, William Dunlap, Joseph Wright, Robert Edge Pine, Jean Antoine Houdon, James Peale, John Ramage, Madame de Bréhan, Christian Gülager, Edward Savage, John Trumbull, Archibald Robertson, Giuseppe Ceracchi, Williams, Walter Robertson, Adolph Ulric Wertmüller, Gilbert Stuart, Rembrandt Peale, James Sharpless, and Charles Balthazar Julien Févret de Saint-Mémin.

CHARLES WILLSON PEALE.

To this artist belongs the distinction of having painted the first and earliest portrait of Washington that we know. It is the not unfamiliar portrait in the costume of a Virginia militiaman, and was painted at Mount Vernon in 1772, when the subject had just turned his fortieth year. It is a three-quarter length, facing left, and the costume is a blue coat, faced with red, with bright metal buttons having the number of the regiment (22d) cast upon them, and dark red waistcoat and breeches. He wears the cocked hat usually called the Wolfe hat, with sash and gorget, this last article now the property of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The face is smooth and unusually young for forty years of age. The picture is now in Virginia, the property of a member of the Lee family. During the artist's sojourn by the banks of the Potomac, while he was painting this large canvas, he painted a miniature of Washington for Mrs. Washington, which differs considerably from the larger picture. After this Peale painted Washington from life on several occasions; indeed, it is claimed that Washington sat to him fourteen different times. In the summer of 1776 he painted a half-length for John Hancock, which it is believed that patriot subsequently presented to the Count d'Estaing, and is now probably in France. In the fall of 1777 Peale again painted a miniature for Mrs. Washington, and in the spring of 1778, at Valley Forge, he began another portrait of Washington from life, this time a full-length,

which was continued at New Brunswick a day or two after the battle of Monmouth, in which the artist had participated, and was finished in Philadelphia. This picture was ordered by Congress, but no appropriation being made to pay for it, it remained in the artist's hands, and is, we believe, the one purchased at the sale of the Peale Museum effects by Mr. H. Pratt McKean of Philadelphia, in whose possession it now is. Of this full-length Peale made several copies, each with more or less variation as to detail. In 1779 Washington sat to Peale for a portrait for the State of Pennsylvania, which the artist subsequently engraved in mezzotinto.¹ The original portrait was destroyed by some vandals who broke into the State House, Philadelphia, where it hung, and irretrievably defaced it.

During the sittings of the convention to frame a Constitution for the United States Washington records in his diary three sittings to Peale, "who wanted my picture to make a print or metzotinto by." Where this original now is we do not know, but the engraving was made and published the same year, and is a very interesting study. In 1795 Peale painted his last portrait of Washington from life, now preserved in the Bryan Collection at the New York Historical Society. On the occasion of this sitting Peale's sons Rembrandt and Raphael and his brother James each made studies of the *pater patriæ*. It will be seen from this rapid survey of the work of this one artist what an interesting iconography we have from the easel of one man; and although Peale's delineations of Washington's features do not give us the ideal or traditional portrait, yet his known fidelity as a draughtsman commands respect and recognition for his work.

DU SIMITIÈRE.

THIS gentleman was a native of Switzerland, but early in 1776 adopted Philadelphia as his home, where he made that unique and very remarkable collection of Revolutionary and ante-Revolutionary broadsides and manuscripts now belonging to the old library company and so well known to historical students. He was endowed with considerable artistic talent, and a series of thirteen profile portraits of illustrious Americans from his "Drawings from Life" was published in London in May, 1783. Among them was a characteristic head of Washington, preserved only through the engraving. This was most probably drawn in the winter of 1778-79, Washington having passed the greater portion of that season in Philadelphia;

¹ This print is exceedingly scarce. An inferior impression is fortunately preserved, however, in the Huntington Collection at the Metropolitan Museum.

but whether in color or crayon, with pencil or paint, is unknown, as no original can now be traced.

DUNLAP.

THE well-known author of the "History of the Arts of Design in the United States" when a mere lad of seventeen secured from Washington and Mrs. Washington each a sitting when the headquarters were at Rocky Hill, near Princeton, New Jersey. This was in the autumn of 1783, and the result was a crude pastel picture of no artistic or delineative value, which a score of years ago was owned by Dr. Samuel C. Ellis of New York.

WRIGHT.

