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America's portraitist: Ralph E.W. Earl and the imaging of the Jacksonian era

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AMERICA'S PORTRAITIST: RALPH E.W. EARL AND THE IMAGING OF THE
JACKSONIAN ERA

by

Rachel Elizabeth Stephens

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in Art History in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

December 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Joni Kinsey

ABSTRACT

This thesis serves as the first in-depth study of the works of Jacksonian-era portraitist Ralph E.W. Earl (1788-1838). Earl's multi-faceted contributions to the development of culture in Nashville, Tennessee complimented his work in formation of the public image of Andrew Jackson. As a young man from New England, Earl painted portraits there as an itinerant artist, eventually making enough money to travel abroad. He lived and worked in England for five years before spending a year in Paris and returning to the United States in 1816. Determined to paint the heroes of the Battle of New Orleans, Earl traveled to Nashville, Tennessee. He met with great success there and found a clear niche, thereafter settling in the up-and-coming city. Earl opened a museum in addition to painting the portraits of nearly every prominent Nashvillian. He also painted Jackson's portrait dozens of times in Tennessee and then in Washington during his presidency.

The focus of this thesis is multifaceted. The history of American art is enriched by the telling of Earl's endeavors, and Earl's career functions as a unique case-study in early American art. Most importantly, Earl's portraits of Jackson helped fashion an acceptable image of the nation's seventh president. Furthermore, Earl's museum and printmaking endeavors expanded early American culture in unique ways. This thesis contributes to the story of American art, history, and culture by revealing the multi-faceted career of a forgotten American cultural hero.

Abstract Approved: _____
Thesis Supervisor

Title and Department

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Graduate College
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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Rachel Elizabeth Stephens

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the
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INTRODUCTION

W.J. Cash opens his seminal 1941 study, *The Mind of the South* by stating that “there exists among us...a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity.”¹ Still today, seventy years later, many consider the South ‘another land.’ In the study of art, the result of this differentiation is a vast ignorance about art produced in the American South, especially before the twentieth century. While the South certainly is a distinct region, the nature of the United States and its artistic and cultural heritage may not be fully understood without a more complete view of the entire nation’s cultural history.

Ella-Prince Knox bemoaned this idea in her catalog of Southern painting saying that, “for all the familiarity with the literature, architecture, and general culture of the South, there has been a haunting lack of attention to its art.”² Because of this ‘haunting lack of attention’ broad characterizations or generalizations about art in the American South are problematic because study of it is still too incomplete in most cases for overarching analysis. Many pieces of the aesthetic puzzle remain unresearched, under-discussed or undiscovered. As a result, the true nature of American art more generally cannot be understood until its broader development, outside the urban centers of the Northeast, receives attention.

¹ Cash’s book has been significant to my understanding of the American South, its history, and its mindset. W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941), xlvii.

² Ella-Prince Knox and Donald Kuspit, *Painting in the South: 1564-1980* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1983), xiii.

One such unrecognized and unstudied American cultural innovator is Ralph Eleaser Whiteside Earl. A study of Earl's career reveals innumerable significances within the history of American art and culture. Perhaps long forgotten because his career matured in Nashville, Tennessee, his success there hinged on the time he spent growing up in New England and studying abroad, and his mature development occurred in Washington D.C., under the roof of the Jackson White House. Therefore, a consideration of Earl should not be limited to a discussion of him as a Southern artist. Rather, this dissertation reveals Earl as a significant component of Jacksonian America. Perhaps Earl's career has been largely forgotten because it does not fit any particular mold or category. His career is unlike any other in the nineteenth-century. Though he worked in the South, he was not a Southerner. He studied in England and France and spent twenty years as Andrew Jackson's artist, but is still considered a 'naïve' artist by some.³ His career also involved innumerable academic endeavors, which this theses traces. It is this ambiguous identity that has made Earl problematic for scholars. But it also reveals a self-made man who actively sought and achieved his goals thus placing Earl at the center of the America experience.

Attribution of Earl's works has also been problematic for scholars and as a result, untold numbers of his early paintings are lost or unidentified. Earl did not sign the vast majority of his portraits. Although he was active as a painter in Troy, New York between 1805 and 1809, no works are identified from this period. Similarly, only three of the dozens of paintings he created while abroad between 1810 and 1814 are known, and none of the portraits he created as an itinerant artist in the South in

³ Such as David Meschutt, "The Portraiture of James Monroe, 1758-1831" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2005), 133-34.

1815 and 1816 have surfaced. Although the Jackson works are also unsigned, their provenances tend to be better recorded due to the subject's significance. Thus large sections of Earl's development as an artist cannot be studied due to the lack of availability of visual evidence.

From what remains though, it is obvious that Earl's life and career offer a significant case study in the development of art, politics, and social change during the Jacksonian era and that he contributed greatly to the developing history and progress of American art. His career also spans some of the most critical periods in American history. He was raised in colonial New England and witnessed the maturation of the country in the Jacksonian era, with close ties not only to the South, but to the nation via Jackson himself. Thus a study of his works, which date from 1800-1838, offers a fascinating glimpse into some specific aspects of artistic development in antebellum America.

This dissertation therefore casts Earl as much more than a Southern portraitist. Throughout his career he spearheaded many significant projects, from an early museum to a printmaking enterprise. His lifelong curiosity and strong ambition enriched his role in Jacksonian America and his significance extends far beyond what anyone has heretofore realized. First, in his young career, by continuing the artistic precedent set in the Connecticut Valley by his father, Earl helped solidify a regional style. He then continued the strong American tradition of studying abroad by living and working in England and France for five years in his twenties. Returning to America, he worked for a year as an itinerant portraitist, something most early nineteenth-century artists in America did in order to maintain themselves. Settling in

Nashville for the middle portion of his career, he exceeded the accomplishments of any artist in the South previous to him. An understanding of his methodology and career trajectory in Nashville will fill a void in cultural awareness regarding artists in the South in this period. Furthermore, in Nashville, and then in Washington after 1829, Earl established a printmaking enterprise by spearheading engravings and lithographs commissioned after his original portraits. Study of these projects, and the rich records and correspondence associated with them sheds light on early printing practices in America. Finally, and most significantly however, Earl cast Andrew Jackson as a heroic gentleman fit for the Presidency. In dozens of original portraits of “Old Hickory”, Earl established an identity for the national hero turned seventh American President. The five chapters of this dissertation investigate Earl’s role in each of these major endeavors thus placing him at the center of the developing American culture of the Jacksonian era.

Earl’s career took place at a time when it was extremely difficult for an artist in America to make a living producing artworks of any genre. While other more well-known American artists were producing portraits of Jackson in the midst of their own financial despair (such as John Vanderlyn), Earl made a comfortable living on portrait painting in Nashville (and subsequently Washington) and he stayed very busy.⁴

According to Jacksonian visual historian James Barber, “As a frontier lawyer and judge, Indian fighter and military hero, and ultimately as President of the United States, Jackson was perhaps the best example of the self-made American in the first

⁴ For more information on the struggling financial situations of early nineteenth-century American artists see, Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966), and Lillian Berensack Miller, “John Vanderlyn and the Business of Art,” *New York History* 32:1 (January 1951): 33-44.

half of the nineteenth century.”⁵ And in Old Hickory’s close associate Earl is perhaps the best example of a self-made artist in the first half of the nineteenth century in America. Despite having opposite personalities, Earl grew to revere Jackson and Jackson respected Earl, and their close daily interaction enriched the careers of both men.

Categorizing Earl and his work has been problematic for many. Earl’s paintings have been considered everything from Americana and folk art, to political icons, historical artifacts, and works of fine art. They have also been exhibited as primitive and naïve works, and often forgotten altogether.⁶ Despite Earl’s success, his paintings have frequently been denigrated by contemporary scholars. Historian James C. Kelly characterized Earl’s work by saying that, “He painted numerous portraits of Jackson, some of distinction but many repetitious in nature and mediocre in quality, which were political icons more than works of art.”⁷ Kelly also noted that “Some [Tennessee] artists lacked the ability to penetrate personality even when the subject was well known to him, as Jackson was to Earl.”⁸ Earl’s contemporaries would have certainly disagreed with this statement. Furthermore, according to Susan Symonds in her 1968 master’s thesis, “Earl’s images of Jackson were highly regarded, on the whole, by Jackson’s admirers. They served as utilitarian art, their function being more

⁵ James Barber, *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study* (Washington D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1991), 26.

⁶ Earl’s works have been included in the following folk art exhibitions, for example: Deborah Chotner, *American Naïve Paintings* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1992) and Edgar Garbisch, Bernice Garbisch, and Albert Gardner, *101 Masterpieces of American Primitive Painting* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1961).

⁷ James C. Kelly, *Landscape and Genre Painting in Tennessee, 1810-1985* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1985), 22.

⁸ James C. Kelly, *Portrait Painting in Tennessee* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1987), 197.

important than the artistic rendering.”⁹ Symonds went on to criticize Earl’s work, saying his “palette could be garish; the colors are vivid and used locally, with little modeling...The paintings are stiff and flat.”¹⁰ Due to the twentieth-century criticism Earl’s works have received, scholars have failed to notice their cultural, historical, and artistic significance.

Because of Earl’s unique position first as both a colonial New England painter, and later as Southern portraitist of the Jackson era, there is great disparity in what has been written about him. This is due also to his ability to manipulate his style based on the region and the patron. According to late curator and scholar David Meschutt, “Although Earl eventually became a relatively good academic painter, he never really grew beyond the naïve manner of his earliest work...Earl occupies that borderland between academic and naïve painting: his work is competent but not especially good and at the same time lacks the charm that makes folk art so appealing.”¹¹ Meschutt goes on to compare Earl’s work to Joseph Steward, John Brewster Jr., and Jonathan Budington, who he says were all influenced by the elder Earl and who worked in the Connecticut Valley. According to Meschutt however, “None ever painted as competently as R.E.W. Earl, but their work is more attractive to modern eyes than his.”¹² In making these statements, Meschutt failed to realize that Earl manipulated his style to suit his patron and he certainly was not trying to appeal to ‘modern eyes.’ Meschutt goes on to quote an often cited statement by John James

⁹ Susan Clover Symonds, “Portraits of Andrew Jackson, 1815-1845” (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1968), 36.

¹⁰ Symonds, 36.

¹¹ Meschutt, 133-34.

¹² Meschutt, 133-4, note.

Audubon, who encountered Earl and his large-scale portrait of Jackson on battlefield in New Orleans and said perhaps out of jealousy over Earl's success, "Great God forgive Me if My Judgment is Erroneous—I New Saw a Worst painted Sign in the Streets of Paris."¹³ Despite seeing it after nearly 200 years had passed, Meschutt apparently agrees with Audubon saying "His assessment was on the mark."¹⁴

More interesting commentary is made by Julie Aronson in *American Naïve Paintings*. Of the Jackson portraits, she says "today these portraits are valued for their historical merits, but are criticized for their repetitiousness and their absence of psychological insight. They lack the tender human quality and unsophisticated decorative appearance that give his early portraits so much appeal to twentieth-century viewers."¹⁵ Like most scholars that have approached Earl's works, Aronson prefers Earl's "naïve" style which he applied in New England prior to his study in Europe. While Earl's portraits' role in historical documentation is certainly warranted and should not be ignored, their value as works of art is equally critical and a broader understanding of Earl's style will strengthen the scope of American art in the critical Jacksonian era. Earl learned from those traditions that preceded him, both European and American, and carved a special niche for himself in a transitional period in American history, manipulating his style and career path as needed. It is ultimately Earl's created style that dominates art in Tennessee throughout the nineteenth century. Symonds furthermore suggests that Earl's portraits of Jackson should be seen

¹³ Quoted in Meschutt, 134, note, from Howard Corning, ed., *Journal of John James Audubon Made During his Trip to New Orleans in 1820-21* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Business Historical Society, 1929), 149.

¹⁴ Meschutt, 134, note.

¹⁵ Deborah Chotner, *American Naïve Paintings* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 103.

as hero images, rather than works of art. However, with his status as one of the most prominent artists in America in the early nineteenth century, they must also be considered for their artistic value.

Although Earl's work has been criticized, according to one author "He, last of all, would have sought the approbation of art critics. Yet, simple justice to his skill demands that he be given better rank among the early American artists and wider recognition of his brilliant, useful career than is usually accorded him."¹⁶ By telling the extraordinary story of Earl's life, and placing his work among the most important events of the Jacksonian era, an American visionary will be revealed.

One of the few glowing reports of Earl's contributions to American art history was made by Abigail Linville:

The scope of Earl's contribution to the state of Tennessee and art in the South is immeasurable. He not only worked as an artist, but as a collector, historian, and an entrepreneur. Owing much of his success to his endearing friendship with President Jackson, he was given the opportunity to pursue his interests without hesitation. His relationship with Jackson surpassed that of patron and painter and affords us a glimpse at the wonderful virtues of this talented man. Earl can be appreciated for his unembellished artistic interpretation during a time when it was essential for American artists to understand and appreciate the artistic styles of England and Europe yet separate themselves stylistically.¹⁷

Indeed Earl often gets more credit in museum catalog entries than in academic scholarship. One says that "the status of Andrew Jackson as a national icon is well represented in numerous portraits that Ralph E.W. Earl produced over the course of

¹⁶ Mary French Caldwell, "Jackson's Court Painter," *The Nashville Tennessean Magazine*, Jan. 1, 1950, 11.

¹⁷ *Southern Perspective: A sampling from the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts* (Winston-Salem: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 2005), 78.

their twenty-year friendship.”¹⁸ And a newspaper article from 1950 acknowledged that Earl’s “faithful and not unskilled portrayal of the features of the great and near-great of the Jackson period give his work a unique and important place in American history.”¹⁹

Unfortunately, Linville’s optimistic summary of Earl’s career is the exception, and Earl has usually been left out of the scholarship entirely. When he has been mentioned, errors in fact inevitably infiltrate the information. So many published errors exist about the specifics of Earl’s life and work, that this project strives especially to make the facts overt based on thorough archival research and to differentiate between evidence and conjecture. This dissertation will offer a comprehensive history on Earl and his life and work, drawing upon all available resources, and in doing so, it will also shed light on some significant and little understood areas of American art.

At the heart of this thesis are the tensions encountered between Jackson’s assumed status of gentility and his own background as a self-made man, involving issues of class, and personal and public maturation in a time of profound transition and considerable anxiety in the United States. As the period of the founding fathers gave way to the Age of Jackson, Earl applied to his portraits of Jackson traditional heroic imagery to assuage growing public anxiety about the transforming state of the nation and Jackson’s role in it. After Jackson’s resounding victory at New Orleans that concluded the War of 1812, the United States was finally free to work out its destiny without European interference. Americans were excited about the future and

¹⁸ *Collection Highlights from the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art* (Memphis: Brooks Museum, 2004)

¹⁹ Caldwell, 9.

had a sense of urgency about its direction, believing that if they did not get it right now, they might never have the chance. The New World was finally going to be solidified and its people looked to Jackson for direction. The turbulent age that followed became the only period in American history known by the name of a single man.²⁰

Earl's role was central to shaping Jackson, Nashville, and by extension, the art and identity of that region, and the nation more generally, from the provincial to the genteel. His work both paralleled and contributed to the growing consciousness in the 1830s that American identity in art, in politics, and in other ways was maturing beyond the generation of the founding fathers into a next phase, one that tested and challenged old models, even as it still looked to them for guidance. In presenting the verifiable facts of Earl's life, and analyzing his style for the first time, based on the full body of his works, the methodology of this study draws on not only the physical evidence of his paintings, but also on social, political, and historical context, as well as an exhaustive investigation of his patrons in order to show his substantial contributions to the development of American art and culture in the nineteenth century. Thus this project is exemplary of a number of critical issues such as the assimilation of European traditions in America, the development of national and Presidential imagery, and the power of that imagery for political and social purposes.

Although Jacksonian imagery (in the form of portraits, miniatures, statuary, and prints) is vast, this art is remarkably understudied. Next to George Washington, Andrew Jackson was the most painted man in American history. His face was easily

²⁰ These ideas were enumerated by Jackson scholar Joseph Feller in the recent PBS documentary "Andrew Jackson: Good, Evil, and the Presidency."

recognized in a time before cameras and constant publicity. According to Barber, Jackson was “the premier icon of his age.”²¹ So why has more not been written about his visage? With the exception of a short exhibition catalog entitled *Old Hickory: A Life Sketch of Andrew Jackson*, and its accompanying text *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study* no books have been published about the history of Jacksonian portraiture and Earl’s role in its development.²² A notable absence of scholarship on antebellum portraiture exists, and scholars who have studied the period have tended to focus on the development of landscape and genre in the United States. However, the lack of Jacksonian studies seems like a glaring hole in the scholarship.

Even though he was Jackson’s most frequent and collaborative portraitist, Ralph E.W. Earl has been virtually ignored by scholars.²³ This has occurred despite the accessibility of a large number of primary sources about the artist, a remarkable amount in fact, especially for an artist who worked in the South where most portraitists were itinerant and documentation if it still exists is usually scant. The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, for example, contains a collection of Earl papers, including several folders of memorandum books, receipts and correspondence. Multiple collections of Jackson papers also help document the daily life of “Colonel Earl,” as Jackson called him, and he regularly appears in the everyday Jackson letters. In addition, the Tennessee State Library and Archives in

²¹ Barber, 1991, 28.

