

# The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts

*The paintings and prints*

BY FRANK L. HORTON

IT CANNOT BE said of many Southern painters that they contributed greatly to the shaping of American art. For the most part they took pleasing likenesses of their subjects and accepted modest fees in return. Two exceptions to this rule stand out: Maryland-born Charles Willson Peale in the colonial period, and Washington Allston of South Carolina in the Federal. The likenesses Peale painted in his early period, according to James Thomas Flexner, "give important indications as to the future directions of American art." Allston became our first full-scale romantic artist and strongly affected the development of this school in America. It is significant that both of these Southern-born artists spent most of their lives and exerted their greatest influence in the North, whereas most of the artists who painted in the South came from elsewhere, and many were itinerants who stayed only a short time.

While many artists advertised in the South that they painted landscapes and history pieces, little can be found today except their portraits. Alfred Coxe Prime, in his *Arts & Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South*

*Carolina, 1721-1800* (2 vols., 1929-1932), lists nine colonial artists advertising in newspapers in Maryland and fifteen in South Carolina. A similar study by James H. Craig, *The Arts and Crafts in North Carolina, 1699-1840* (1965), lists no artists working in North Carolina prior to the Revolution. Studies made of the wills and inventories of that colony tell the same story. While no similar investigation has been made of Virginia, the evidence from surviving paintings and other historical sources reveals that only a few artists worked in that colony.