AMONG the most interesting of the generally unfamiliar portraits of Washington are those by Joseph Wright, oftentimes improperly dubbed the Quaker artist, who was a son of Mrs. Patience Wright, celebrated in her day as a successful modeler of profile likenesses in wax. Wright, when about sixteen, accompanied his mother to London, where he was instructed in art by West and Hoppner, and after remaining ten years returned, late in 1782, to this country, bringing a letter to Washington from Franklin. Wright presented himself to Washington at the Rocky Hill headquarters contemporaneously with Dunlap, and here he painted his first portrait of the Commander-in-Chief. This is a particularly valuable likeness for the reason that while it is strangely unlike the accepted portraits of Washington it has received from Washington himself most unmistakable signs of approval. Soon after the original study — which is now in Philadelphia — was made Washington ordered two enlarged copies from the artist, one of which he sent to Count de Solms, a distinguished officer in the Prussian service, who solicited it to place in his gallery of military characters, and the other he presented to his friend Mrs. Samuel Powel, — Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Willing of Philadelphia, — and it is now in the custody of her descendants at Newport, Rhode Island.¹

This last is a full half-length in military costume, cut off below the knees, and giving the face in full view. It is signed, "J. Wright, 1784." One marked characteristic of these Wright portraits is the short cut hair. They have not very great artistic merit, but their historical interest is perhaps greater than any other portrait of Washington from having received from him, as already said, the stamp of his approbation. Wright *stole* a later portrait of Washington during the President's attendance upon service

¹ Engraved on wood for THE CENTURY, November, 1887.

at St. Paul's Chapel, while residing in New York during his presidency. This drawing was in profile, and from it the artist made an etching and had it printed on small cards, which, although probably very plenty at the time, have become exceedingly scarce. There is a profile portrait painted by Wright, evidently from the same head, belonging to the McKean family, Washington, D. C., and Mr. C. W. Bowen has another — a most interesting and important portrait of Washington by Wright; but whether it is an original, as it would inherently indicate, cannot be positively settled.

This last named picture would seem to have given to Savage the pose and accessories for his familiar large mezzotinto plate. Wright evidently was in favor with Washington, for he submitted to having made by him a plaster cast of his features, and upon the founding of the United States Mint, Wright was appointed the first designer and die-sinker. He died of yellow fever, when epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793.

PINE.

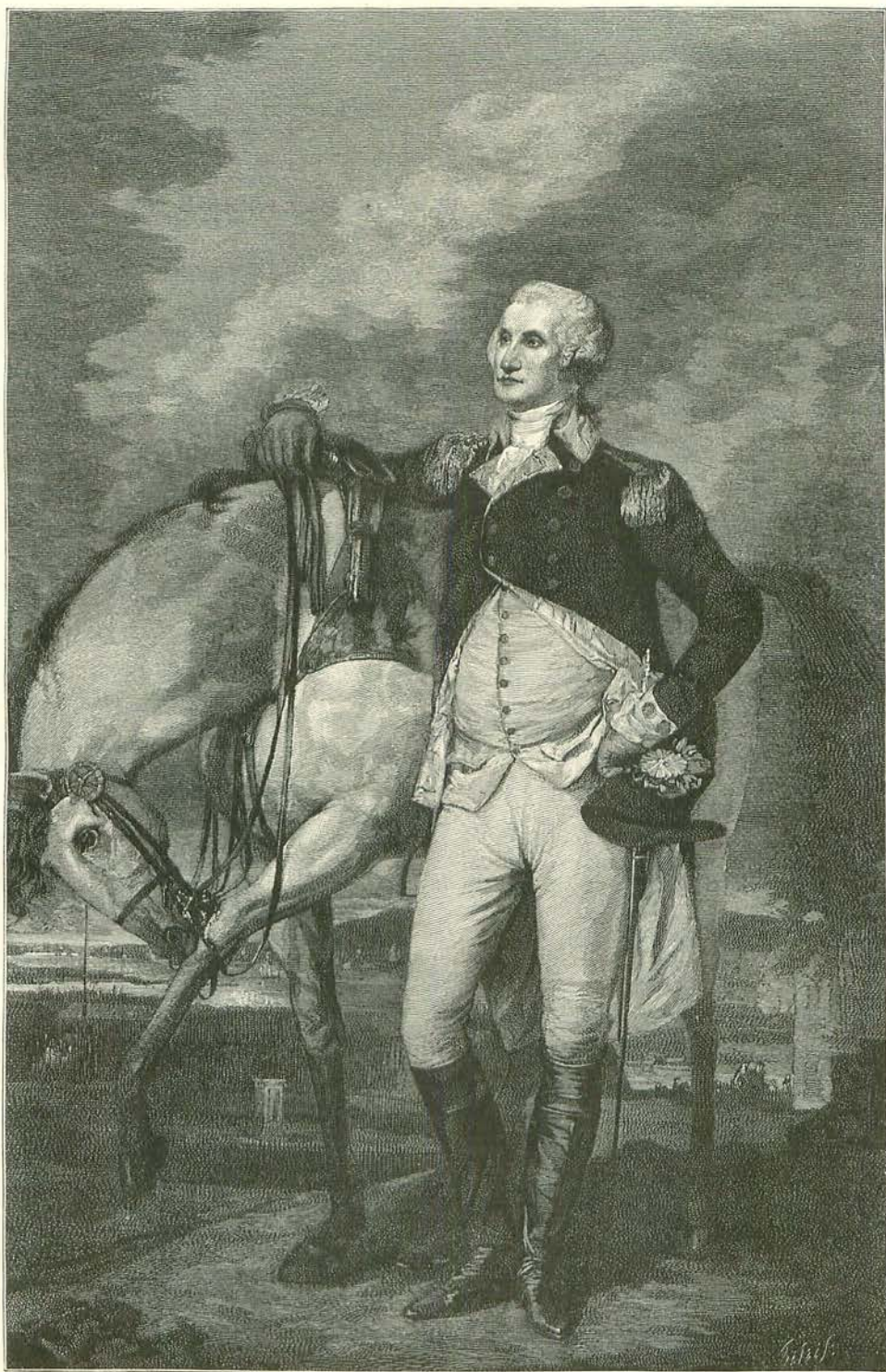
THIS distinguished English artist came to this country in 1783-84, for the purpose of painting portraits of eminent men of the Revolution with a view of representing in several large paintings the principal events of the war. In 1795 he painted Washington at Mount Vernon, which original picture is now in the National Museum at Philadelphia; a replica belonged to the late J. Carson Brevoort of Brooklyn, N. Y. It is a weak and unsatisfactory portrait, while good as a work of art.