²² James G. Barber *Old Hickory: A Life Sketch of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D.C. and Nashville: National Portrait Gallery and Tennessee State Museum, 1990) and Barber, 1991.

²³ According to McGinniss, Earl is among a list of “prolific artists who painted in the South and whose works need additional study.” Maurie D. McGinniss, “Little of Artistic Merit? The Problem and Promise of Southern Art History,” *American Art* 19:2 (2005), 17.

Nashville, Tennessee, which specializes in the Jackson period, contains many archival records regarding Earl's creation of the Nashville Museum, and a small collection of Earl's letters, as well as all of the local newspapers from the period. The Hermitage collection also has some of his personal belongings and several letters. Finally, and most significantly, the Library of Congress has a vast Earl archive included as part of Jackson historian and editor John Spencer Bassett's papers.

Earl's visual legacy is also extensive. Over 100 of Earl's paintings are known, many of which are still located in the state of Tennessee. Jackson's estate, The Hermitage, is the primary repository of Earl's work. The Tennessee State Museum in Nashville also owns many Earl paintings. Numerous other Earl portraits are scattered in museums around the eastern United States, and dozens of others are located in private collections. There are also potentially hundreds of extant prints that Earl commissioned after his portraits. However, because he painted several different versions of the same portrait repeatedly, his work is often considered unoriginal. This occurs despite the fact that more well-known artists such as Gilbert Stuart had exactly the same tactics. In many cases, Earl's portraits are also unsigned and undated, making it very difficult to tell which portrait was the original. Attribution is also sometimes uncertain with Earl's mostly unsigned works.

Despite all of the primary resources, Ralph E.W. Earl has not received nearly the scholarly attention that has been accorded to his less prominent father.²⁴ Partly because the majority of Earl's career was spent in Nashville, Tennessee (a city not

²⁴ The following sources are all about Ralph Earl Sr.: Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, with Richard L. Bushman, Stephen H. Kornhauser, and Aileen Ribero, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, ex. cat. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), Laurence B. Goodrich, *Ralph Earl: Recorder for an Era* (Albany: State University of New York, 1967), and *Ralph Earl, 1751-1801: Catalogue* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1945).

traditionally known for its involvement with the visual arts), and the bulk of his collection is at The Hermitage, rather than an art museum of note, it has been long overlooked. It is also easy to discount or discredit Earl's artistic merit on qualitative grounds.

The secondary literature about Earl is not nearly as plentiful as the primary sources. While scores of books regarding Jackson's life, political involvements, and military prowess exist, no scholarly sources address Earl's career and its significance. A few scant articles and chapters have been published over the years. The first appeared in a Nashville publication, the *Taylor Trotwood Magazine* in 1908, a brief but factually correct article entitled "Ralph Earl, painter to Andrew Jackson" by Emma Look Scott.²⁵ A 1972 exhibition organization by students at the University of Connecticut entitled "The American Earls" was dedicated to the three primary artist members of the Earl family, Ralph Earl Sr., James Earl, his brother, and the younger Ralph E.W. Earl, however, the slight inclusion of the youngest Earl's work is far from comprehensive.²⁶ Symonds' unpublished 1968 master's thesis for the University of Delaware was dedicated to portraits of Andrew Jackson, and includes one chapter about Earl's Jackson paintings.²⁷ James Barber has done the most extensive archival research about Earl and he devotes one chapter to Earl in his volume *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study*.²⁸ Georgia Barnhill wrote the most scholarly Earl article

²⁵ Emma Look Scott, "Ralph Earl, Painter to Andrew Jackson," *Taylor Trotwood Magazine* (April 1908), 29-34.

²⁶ *The American Earls: Ralph Earl, James Earl, R. E. W. Earl*. Exh. cat. William Benton Museum of Art. (Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1972).

²⁷ Susan Clover Symonds, "Portraits of Andrew Jackson, 1815-1845" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1968).

regarding two of the print series that Earl commissioned, and an overview of Earl's life by Jerome MacBeth appeared in *Antiques* magazine in 1971.²⁹ Beyond these, scholarly attention to Earl's work is non-existent. Several books and articles about the art of his father provide insight into his background however, most notably Elizabeth Kornhauser's 1991 publication, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, which briefly addresses Earl Jr. and illustrates three of his works.³⁰ Greater interest has also been shown in Jackson's home, the Hermitage, where Earl lived for many years and several books have been published about it, most recently Charles Phillips' *The Hermitage: Home of Andrew Jackson*.³¹

Although a truly in-depth study of Earl's work during the "Age of Jackson" has yet to be written, many critical issues involving the developing state of American art and culture, party politics, and class issues lie at the heart of this project. Based on his artistic lineage and European training, Earl assisted Jackson in using portraiture as political propaganda in the service of identity formation. As the first president elected by the people, not the Electoral College, Jackson was truly a democratic President, and he displayed his commitment to the people by becoming the first president to invite the public to his inauguration. Orphaned during the American Revolution as a teenager in the western Carolinas, Jackson trained to be a lawyer and moved to

²⁸ Barber, 1991.

²⁹ Georgia Brady Bumgardner, "Political Portraiture: Two Prints of Andrew Jackson," *American Art Journal* 18:4 (Autumn 1986): 84-95. Jerome MacBeth, "Portraits by Ralph E.W. Earl," *Antiques* 100 (Sept. 1971): 390-393.

³⁰ Elizabeth Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1991).

³¹ Charles Phillips, *The Hermitage: Home of Andrew Jackson* (Hermitage, TN: Ladies Hermitage Association, 1997).

Nashville in 1788. His 1791 marriage to Rachel Donelson connected him to one of Nashville's oldest families, yet his roots were humble. Jackson's conflicting identity as a rising star on the western frontier and a rough neck country gambler would become something Jackson would publicly grapple with for the rest of his life. Jackson became the first Tennessean on the national stage and the state's first Senator. The image Jackson projected and his actual background was fraught with tensions, and he employed Earl to remind the public of his heroics and respectability.

According to historian Stanley Horn, "Earl is described by his contemporaries as a man of quiet and gentle ways, and he must have been an excellent foil for the fiery old General."³² Despite the artist's status as intimate of the Jackson family, however, little was recorded about Earl's family history and personal affairs, and even the date of his birth is unknown. According to Emma Scott, one of the first to publish on Earl, "He was a modest man and little given to speaking of his affairs or personal relations. A nature of less reserve... would have made much of his unique position in the Jackson family; or would have left memoirs to succeeding generations."³³ Earl's remarkable life certainly warranted a memoir. With his status as Jackson's visual promoter and right-hand man, in addition to his extensive connections and friendships within the American contemporary art and political scene, Earl became a celebrity in his own right.

Based on his many personal and professional contacts, his friendly demeanor, and his artistic ability, Earl succeeded in gaining a national reputation. In a

³² Stanley F. Horn, *The Hermitage: Home of Old Hickory* (Richmond, VA: Garrett & Massie, 1938), 125-6.

³³ Emma Look Scott, "Ralph Earl, Painter to Andrew Jackson," *Taylor Trotwood Magazine* (April 1908): 29-30.

contemporaneous letter, one of his friends described him as “the very soul of goodness and honor” and he seems to have been highly regarded by all who knew him.³⁴ His “goodness and honor” as well as his modesty and jovial personality helped him succeed in becoming extremely well connected in the most important political and artistic circles. As long as Jackson was in the White House, any artist that desired a sitting with him had to go through Earl. For example, Earl and the noted sculptor, Horatio Greenough were on friendly terms. One letter demonstrates that Greenough communicated to Jackson through Earl (as people often did), asking him to express his disappointment at being unable to make it to a sitting for a bust of the President. Earl’s success is further demonstrated in a letter from Alfred Greenough which states that “My brother [Horatio] has requested me to express to you his satisfaction with the noble and manly representation of the general which hangs in your room. Among the many portraits he has seen of him none appears to have seized his character of bearing as you have succeeded in doing.”³⁵

As a member of the inner circle of the White House, Earl was privy to constant interaction with Jackson as well as insider information. American artist and naturalist John James Audubon visited Washington, for example, (long after encountering Earl’s painting in New Orleans) and recorded the events of his trip in his journals. He had travelled there with several letters from New Orleans for Jackson. He wrote about his visit to the Jackson White House, saying that he was shown to the President’s office, “to present my letters. There we found Colonel

³⁴ Stanley F. Horn, *The Hermitage: Home of Old Hickory* (Richmond, VA: Garrett & Massie, 1938), 125.

³⁵ Alfred Greenough to Earl, July 5, 1836, Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1:3.

Donelson [Jackson's nephew and secretary] and Mr. Earle [*sic*], and in a moment I was in the presence of this famed man, and had shaken his hand." Jackson received his letters and Audubon "went to see Colonel Earle, who is engaged in painting General Jackson's portrait."³⁶ During his visit, Audubon was invited to join the President's family for dinner and he noted that he sat among Andrew Donelson, Earl, and the President. Importantly, Audubon also mentioned a portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart which hung in Earl's studio. Audubon stated that the painting "was found during the war with England by Mrs. Madison, who had cut it out of the frame, rolled up, and removed to the country, as Mr. Earle told me."³⁷ Although it is unknown which Stuart painting Audubon referred to, the appearance of a portrait of the country's first president in Earl's quarters is significant in showing Earl's awareness of his predecessors and his desire to place Jackson in a similar context.³⁸

Earl's fame and success in the national capital are evident in an announcement from an April 1837 Nashville newspaper which lauded his return home to Nashville at the end of Jackson's presidency:

The accomplished artist, Col. R.E.W. Earl, after a sojourn of eight years at Washington, in the family of his venerated relative Ex-President Jackson, has returned to Nashville; to the bosom of a society in which he is as much beloved for his private worth and personal virtues, as he is esteemed for his skill as an artist, occupying the front rank of his profession. For the future, we understand, he will reside principally at the Hermitage; visiting this city and

³⁶ John James Audubon, *The Life of John James Audubon, the Naturalist, edited by his Widow* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1879), 395-96.

³⁷ Audubon, 399.

³⁸ The portrait was probably not the famous Lansdowne portrait of Washington, of which there were two versions, both in England during the Madison presidency.

his friends occasionally, as leisure from his professional engagements permits.³⁹

Not only does this early nineteenth-century personality deserve further attention, but a study of his career will fill the gulf in American art scholarship in antebellum portraiture. While studies of both Colonial portraiture and that of the later nineteenth-century abound, antebellum American portraiture has only received scant scholarly attention. This has occurred despite the enormous popularity of portraiture in the period, and its growing importance based on the emerging commercial order in the United States. America's first art critic, John Neal, wrote about the prevalence of portraiture in 1829, stating that "you can hardly open the door of a best room anywhere, without surprising or being surprised by the picture of somebody plastered to the wall and staring at you with both eyes and a bunch of flowers."⁴⁰ The study of Earl's portraiture and its forgotten role in the developing American culture therefore will contribute greatly to the understanding of antebellum American art and history.

³⁹ "Col. Earle," *Nashville Union*, April 11, 1837.

⁴⁰ John Neal, "American Painters and Painting," *The Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette* I (1829): 45, cited in David Jaffee, "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*, ed. Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 110.

**CHAPTER ONE:
EARL'S EARLY CAREER: PORTRAITURE, SOCIAL STATUS, AND THE
EUROPEAN TRADITION**

Ralph Eleazer Whiteside Earl (1788-1838) was ideally suited to crafting Andrew Jackson's developing image and contributing to the country's cultural advancement. The son of Ralph Earl (1751-1801), an acquaintance of Joshua Reynolds and Benjamin West in England and a leading portraitist of the Connecticut School in the late eighteenth century, Ralph E.W. Earl had grown up in artistic circles in New England, traveling with his itinerant artist father, and was well aware of the power of art to craft identity. The elder Earl was a portraitist who often cited John Singleton Copley, Benjamin West, and Joshua Reynolds as his influences, and from him the younger Earl learned to paint with strong, flat lines, sharp focus, and even panoramic perspectives. Earl Sr. also provided important contacts that would prove extremely useful to his son both in his early career in New England, and later in Europe. During his lifetime, the entirety of which revolved around artistic production, Earl Jr. was exposed to an enormous variety of social and cultural conditions, all of which he would later draw upon in his mature career. This chapter looks in depth at the first two phases of Earl's career, first his early training and subsequent portrait production in New England, especially under his father's tutelage, and next, his five years abroad which have never received any scholarly attention. His early career provides insights into the life of an early American portraitist, and the progression of his career and its influences reveal the roots of his Jacksonian-era work.

Ralph Earl Sr.

Earl Sr.'s own development as an artist was typical of the formative period of art in the late colonial era in America during which opportunities for artists were few, and the elder artist's background was fundamental to his son's later achievements. Earl's ancestors were Quakers from Exeter, England who immigrated to Rhode Island around 1634 eventually settling in Worcester County, Massachusetts. Ralph Earl Sr. was born on May 11, 1751 to Ralph Earl and Phebe Whittemore Earl.⁴¹ The Earls ran a large and successful farm, and as the family's eldest son, Ralph Earl was entitled to the land and the continuation of the family business after his father's death. Despite this, however, Earl did not take up farming, deciding instead to begin a painting career. He began traveling around New England, learning what he could and gaining some early patronage.⁴² He married Sarah Gates, and had two children, though he basically abandoned them in pursuit of his painting career. According to Gates family records, Earl "was a Tory, and skedaddled, leaving her behind."⁴³ He befriended Henry Pelham and probably gained access to his more famous half-brother, John Singleton Copley's works through this association. He also gained notoriety for producing the sketches for four prints of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, which

⁴¹ Technically, our Ralph E.W. Earl was not Earl Jr. He came from a long line of Ralph Earls (he was seventh Earl in direct succession to bear the name Ralph) but did not share his exact name with his father due to his two middle names, which were taken from his mother's side: Eleazer Whiteside was his maternal grandfather's name. For the sake of clarity, however, this study will occasionally refer to him as Earl Jr. and his father as Earl Sr.

⁴² Unless otherwise stated biographical details about Earl Sr. are taken from Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, with Richard L. Bushman, Stephen H. Kornhauser, and Aileen Ribero, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, ex. cat. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

⁴³ Quoted in, "The Fine Arts: How Art History is Written" from *Boston Evening*, June 10, 1915, clipping in Charles Henry Hart Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

were engraved by his associate Amos Doolittle.⁴⁴ These engravings (1775, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford) bear the distinction of becoming the first historical pictures created by an American artist. Although the prints were created long before the birth of Earl Jr., they do set a precedent in the Earl family for collaborating with printmakers. Later, the younger Earl's portrait-prints of Andrew Jackson would decorate American homes, as the Earl/Doolittle engravings had done in the wake of the Revolutionary war.

At a time when most American artists had great difficulty pursuing their profession, Ralph Earl Sr. found modest success, both in colonial New England and after a remarkable escape during the Revolution, in Great Britain. When, in 1777 he was in danger of being imprisoned as a Loyalist (he had long since refused his father's requests to join the Revolutionary Army), he fortuitously met Captain John Money (1752-1817), a quartermaster general of Burgoyne's army at Saratoga. Earl proclaimed his allegiance to Great Britain and set sail for London dressed as Money's servant. Upon arriving in London and in dire financial straits, Earl followed Money to his hometown of Norwich, England, where Money became his patron and assisted him in acquiring commissions. Earl Sr. remained in Norwich from 1778 to 1782, after which he moved to London until 1785. In London he became well acquainted with Benjamin West, and was exposed to Grand Manner portraiture and history paintings since he served for a time as an assistant in Sir Joshua Reynolds' studio. However, he was most influenced by elaborate landscape settings for portraits in the style of Thomas Gainsborough, as well as George Romney's intricate room interiors. He took

⁴⁴ For more information on the prints see Ian M.G. Gimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord," *Winterthur Portfolio* 4 (1968): 83-108.

these particular elements back to the United States with him and incorporated them into his later New York and Connecticut portraits.

After settling in Norwich with Money's help, he met his second wife, Earl Jr.'s mother, Ann Whiteside, daughter of Eleazer Whiteside. There is no record of their marriage, however it probably took place in 1784 or 1785.⁴⁵ There is also no record of a divorce with his first wife, therefore his marriage to Ann was probably bigamous. Ann's father was a friend and neighbor to John Money, who had become Earl's main patron in England, and who would go on to befriend Earl Jr. later in Norwich as well.

At the close of the Revolutionary War, Earl safely returned to the United States with his new wife in the last week of April 1785. He had sailed home with a number of Americans, including his friend Joseph Trumbull (no relation to the artist John Trumbull), a doctor, who would become an important patron for Earl.⁴⁶ The Earls stayed in New York City for a time, and according to his most recent biographer, Elizabeth Kornhauser, "Earl responded to the tastes and values of his patrons...For his New York clients [who were necessarily more sophisticated than their rural New England counterparts] Earl drew on his English experience."⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Earl encountered financial trouble in New York and was sent to debtor's prison from September 1786 to January 1788. During this time, his wife had to fend for herself, and she probably worked as a shopkeeper, but Earl had some

⁴⁵ According to Kornhauser, et al, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 30.

⁴⁶ For a list of other American passengers, see Kornhauser, et al, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 95, note 82. Earl painted Dr. Joseph Trumbull's portrait in London in 1784 and it is located at Historic Deerfield in Deerfield, Massachusetts.