The paintings in the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts form a collection which well represents the artists and subjects of this sparsely populated region from its settlement through the early nineteenth century. The use of prints to decorate American homes is well known, and the custom was prevalent in the South, as elsewhere. Prints of Southern interest, usually of English origin, supplement the paintings. Several of the pictures shown here in detail may also be seen on pages 72 through 95 as they appear on the walls of the museum.

*All illustrations are from the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.*

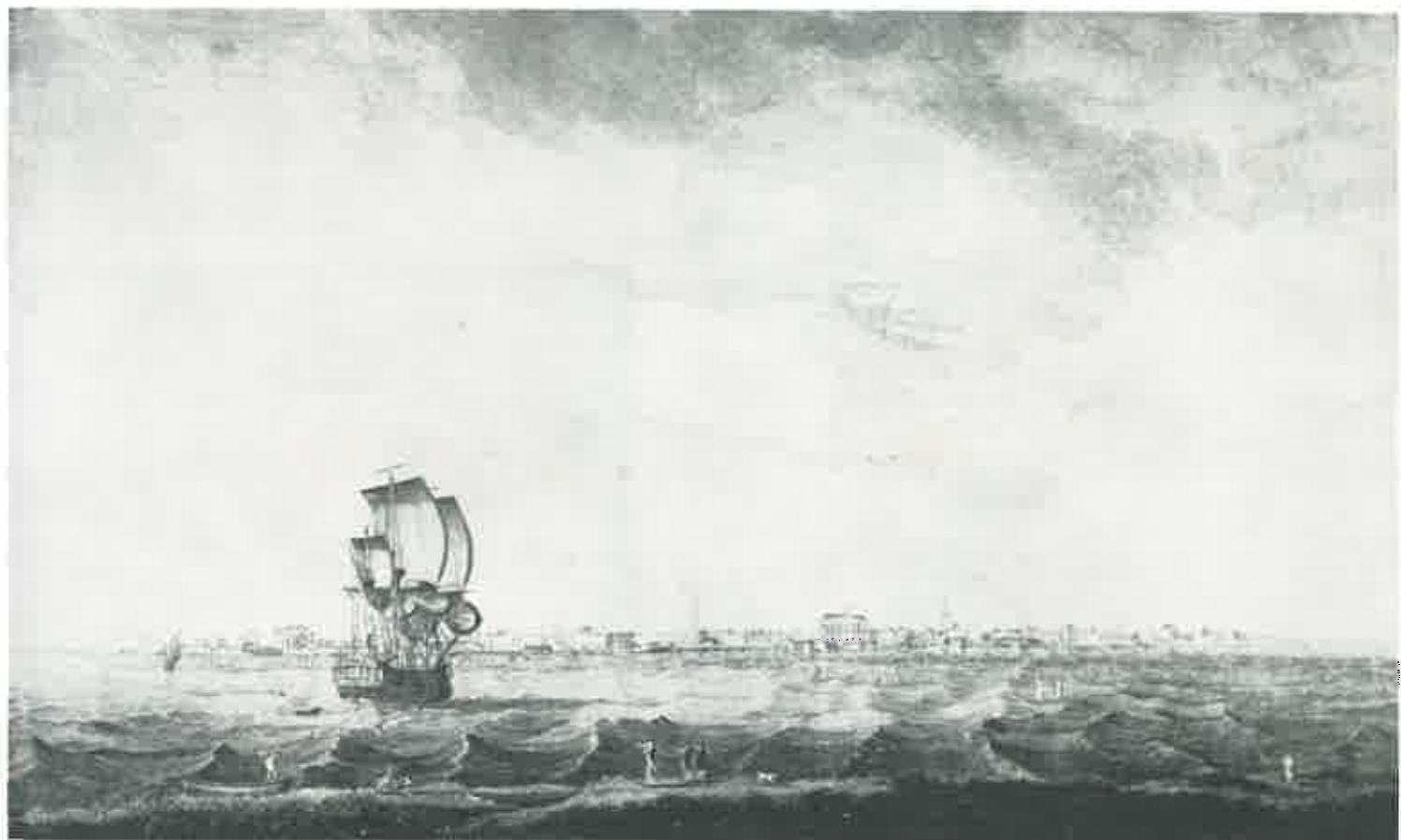
1 Thomas Leitch (or Leech), *A View of Charles-Town, the Capital of South Carolina, from an Original Picture Painted at Charles-Town in the Year 1774*. The artist arrived in South Carolina in October 1773 and a year later, on October 31, 1774, placed the following advertisement in the *South Carolina Gazette*: "Proposals for publishing by Subscription, A View of Charles-Town: This View has been taken with the greatest Accuracy and Care by Mr. Leech, who is now employed about painting a finished Picture from the Drawings already made by him.—The Picture will be ready to send Home by the next Ships, expected from London, in order to be engraved; and will be so exact a Portrait of the Town, as it appears from the Water, that every House in View will be distinctly known . . . Mr. Leech cannot support the Expence of such a Work without Assistance, and