HOUDON.

THIS great French sculptor, who shared with his English contemporary Nollekens the reputation of being the best portrait sculptors of modern times, came to America in 1785 expressly for the purpose of modeling Washington. He remained two weeks at Mount Vernon, during which time he made a cast of the face, from which a bust was modeled, and took minute measurements of the person of Washington. The result is the typical Washington perfected by the genius of the French sculptor, and it sustains a noble ideal. The statue is in Richmond, Va.

JAMES PEALE.

THIS gentleman was a younger brother of Charles Willson Peale and had great merit as a miniature painter. In 1788 he made his first portrait of Washington, representing him with flowing hair and a contour not unlike that in Houdon's bust. This miniature belongs to the



GEORGE WASHINGTON.

(FROM A PAINTING BY JOHN TRUMBULL, NOW IN THE CITY HALL, NEW YORK.)

artillery company Washington Grays, and is in the keeping of the Pennsylvania Historical Society. In 1795, when his brother was having his last sitting from Washington, he was accorded the opportunity of another study, and the portrait in the Lenox Library, New York, was the result.

RAMAGE.

OCTOBER 3, 1789, Washington in his diary records: "Sat for Mr. Ramage near two hours to-day, who was drawing a miniature picture of me for Mrs. Washington." This artist was an Irishman, and the principal miniature painter in New York from 1777 until his death, which occurred soon after he painted the miniature of Washington. All trace of this interesting portrait is unfortunately lost.

MADAME DE BRÉHAN.

THIS lady, who was a sister to the French minister, was an amateur of no mean ability. She painted on copper, in blue and white, a profile of Washington, who mentions it in his diary under the same date as the last extract: "Walked in the afternoon, and sat about 2 o'clock for Madam De Brehan to complete a miniature profile which she had begun from memory and which she had made exceedingly like the original." The head was laureated, and Washington was so delighted with it that he distributed prints from it among his friends.

GÜLAGER.

THIS man was a Dane and very little of the artist, as exhibited in his portrait of Washington. It was painted from life at Portsmouth, N. H., on November 3, 1789, and now belongs to a lady in Rhode Island.

SAVAGE.

ORIGINALLY a goldsmith, Savage soon turned his attention to painting and engraving, and became an admirable mezzotinto and stipple engraver. In 1789-90 Washington sat to him for a portrait for Harvard University, where it now hangs in Memorial Hall. Savage's portrait is nearer Houdon's bust than any other portrait of Washington and has intrinsic evidence of being a good likeness; especially is this the case with the large mezzotinto plate previously mentioned.

TRUMBULL.

NEXT to Peale, Washington accorded Trumbull the greatest and most frequent facilities to study his features and form. This self-sacrifice on the part of Washington to these two men was doubtless owing to the military relation that had existed for so long between them, and there-

fore it is that the *military* portrait of Washington is Trumbull's. In 1790 was painted the whole-length portrait of Washington in full uniform standing by a white horse, for the city of New York, and now in the City Hall—an engraving of it appears on the previous page. Two years later was painted the full-length portrait now in the Trumbull Gallery at Yale University, and which the artist considered the best of the portraits of Washington that he painted. The following year the bust portrait in civil dress, in the Trumbull Gallery, and the military picture for Charleston, S. C., were painted from sittings especially given for the purpose. In 1794 Trumbull painted a small cabinet or miniature portrait on panel, now in the National Museum in Washington. It is interesting, but not satisfactory, having too much dash in it for the dignified President.