⁴⁷ Kornhauser, et al, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 33.

freedoms in prison. He continued to paint, and received visits from his wife. Their daughter, Mary Ann Earl was born on August 5, 1787. Mary Ann later married Colonel Benjamin Higbie and settled permanently with her mother in Troy, New York, and bore two daughters of her own, all of whom Earl Jr. would maintain correspondence with over the ensuing decades. Earl Sr. eventually made enough money painting portraits in jail that he was able to help cover his debts and allow for his release.

Earl also started drinking in jail. According to Kornhauser, “his drinking not only hindered the advancement of his career but did little to enhance a reputation already tarnished by his disloyalty to his country, by his bigamy, and by his indebtedness. Alcohol eventually caused his death.”⁴⁸ After his release from prison, Earl left New York, where there was great competition from portraitists such as John Trumbull and Gilbert Stuart, and with the help of patron Mason Fitch Cogswell, he began to work in the Connecticut River valley.⁴⁹ Although a career in rural New England would not provide the national recognition that one in New York City might, there was very little competition in the area and Earl was the first artist to visit many of the towns to which he traveled. Earl’s influence in the area was consequently great, and he went on to inspire a host of followers who are today regarded as “The Connecticut School.”

Although no definitive record of his birth has been found, Ralph Eleazer Whiteside Earl was probably born in New England, most likely New York, in late

⁴⁸ Kornhauser, et al, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 36.

⁴⁹ Cogswell was a significant physician from Hartford, Connecticut, with who took an interest in Earl’s portraits and assisted in his relocation.

1788, after his father returned from England with Ann Whiteside. The date of Earl Jr.'s birth has long been unclear, and it is usually misstated as having occurred in 1785 in England. However, it seems more likely that he was born in 1788 based on several key pieces of information. First, a notice of the elder Earl's arrival at port back in the United States in 1785 lists Earl and lady, with no mention of a child.⁵⁰ In addition, Earl always claimed an American identity and was quite patriotic. A letter of introduction dating from shortly after the younger Earl arrived back in the United States after his own European training states, "Mr. Earle has spent 6 or 7 years in Europe which time has been devoted to his profession. He is an American by birth and the son of a portrait painter of N. York of considerable celebrity. Mr. Earle arrived here last fall from France."⁵¹ In addition, Earl Jr. obtained a passport upon leaving France to return to the United States, and although no birth date is listed on it, it does claim Earl as a "natif de Boston, deneusant á New York, Citoyen des Etats-Unis."⁵² In addition, there is no evidence to substantiate the traditional 1785 dating of Earl's birth found in most Earl scholarship.

Ralph E.W. Earl's young life was anything but typical. His parents had no house of their own, and they frequently boarded at taverns or even with portrait sitters for weeks at a time while the elder Earl completed their portraits. Earl Sr. was a slow

⁵⁰ The following announcement appeared in the *Salem Gazette*, May 24, 1785: "Boston, May 23 In the Neptune, Capt. Callahan, who arrived here since our last, in 30 days from England, were the following passengers: Mr. Joseph Trumbull, Worcester; Mr. Earl and lady, Worcester:..." This was reproduced in William Sawitzky and Susan Sawitzky, "Two Letters from Ralph Earl with notes on his English Period," *Worcester Art Museum Annual* 8 (1960): 35-36, and again in Kornhauser et al, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 95, note 82.

⁵¹ W.C. Daniell to C.W. Short M.D., June 2, 1816, Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

⁵² His passport is located in the John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:14, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

and deliberate worker, and his progress was inevitably slowed by his alcohol consumption. In addition to making housing available, sitters provided for Earl Sr. in other ways. For example, one of his patrons, Jared Lane, an in-law of the Ruggles family of New Milford, Connecticut, kept an accurate record of expenditures on behalf of the Earls while they boarded with his family from May 23 to September 30, 1796, while Earl painted two portraits. The account book lists painting supplies, boarding for Mr. and Mrs. Earl (with no mention of the children), and nearly three gallons of liquor supplied to Mr. Earl.⁵³ The slow nature of his working method was recorded by another sitter: “You ought to consider that my attention has been engrossed by Mr. Earl and that I have had enough to do, to acquire the grace of patience. I assure you I have nearly attained it, and probably in the course of two or three months shall arrive at a state of perfection in this virtue. Painting goes on steadily though slowly.”⁵⁴ Earl Sr. lived out his final years as an itinerant portraitist and died of alcoholism in 1801.

The most comprehensive research on the elder Earl has been conducted by Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, whose dissertation provides a *catalog raisonné* of his works.⁵⁵ In 1991 she published some of her research in *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic* in conjunction with a retrospective exhibition of some of Earl’s best

⁵³ Jared Lane’s complete account record from May 23 to September 30, 1796 is reproduced in Kornhauser, et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 203.

⁵⁴ Laura Mosely to Frederick Wolcott, September 28, 1791 in Samuel Wolcott, *Memory of Henry Wolcott, one of the First Settlers of Wolcott, Connecticut, and some of his Descendants* (New York, 1881), 149-150. Cited in Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, “‘By Your Inimitable Hand’: Elijah Boardman’s Patronage of Ralph Earl,” *American Art Journal* 23:1 (1991): 19, note 24.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Kornhauser, “Ralph Earl: Artist-Entrepreneur” (PhD diss., Boston University, 1988).

preserved paintings.⁵⁶ Kornhauser lauds Earl Sr.'s career saying that he was "one of a few American artists to achieve success in both England and America in the last quarter of the eighteenth century."⁵⁷ As she explains, in his early career, and indeed throughout it, Earl emulated John Singleton Copley's "muted colors, strong side-lighting, careful attention to detail, and strong characterizations."⁵⁸ While in England, Earl even joked that Copley could learn something from his own portraits. In a letter to his friend, Dr. Joseph Trumbull, Earl wrote "the picture which I have begun and finished since [*sic*] you was heir is the best that eaver I painted, I intend to offer it to Copley to coppey for his improvement."⁵⁹ Kornhauser's argument is quite convincing that Earl "deliberately altered his style to suit the aesthetic sensibilities of his patrons in the various regions he worked."⁶⁰ Ralph Earl's success hinged on his ability to produce paintings that suited the tastes of his patrons, whether they were wealthy rural landowners or aristocratic New Yorkers.

This idea was translated to the younger Earl, which is clearly discernable in the three distinct styles he adopted based on his geographical location. His career can be roughly be divided into three phases, his New England period (1800-1809,

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, with Richard L. Bushman, Stephen H. Kornhauser, and Aileen Ribero, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, ex. cat. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991). "Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic" opened at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Nov. 1, 1991- January 1, 1992). From there it traveled to the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut (Feb. 2 - April 1, 1992). Its final venue was the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX (May 16- July 2, 1992). The spelling is Earl's.

⁵⁷ Kornhauser, et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 5.

⁵⁸ Kornhauser, et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 11.

⁵⁹ Earl to Trumbull, September 23, 1784. Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, Mass., reproduced in William Sawitsky and Susan Sawitsky, "Two Letters from Ralph Earl with notes on his English Period," *Worcester Art Museum Annual* 8 (1960): 11-12, and Kornhauser, et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 21.

⁶⁰ Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 41.

although the latest attributed work from this period dates to 1804), his European period (1809-1815), and his Jacksonian period (1816-1838). In each stage, Earl's style was distinctly different from that which preceded it. He attained measured success in all three phases of his career and was able to support himself through artistic production alone his entire life. This may be partly attributed to his ability, learned from his father, to tailor his portraits to his sitters' tastes. The younger Earl was also very fortunate to have come of age at the turn of the nineteenth century when Americans were becoming more eager consumers of their own likenesses. The desire to have one's portrait painted grew significantly in the United States between 1800 and 1850, and as the American economy grew, with a steadily increasing middle class, so too did citizens' desire to own portraits.

Earl Sr.'s career might have had an even more lasting impact on his son's had his career and life not been in a state of decline in Earl Jr.'s formative years. The elder Earl left Bennington, Vermont with Earl Jr. for Northampton, Massachusetts in 1799 where he painted several portraits, but even Kornhauser admits, "The noticeable decline in the care Earl took with these portraits may reflect the artist's growing physical decline due to his drinking habits." She goes on to say that "The quality of these works is so inferior, that were it not for the fact that they are signed by the artist, one might assume that they were executed by one of Earl's many, less accomplished followers."⁶¹

Unlike his son, Earl Sr. held no pretenses of becoming a history painter. In addition, according to Kornhauser, "unlike [Mather] Brown and Trumbull who had received a formal education, Earl, like most American artists of the era, was hindered

⁶¹Kornhauser, "Ralph Earl: Artist-Entrepreneur," 224.

by a lack of the classical and literary education essential for history painting.”⁶² Earl did, however, hope to cultivate a taste for landscape painting among his New England patrons, and he often included landscape elements in his paintings, inspired by works he had seen in England. This emphasis would later be adopted by the younger Earl in paintings throughout his career. The elder Earl especially favored the landscape as an appropriate setting for women, and he was painting pure landscape scenes in New England long before the Hudson River School painters.⁶³ He created the first painted view of several New England towns. He was also the first American artist to travel to Niagara Falls and depict the tremendous view, which he did in panoramic form (measuring approximately twenty by fifteen feet, but no longer extant) in 1799. After exhibiting the large painting in Northampton, Massachusetts, it traveled to Philadelphia where Charles Willson Peale exhibited it in his museum, then located in the State House.⁶⁴ Although Earl Jr. probably did not travel to the falls with his father, Earl Sr.’s commercial ventures associated with the exhibition of the panorama and his dealings with Peale educated his son on some aspects of the business of art. From Peale’s museum too he probably received early exposure both to portraits of American heroes and a natural history, art, and history museum, which may have directly inspired his later similar ventures in Nashville.

Although virtually nothing is known about Earl Jr.’s formal education, unlike his father, he did receive an adequate one. It is possible that the astute young man was

⁶² Kornhauser, et al. *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 22.

⁶³ Perhaps the best known example of Earl’s pure landscapes is entitled *Looking East from Denny Hill*, 1800 and is owned by the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.

⁶⁴ Kornhauser, “Ralph Earl: Artist-Entrepreneur,” 227-235.

self-taught or home schooled in his youngest years due to the family's constant travel. However, based on the types of books he listed in his library after his return from Europe, as well as his insatiable appetite for knowledge as seen in his letters and his accomplished writings, it is evident that he was relatively well-educated. Earl kept a list, "Catalogue of Books belonging to my library," which included two volumes of Milton's works, six volumes of Shakespeare, Homer's *Odyssey*, Burke's *On the Sublime*, Byron's works, and many other encyclopedias, memoirs, and dictionaries.⁶⁵ Earl also produced several paintings in England based on well-known literary works.⁶⁶ In addition, unlike his father's, the younger Earl's letters are extremely genteel and marked by immaculate penmanship, learned spelling, and perfect grammar.

Earl Jr.'s Early paintings

Ralph E.W. Earl was fortunate to have come of age in a period of tremendous population and economic growth in his region. The agricultural expansion and commercial development in rural, post-revolutionary New England prompted a shift toward consumerism for the first time.⁶⁷ Along with this came a growth in the popularity and prevalence of portraiture. According to David Jaffee, "The provincial elite wanted a family record, similar in purpose to, but grander in style than, the

⁶⁵ His library catalogue is in the Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

⁶⁶ These paintings are all unlocated but reproduced for example scenes from Thomas Gent's 1812 poem, *The Beggar*, as well as fictional stories such as *The History of Raymond and Agnes*, and *Gil Blas*.

⁶⁷David Jaffee, "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760-1860," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*, ed. Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 109. For further reading see Christopher Clark, "Household Market and Capital: The Process of Economic Change in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts, 1800-1860" (PhD diss, Harvard, 1982).

genealogies bound in treasured Bibles or hung on bare household walls.”⁶⁸ Portraiture became one avenue that early nineteenth-century Americans used to explore their cultural identity, and the range in quality and price of these images varied tremendously, from untrained limners producing profile images around a dining room table, to the Earls, who were European trained. A young enterprising rural resident, like Earl, could do very well as an itinerant portraitist.

After a life of economic hardship, in which he hated producing portraits and toiled to elevate the taste of the American public beyond portraiture, the well-known artist John Vanderlyn offered his nephew, John Vanderlyn Jr., the following piece of advice: “Were I to begin life again, I should not hesitate to follow this plan, that is, to paint portraits cheap and slight, for the mass of folks can’t judge of the merits of a well finished picture... Indeed, moving about through the country... must be an agreeable way of passing ones time... and if he was *wise* might be the means of establishing himself advantageously in the world.”⁶⁹ Although Earl would not spend his entire career as a traveling portraitist for the middle class, his early itinerant experiences did provide him a springboard to greater things.

Although the circumstances of Ralph E.W. Earl’s earliest painting practices are unknown, his early works show the unmistakable influence of his father’s rural New England paintings. One particular attribute that Earl Jr. learned to appreciate from his father was an interest in depicting costumes, and Earl would go on to meticulously depict, among other sitters, Andrew Jackson dressed variously as a

⁶⁸ Jaffee (1985), 108.

⁶⁹ Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn Jr., Kingston, New York, Sept. 9, 1825. Vanderlyn Papers, New York Historical Society. This quote is often cited in the Vanderlyn scholarship, such as in Lillian Berensack Miller, “Vanderlyn and the Business of Art,” *New York History* 32:1 (Jan. 1951): 35-36.

general, a civilian, and a statesman later in his career. Earl Jr. seemed to realize from a young age that one's attire in a portrait played a large role in the painting's message and he probably learned this from his father. According to one art historian, "Earl [Sr.] was an especially capable painter of costume and one is constantly intrigued by his picturing of hair ornaments, embroideries, shawls, laces and fichus. The imitation of various fabrics, satins, silks, linens, woolens, etc., and the handling of draperies he managed very well. Probably in the product of no other American artist can one study more successfully the costume of the time."⁷⁰ One of the best examples of the elder Earl's facility with a portrait's specific details occurs in his portrait of Elijah Boardman (fig. 1.1). Boardman was a member of a wealthy family in New Milford, Connecticut and commissioned a life-sized full-length portrait from Earl Sr. In the painting, the successful merchant and landowner stands before a vast array of beautiful silks and fabrics which he carried in his shop. Not only does the painting serve to advertise the types of fine goods he sold, but it displays Earl's adept ability at rendering an array of textures.⁷¹ Earl transmitted the important impact of such background details to his son, and Earl Jr. applied this understanding not only in his Jackson images, but also in the portraits he produced independently in New England after his father's death.

In Earl Sr.'s final years between 1798 and 1801 he traveled through Vermont and Massachusetts, and instructed several students.⁷² Earl Jr. probably received his

⁷⁰ Frederic Fairchild Sherman, "The Angus Nickelson Family Painted by Ralph Earl," *Art in America* XXIII: 4 (Oct. 1935): 158.

⁷¹ See also Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, "By your inimitable hand': Elijah Boardman's Patronage of Ralph Earl," *American Art* 23:1 (1991): 4-19.

initial instruction in painting from his father around this time, when he was also teaching his son's second cousin William Southgate.⁷³ In 1798, Earl's wife Ann, tired of the constant travel settled permanently in Troy, New York with their daughter Mary Ann (1787-1866), leaving Earl Jr. to travel with his father studying the art of painting.⁷⁴ This tutelage is evidenced by at least one portrait executed under his father's direction as well as the obvious influence of his father more generally on his early works. One of the most lasting lessons Earl Jr. took from his father was to aim high, and pursue his artistic goals despite inevitable setbacks.

Some light may be shed on Earl's early training in a landscape portrait by Earl Sr., *Landscape View of Old Bennington* (fig. 1.2). Within this view, painted for Elijah Dewey, a Bennington, Vermont tavern-keeper, and his wife Mary Dewey, is a self-portrait of Ralph Earl sketching before the meticulous townscape he had recreated. Rather than sketching the land, however, he appears to be drawing a young boy, who poses before him. To the artist's right is another young child who plays with a dog. It is likely that these are the Earl children, or perhaps, Earl Jr. and Southgate, and it demonstrates the younger Earl's early exposure to his father's methods and artistic production (he would have been about ten years old at this time).⁷⁵ Earl's experience with his father set him up to be a successful itinerant portraitist. While this might not have been the ideal lifestyle, the vast majority of artists in New England at the time

⁷² Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, "Regional Landscapes in Connecticut River Valley Portraits, 1790-1810," *The Magazine Antiques* (November 1985): 1019.

⁷³ Kornhauser, "Ralph Earl, Artist-Entrepreneur," 220.

⁷⁴ Kornhauser says this, but does not provide evidence for it in "Ralph Earl, Art for the new Nation," *The Magazine Antiques* (November 1991): 802-03.

⁷⁵ Kornhauser, et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 228.

were itinerant. Earl went on to produce paintings that were in tune with the popular styles of the period, however he was fortunate to have had the experience as a very young man of training with an established artist. Whereas most artists at that time began their careers as house, sign, or chair painters, Earl was producing original oil paintings from the start.

