

NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D. C.

FOR RELEASE: Morning papers of
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WASHINGTON, June 26: As part of the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the establishment of the Federal Government in the City of Washington, the National Gallery of Art is presenting an exhibition of portraits entitled "Makers of History in Washington, 1800-1950".

The exhibition will be opened to the public on June 30, and will continue through November 19, 1950. There will be a preview on Thursday evening, June 29, for Government officials and other invited guests. A completely illustrated catalogue of the exhibition will be available.

The exhibition includes portraits of eminent persons who have had an important role in historical events in Washington, or have taken a leading part in the founding and development of the City, itself. Thus, a portrait of Alexander Hamilton is included because of the part which he played in selecting the site for the Federal Government. His portrait, however, is shown in the room with those of Washington, Jefferson, and Jay, his co-architects in the far greater work of founding the Republic and organizing the Government during its early years.

In another room may be found portraits of those whose work was primarily concerned with the development of the City of Washington. Here may be seen also the famous group portrait by Savage of the Washington Family, with General and Mrs. Washington seated on the terrace at Mount Vernon, viewing the map of the proposed "Federal City", as designed by Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the French engineer whom Washington had selected to plan the City. Unfortunately, the room contains no portrait of Major L'Enfant, as none exists.

Because of limitation of space, no portraits of living persons are shown, with the exception of portraits of Presidents and the wives of Presidents. By courtesy of the President and Mrs. Truman, the entire collection of the White House portraits has been made available for this exhibition. With these and other portraits borrowed for the occasion there is on view a complete collection of portraits of Presidents of the United States. In some cases, unfortunately, the portrait of a President's wife has not been available. It was hoped also to include portraits of all Vice Presidents and Speakers of the House of Representatives. It was not possible to do so, however, as these portraits could not be removed from the Capitol where they are permanently installed as part of the decoration of the Senate Chamber and the Speaker's Lobby. They may be viewed there in connection with this exhibition.

The portraits on view in the National Gallery have been arranged in chronological order. The persons represented are usually shown with others in the administration with which they are identified, or in the decade in which they were most prominent, although it has not always been possible to adhere to this rule. Thus, Calhoun, Clay and Webster are shown with the Administrations of Presidents Madison, Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Jackson, rather than in the later and, perhaps, more famous periods of their careers. The fine portrait of General Robert E. Lee, exhibited in the room with portraits of President Lincoln and General Grant, depicts General Lee as he appeared shortly after the Mexican War when he was an officer of the United States Army and living at Arlington, rather than as he appeared at the time he was offered, in Blair House in 1861, the command of the United States Army in the field.

Although Henry Adams saw many administrations come and go, his portrait is shown with those of President Theodore Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, John Hay, and others in that brilliant group of friends who lived around Lafayette Square and whose writings and conversation marked such a high point in the life of Washington. In like manner, the portrait of Miss Mabel Boardman is grouped with portraits of the Taft Administration, but her great work in the American Red Cross continued from the Administration of President Theodore Roosevelt to that of President Truman.

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The exhibition has been assembled with funds provided by the National Capital Sesquicentennial Commission, as part of the celebration of the founding of the City of Washington. Grateful acknowledgment is made of the generous cooperation of the Sesquicentennial Commission and especially of the assistance rendered by Mr. Carter Barron and Mr. Edward Boykin of the Commission.

David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, said: "The exhibition gives, in microcosm, a pre-view of what a National Portrait Gallery should be if present plans are carried out. The Trustees of the National Gallery of Art now hold a collection of portraits of historical personages as the nucleus of what, it is hoped, will some day become a National Portrait Gallery. Such a gallery is particularly needed at the present time when it is so important for the coming generation to have an understanding of our history and of those who created the civilization we now enjoy. In realizing these aims, a National Portrait Gallery would be an educational force of the greatest value, with a potential influence on future generations that could not possibly be measured."

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