THE ROBERTSONS.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON is the Scotch artist who carried from David, Earl of Buchan, to Washington the gift of the celebrated box made from the wood of the oak tree which sheltered Sir William Wallace after his defeat at Falkirk. Mr. Robertson arrived in New York in December, 1791, and Washington sat to him on the 13th for a miniature, from which a large picture was painted for the Earl of Buchan.

Walter Robertson was an Irishman and no relative, it is thought, to the preceding. He came to this country with Stuart in 1793, and the next year painted a miniature of Washington, which, from the engraving of it, could have borne little or no resemblance to the subject, notwithstanding the statement of Robert Field, who made a contemporaneous engraving of it, that it "is as good a likeness and as fine a piece of painting as I ever saw." Its dissimilarity to the other portraits, together with the statement of Field, would indicate pretty clearly that it was from life.

CERACCHI.

CERACCHI came to this country with the idea of executing a monument to Liberty, which he designed should be one hundred feet high, have statues of the most prominent heroes of the war, and cost thirty thousand dollars. Towards carrying out his intention he modeled and cut the busts of Washington, Hamilton, Clinton, and others, which, although severe and classical, are fine specimens of the statuary art.

WILLIAMS.

A PAINTER by this name persecuted and persisted until he succeeded in 1794 in obtaining a sitting from Washington for a portrait

now in the possession of Washington Lodge No. 22 of Alexandria, Virginia. It is a miserable picture in every respect.

WERTMÜLLER.

THIS artist was a Swede and a painter of considered merit. He painted Washington in Philadelphia in 1795, of which portrait he made several replicas; but which one is the original it is not possible to state with any certainty.

STUART.

THE household Washington of the world is Stuart's Washington. Why it is so, it is indeed difficult at this day to say, for it admittedly lacks the strength of this artist's best work and fails as a true portraiture to satisfy the student of Washington's character. It is essentially an ideal head, and Stuart became so imbued with his ideal Washington that there are several portraits of prominent men painted by him at this period that are strongly tintured with similar characteristics. Stuart painted Washington from life three times. Of these three portraits there are sixty-one known replicas, and they have been engraved more than two hundred times. The first, and by all question the most satisfactory Stuart's Washington, was painted in Philadelphia in 1795. It presents the right side of the face. Soon after it was painted it was taken to England and became the property of Mr. Samuel Vaughan, from which circumstance it is known as the Vaughan Washington. It now belongs to Mrs. Joseph Harrison of Philadelphia. The second portrait was painted in 1796, and is the full-length known as the Lansdowne portrait. Whether the Lansdowne picture or the one belonging to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts is the original is a mooted question, with the odds against the Lansdowne picture. The third and last portrait of Washington painted by Stuart from life is the famous Athenæum head, so well known that our space will not admit of further criticism or comment. It is from this head that Stuart painted most of his replicas.

REMBRANDT PEALE.

As already mentioned, when Washington gave his last sitting to the elder Peale all the members of the family took advantage of the opportunity to gain sketches. Subsequently

Rembrandt Peale had two other sittings, and the result was a very weak, poor picture, closely resembling his father's last portrait. The well-known Rembrandt Peale portrait of Washington is a composite picture, and not an original from life.

SHARPLESS.

SHARPLESS was a crayon draughtsman who came to this country in 1794 and made profile portraits in pastel of many prominent men. In 1796, being in Philadelphia, Washington sat to him, and Sharpless's portrait of Washington is the best-known profile likeness of the subject. The artist made many copies of the original, which he sold for fifteen dollars apiece.

SAINT-MÉMIN.

As Charles Willson Peale was the first to delineate the features of George Washington, so Charles Balthazar Julien Févret de Saint-Mémin was the last, and their works are equally esteemed and valuable. Saint-Mémin was a Frenchman who came to this country to introduce the physiognotrace, an invention of Chrétien by which an accurate profile outline could be obtained and subsequently reduced to any required size by the use of the pantograph. These reduced profiles were etched on copper and finished with the graver. In November, 1798, when Washington was in Philadelphia organizing the army for the threatened war with France, Saint-Mémin secured a sitting, and the profile then made is the last portrait from life of the Father of his Country. It is very strong and necessarily correct. The original life-size drawing on pink paper in black crayon did belong to the late Mr. Brevoort of Brooklyn.

THUS is brought to a close this bare record of all the known authentic original portraits of Washington. Any one perusing these pages will readily understand how much easier it would have been and how much more entertaining it might have become had space permitted of amplification instead of curtailment; but it will also be recognized that the subject is sufficient for a small volume rather than a contribution to a popular magazine. The epoch, however, that we have now reached could not be allowed to pass without marking it by the preservation of some such register as is here given.

Charles Henry Hart.