No concrete information has surfaced about Earl's early career in New England after his father's death in 1801 when he was only about twelve or thirteen years old, but, his activities may be documented to a certain extent by the portraits he produced and the sitters for which he worked. Earl's earliest documented portrait, and the only documented work of his known to have been created during his father's lifetime, is a picture of two-year-old Edward Gere painted in 1800 (fig. 1.3).⁷⁶ On this occasion, Ralph Earl Sr. allowed his son to assist on a portrait commission for Isaac Gere, Edward's father, a Northampton, Massachusetts clockmaker. The elder Earl painted portraits of Isaac and Jemima Kingsley Gere, his wife (both in private collections), and Earl Jr. depicted the couple's son which he proudly signed in large red crimson letters, "R. E. W. Earl/ Pinxt 1800." The younger Earl's signature alludes to his own composition and painting of the image, although noting the painting's similarities to facial characteristics and brushwork of Earl Sr., Kornhauser believes the work was probably finished by the father.⁷⁷ This charming image depicts the two year old child with bright eyes, a mischievous grin, and the feathery hair of a baby,

⁷⁶ The location of the picture is currently unknown but a photograph of the portrait is contained in the photographic files at the Frick Art Reference Library. It is also reproduced in Kornhauser, et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 63 and there is a copy photograph in the William Sawitzky Papers in New York Historical Society, New York, New York.

⁷⁷ Kornhauser, "Ralph Earl: Artist-Entrepreneur," 226.

holding a large cat. The child is depicted wearing a loose frock that was of the type generally worn by children (regardless of gender) until age three or four. The young Earl has obviously borrowed devices used by his father such as the green curtain pulled back to reveal a window overlooking a rolling New England landscape. The painting was quite an accomplishment for the adolescent Earl, who was only about twelve years old in 1800. The work is executed in a clear, realistic manner with a fine paint handling. Earl successfully rendered a sense of life in the young boy's wide-set eyes and pursed lips. This demonstrates not only Earl Jr.'s skill as an artist, but also that he had probably been studying with his father for quite some time by this point.

Even in this first, very early work by the younger Earl, his style, subject, and working manner, and that of his father was consistent with the trends of portraiture in the region. For example, adults predominated as subjects in New England paintings of the period, and children were substantially underrepresented compared to their numbers in society.⁷⁸ Children were generally ascribed subsidiary roles in portraiture and everyday life, and similarly Earl, the apprentice was allowed to paint the less important aspect of the commission. Yet in the Gere portrait, Earl followed many of the common trends of childhood portraiture, and displayed an incredible artistic awareness at such a young age. The baby is depicted with a cat, an animal which in adult portraits was typically reserved for association with women. However, Karin Calvert has argued that children of both genders under age fourteen were often

⁷⁸David Jaffee, Jack Larkin, Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, Caroline Sloat, and Jessica F. Nicoll, *Meet Your Neighbors: New England Portraits, Painters, and Society* (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 15.

depicted with traditionally feminine objects, such as fruit, flowers, or pets, to signify not their gender, but their subordinate status as children.⁷⁹

With the death of his father in 1801, Earl continued to paint portraits in the Connecticut River Valley and in Troy, New York where his mother and sister had settled, until he left for England in 1809. According to Elizabeth Kornhauser, his portraits of this period “demonstrate a marked reliance on his father’s example.”⁸⁰ Earl did employ elements frequently applied by his father such as sweeping draperies, landscaped views, especially behind his female sitters, and objects that convey the interests of his subjects. However, he was also developing his own style and brushwork in this period while still struggling to master figure painting. Earl Sr.’s notoriety in the area certainly helped his son gain patronage and he probably resided with some of his father’s former patrons while he worked on portraits away from his mother and sister. Between 1805-1809, however, Earl Jr. seems to have stopped signing his works and none of them from this time are known. This period is largely a mystery.

Earl’s first documented painting after the death of his father is a portrait of an unknown gentleman now owned by the Historic Deerfield collection of Western Massachusetts (fig. 1.4). Earl signed this work in crimson lettering, as in the Edward Gere portrait, “R. Earl./Pinxt 1802.” Still in his adolescence, it seems that the now fourteen-year-old Earl thrived despite his father’s absence. He shows here perhaps for the first time, his ability to gain commissions outside of his father’s shadow. In this

⁷⁹ Thus placing them in a subordinate category like women. Karin Calvert, “Children in American Family Portraiture, 1670 to 1810,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 39:1, *The Family in Early American History and Culture* (Jan. 1982): 97.

⁸⁰ Kornhauser, et. al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 62.

portrait, Earl created a waist-length portrait in an oval format depicting a serious gentleman peering directly out at the viewer. He wears a navy blue, double-breasted jacket with brass buttons over a white shirt and cravat and sits against a plain brown background. Although this portrait is simpler in composition than the portrait of Edward Gere, Earl was also clearly leaning less on his father's example while still exploring what was to become his own independent style. It is more direct than his father's works, and in this case he abandoned his father's interest in background details to focus on the sitter's likeness. This portrait is also more finished and without the compositional difficulties evident in the earlier Gere portrait. Later in his life, he would draw on this same, simplified composition that appealed to the rural New England landowners for many of his Tennessee patrons.

Quite similar in format to the painting of the unknown gentleman are a pair of pendant portraits of Reverend Elihu Ely (1777-1839) and his wife Grace Rose Ely (1777-1840, figs. 1.5 and 1.6).⁸¹ Despite being unsigned and undated, the works have long been attributed to Earl and dated to 1800, although it seems likely they were produced a bit later, probably in 1803.⁸² The simplicity of the pendant pair suggests that these portraits may have been among Earl's first independent commissions. Earl

⁸¹ The son of Captain Levi Ely, Elihu Ely was born in West Springfield, Massachusetts in 1777. His wife, the daughter of Colonel Samuel Rose was born in Providence, Rhode Island, also in 1777. The pair were married in 1797, settled in Westfield, Massachusetts and bore nine children two of which died in infancy. William R. Cutter and William F. Adams, *Genealogical and Personal Memoirs Relating to the Families of the State of Massachusetts* (Massachusetts: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1910), 666.

⁸² The works have been dated circa 1800 but it is my belief that they were painted in 1803. Not only are they similar to the 1802 portrait of an unknown gentleman, but Earl depicted Elihu Ely's brother, Heman Ely in a very similar manner in a work that is signed and dated 1803. The painting of Heman Ely is unlocated but pictured in the Frick Art Reference Library's records. The paintings of Elihu and Rose Ely were among forty-six other "naïve" American paintings donated to the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia by Colonel Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, whose collection of works of this type numbered over 2,600 at one point.

has depicted each sitter in similar waist-length views, in an oval format, against a plain, brown background. The paintings are quite simple in composition, and Earl has pared down his format in comparison to the Gere work to include only the essential details. Each portrait shows its sitter portrayed from the waist up, seated in a round-back upholstered red chair and dressed in an elegant, if unadorned, manner. As he had done previously, Earl again displayed his awareness of current trends in portraiture. His New England portraits focus more on the patrons' individual appearances than on the spaces in which they occupy. And although Earl's portraits did become a bit more detailed as he gained experience, his focus in his early career was always on the sitter. In early nineteenth-century New England a portraitist's most significant duty was to capture a correct likeness, and by extension, a patron's biggest concern was an artist's ability to do so.⁸³ Earl also depicted his sitters in popular attire. Both Mrs. Ely's Empire-waisted white gown, and Reverend Ely's fine black waistcoat are the height of fashion for their time and place. In addition, Mrs. Ely holds a fan, which was a frequent element used by Earl's father, to signify her feminine sophistication.

1804 was a productive year for young Earl. His *Portrait of Mrs. Williams* (fig. 1.7), owned by the Metropolitan Museum in New York, depicts Earl's standard portrait type for that year and shows great improvement in his skill and ambition since the previous year's works. Mrs. Williams is seated with her body turned demurely to the left and her face looking out at the viewer. She rests her left arm on a side table on which a case, perhaps holding a sewing kit, rests. Behind her a wine red curtain opens slightly on the right side to reveal an idealized landscape. Mrs. Williams' white Empire-waisted Neoclassical dress is a near-duplicate of those worn

⁸³ Jaffee, et. al., 12.

by several women Earl depicted about the same time and was a popular style of the period. Her rose-red chair was also a standard prop of Earl Sr's and quite similar to the Ely's. This portrait also presumably had a pendant depicting Mr. Williams, although it, along with detailed information about the sitters, has been lost.⁸⁴

Mrs. Williams' portrait is revealing of a number of consistencies between Earl's maturing works, and early nineteenth-century New England portraits generally. Portrait pairs accounted for one-third to one-half of all painted portraits in New England at the time. Husbands and wives were not usually depicted on the same canvas but rather connections were made between them through complementary poses and similar settings and backgrounds, and Earl had learned this tactic early in his career.⁸⁵ Such portraits were considered among the increasing quantities of "consumer goods" such as sofas and framed mirrors that were appearing as "emerging emblems of the prosperous American parlor" as a result of the economic prosperity of the first half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ Intended to hang in the parlor, women were almost always depicted as if they were ready to receive company. Mrs. Williams pleasantly looks directly out at the viewer as the model of domestic virtue.

⁸⁴ According to records in the Frick Art Reference Library, Williams was the daughter of a man named Admiral McCarthy. According to notes in the Vose Gallery archives in Boston, her husband owned a general store near the Catholic Cathedral on the Southern Side of Boston. If this information is accurate, Mrs. Williams is part of the merchant class, the group from which Earl's patrons usually emerged. And if the Williams' were from Boston, this reveals Earl's presence in that city where he would have had much greater access to galleries and examples of other artists' works. The painting was acquired in the early 1930s by the Newhouse Galleries from the Ehrich Galleries, both in New York. Originally attributed to Earl Sr., William Sawitzky reassigned the attributed to Earl Jr. based on its similarities with his other works. The Metropolitan Museum has mistakenly dated it to 1838 which is clearly off base.

⁸⁵ Jaffee, et. al., *Meet Your Neighbors*, 17.

⁸⁶ Jaffee, et. al., *Meet Your Neighbors*, 11, 12.

Another early pair, completed in 1804, Earl's busiest year to that point, is the pendant portraits of Reverend Ebenezer Porter and Mrs. Patty Porter (figs. 1.8 and 1.9). Mr. Porter's portrait is signed and dated on the reverse, "R. Earl Jr., 1804" and if Earl was responsible for this signature it offers the only known time he referred to himself as Jr. It is likely that the signature was added by someone else, perhaps even the sitter. Mrs. Porter's (Lucy "Patty" Pierce Merwin Porter) portrait is also signed and dated on the reverse: "Mrs. Patty Porter/ R.Earl pinxit, 1804," which is a more typical Earl signature.

Born in Cornwall, Connecticut, Ebenezer Porter graduated from Dartmouth College in 1792 and succeeded Reverend Noah Merwin as the congregational minister of Washington, Connecticut. In 1812 he was appointed professor at the Andover Theological Seminary in Andover, Massachusetts, becoming the school's president in 1827.⁸⁷ He married his predecessor's eldest daughter, Lucy "Patty" Pierce Merwin shortly after assuming his duties as Reverend in 1796.⁸⁸ Mrs. Porter was one of four daughters of Reverend Merwin and his wife Lucy Pierce Merwin.

The Porters represent the typical class of patrons that were commissioning portraits from Earl. Although Porter was clergy, he was a relatively minor clergyman of a small congregation and thus was of a more modest social standing than other more prominent ministers who had been among the subjects of American portraits in the previous century. These patrons represent a new expanded class that were commissioning portraits. According to Jack Larkin, "Earlier in the seventeenth and

⁸⁷ William Newell Hosley and Gerald W.R. Ward, *The Great River: Art and Society of the Connecticut Valley, 1635-1820* (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1985), 163.

⁸⁸ Biographical information is from Kornhauser, et. al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 229.

eighteenth centuries, portraits had been a clear badge of high status in New England, distinguishing magistrates, powerful clergymen, great merchants, country squires and other members of the elite from ordinary people. However in the years after 1800, itinerant artists and their customers were beginning to alter the terms of this social equation. Comparatively inexpensive and simple portraits were becoming much more widely available.”⁸⁹ While Earl’s portraits were certainly not the most rudimentary and simplified works being churned out by common limners, his portraits did appeal to a slightly wider audience. Although the market for portraits was expanding in New England in the early nineteenth century, only roughly the upper ten percent of households owned portraits of themselves.⁹⁰ The patrons of even the most simplified paintings were still, for example, merchants, doctors, lawyers, and clergymen – precisely the types of sitters for which Earl was producing.

According to David Jaffee, “Those able to afford the services of [a portrait painter] were the magistrates and ministers: the established gentry in village society who found in such family icons the means to display their personal possessions and social status while decorating their homes in one of the few permissible modes in this still intensely Puritan culture.”⁹¹ The new, slightly expanded class of patrons favored a more simplified portrait style that placed them in their own familiar settings. Reverend Porter, for example, is depicted as a humble, approachable pastor, rather than an authoritarian clergyman, as had been the typical subject for earlier generations of artists or those oriented toward more European trends. For example,

⁸⁹ Jaffee, et. al., *Meet Your Neighbors*, 10.

⁹⁰ Jaffee, et.al., *Meet Your Neighbors*, 10.

⁹¹ Jaffee (1985), 108.

Zedekiah Belknap's portrait of Nathanael Howe from 1815 (in the collection of Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Massachusetts) displays a more elaborate composition, depicting him in a long starched linen collar and flowing gown.⁹²

In Earl's portrait, Reverend Porter is seated facing left wearing a full black suit and robe, with a typical split clerical collar. At the time Porter was taking a year off from his ecclesiastical duties, thus providing Earl with plenty of time to execute the largest and most visually advanced works he had completed to date (each of the Porter's portraits measures about 45 x 36 inches). According to one source, "the severity of [Porter's] labors, especially during the season of revival in 1804-5, reduced his health so materially, that he was obliged to discontinue them altogether for nearly a year."⁹³ In Earl's portrayal however, Porter looks healthy enough as he sits upright holding his place in a hand-printed text on the side table which probably contained his sermons. Literary elements (such as books, newspapers, periodicals, pens, letters, etc.) were the most commonly depicted objects in early nineteenth-century New England portraits, and were especially favored for clerics. According to Larkin, men were often depicted with "emblems of the work that shaped their masculine identity."⁹⁴

The Porter portraits were Earl's most visually complicated works to date. He took care to depict the couple as learned and genteel. Reverend Porter's formal dress, book of sermons, and austere setting all serve to remind the viewer of his profession.

⁹² Jaffee, et. al., *Meet Your Neighbors*, 13-14, 102-103, cat. 44.

⁹³ William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York, 1857), 2:251-57, cited in Kornhauser, et. al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 229.

⁹⁴ Jaffe, et. al., *Meet Your Neighbors*, 13.

In both Porter portraits Earl recalled his father's habit of placing sitters before either a red or green curtain. In this case Reverend Porter sits before a red one and Mrs. Porter in front of a green curtain, and each drape is drawn aside. In Mrs. Porter's, the opening reveals a view of a pleasant stylized landscape scene. This background was also a favorite of Earl Sr. and other eighteenth-century painters and both engage in the long tradition of equating femininity with nature.

Earl depicted both Porters seated in red chairs, and although Reverend Porter's is a new design, Mrs. Porter's chair is quite similar to others already painted by Earl and to one that his father had used repeatedly over the years. In Patty Porter's portrait, the sitter holds a piece of lace which matches the trim on her elegant grey empire waist satin dress. Mrs. Porter has just made the lace she holds (as shown by the sewing kit on the table), and is thereby engaging in a feminine and patriotic activity.⁹⁵ Earl Sr. had also represented a woman making lace in his portrait of Mrs. Charles Jeffery Smith, although rather than displaying her with her finished product, she is seen unraveling silk cocoons (1794, New York Historical Society). Behind Mrs. Porter, two large classical columns mirror her erect posture and she leans her right elbow comfortably on a covered green side table where the lace-making tools are present. The columns represent a departure from Earl's father's work, and Kornhauser has suggested that perhaps Earl had seen the work of Gilbert Stuart in Boston, who frequently included columns in his portraits.⁹⁶ Although it is possible

⁹⁵ The production of silk and lace was thought to be a patriotic activity during and after the Revolution. Kornhauser, et. al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 194. See also L.P. Brockett, *The Silk Industry in America* (Philadelphia, 1876), 30-31.

⁹⁶ Kornhauser, et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 229 Stuart lived in Boston until his death in 1828. He was very influential on portraitists in the region and favored bust-length portraits.

that Earl had seen Stuart's works, Stuart actually moved from New York to Boston in 1805, the year after he painted the Porter portraits.

Earl would rely on Stuart's influence even more markedly in his "National Picture" of Jackson, which was directly inspired by Stuart's Lansdowne portrait of Washington (1796, discussed in chapter four). Still influenced by the teachings of his father, however, who was certainly his main source of inspiration before he went abroad, Earl here incorporated the most common compositional elements that his father used, in addition to his favored red and green palette. In the Porters' portraits the curtain tassels in addition to the aforementioned red upholstered side chairs, landscaped background, and inclusion of meaningful objects are all common elements in his father's paintings.⁹⁷

Although his early New England portrait style differs markedly from the portraits he would go on to create for Andrew Jackson, Earl continually used some of the most meaningful elements of his earliest works throughout his career, such as columns and landscapes. In Mrs. Porter's portrait, the columns represent her wealth and affluence in owning a stately home as well as perhaps the stability of her marriage, however these would take on new meanings, such as republican virtue in the later Jacksonian works.