therefore proposes to all Lovers of the Polite Arts, opening a Subscription, at so low a Price as a Guinea a Piece:—Half to be paid down at the Time of subscribing, the other Half on the Delivery of the Print."

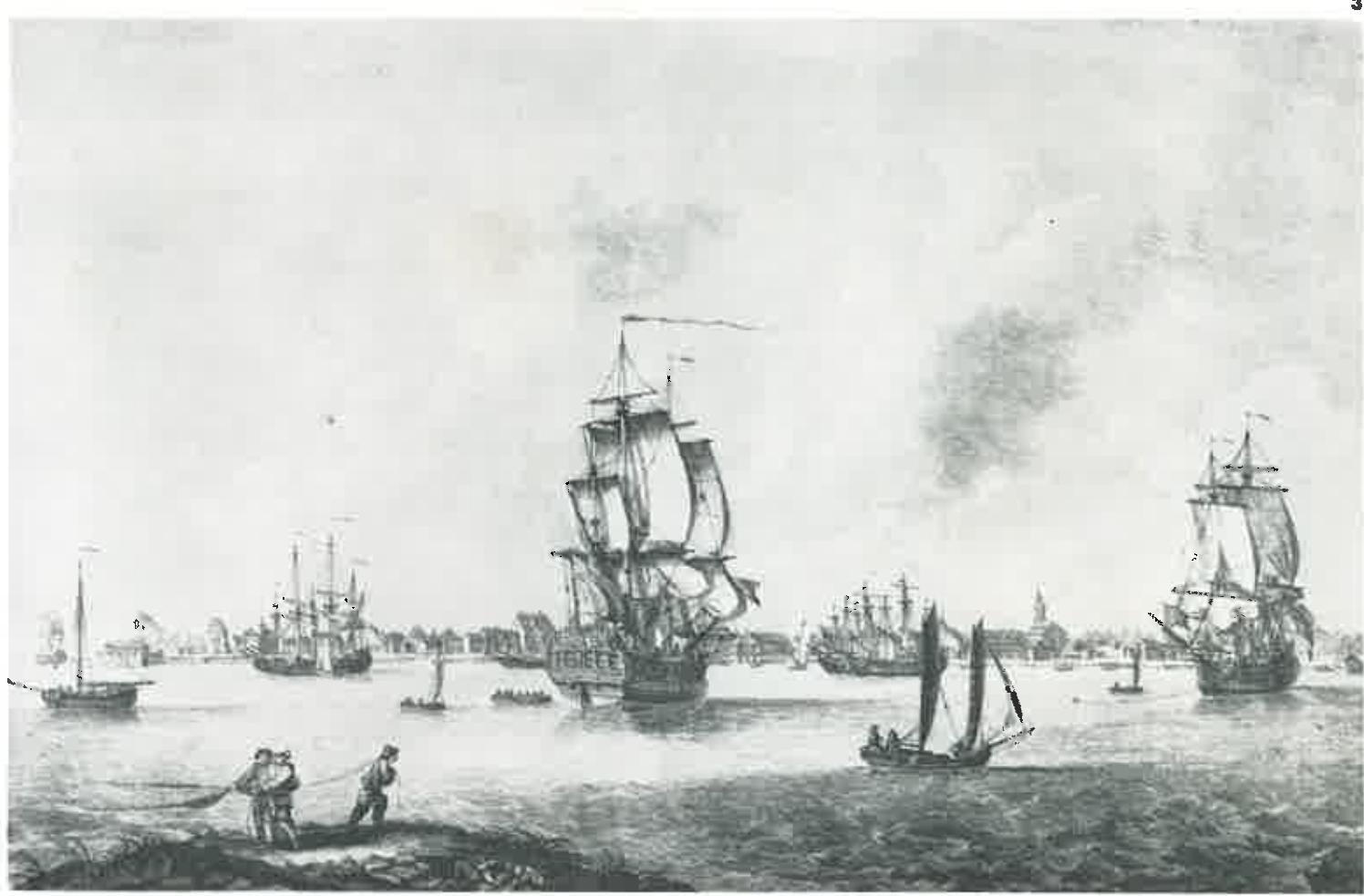
2 Leitch's *View of Charles-Town*, engraved by Samuel Smith and published in London, June 3, 1776. On earlier engraved views of Charleston, see ANTIQUES, March 1940, p. 137; August 1947, p. 100.

3 T. Mellish, *A View of Charles Town the Capital of South Carolina in North America*, engraved by C. Canot, printed for John Bowles, London, c. 1762. Leitch, in preparing his painting of 1774, was not above copying a previous artist's work, as can be seen by comparing the ships in the foreground.





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4 Henrietta Johnston (d. 1728/29), *Colonel Samuel Prioleau*, Charleston, 1715. Mrs. Johnston was America's first professional woman artist and a pioneer, if not the first, pastellist. Her husband, the Reverend Gideon Johnston, wrote soon after their arrival in Charleston from Ireland, "were it not for the Assistance my wife gives me by drawing Pictures (which can last but a little time in a place so ill peopled) I should not have been able to live" (quoted in ANTIQUES, March 1947, p. 185). The museum also owns the companion portrait of Mrs. Prioleau.

