

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
Washington, D. C.

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National Gallery of Art given famous
American paintings.

The National Gallery of Art today announced the acceptance of a valuable gift of 11 celebrated paintings by early American artists.

This important gift, including the noted painting of the family of George Washington by Edward Savage -- from which one of the most famous engravings ever executed in this country was produced -- was made by the Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust through Paul Mellon, David K. E. Bruce and Donald D. Shepard, as trustees, who are administering the fund under which the National Gallery of Art is being built in Washington to house the great works of art belonging to the nation.

Supplementing other priceless works of art donated to the government by the late Andrew W. Mellon, the present gift marks the first step toward setting up in the National Gallery a special section devoted to the advancement and preservation of American art.

To this end, officials of the National Gallery made known that the 11 early American paintings will be placed in specially designed and separate rooms when the building, now well along in construction, is completed during the Fall of this year.

Adjoining rooms will contain the famous Gainsboroughs, Reynolds, Romneys and other 18th Century English canvasses which formed a part of the Mellon collection given to the government as a nucleus for the National Gallery.

In establishing the trust fund providing for the National Gallery it was the purpose of the founder not only to create an institution that would attract works of old world masters held in this country, but also to collect and encourage meritorious American paintings and sculpture.

The policy of the National Gallery, it is pointed out, calls for including in the permanent collection only such paintings and sculpture as are representative of artists whose merit and importance have been generally recognized for more than 20 years after their death. The 11 paintings just donated fully maintain the high standard of quality fixed in the policy of the National Gallery and reflect a further step toward realization of the ideal behind the original gift of art masterpieces.

Representing the first paintings of the American school so far acquired by the National Gallery, the latest Mellon

gift includes prized portraits by Gilbert Stuart, John Copley, Benjamin West, John Trumbull, Chester Harding, Edward Savage, and Mather Brown.

Outstanding for esthetic, as well as for historic merit, it is expected that these portraits will form the foundation of a great collection of American painting, representative not only of the 18th Century but also of more recent years, providing, ultimately, a comprehensive view of the highest achievements of American artists. It was with this idea in view that Mr. Mellon, during his lifetime, purchased a considerable number of American paintings including the famous Thomas B. Clarke Collection, of which some of the paintings in the present gift were a part.

Five of the portraits are by Gilbert Stuart and throw light on the most interesting phases of his development in America. One is his Philadelphia period, the portrait of Washington, which was brought to this country from Ireland where it had been sent by Stuart and had remained until 1919. The artist's New York period is represented by two fine examples -- the portrait of Lawrence Yates and that of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Richard Yates; and his style at the end of his life, when he was working in Boston, is to be seen in the portrait of Joseph Coolidge. Stuart also painted in Washington and its vicinity. This phase of his activity is well illustrated by the portrait of the young John Randolph

which, as Henry Adams once wrote, "interprets the mystery of the affection and faith he inspired in his friends."

Randolph as an elderly man is also portrayed in another fine portrait -- by Chester Harding -- likewise included in the donation.

A portrait group of special interest to all Americans, and particularly on this day of Washington's anniversary, is the "Washington Family", by Edward Savage, painted in New York and Philadelphia between 1789 and 1796. It constitutes a priceless historical as well as artistic treasure. The painting shows Washington with one hand resting on a plan for the "Capital City" which was afterwards to bear his name and along whose main axis the National Gallery is now being erected.

In this, one of the most engaging family-group pictures in this country, George and Martha Washington are shown in their home at Mount Vernon with their adopted children, son and daughter of John Custis, who was Mrs. Washington's son by her first husband. At the right stands Washington's negro servant, Billy Lee. This picture, painted against a traditional background of red draperies and with a view of the Potomac River beyond, accurately portrays the simple dignity of the Washington household, and is one of the most interesting examples of 18th Century American portraiture.

A portrait by John Trumbull of Washington's confidential aide and the great Federalist, Alexander Hamilton, is to be seen in another picture included in the Mellon gift.

The donation illustrates also the activity of American painters in England. The friend and protector of American painters resident abroad and successor to Sir Joshua Reynolds as President of the Royal Academy at London, Benjamin West, is represented by one of his finest groups -- a portrait of Guy Johnson, translator of the Bible into the Mohawk dialect, and directly behind him, his Indian guide and secretary. West's pupil, Mather Brown, appears in a moment of genius with his striking portrait of William Vans Murray, American Minister to Holland and to France at the end of the 18th Century.

Lastly, John Copley who was equally famous in England and America, is represented by a splendid portrait of Earl Howe, painted shortly after the latter had retired as commander-in-chief of the British Armies in North America. The portrait, one of Copley's finest, seems to symbolize in subject and artist the renewal of friendship between the two nations, and in style it combines the ease of English portraiture with the strength of the more provincial manner of the artist's colonial heritage. It completes this unusually fine group of portraits whose significance as historical documents is surpassed only by its artistic interest.

The gift forms a worthy foundation for the American artistic tradition to which a considerable part of the National Gallery will be fittingly dedicated, in accordance with the ideals of its establishment and the plans now formulated for its future development as a national institution.

These 11 new acquisitions make an important addition to the collection of some 111 paintings by old masters and 21 Renaissance sculptures presented to the government by Mr. Mellon in 1937, and to the great collection of Italian art masterpieces -- comprising 375 paintings and 18 pieces of sculpture -- which Mr. Samuel H. Kress, of New York, gave to the National Gallery in 1939.

Included in Mr. Mellon's initial gift are three renowned Raphaels and four Botticellis, together with important works by Duccio, Fra Angelico, Jan van Eyck, Titian, Rubens, Van Dyck, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Frans Hals, Goya, El Greco, Velazquez, and others.

The Kress gift includes an outstanding work of most of the important painters of the Italian School from the 13th to the 18th Centuries, such as Duccio, Giotto, Fra Angelico, Giorgione, Titian, and others.

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