Another pair of Earl's portraits from 1804 represent Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Ruggles (figs. 1.10 and 1.11). Like the Porters, these portraits are also signed and dated on the verso and were clearly inspired by the elder Earl's work.⁹⁸ Although the

⁹⁷ For example, his father applied all of these elements in paintings such as *Mary Ann Carpenter* (1779, Worcester Art Museum), and *Reverend Jeremiah Strong* (1790, Yale University Art Gallery).

circumstances of the commission of the portraits are unknown, Earl most likely gained it through his father's connections. The Ruggles were from a very old New England family, and Earl Sr. had often boarded with Lazarus and Hannah Bostwick Ruggles in New Milford, Connecticut, while painting pictures of several family members. Nathaniel and Martha Ruggles were the young Earl's most mature patrons to this point and had perhaps even been acquainted with his father.

As in Reverend Porter's portrait Mr. Ruggles is seated before a sweeping red curtain, which reveals a landscape scene beyond the open window and he too appears to have momentarily halted his reading. Ruggles marks his place by pointing to a passage in an open book on the table before him. This gesture had also been a favorite of Earl's father who had employed it in works such as *Esther Boardman* (1789, private collection), *Dr. Mason Fitch Cogswell* (1791, Museum of Fine Art, Houston), and *Sherman Boardman* (1796, New Milford Historical Society, New Milford, Connecticut). The elder Earl had learned this visual tool in England, and according to Lillian Miller, "the open book with thumb inserted as if to suggest a pause in a continuous activity was a common way for English portraitists to signal that their sitters were "ladies" or "gentlemen," as well as to indicate the occupations of clergyman, writer, or magistrate."⁹⁹

⁹⁸ The Ruggles were from Roxbury, Massachusetts and had married in 1778. The pair was sold at auction by Sotheby's into a private collection in 1985. Mr. Ruggles portrait is signed on the back, "Mr. Nathaniel Ruggles/ R. Earl pinxt, 1804." Thomas H. Gage, an Earl descendant wrote to the *Boston Evening* June 10, 1915 saying "Some years ago, in Maine, I found two old portraits on the back of which were the names of the subjects and the inscription, "R. Earl Pinx, 1804." Perhaps these are the Ruggles' portraits.

⁹⁹ Lillian B. Miller, "The Puritan Portrait: Its Function in Old and New England" in *Seventeenth-Century New England: A Conference* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1984), 156.

Earl's portrait of Mrs. Ruggles also contains similarities with his other early works. Behind her, a sweeping green curtain has been pulled aside to reveal a landscape scene. It is unknown if Earl Jr. had yet attempted a pure landscape, however his father had promoted the genre in the area, and this allusion might be considered a tribute to his father's work, especially considering his connection to the Ruggles family. Mrs. Ruggles' red empire-waist dress is also similar to others painted by Earl in this period, and she holds a fan, as had Mrs. Ely. As the most mature woman Earl had painted up to this point Mrs. Ruggles nevertheless is seated at virtually the same angle as Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Williams and her facial features are similar to theirs as well. At the same time she wears a bonnet, unlike his other sitters, which suggests that Earl was beginning to be more comfortable and confident in making minor changes to the formulaic composition he had learned from his father.

This growing confidence was certainly on display in Earl's most ambitious portrait to date, his *Family Portrait* of 1804 located in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (fig. 1.12). The painting depicts an unidentified New England family from around Springfield, Massachusetts. It is also one of only two group portraits solidly attributed to Earl, since it is signed "R. Earl Pinxit 1804" at the lower right.¹⁰⁰ As Earl's first large-scale work (46.5 x 63.5 inches), this portrait still displays a marked reliance on his father's example. Earl Sr. had begun painting large

¹⁰⁰ The other depicts the Foster Family (1825) and is located at the Cheekwood Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee and discussed in chapter three. Earl Sr. was known to have signed his paintings "Pinxt" or "Pinit" but never "Pinxit."

group portraits in England and had produced several once back in the United States.¹⁰¹

Though the identities of the sitters have been lost, the conversation piece portrays a family of four seated together on an elegant high-back red sofa. In tune with the preferences of the period Earl placed his sitters in what appears to be the comfort of their home, as he always did in his New England paintings. Here, the young Earl has depicted a tender connection between the family members as the mother places her arm behind her younger son's back and father and elder son exchange gestures. This intimate relation between a father and his son was new in turn-of-the-century American portraiture. For the first time, fathers began showing paternal affection toward their children, however, almost always, and Earl's portrait is no exception, the mother is shown closest to the youngest child.¹⁰² Behind the group, a heavy green curtain is raised in the middle to reveal a pleasant view of the outdoors, framed with tree branches and the setting sun. Although it is an accomplished work for an artist of fourteen or fifteen years, Earl struggled with his figures, giving them ovoid heads, cylindrical arms and fingers, and overly erect postures. In many of his works from this period, in his women especially, the necks are unnaturally elongated.¹⁰³ However, despite some difficulties in this early effort, the mother's and father's faces are individualized and each seems to retain an element of naturalism.

¹⁰¹ Such as *Mrs. Noah Smith and her Children* (1798, Metropolitan Museum of Art, discussed below), and *Angus Nickelson and Family* (c. 1790, Museum of Fine Art, Springfield, Massachusetts), in addition to many double portraits of mother and child.

¹⁰² Calvert, 109.

¹⁰³ This aspect was noted by Julie Aronson in Deborah Chotner and others, *American Naïve Paintings* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 106. She believes that this quality "seems to enhance rather than disturb their simple dignity." Aronson also notes the similarity in the poses of

Despite these anatomical inconsistencies, Earl's depiction of costumes, which are clear and crisp and meticulously rendered in *Family Portrait*, is particularly skillful. The mother (much like all of the other women he had depicted to this point) sits in near profile, with her knees facing to the right, left arm resting on her lap, and her face turned towards the viewer. Her dress is gray with lace trim, a near duplicate of Patty Porter's, and also quite similar to that of Mrs. Grace Rose Ely. The Empire waist gown reflects a Neoclassical trend, popular in America at the turn of the century. This particular style is known as a round gown, and is fastened by a drawstring under the bust. In addition the clothing of the children is in the distinct style of the transitional mode between a child's frock and adult wear. This costume was known as the skeleton suit, popularized in England in the 1770s. Unlike anything men or children had worn prior to this, it consisted of long trousers and a short attached jacket with a wide collared shirt underneath. The skeleton suit was a sign of a young boy's masculinity and was worn by young boys between the ages of three and ten at which time they adopted adult dress, such as the breeches worn by the boy's father in the painting.¹⁰⁴

According to Kornhauser, the painting offers a "similar, but naïve, interpretation" of Earl Sr.'s more elaborate *Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children* (fig.

Nathaniel Ruggles and the father in the Family portrait, but says that the father's "head is more naturalistic than Ruggles' egg shape" which "suggests that the group portrait was probably painted later in the year, as Earl's drawing became increasingly skillful" 106.

¹⁰⁴ Calvert, 105-108, and Kornhauser, et al. *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 220 (costume notes by Aileen Ribeiro). See also Ann Buermann Wass and Michelle Webb Fandrich, *Clothing Through American History: The Federal Era through Antebellum, 1786-1860* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010). Other examples of children in skeleton suits may be seen in Ralph Earl Sr.'s portrait of *Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge and son William* (1790, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut) and his *Mrs. William Mosely and son Charles* (1789, Yale University Art Gallery), and John Trumbull's *John Vernet and Family* (1806, Yale University Art Gallery).

1.13).¹⁰⁵ Earl Sr. had initially painted Mr. Noah Smith, a Connecticut native and Yale graduate living in Bennington, Vermont, in 1798 separately in a single portrait (fig. 1.14). Smith was a leading attorney in the area and later, a Supreme Court Judge in Vermont.¹⁰⁶ According to Kornhauser, Earl “attempted to vary the poses and facial expressions of each family member, and each holds a personal attribute. However there is an engaging family resemblance seen in each of the likenesses.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed the younger Earl’s *Family Portrait* shares many commonalities with his father’s *Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children*. Both groupings depict a tender family scene before a red sofa with a drape pulled back to reveal a landscape. In addition, the younger Earl echoed his father’s careful attention to costume, and even dressed his young boys in skeleton suits nearly identical to those worn by the Smith boys. Both portraits are also visually framed by senior members of each family, with the children in the center. Each also has a taller child in the middle. However, the younger Earl’s portrait is more symmetrical with a green curtain (instead of red) open in the center, rather than hanging on only one side of the canvas as in the Smith group. The younger Earl also echoed his father in depicting one of the children holding a hat in which lies a piece of fruit, a common attribute of both children and women portraits of in the period. The “awkwardly drawn face” of the child on the left, has also been compared to Martha Tennent Rogers’ daughter, a subject of Earl Sr.¹⁰⁸ Regardless of these similarities with his father’s work, the ambitious composition, bright coloration, large

¹⁰⁵ Kornhauser, et al. *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 219.

¹⁰⁶ Kornhauser, “Ralph Earl, Artist-Entrepreneur,” 221.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ According to Jerome R. MacBeth in “Portraits by Ralph E.W. Earl,” *Antiques* (Sept 1971): 390. The portrait is in the National Gallery.

size and tenderness of the *Family Portrait* foreshadows Earl's later compositions and speaks to his young ambition.

Earl's *Family Portrait* also differs from his father's in a significant way. As Margaretta Lovell has pointed out, New England portraits of this period that include children, are most often maternal groupings, without the presence of the father.¹⁰⁹ This is the case in *Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children*; Earl Sr. portrayed Mr. Smith separately. However, several late eighteenth-century folk, or naïve paintings, including Earl's *Family Portrait*, offer a significant change by including both the mother and father in the same painting. As in portraits of couples depicted slightly earlier by Copley, Trumbull, Peale, and others, neither husband nor wife is visually dominant in Earl Jr.'s family grouping. It, like other contemporary naïve works, is even in its attention to family members. Giving credit to the folk painters like Earl for knowing their audience, Lovell notes that the social gulf between patrons in the commercial centers, and Earl's rural gentry was greater than might be imagined today. As a result Earl was most likely adapting his painting style to the desires of his sitters, rather than working in strict imitation of his father. Lovell attributes this strictly rural convention to several possibilities including different "child-rearing patterns in nonurban areas...*retardataire* painterly conventions, or...certain habits of mind characteristic of the folk painter."¹¹⁰ Similarly, historian Karin Calvert also

¹⁰⁹ While there were certainly stunning eighteenth-century group portraits that included the entire family such as Robert Feke, *Isaac Royall and Family* (1741, Harvard University) and John Singleton Copley's *Sir William Pepperell and His Family* (1778, North Carolina Museum of Art) these portraits were the exception rather than the rule. Margaretta M. Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 163-4, see also her seminal article "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self Images," *Winterthur Portfolio* 22:4 (Winter 1987): 243-264.

¹¹⁰ Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 164.

noticed a shift in the new and more common inclusion of the patron of the family, noting that “after 1770 family groupings presented in portraiture changed markedly. Americans had always commissioned portraits of individuals, sibling groups, and mothers and children. Nuclear family portraits, however were a different matter. No portrait of a nuclear family portrait has yet come to light from the years before 1730, and for the next forty years such portraits constituted less than one percent of those studied. By contrast for the period 1770 to 1810, nuclear portraits made up twenty-seven percent.”¹¹¹

Earl’s art has frequently been denigrated, sometimes for the “folk” or naïve quality of his early works discussed here. However, these portraits exude a charm that belies Earl’s age; he was approximately aged twelve to sixteen between 1800 and 1804, when he created these works. Earl had no access to formal training in rural New England with the exception of his father’s tutelage. Despite his age and educational challenges, however, his use of colors and limited shading are in tune with popular craft style of painting in the period and area. Bold lines and colorful designs were the stock characteristics of painting in the region and “decorative display predominated over geometric perspective in rural portraiture.”¹¹² Bright colors added to the decorative quality of an often otherwise drab interior. In addition, Earl’s patronage was relatively unsophisticated in their aesthetic tastes. According to Kornhauser in *Meet Your Neighbors: New England Portraits, Painters, and Society, 1790-1850*, “During the first half of the nineteenth century, members of rural New England society demonstrated an unprecedented demand for portraiture. By and large,

¹¹¹ Calvert, 108.

¹¹² Jaffee (1985), 121.

these first-time patrons' understanding of art was limited to their desire for a portrait likeness, painted quickly and cheaply."¹¹³

Earl's works from this period also reveal some important early trends that persisted throughout his later career. In his later Tennessee portraits and his suite of Jackson images, he would draw on numerous artistic traditions, including those he practiced in New England. He continued to produce simplified bust-portraits for the rest of his career, and to show a penchant for costumes and bright colors. In addition, Earl learned early on the importance of tailoring portraiture to a sitter's tastes, and he continued to obey cardinal this rule of portraiture as his career moved forward.

Earl's activities from 1805-1809 are somewhat unclear, and no works from this period have surfaced, although he was certainly still painting. It is more likely that he stopped signing his works at this time and therefore (if they still exist) they are unattributed. It seems that from at least 1806 Earl settled in Troy, New York where his mother and sister lived. It is likely he lived with them the majority of the time after the death of his father, only traveling occasionally to fill commissions. Later letters allude to his many friends in Troy, and a few additional records indicate he did some work there. Earl's local residence and portrait business was advertised in the *Troy Gazette* for example on October 14, 1806: ""Bust, Half Length, & Full Length Portrait Painting by Ralph E.W. Earl, Lorenzo Gallery, In Congress Street over the offices of Mssrs. Font & Rumsey and the County Clerk, where, as usual, he will be obsequious to the patrons of the art. Ladies attended at their own rooms."¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Elizabeth Kornhauser, "'Staring Likenesses: Portraiture in Rural New England, 1800-1850," in Jaffee, et al., *Meet Your Neighbors*, 24.

Furthermore, in an 1821 letter to his mother responding to one he had received from her, he stated, “This is the first information I have received from Troy since I left,” which suggests he probably lived primarily in Troy until he left for England in 1809.¹¹⁵ The early death of his father had forced Earl to begin finding his own commissions and to rely solely on himself for support. As he said later in the letter to his mother, “I have had to work my own way through this life so far to obtain my profession.”¹¹⁶ Thus, it seems he was successful enough painting portraits in Troy to earn enough money to travel to England.

London

Earl achieved such success in New England after his father’s death that he was able to follow in his footsteps by traveling to England in 1809 to advance his skills as an artist. He arrived in London in 1809 without the help of patronage, or as he put it “without assistance of a friend in a pecuniary way.”¹¹⁷ There, Earl encountered first-hand the grand European tradition, both Neoclassical and Romantic in style. He spent twelve months in London where he benefited from the expertise of the prominent American artists there, especially Benjamin West and John Trumbull, whose acquaintance he probably made through his father’s past connections (the senior Earl had worked in London from 1782-85, but would have also perhaps known Trumbull in New York). Earl Jr. became especially close with Trumbull and studied

¹¹⁴ *Gazette*, Troy, New York, October 14, 1806, 2. The same advertisement reappears many times over the following several years.

¹¹⁵ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress manuscripts, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

under his direction during his year in London. As he wrote, “from Col. Trumbull I received great ~~instruction~~ information in my art and friendship – Mr. West was also friendly.”¹¹⁸ Earl kept in touch with Trumbull even after he left London, revealing the warmth of their relationship in a letter from Norwich in 1810: “I have taken the liberty to inform you and Mrs. Trumbull of my success on coming to Norwich knowing you have much interest in my welfare.”¹¹⁹ He went on to discuss his new patron and friend General Money, and the success he was having in the region, modestly concluding, “what have I done to deserve all these honours!”

Training with West and Trumbull was essential to Earl’s later success, especially in his work as a painter for Andrew Jackson. From them and the exhibitions and collections in London, Earl absorbed the grand tradition of both portraiture and history painting, and was inspired to produce such paintings himself. Trumbull was already known for his history paintings of battles and other important events of the American Revolution as well as portraits of George Washington, George Clinton and Alexander Hamilton. West, of course, was not only the principle artist to the King of England, but also an important history painter as well, and Earl’s formative exposure to their work equipped the young artist to later translate Jackson’s image in a similarly ambitious manner.

Upon his return from Europe in 1785, Earl Sr. had utilized the British Grand Manner portrait style for a number of commissions. For example, his painting of Baron von Steuben depicts the uniformed officer in a formal three-quarter length

¹¹⁸ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress manuscripts, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁹ Ralph E.W. Earl to John Trumbull in London, from Norwich, July 18, 1810, Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

view. A native of Prussia who had served as major-general for the American army during the Revolutionary War, the general stands resting his outstretched right arm on his sword before a loosely painted tree with a military encampment seen in the background (fig. 1.15). Thus Earl Jr. was probably familiarized with the European style of portraiture directly through his father, even before he traveled abroad himself. The British Grand Manner portrait would provide just one of the many forms of artistic inspiration for Earl in his work for Jackson. Earl also drew upon the precedent of American presidential portraiture which had also been inspired by the European tradition, and is more fully addressed in chapter four.

While in England studying with Trumbull, Earl undoubtedly came in contact with other young American artists that, like himself had traveled abroad to advance their art. Among those in England at the time were Washington Allston, Samuel F.B. Morse, Thomas Sully, and Charles Bird King. Along with Earl, all of these men returned to the United States to expand the quality and scope of American art. The social skills that Earl had acquired after his father's death in addition to his sincere and modest personality certainly served him well in England as Earl found his way with relative ease, and he continued to use these talents to his advantage throughout his career.