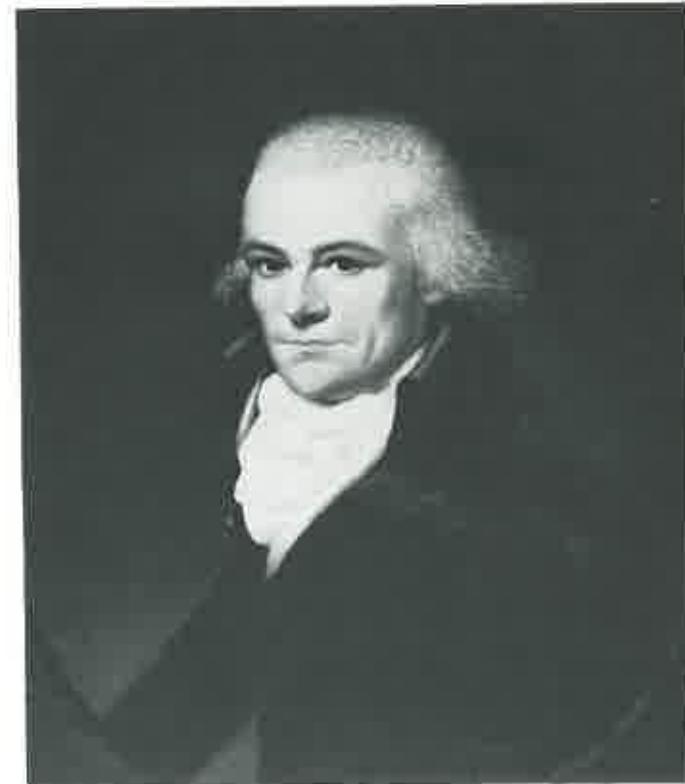
5 John Wollaston (painting in America 1749-1758, 1765-1767), *Daniel Ward*, Charleston, 1765-1767. John Wollaston was America's most prolific painter during his two sojourns here. During 1749-1752 he was in New York City; 1753-1754, in Annapolis and elsewhere in Maryland; c. 1755-1757, in Virginia; and 1758, Philadelphia. He was again in America, painting in Charleston, during parts of 1765-1767. Curiously, the remainder of his life is a mystery.

6 Jeremiah Theus (painting in Charleston c. 1739-1774), *Son of Samuel and Mary Odingsell Jones*, c. 1770. Charleston's most popular colonial painter first advertised in the *South Carolina Gazette* on September 6, 1740: "Notice is hereby given, that Jeremiah Theus, Limner, is remov'd into the Market Square near Mr. John Laurens, Sadler, where all Gentlemen and Ladies may have their Pictures drawn, likewise Landskips of all sizes, Crests and Coats of Arms for Coaches or Chaises. Likewise for the convenience of those who live in the Country, he is willing to wait on them at their respective Plantations" (quoted in Prime, *Arts & Crafts*, Vol. 1, p. 10). While Theus' portraits are not great works of art, they are honest likenesses and, as such, form an important source of information on Charleston costume of the period from 1739 to 1774.

7 Henry Benbridge (1743-1811/12), *Rachel Moore*, Charleston, c. 1774. The subject married William Allston and became the mother of Washington Allston. Benbridge was born in Philadelphia and possibly received early training under Matthew Pratt. He went to Rome in 1764 and there studied under Mengs and Batoni. To his mother he wrote, "I am not long painting a Picture, having studied an expeditious way and at the same time a correct one." After his marriage to Letitia Sage, herself an accomplished miniaturist, he moved to Charleston where he worked, with interruption due to his capture by the British during the Revolution, from mid-1773 to about 1800. The rest of his life he spent in Norfolk, Virginia, where he was one of Thomas Sully's early instructors (see ANTIQUES, September 1960, p. 236).

8 John Hesselius (1728-1778), *Richard Sprigg of Strawberry Hill*, Maryland; inscribed on back of canvas: *Richard Sprigg Aetate 22 / J. Hesselius P. 1761*. (Hesselius' portrait of Mrs. Sprigg in the Newark Museum was illustrated in ANTIQUES, May 1956, p. 450.) The artist probably received his training from his father, Gustavus Hesselius, the Swedish painter who came to America in 1711. John's earliest dated portrait is of 1750. He worked in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and Philadelphia, finally settling, after his marriage, in Annapolis, Maryland. Charles Willson Peale received his first instruction in painting from him about 1762.

9 James Earl (1761-1796), *Charles Paxton Butler* (1765-1858), Charleston silversmith; 1794-1796. James, younger brother of the New England artist Ralph Earl, studied with Benjamin West from 1784. During his ten years in London he exhibited at the Royal Academy. On his return his ship was blown off course and made port in Charleston. He made preparations to live in that city and was about to return to England for his family when he died, August 18, 1796, of yellow fever, a malady that frequently claimed strangers to the climate. His obituary in the *South Carolina Gazette* (August 20) speaks of his talent in a way that applies particularly to his painting: "To an uncommon facility in hitting off the likeness, may be added a peculiarity in his execution of drapery, and, whichever has been esteemed in his art the *Ne Plus Ultra*, of giving life to the eye, and expression of every feature" (quoted in Prime, *Arts & Crafts*, Vol. 2, p. 7).





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10 Philip Thomas Coke Tilyard (1785-c. 1830), *Mrs. George Washington Waring* (Sarah Meriweather Dorsey, 1794-1865), Baltimore; signed *P. T. April 1823*. The son of a painter and glazier, Philip Tilyard trained with his father and for a time offered "sign and ornamental painting" to the people of Baltimore; by 1814 he listed himself as a "portrait painter." William Dunlap records, "My friend [Thomas] Sully says of Mr. Tilyard, in 1810 'his attempts at portrait are admirable: he made great efforts to get on as a portrait painter, and I helped him all I could.' "

11 Matthew Harris Jouett (1787/88-1827), *Mrs. Joseph Boswell* (Judith Bell Gist, 1788-1833), Kentucky, c. 1820. Born near Harrodsburg, Kentucky, Jouett read law and began to practice in Lexington in 1812. He started his painting career after the War of 1812, in which he served as a captain. Jouett went to Boston in 1816 to spend a few months with Gilbert Stuart and was considered one of his most distinguished pupils (compare, for example, this painting and Stuart's portrait of Isabella Henderson Lenox illustrated in ANTIQUES, January 1929, p. 22). Jouett's entire painting career took place in Kentucky.

12 Charles Bird King (1785-1826), *Henry St. George Tucker* (1780-1848), Washington, D. C., c. 1816-1820. The artist was born in Newport, Rhode Island, and received early encouragement in painting; Samuel King instructed him in Newport and Edward Savage helped him in New York. He spent seven years in London, where he roomed with Thomas Sully and studied under Benjamin West. He worked with little success in Philadelphia for four years and moved to Washington in 1816, where he remained until his death. While he is best known for his portraits of Indians who came to the capital to treat, he painted the politically prominent as well. *Gift of R. Philip Hanes Jr.*



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13 Charles Balthazar Julien Févret de Saint-Mémin (1770-1852), *Robert Rankin*, Baltimore, c. 1804-1809. (Previously illustrated, when privately owned, in *ANTIQUES*, November 1947, p. 352.) Saint-Mémin came to America about 1793 and began a career as professional artist in 1796, at first painting landscapes. He soon turned to portraiture and, with the aid of a physiognotrace, took accurate profiles in life size on a buff-color paper. After finishing the features freehand in black crayon he would give the whole a wash of varying shades of pink. In some cases a small circular copperplate engraving was made from the drawing by the aid of a pantograph. Saint-Mémin returned to France in 1814.

14 Ralph Eleaser Whiteside Earl (c. 1785-1838), *Cumberland River near the Hermitage, Home of Andrew Jackson*. The artist, the son of Ralph Earl, from whom he learned his profession, worked in various parts of the South. He married a niece of Mrs. Andrew Jackson and became a member of the Jackson household after Mrs. Jackson's death in 1828. His numerous portraits of Andrew Jackson earned him the facetious title of "the king's painter."

15 Unidentified artist, *William Darke* (1736-1801), oil on paper. This primitive painting shows the Virginia Indian fighter in apparent victory over the Miami Indians, shown in retreat at the left. As a matter of record, however, the good lieutenant colonel, in command of a regiment of levies forming the left wing of St. Clair's army, was wounded and defeated in this engagement on November 4, 1791.

16 Tomo Chachi mico or king of Yamacran, and Toonahoni his Nephew, Son of Mico of the Etchitas, mezzotint engraving after William Verelst by John Faber (1684-1756). Chief Tomochichi, of the Yamacraws, visited England with General Oglethorpe and was painted there by Verelst in 1734. A similar engraving appeared as the frontispiece of Samuel Urlsperger's *Ausführliche Nachricht von den Salzburgischen Emigranten*, published at Halle, Germany, 1744.



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