Norwich

At the end of his year in London, Earl moved to Norwich, England where he lived from 1810 to 1814. In February of 1810, his presence there was announced in the local paper, saying Earl was a "portrait painter...and the son of an artist who resided in Norwich some years since. His pictures are faithful likenesses, and he has

had the happiness of being employed to portray very beautiful originals.”¹²⁰ Earl was probably drawn to Norwich for a couple of reasons. First, his mother was a native of the town, and his maternal grandfather and uncle still resided there, although he neither lived with his relatives, nor seems to have received much assistance from them. He updated his mother in his letter from 1821 on the status of her family in England, but did not talk at length about their personal attributes, which he was known to do for loved ones, especially Andrew and Rachel Jackson later. He stated simply “Your father and your Brother James were still living when I first arrived in Norwich, and lived at the same place they did when you left that Country – your father died in 1812 – aged 86 years – your sister Mrs. Graves was living when I left England.”¹²¹

Earl Sr. had also worked in Norwich for a time and his former contacts were still in the area, most notably General Money. Money’s house in Norwich was located near the home of Earl’s maternal relatives and the two families had longstanding associations. Like his father, the younger Earl went to Norwich “under the patronage of General Money,” and his was one of the first portraits Earl painted there (unlocated). Earl boasted of his success on coming to Norwich in the letter to his mentor John Trumbull in London stating that, “General Money whom you have heard me mention was my father’s friend has become my friend, and have just finished a portrait of him much to his satisfaction.” He continued, saying he had “met the public approbation so farr [*sic*] as shall spend some time here – The General is a particular

¹²⁰ *Norwich Mercury*, February 18, 1810, cited in Kornhauser et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, 232, note 6.

¹²¹ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress manuscripts, Washington, D.C.

friend and correspondent of the Duke of Kent whom he is going to solicit the favour to let me paint his portrait for him, this he thinks will be an advantage to me.”¹²² If Earl did paint a portrait of the Duke of Kent the work is unknown.

Norwich also offered the motivated young artist an active artistic community. Outside of London, Norwich was one of England’s most important artistic centers. Shortly after his arrival in 1810 Earl began exhibiting with the Norwich Society of Artists, which had been formed in 1803 by John Crome and John Sell Cotman and their circle of artists. It was the first regional school of artists in England and one of the most successful of many groups of painters that sprang up around England in the nineteenth century. The society held its first exhibition in 1805 and continued to host a yearly exhibit every year (except 1826 and 1827) until 1833.¹²³ The Norwich artists were noted for their realism based on observation, in contrast to the romantic embellished paintings of Gainsborough and his followers in London. In addition, many of the Norwich Society artists favored landscape painting, and although Earl continued to produce primarily portraits in England, this exposure to landscape expanded his range. He is known to have painted at least two pure landscapes of rural

¹²² Ralph E.W. Earl to John Trumbull, from Norwich, July 18, 1810, Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

¹²³ During the two-year gap, their original exhibition space at Sir Benjamin Wrenche’s Court was demolished and their new gallery, which formed part of the new Corn Exchange, was built. Miklos Rajnai, *The Norwich Society of Artists 1805-1833: A Dictionary of Contributors and their Work* (Norwich, U.K.: Norfolk Museum, 1976), 3. The original exhibition space where Earl’s works were shown was an unoccupied mansion owned by a physician, Sir Benjamin Wrench, located in Norwich “where Little Cockey Lane ran into old Pottergate.” R. H. Mottram, *John Crome of Norwich* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Limited, 1931), 108.

Tennessee once back in the United States, probably based in part on his experience with the Norwich School landscapes.¹²⁴

Earl's name first appears in the Norwich Society Exhibition Catalog of 1810 and he is listed as a portrait painter with an address of Judge's Old Lodgings, Charing Cross, Norwich.¹²⁵ In what was perhaps his first exhibition opportunity, he showed seven works in the Norwich Society's exhibition that year. Five of them were portraits, including the portrait of "Lieut. General Money," one of Earl's first Norwich works, and two were literary inspired works.¹²⁶ Illustrational scenes were new to Earl's oeuvre and lines from the stories that they represented were included with the exhibited works. One was entitled *Don Raymond in the Robber's Cottage*, taken from *The History of Raymond and Agnes*, an English Romantic opera. The other, *Gil Blas endeavoring to escape from the Cave of the Robbers* came from *Gil Blas*, a picturesque French adventure novel written between 1700 and 1730 by Alain-René LeSage which was loosely translated into English by Tobias Smollet.

Earl ended up producing several literary scenes such as these while living in England. For example in 1812 he exhibited a painting called *The Beggar*, taken from a poem of the same name by Thomas Gent, a contemporary English poet. The sonnet that inspired the work was included in the exhibition. Earl also showed four other

¹²⁴ The most well-known and documented of these is *The Cumberland River* (ca. 1820-23), which is discussed in greater detail in chapter five. There is record of another quite similar Nashville landscape that has descended through prominent Nashville families and is located in a private collection. However, there is no clear attribution for this painting. It is pictured and recorded in the archives of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

¹²⁵ *Catalogue of the exhibition of the Norwich Society of Artists*, 20 v. (Norwich: 1805-1824).

¹²⁶ The other four portraits he showed are recorded in the exhibition catalog as *Portrait of a young lady of Miss Coe's Academy*, *Portrait of Mrs. Thurgar*, presented by the young ladies of her academy (Mr. and Mrs. Chris Thurgar kept a ladies' academy located on St. Giles Broad Street in Norwich – see Mottram, 122), *Portrait of Lady Jerningham and two of her children*, and *Portrait, the Rev. Mr. Fleury*.

portraits that year.¹²⁷ None of Earl's literary art from England is located today. Earl may have continued producing such scenes once back in the United States. Although no records of these have surfaced, it seems likely that he either created them and they have been lost or he sought to, because clippings of stories, poems, and other creative writings have been found among his papers.¹²⁸ Like many early artists in the United States who had trained abroad, Earl wanted to produce more than portraits, even though there was little demand for historical or literary paintings at the time in America.¹²⁹

Earl was elected a full member of the Norwich Society in 1811.¹³⁰ Members were elected by a three-quarters majority of members present at the meetings, which were held every two weeks. Eligibility involved exhibiting examples of the artist's work to current Society members.¹³¹ For his admission, Earl exhibited eleven portraits, including some of his most significant Norwich works. He showed a self-portrait (unlocated, the only one he is known to have ever done) in addition to his portrait of Captain Money.¹³² Earl also included the portraits of several members of

¹²⁷ The portraits included: *Portrait of Mr. Ungleman*, *Portraits of Master and Miss Jenner*, and *Portrait of Lieut. Mullen of the Dorset regiment*.

¹²⁸ In the Earl archives at both the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts and in the John Spencer Bassett papers at the Library of Congress.

¹²⁹ For further insight on this topic see Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), especially chapter 2.

¹³⁰ As notated in that year's exhibition catalog. *Catalogue of the exhibition of the Norwich Society of Artists*, 20 v. (Norwich: 1805-1824).

¹³¹ Rajnai, 3. In its thirty-one years of existence, the society had a total of fifty full members, in addition to twenty-nine honorary ones.

¹³² For posterity, it would be nice to have this and other self-portraits of Ralph E.W. Earl. However, he was probably simply too busy to take the time to paint his own image, especially after returning to the United States. He also was not known to be overly self-indulgent. As Charles Bird King sarcastically wrote on his own self-portrait at age 70, "When you have nothing to do, paint your own portrait"

the Norwich Society, including “Mr. Crome,” “Master Berger,” and “F. Crome.”¹³³

The members of the Norwich Society of artists had very close master-pupil relationships and Earl’s membership in the society offered him great opportunities to advance his skills and receive additional artistic training from the society’s founders.

Earl seems to have been busy taking commissions in 1812. His address was listed in nearby Yarmouth in that year’s exhibition catalog, and perhaps he was traveling throughout County Norfolk seeking out commissions to earn a living, possibly aided by John Crome, president of the Norwich Society, who had strong connections in that area.¹³⁴ Earl was definitely producing works outside of those he exhibited. Because the works at the Norwich School exhibitions were rarely offered for sale, he had to find other markets for his work.¹³⁵ At the same time, however, he could exhibit works that were privately commissioned; he might have obtained permission from his patrons to exhibit the portraits he had produced for them. This arrangement seems fortuitous for both artist and sitter giving each a certain amount publicity, Earl for his work, and the sitter for the prestige of having an exhibited portrait.

Though the vast majority of Earl’s English works are unlocated, one extant work dates from his time in Yarmouth. In 1812, in an unusual transatlantic encounter,

(1856, Redwood Library). Earl also showed a *Portrait of Mr. Pikeling, Shepherd Boy, Portrait of Mr. Bardelin, Portrait of Lieut. Chamberlin, R.N.*, and *Head of a Girl* in 1811.

¹³³ ‘Mr. Crome’ is presumably John Crome, the Society’s president and master-teacher. F. Crome is presumably Frederick James Crome (1796-1832), one of John Crome’s sons who also became an artist. The identity of ‘Master Berger’ is not known.

¹³⁴ Mottram, 121-122.

¹³⁵ Only one of Earl’s works, his *Child with Butterfly* (unlocated), of 1811, was ever offered for sale at the exhibits.

Earl depicted Captain Joshua Combs, an American from Bath, Maine (fig. 1.16). The well-executed portrait was inscribed by Earl on the reverse “Capt. Joshua Combs, Born in Bath, State of Massachusetts United States in the year 1778. Painted by Ralph E.W. Earl, Yarmouth, England 1812” (Maine was a part of Massachusetts until 1820). Interestingly, this is an image of an American sea captain in an English port on the eve of the outbreak of the War of 1812. He presumably sat for the portrait before word reached England of the declaration of war with the United States. Combs was the captain of the ship *Vigilant* out of Bath in 1806, and owner/master of the ship *Hazard* also of Bath. In 1813 he was commissioned a privateer by Congress. Little is known of his life beyond the family tradition that states that “Joshua was a sea captain and drowned.”¹³⁶ Earl’s accomplished bust-length portrait depicts Combs not as a military officer in uniform, but rather as a young, pleasant gentleman. But its sensitive likeness shows that Earl had made great progress in England since his last known New England portraits of 1804. Combs wears a white cravat underneath a black jacket and is set quite simply against a dark background. He has a lively expression and nuanced features that bear a much greater naturalism than his stylized New England portraits of 1802-04.

According to the Norwich exhibition catalog of that year, in 1813 Earl was back in Norwich at his old address, “Judge’s Old Lodgings, Charing Cross,” and he exhibited fifteen portraits in that year’s exhibition, the most of any year in Norwich.

¹³⁶ The work was sold into a private collection in 1982. Thanks to Raymond Agler, with Raymond Agler Fine Arts in Gloucester, Massachusetts for providing this information. Agler’s gallery handled the painting in the 1980s. Combs wife, son, and daughter are buried in the old White Cemetery in Bath, Maine. Another pair of portraits from Earl’s English period was handled by Sotheby’s in 1984 depicting Mr. and Mrs. Robert Algar and dated 1814. Recently (in summer 2009) another Earl portrait of a young woman painted in England was purchased at an auction house and sold on Ebay.

Of these, his most significant was his “Portrait of Master West,” now lost. If Earl had indeed painted Benjamin West that year, it attests to his continued contact with the London-based artist. If he had painted the portrait while he was still in London in 1809, it proves at the least, West’s availability to Earl and willingness to assist him.¹³⁷

Earl was still a full member in the society in 1814 and exhibited an additional five portraits in the year’s exhibition. Three more of his portraits were exhibited in 1815, although he resigned membership that year having moved to Paris in the fall of 1814.¹³⁸

In total, Earl exhibited forty-five paintings with the Norwich School, in addition to gaining full membership in their Society and painting the portraits of some of England’s most eminent artists, including two of the Crome family, and Benjamin West. In that lively artistic community, Earl had constant interaction and painted prolifically. Even so, his presence in Norwich and significance within the society has been all but forgotten; he is often left out of scholarship about the group. Admittedly, Earl was a portrait-painter among landscapists, and none of the paintings he exhibited are located. But as one of only fifty full members who ever joined, and an especially active exhibiting member for a time, this seems like a glaring omission.

Earl’s time in England was essential to his later success. He received his first formal artistic training, was part of an active and accomplished artistic community,

¹³⁷ Earl also exhibited the following portraits in 1813 as listed in the exhibition catalog: *Portrait of Mr. Burroughes, Portrait of Miss H. Burroughs, Portrait of Master J. Pilgrim, Portrait, Portrait of Master M. Pilgrim, Portrait of Mr. Wilkins, Portrait of a Gentleman, Portrait of an Old Gentleman, Portrait of a Lady, Portrait of J.L. Farr, Esq., Portrait of Miss M. Burroughs, Portrait, Portrait of the Rev. J. Nelson, Portrait of Mrs. Berger.*

¹³⁸ The portraits exhibited in 1814 are *Portrait of W. Simmonds, Esq., Portrait of a Clergyman, Portrait of J. Butters, Esq., Portrait of the Rev. C.M. Donne, and Portrait of the Rev. J.C. Manning.* For 1815 the following works were shown: *Portrait of Gentleman, Portrait of a Lady, Portrait of a Lady.*

and his style became more sophisticated. He was introduced to new modes of portraiture, such as the state portrait, upon which he would later draw in his Jacksonian imagery. One obvious change in his art after his time in England was his depiction of the sky which he had been including in his portraits from the beginning of his career. In New England, his clouds looked staged or abstracted, like cotton balls. However, post-Europe, his skies were more vibrantly conceived and reflected his awareness of Gainsborough and Lawrence. More generally, his touch after his European exposure also changed. Many of his later Tennessee works, especially those of Jackson, for example, display a soft Rococo-like brushstroke that was still lingering in England when Earl was there. For his poses of Jackson too, it is clear that Earl adopted many European mannerisms.

Paris

After six years in England, Earl spent a year in France, where Jean-Antoine Gros, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres were crafting Napoleon Bonaparte's image in ways similar to those Earl would later use to portray Jackson. Part of Earl's time in France was spent copying paintings at the Louvre, about which he later recounted to his mother: "In the autumn of 1814 I arrived in Paris, where I continued nearly twelve months. During that time, I received more information in my art than I had done the whole time I remained in England, owing to Bonaparte's having collected all the fine paintings he could on the Continent, and brought them to Paris for the benefit of the arts and his own aggrandizement."¹³⁹ It is likely that Earl was among a group of English artists who traveled to France with John Crome just before

¹³⁹ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress manuscripts, Washington, D.C.

the Battle of Waterloo in 1814 to see the paintings Napoleon had looted from collections throughout Europe. Earl was well-acquainted with ‘Master Crome,’ a founder of the Norwich Society and the President during Earl’s tenure. Crome and the group traveled to France in October 1814 and Crome wrote a letter to his wife of visiting the chateaus of St. Cloud and Versailles, and his anticipation that “this morning, I am going to see the object of my journey, that is the Thuilleries” [the exhibition of Napoleon’s paintings]. He goes on to mention that “I shall see David tomorrow [*sic*] and the rest of the artists when I can find time.” Without mentioning the names of those in his traveling party, Crome states that “we are all in good health and in good lodgings.”¹⁴⁰ Although there is no clear documentation that Earl was traveling with Crome, the consistencies between their timing and activities (both had mentioned seeing Napoleon’s paintings as well as the Allied Armies) makes this likely.

Although Crome returned to England, Earl spent a year in France. There he became well-acquainted with the renowned American artist John Vanderlyn, as he explained to his mother, “Here I met with another excellent friend, Mr. Vanderlyn, the painter from New York.” Undocumented until now, Vanderlyn and Earl seem to have shared a mutual respect for one another and had probably become acquainted while copying portraits at the Louvre. They may have even shared studio space in Paris, and were at the least very well-acquainted with each other’s working techniques. Vanderlyn, for example alluded in a later letter to Earl of a “portrait painted on a piece of good elastic piece of canvass or on stout papers such as I have

¹⁴⁰ John Crome to his wife Phoebe, October 10, 1814, transcribed in Mottram, 146-149.

painted on in France.”¹⁴¹ After their separate returns to the United States, which occurred within a month or two of each other, after the end of the War of 1812, Vanderlyn settled in New York, and Earl in the South, but they did exchange an occasional letter and kept in touch through mutual friends, namely another young American artist, Archibald Woodruff, who had been in Paris with them. A letter from Vanderlyn to Earl written in 1819 asking for Earl’s assistance with his portrait of Jackson that had been commissioned from him by the city of New York also attests to Vanderlyn’s respect for Earl as an artist. Vanderlyn requested a small, three-inch bust portrait of the General “which is about the size you made a copy of a small portrait of Mr. Purvia when at Paris.” Vanderlyn was friendly, saying “I was pleased to learn that you was advantageously established at Nashville – most of this information I learnt from Genl. Jackson & his staff when they were here.”¹⁴²

Like Earl, Vanderlyn also showed an interest in executing a history painting of the Battle of New Orleans, and it is probable that the two artists had discussed the idea while in Paris. According to Vanderlyn, “I propose going to New Orleans next autumn or winter. I may take Nashville [where Earl was living] on my way. I have the project of painting the Battle of New Orleans.”¹⁴³ Once back in America, Vanderlyn started garnering support for his history painting, which he envisioned being along the lines of John Trumbull’s *Battle of Bunker Hill* (1786, Yale University Art

¹⁴¹ John Vanderlyn to Ralph Earl, April 2, 1819. Collection of Harry M. Bland, New York, reproduced in its entirety in Louise Hunt Averill, “John Vanderlyn: American Painter, 1775-1853” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1949), 254-55.

¹⁴² John Vanderlyn to Ralph Earl, April 2, 1819, reproduced in its entirety in Louise Hunt Averill, “John Vanderlyn: American Painter, 1775-1853” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1949), 254-55.

¹⁴³ Vanderlyn to Earl, April 2, 1819.

Gallery). He had even received letters of support from prominent men such as Robert and Edward Livingston, George and DeWitt Clinton, and Nicholas Biddle.¹⁴⁴

Unfortunately, neither Vanderlyn nor Earl ever saw their idea of a Battle of New Orleans history painting through to fruition. Vanderlyn was unable to garner enough financial backing, busying himself instead with his Versailles Panorama. Earl established a busy portrait career for himself in Nashville and never saw the project completed either, though both artists ended up producing historical portraits of Jackson on the battlefield. Vanderlyn and Earl's paths probably did cross again in the winter of 1820 when both men were in New Orleans on different pursuits. Vanderlyn was exhibiting his Versailles panorama for the city and Earl exhibiting his large-scale portrait of Jackson in hopes of gaining a commission from the city (discussed in chapter four).

Earl also befriended Archibald Woodruff while in France. The two returned to the United States at the same time, at the end of 1815, Woodruff to Philadelphia, and Earl to Savannah, and they corresponded regularly. Woodruff confirmed Vanderlyn's friendship in a letter to Earl five years later, in 1821, saying, "It is long since I had the pleasure of hearing from you, nor did I know what had become of you till last winter, when I saw our friend Vanderlyn, in Philadelphia who told me you resided at Nashville, and that you had united yourself...with a relative of our Immortal Jackson."¹⁴⁵ Woodruff went on to update Earl on Vanderlyn's current affairs: "Mr. Vanderlyn, you have doubtless heard went to New Orleans last winter, with his

¹⁴⁴ Averill, 100.

¹⁴⁵ Woodruff to Earl, April 25, 1821. John Spencer Bassett Papers, 31:5, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

painting of the Garden & Palace of Versailles – I have not heard what success he met with.”¹⁴⁶ In 1815, Vanderlyn painted Woodruff’s portrait (Cincinnati Art Museum), a striking bust-length view that depicts Woodruff as a well-dressed gentleman.

With the exception of two paintings and Vanderlyn’s mention of Earl’s “small portrait of Mr. Purvia,” little of Earl’s artistic productivity in Paris has come to light. In 1820, Earl arranged to have two of his French-produced paintings, depicting Napoleon (fig. 1.17) and Michel Ney, shipped to him in Nashville from Paris via New Orleans. Ney was one of Napoleon’s original marshals in the Napoleonic wars, nicknamed by him “the bravest of the brave,” and he gained fame as Napoleon’s cavalry commander. Although it seems likely that the portraits were copied from works at the Louvre, Earl claimed to have taken them from live sittings with the men, which was possible at the time due to Napoleon’s escape from the Island of Elba and return to power in Paris. The paintings became major attractions at his Nashville Museum (addressed at length in chapter two).

The portrait of Ney is unlocated but Napoleon’s picture remains in the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville. The strength of the Napoleon portrait shows that Earl’s abilities had indeed continued to progress in Paris. Earl depicts the French leader in middle-age, wearing his military uniform and turned slightly to the viewer’s left with his head shifting right. Earl’s brushstroke is clear, his colors are vibrant and Napoleon is seated against a nondescript blue-brown background. In addition to the skills Earl gained from studying painting in Paris, the painting of a military figure and

¹⁴⁶ Woodruff to Earl, April 25, 1821. John Spencer Bassett Papers, 31:5, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. Ultimately, Earl’s pursuits in New Orleans, which gained him a \$1000 commission were more successful than Vanderlyn’s, who just about broke even on his trip. Earl’s commission is discussed in depth in chapter 4.

national leader is significant to the development of Earl's career. Although he had depicted military leaders in England, none of them were of the significance of a figure such as Napoleon, and this is the first such portrait that has come to light. As such, it offers a very important precursor to Earl's Jackson paintings, and although it remains to be seen whether or not this is a copy-portrait, Earl's exposure to Napoleon's antics certainly aided him in navigating the Jacksonian political realm years later.

Return to the United States

Earl returned to the United States in 1815, landing in Savannah, Georgia on the last day of December, hoping to create a series of history paintings depicting the nation's recent victory in the Battle of New Orleans. He took a room at a local inn where artists often boarded called the "Exchange" in Savannah, and established himself as a portrait painter.¹⁴⁷ Though only scant information exists regarding Earl's time there, at least one of his friends from Georgia, a William D. Stone, kept in touch with him for the rest of his life. Stone apparently commissioned a painting because years later, he visited the artist in the nation's capital, and afterwards wrote him a letter that mentions a portrait of George Washington Earl painted in 1816. Stone wrote, "Since my return from Washington, I have been so constantly engaged...that this is the first moment I have had to write a friend. The likeness of General Jackson with which you had the goodness to present me came safe and uninjured; it is in a beautiful frame and is placed in my drawing room by the side of the portrait of

¹⁴⁷ According to the *Savannah Republican*, March 15, 1817, another artist, C. Shroder, had "taken the room in the Exchange, formerly occupied by Mr. Earl, where his Specimens can be inspected," 3-4.

General Washington which you painted for me at Savannah.”¹⁴⁸ Not only does this mention of a Washington portrait provide the only known example of something Earl had painted in Savannah, it also shows his familiarity and interest in presidential imagery at an early point.

The circumstances of the portrait’s origins are uncertain. Perhaps Earl had copied one of John Trumbull’s paintings of the president while in London. In any case, the 1816 portrait of Washington and the painting of Napoleon created in Paris and later shipped to Nashville, reveal Earl’s interest in generals-turned-presidents, and their imagery, even before he depicted Andrew Jackson. It also proves Earl’s awareness of the tradition of presidential portraiture in the United States, and shortly after painting George Washington he headed to Nashville to do something similar with Jackson’s portrait.

Earl made other contacts during his seven months in Savannah who helped him as he looked ahead to meeting the heroes in Tennessee. He reported that he “had made up my mind to visit the western country and proceeded to Nashville in order to obtain the portraits of General Jackson, Coffee, and Carroll, that I might at some future period be enabled to paint the Battle of New Orleans. This subject I had thought of while in Paris. I reached [Nashville] the first of January 1817.”¹⁴⁹ To aid his introductions, Earl carried a letter from a Savannah man, W. Stephens, to General Flourney saying, “I introduce to your notice Mr. Earle [sic], an excellent portrait painter, whose stay in Augusta will be but short, as he goes to Tennessee for the

¹⁴⁸ William D. Stone to Ralph E.W. Earl, John Spencer Bassett papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁹ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress manuscripts, Washington, D.C.

express purpose of taking the likeness of Genl. Jackson whose portrait is in great demand in Chston and [Savannah].”¹⁵⁰ In another letter, Stephens was even more direct in saying that Earl “is on his way to Tennessee to take the likeness of Genl. Jackson, as the portrait of this Hero is in great demand.”¹⁵¹ Earl was obviously aware of the money-making potential of images of Jackson and recognized this as the quickest way of becoming established in Nashville.

As a young man raised in Massachusetts and educated in Europe, Earl probably had no idea what to expect upon arriving in Nashville, or on any of his journeys through the South and “western country,” as Tennessee was known at the time. In the early decades of the nineteenth-century, most people in the eastern cities had no idea what life in the West was like and “the population of that region was supposed by many to be semi-barbarian; and to go to Kentucky or Tennessee was banishing yourself from civilization.”¹⁵² Samuel A. Bascom, a friend and bookseller in Pennsylvania (who requested that Earl let him know if there was a market for books in Tennessee), asked him to “give me some account of your journey through the Wilderness,” but was encouraging and hopeful saying, “I hope you may find friends in the new & untried regions of the west & that Old Hickory may be found Courteous & accommodating & disposed to patronize the fine Arts;...I think it very possible you may find so much encouragements in the western country as to detain you there a year, should that be the case you will not see N Orleans the ensuing

¹⁵⁰ W. Stephens to General Flourney from Savannah, GA, July 19, 1816. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

¹⁵¹ W. Stephens to T. Cummins from Savannah, GA, July 19, 1816. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

¹⁵² Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It* (St. Louis, 1880), 172.

winter.” Based on this letter, it seems that Earl’s initial plan, after taking the portraits of the battle’s heroes was to continue on to New Orleans to perhaps sketch the battlefield, garner support for his history painting, or procure additional portrait commissions. Bascom concluded his letter in a touching way, saying to Earl “you are the happiest man I know of – having a pursuit & object which is capable of engrossing the whole of your attention, & except the vexation which is sometimes excited by the... false criticisms of pretentious Connoisseurs, I believe you have no troubles.”¹⁵³

Based on Bascom’s letter, it seems that Earl originally had no intention of staying in Nashville for an extended period. Bascom asked Earl to “write me immediately on receipt of this where you will be in November & how long you expect to remain in Nashville.” He offered his assistance in providing artistic materials for Earl, saying that he would “not fail to procure the articles you may be in want of by the assistance of some painter in Philadelphia,” and noted that from Pittsburgh “there is a passage all the way by water for loading in Nashville.” The Philadelphia artist Bascom spoke of may have been Thomas Sully who later had friendly correspondence with Earl and helped him procure frames through his own frame-maker, James Earl (no relation).

As Earl made his way to Nashville at the age of twenty-eight to begin the mature phase of his career he could look back on a period of artistic apprenticeship longer and more distinguished than most artists of his time and place. Tennessee was still a developing region in 1817, only a few years into statehood and without any

¹⁵³ Samuel A Bascom to Earl from Philadelphia, Sept. 8, 1817. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

artistic presence and this offered fresh opportunities for an aspiring young man. Earl hoped that its distinguished military heroes would be receptive to him especially because of his training abroad and his good contacts and references throughout the Southeast.

Earl's early career in New England and Europe are fundamental to understanding his later career in the Jacksonian era. From his rural New England sitters, he realized the need to recognize and offer patrons the style and subject matter they desired. Although his paintings from this period may be considered folk or naïve, they are in keeping with the popular modes of portraiture in the area at the time. His artistic experience and skill dramatically expanded during his years abroad and by the time he reached Nashville and Jackson in early 1817, he had gained enough experience that his career flourished in Nashville in a number of different ways.



Figure 1.1. Ralph Earl, *Elijah Boardman*, 1789. Oil on canvas, 83 in x 51 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed December 29, 2009).



Figure 1.2. Ralph Earl, *Landscape View of Old Bennington* (detail), 1798. 59 $\frac{3}{4}$ in x 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. The Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont. Reproduced from Elizabeth Kornhauser et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 228.

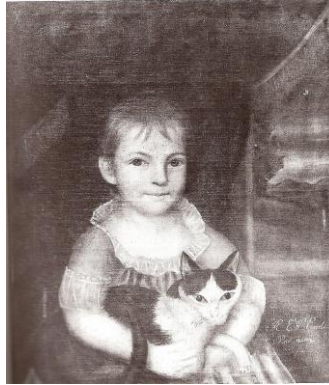


Figure 1.3. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Portrait of Edward Gere*, 1800. Oil on canvas, 22 in x 18 ½ in. Location presently unknown. Reproduced from Elizabeth Kornhauser et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 63.



Figure 1.4. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman*, 1802. Oil on canvas, 26 7/8 in x 23 in. Historic Deerfield Collection, Deerfield, Massachusetts. Reproduced from www.historic-deerfield.org (accessed November 14, 2008).

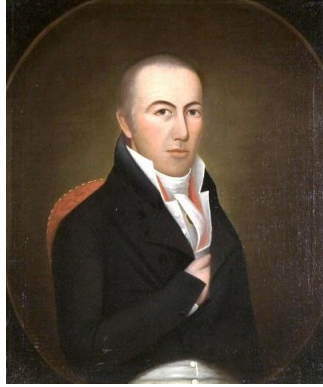


Figure 1.5. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Reverend Elihu Ely*, ca. 1800-1803. Oil on canvas, 28 ½ in x 24 ½ in. Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia.



Figure 1.6. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Grace Rose Ely*, 1800 or 1803. Oil on canvas, 28 ½ in x 24 ½ in. Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia.



Figure 1.7. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Williams*, ca. 1804. Oil on canvas, 37 ½ in x 30 ½ in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Reproduced from www.metmuseum.org (accessed June 8, 2009).



Figure 1.8. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Reverend Ebenezer Porter*, 1804. Oil on canvas, 45 ½ in. x 36 in. Private Collection. Reproduced from Elizabeth Kornhauser et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 231.



Figure 1.9. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Lucy "Patty" Pierce Merwin*, 1804. Oil on canvas, 45 $\frac{3}{4}$ in x 36 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Brooklyn Museum. Reproduced from Elizabeth Kornhauser et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 230.

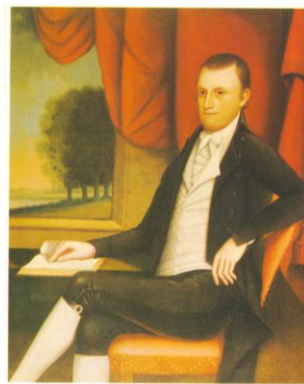


Figure 1.10. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mr. Nathaniel Ruggles*, 1804. Oil on canvas, 45 $\frac{1}{4}$ in x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Private Collection. Reproduced from *Magazine Antiques* (Oct. 1981), 880.



Figure 1.11. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Martha Ruggles*, 1804. Oil on canvas, 45 ¼ in x 36 ¼ in. Private Collection. Reproduced from *Magazine Antiques* (Oct. 1981), 880.



Figure 1.12. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Family Portrait*, 1804. Oil on canvas, 63 ½ in x 46 ½ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Reproduced from www.nga.gov (accessed Jan. 1, 2010).



Figure 1.13. Ralph Earl, *Mrs. Noah Smith and her Children*, 1798. Oil on canvas, 85 $\frac{3}{4}$ in x 64 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed December, 30, 2009).

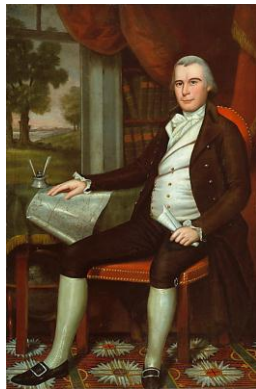


Figure 1.14. Ralph Earl, *Mr. Noah Smith*, 1798. Oil on canvas, 64 $\frac{1}{4}$ in x 42 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Art Institute of Chicago. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed December, 30, 2009).



Figure 1.15. Ralph Earl, *Major General Baron von Steuben*, 1786. Oil on canvas, 48 ½ in x 40 in. Yale University Art Gallery. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed January 4, 2010).



Figure 1.16. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Captain Joshua Combs*, 1812. Oil on canvas, 22 ¼ in x 17 ¼ in. Private Collection.



Figure 1.17. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Napoleon Bonaparte*, 1814 or 1815. Oil on canvas, 33 in x 28 ½ in. Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed April 21, 2007).

**CHAPTER TWO:
EARL IN NASHVILLE: CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN A
DEVELOPING REGION**

Earl was “esteemed for his personal virtues and his contributions to the life of
the city.”¹⁵⁴

Armed with the knowledge of Benjamin West and John Trumbull’s history paintings, and steeped in the teaching of the European grand manner and the spectacle of Napoleonic portraiture, Earl came back to the United States to try his hand at history painting. Although his grand Battle of New Orleans painting never materialized, Earl drew upon his European experiences once back in the United States, and advanced the developing antebellum culture there in many unique ways. His early contributions to the burgeoning American society, particularly that of Nashville and the state of Tennessee, offer a contextual basis for subsequent discussions regarding his mature artistic production, and allow for a greater understanding of Earl’s remarkable, significant, and multi-faceted career.

As a resident of Nashville from January 1, 1817 to his death on September 16, 1838, Earl spent the majority of his mature career working towards forming and advancing the city’s cultural life in innovative ways.¹⁵⁵ Earl’s career should be considered among those of other elite artists of his generation, such as Thomas Sully, Asher B. Durand, Charles Bird King, and William Edward West, all of whom spent time in the South, but as a cultural innovator, Earl should also be remembered among American luminaries Charles Willson Peale and Rembrandt Peale, among others.

¹⁵⁴ Jerome R. MacBeth, “Portraits by Ralph E.W. Earl,” *Magazine Antiques* 100 (Sept 1971): 390.

¹⁵⁵ Earl actually spent the majority of 1831-1837 in Washington, but came back to Nashville intermittently during that time, and returned permanently with Jackson after his presidency.

Learning from his colonial portraitist father, and educating himself in Europe, Earl returned home to encourage cultural expansion in the United States, just as the nation was beginning to come into its own on an international stage.

Letters of introduction from friends in the Southeast, often mentioning his European training, helped Earl establish himself with relative ease in Tennessee. For example, one of his friends and supporters in Savannah wrote to an acquaintance saying, “Permit me to Introduce to your notice Mr. Earle, a native of Massts, he is an admirable portrait painter been many years in Italy, France, and England under the first artists.”¹⁵⁶ Several months later, upon his arrival in Nashville John Coffee wrote a letter on his behalf saying, “There is a gentleman here, who, I am informed is a pupil of the celebrated painter West.”¹⁵⁷

Being the son of a famous artist “from Eastward” did not hurt Earl’s reputation, but some accounts were inaccurate in Earl’s favor. One letter of introduction inaccurately claimed, for example, “Mr. Earle was several years in Italy – under David the Great French Painter.”¹⁵⁸ The *Nashville Whig* reported the arrival of Earl’s portraits of Napoleon and Marshal Ney from France by calling them “Original Portraits of these great men, taken by Mr. Earl, shortly after the return of Napoleon from the Island of Elba.”¹⁵⁹ Although Earl neither went to Italy, nor is it likely that he studied directly under David, he certainly enjoyed the benefits of the

¹⁵⁶ W. Stephens to T. Cummins, from Savannah, Georgia, July 19, 1816. Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁵⁷ Charles Cassedy to John Coffee, February 19, 1817. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

¹⁵⁸ W. Stephens to General Flournoy, from Savannah, Georgia, July 19, 1816. Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁵⁹ *Nashville Whig*, April 20, 1822.

publicity. While it is questionable whether Napoleon and Ney actually sat for Earl, he substantiated this claim himself in a notice in the local newspaper, saying that the portraits of “Napoleon and Ney, taken from life by the proprietor while in Europe” would soon be added to his portrait gallery.¹⁶⁰ Even though the paintings were almost certainly copies, Earl’s recording of the famous Frenchmen’s likenesses is significant and he was easily welcomed in the “Western Country,” as it was known, as a respectable gentleman-artist.

Perhaps surprisingly, Earl’s status as a northerner from Massachusetts, did not seem to have caused him any overt problems as he rooted himself in the South. His New England origins are never referred to negatively, if at all, in the surviving documents. And though culturally there certainly were regional differences between the North and South, animosities were not nearly as pronounced in the second decade of the nineteenth century as they were in the 1850s and 1860s, and certainly this was true as well for sectional discord. In the first half of the nineteenth century, artists from up and down the eastern seaboard travelled south, hoping to find patrons for their work. Earl was one of the few to find such success that he settled permanently. He never commented on his opinions regarding slavery, although living at the Hermitage, he benefited from the slave labor that kept the plantation in operation. When he traveled, he was also known to have been accompanied by a young slave girl. Though he benefitted from it personally, artistically, he ignored the institution of slavery.

Nashville had neither an artist nor much concern with antiquities when Earl appeared there in 1817. As one historian put it, “His prominence as painter-

¹⁶⁰ *Nashville Whig*, May 24, 1820.

antiquarian in a place like Nashville in 1818 can be easily imagined, more especially since he acted like a plain citizen and did not put on airs. As a painter he gained a measure of distinction for his portraits of local celebrities.”¹⁶¹ Earl enjoyed the ease of his establishment in Nashville and quickly became one of the city’s leading citizens.

The City of Nashville

Although Earl’s primary contribution to the history of American art lies in his formation of Andrew Jackson’s public image through portraiture, detailed in chapter four, the scope of his achievements extends remarkably far beyond that of a presidential portraitist. Earl worked toward elevating Nashville, his adopted home town, to a city worthy of being home to the President. In the early 1820s Nashville was transforming from the frontier settlement it had been at its founding in 1779 to the bustling commercial center it would grow into by mid-century.

By 1819, Nashville boasted a population of three-thousand residents (with a total of 20,000 in Davidson County) and the first steamboat arrived up the Cumberland River, the *General Jackson* from New Orleans, thus opening up the city to much greater commercial possibilities and connections with other regions.¹⁶² The appearance of the steamboat was, according to a local newspaper, “a sight so novel at this place [that it] attracted large crowds of spectators.”¹⁶³ The boat’s arrival marked the beginning of a new era for the city, and Earl appeared just on the cusp of this to serve as one of the city’s early cultural leaders. Thereafter, Nashville became a

¹⁶¹ Guy Miles, “The Tennessee Antiquarian Society and the West,” *East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications* 18 (1946): 92.

¹⁶² Celia Walker, ed., *Cheekwood Museum of Art Collection Catalog* (Nashville: Cheekwood, 2001), 23.

¹⁶³ *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, March 13, 1819, cited in John Egerton, *Nashville: The Faces of Two Centuries, 1780-1980* (Nashville: Plus Media, 1979), 56.

popular stopping point for people traveling between the Northeast and New Orleans. Ann Royall, who is often considered the America's first female journalist, visited Nashville in 1817 and described that "Nashville is principally built of bricks and is very handsome, and does much business... The citizens of Nashville in their dress and manners exhibit much taste and opulence."¹⁶⁴ Another visitor in 1823 remarked on the town's appearance saying, "The center of town is a square with a courthouse and market on the square... The hills about the town afford agreeable sites for houses and are well filled in this way."¹⁶⁵ A Civil War era photograph, taken from the steps of the Tennessee State Capitol in Nashville, illustrates this effect, as does a painting, James E. Wagner's *Tennessee State Capitol from Morgan Park*, from a few years earlier (figs. 2.1 and 2.2). Furthermore, by 1832, at the time of Earl's departure for Washington, Nashville's population had grown to 5,566 and had "all the features of a commercial depot, having numerous stores, a branch of the U.S. bank, and two other banks."¹⁶⁶ By the time of the state's 1896 Centennial Exposition, Nashville was a booming metropolis, capable of hosting a World Fair-type event, which Earl would have regarded with great pride and interest (fig. 2.3).

When Earl arrived, Nashville already had several weekly and bi-weekly newspapers, changing the city's publishing output "from an inflexible pioneer newsheet into an organ capable of reflecting a wide range of interests."¹⁶⁷ This was

¹⁶⁴ Anne Royall, *Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects* (Washington, 1830), 21.

¹⁶⁵ Luther Holley to Horace Holley, August 14, 1823. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

¹⁶⁶ The bank of Nashville was chartered in 1807. William Darby and Theodore Dwight, *A New Gazetteer of the United States of America* (Hartford: E. Hopkins, 1833), 332. Cited in Wendy A. Cooper, *Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 233.

¹⁶⁷ Miles, 87.

fortuitous for Earl, who took great advantage of the advertising capabilities offered by the newspapers, both for his portrait production and his museum. This was a practice that his father had profited from, and he had used it himself while in Troy, New York, England, and Savannah. As he gained national fame, Earl would continue to use newspapers across the country to advertise his various projects. Nashville was also known as an important publishing center and books published there were circulated throughout the country.¹⁶⁸ In addition to being an avid reader and collector of books, Earl used these publishers to help him circulate subscription lists for his Jackson prints (as chapter five details).

The period of Earl's residence in Nashville was also one of early institution building. Cumberland College was established in 1806 and in 1824 it became the University of Nashville, acknowledged at the time as one of the nation's leading universities. The school "became the cornerstone of the educational prominence of Nashville," the so-called 'Athens of the South,' a nickname bestowed on the city based on its early educational quality.¹⁶⁹ A theatre was also established, and the nationally recognized Nashville Female Academy opened in 1816. President James Monroe visited the school on his southern tour in 1819, and by 1860 it was the largest school for women in the United States.¹⁷⁰ Monroe's visit to Nashville also brought

¹⁶⁸ F. Garvin Davenport, "Cultural Life in Nashville on the Eve of the Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History* 3:3 (Aug. 1937): 326-327.

¹⁶⁹ Davenport, 328.

¹⁷⁰ James Monroe, Daniel Preston, and Marlana C. DeLong, *The Papers of James Monroe*, vol. 1 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), 677. For more information on the Nashville Female Academy see Christine Kreyling et al., *Classical Nashville: The Athens of the South* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Press, 1996), 11 or Anita Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860: From Frontier to City* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1989), 63. Unfortunately, the school was forced to close in

honor and prestige to the bustling community. There was a general spirit of enthusiasm in the city and by 1850, Nashville “was more than a country town – it was an educational center possessing many of the attributes of cultured society.”¹⁷¹ Earl’s conspicuous presence there beginning in 1817 had a large impact on the community’s cultural and historical direction.

Earl’s Early Life in Nashville

Upon his arrival, Earl began working tirelessly to advance his career in the city. He was immediately successful as a letter from William Meriweather, written only six months after Earl’s arrival attests, “It gives me great pleasure to hear you are doing very well in Nashville.”¹⁷² Meriweather also said that he “shall hope to see you there on your return to Georgia.” Perhaps Earl intended to return to New England to his family and friends after his travels through the South, or possibly he planned to establish himself in Savannah or Charleston which were more culturally advanced than Nashville. Whatever his plans, Earl certainly did not intend to stay in Tennessee, but this would change. A friend in Lookout Mountain, Georgia responded to a letter of Earl’s on March 22, 1819, more than two years after he had arrived: “I am glad to hear you are in good business in Nashville, indeed from your talents you cannot fail to succeed anywhere, and greatly wish you all the possible success in the line of your profession.”¹⁷³ Earl thus became Tennessee’s first resident artist, and the first

1862 due to the Civil War and unable to reopen. Goodstein’s book offers the first major scholarly study of antebellum Nashville.

¹⁷¹ Davenport, 347.

¹⁷² William Meriweather to Ralph E.W.Earl, John Spencer Bassett papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷³ Daniel Ross to Ralph E.W. Earl, March 22, 1819. Earl papers, 1:2, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts .

European-trained artist even to pass through the area. This fact alone offered him immediate prestige as well as many patrons eager to have their portraits painted. His talent for this work brought him easy success in Nashville.

The most significant event of Earl's life occurred shortly after arriving in Nashville. During his frequent visits to the Hermitage for sittings with Jackson and his friends and family, Earl met Jackson's niece, Jane Caffery, the daughter of Rachel Jackson's sister, Mary and her husband John Caffery.¹⁷⁴ After her husband's death in 1811, Mary Caffery had moved to the Hermitage with several of her young children, including Jane, the youngest of twelve.¹⁷⁵ Jane was still at the Hermitage when Earl arrived in Nashville in 1817. Jane and Earl's courtship must have been brief, because her marriage to Earl on May 18, 1818 came as a shock to her distant family and friends. Her best friend, Mary Thompson expressed disappointment at the sudden event, saying "By a letter received yesterday...we learn you are about to throw aside the sprightly girl we have been so long accustomed to admire, and substitute in her place the dignified and respectable head of a family, in Mrs. Earl."¹⁷⁶ And her sister, Catherine Walker said "I saw a publication of your marriage long before I received

¹⁷⁴ John and Mary Donelson were both natives of Virginia who had married on October 25, 1775 and come to middle Tennessee in 1780, as some of the state's earliest settlers. After living for years in Tennessee the Cafferys settled in Natchez, Mississippi where John Caffery served as an "agent" for his in-law, Andrew Jackson.

¹⁷⁵ All of the genealogical information for the Caffery's is from the Hermitage archives and was provided to me by Marsha Mullin, curator of the Hermitage.

¹⁷⁶ Mary Thompson to Jane Caffery, from Pebble Springs, May 19, 1818. John Spencer Bassett Papers, 31:2, Library of Congress.

your letter. I assure you I was very much astonished having no intimation of such a thing [until] after seeing your marriage advertised.”¹⁷⁷

After his marriage to Jane Caffery, the bond between Earl and the Jacksons grew especially strong, and they considered Earl a family member. The Earls lived in Nashville, but visited the Hermitage regularly. In one letter Earl wrote to Mrs. Jackson that “Jane and myself will come up on Saturday if possible.”¹⁷⁸ In others, Rachel Jackson would ask Earl to check the Nashville post for her mail, and note that she was lonely in Jane’s absence.¹⁷⁹ This close relationship continued throughout the 1820s, while Earl’s career in Nashville was progressing, and Jackson was advancing his own political career.

Earl painted Mrs. Mary Caffery, Jane’s mother, soon after the marriage (unlocated).¹⁸⁰ According to a letter from Jane’s sister in Natchez, “It will be with pleasure and pain also to receive my dear mothers portrait. I wish very much you could have yours taken and sent to me.”¹⁸¹ Her friend Mary Thompson also expressed her desire for a likeness of Jane: “As I can’t see the original, do have your pretty face put on something and send it down here. I should really like to have a peek at it once

¹⁷⁷ Catherine Walker to Jane Caffery Earl, August 16, 1818. John Spencer Bassett Papers 31:2, Library of Congress.

¹⁷⁸ Earl to Rachel Jackson, Nov. 5, 1818. Tennessee Historical Society.

¹⁷⁹ Rachel Jackson to Earl from the Hermitage, Feb. 23, 1819 and July 3, 1819, both owned by the Ladies Hermitage Association.

¹⁸⁰ Rachel Jackson was in the habit of keeping nieces with her at the plantation, and it seems that Jane stayed on at the Hermitage even after her mother had returned to Natchez. It has long been assumed that Earl met Caffery at Natchez, where she was from, since Earl did travel there later, but in actuality he met her at the Hermitage and married her in Nashville. Her presence at the Hermitage in 1818 is documented in her letters from this period and Earl did not travel to Natchez until late 1820, after her death.

¹⁸¹ Catherine Walker to Jane Caffery, August 16, 1818. John Spencer Bassett Papers 31:2, Library of Congress.

more: it will be very pleasant amusement for Mr. Earl & will cost you nothing.”¹⁸² However, even though her family begged for a portrait of Jane, it seems that Earl never got the chance to make one. Less than a year after their marriage, she died in childbirth, along with the Earls’ newborn son.¹⁸³ Earl, however, though without children was not without a namesake. One of Jane’s older brothers, Jefferson Caffery (1789-1829), who had lived at the Hermitage for many years, and who was well acquainted with Earl, named his first-born son, Ralph Earl Caffery.¹⁸⁴ Earl wrote of his time with Jane in the autobiographical 1821 letter to his mother, saying, “I became connected in Genl. Jackson’s family by marrying a niece of Mrs. Jackson’s whom I had the misfortune to lose upwards of two years ago. She died in child birth, about eighteen years of age, and one of the most amiable of women.”¹⁸⁵ Although their marriage was cut short, Earl maintained his devotion to Jane by keeping a lock of her hair in a locket among his belongings until his death.¹⁸⁶ Earl neither remarried, nor showed any interest in such matters for the rest of his life. According to Pauline Wilcox Burke, a Donelson descendant who wrote an informative biography of Emily Donelson, another of Rachel’s nieces, “for the rest of his life until his own death in

¹⁸² Mary Thompson to Jane Caffery, October 14, 1818. John Spencer Bassett Papers 31:2, Library of Congress.

¹⁸³ According to notes from the Hermitage the “only known info is that he died shortly after birth, just before the death of Jane.” Reverend Hume, who had conducted their marriage ceremony less than a year earlier, also presided over the funeral.

¹⁸⁴ Ralph Earl Caffery was born January 10, 1826 in Lafayette, Louisiana. This information is from geneology notes for the descendants of John Caffery, provided by Marsha Mullin at the Hermitage.

¹⁸⁵ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress.

¹⁸⁶ Andrew Jackson, Jr. and Andrew Jackson Donelson took an inventory of Earl’s positions at his death. The original inventory is located in the John Spencer Bassett Papers, Library of Congress, 31:13. A typescript of the inventory can be found in the Thomas H. Gage Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

1838, Earl mourned her loss, seeking consolation in his art, painting with indefatigable energy.”¹⁸⁷

Rachel Jackson had great affection for Earl and was a source of comfort for him after the death of his wife. In one letter, she wrote, “My friend, you have not to weep as thos who have no hope. Angels wafted Her on Celestial wings to that blooming garden of roses that has no thorns.”¹⁸⁸ Earl continued to be considered a family member and moved into the Hermitage after Jane’s death. When Mrs. Jackson died suddenly, ten years later, shortly after Old Hickory’s election to the presidency in 1828, Earl and Jackson became inseparable. Because Earl had been such a favorite of Rachel’s, he became even more special to Jackson after her death. According to James Parton, an early Jackson biographer, “By [Rachel’s] death, this relative (Earl) became sanctified for the General’s heart. Earl became forthwith his protégé. From that time forward the painter’s house was under his roof.”¹⁸⁹ Their shared experience of being widowers cemented the bond between the two men, and for the rest of his life, Earl’s devotion centered on the “Old General.”

The Nashville Museum

In addition to painting dozens of portraits of Jackson and others, much of Earl’s energy during his first eight years in Nashville was devoted to operating an art and natural history museum and cultivating the developing consciousness of art and science in Nashville. Earl was not only the first artist in the area, he was one of the

¹⁸⁷ Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 2 vol. (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, 1941), 1:82.

¹⁸⁸ Rachel Jackson to Ralph E.W. Earl, February 23, 1819. Cited in Marquis James, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1938), 304.

¹⁸⁹ James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Mason Brother, 1860), 603-4.

very few people performing scientific inquiry west of the Appalachians. Moreover, his painting collection offers an extraordinary example of early American art being produced outside of the traditionally acknowledged cultural centers.

In 1818, following Charles Willson Peale's example in Philadelphia, Earl partnered with George Tunstull, a junior editor of the *Nashville Whig* newspaper, who was also a Nashville newcomer "of a progressive spirit," in the formation of the Tennessee Museum.¹⁹⁰ Though not an artist himself, Tunstull shared Earl's opinion that American art needed bolstering, stating that "as an American I feel particular solicitude for the success of the fine arts."¹⁹¹ Within a few years, the museum's collections would come to boast a hall of portraits of the region's most important men and a collection of "natural and artificial curiosities" that Earl personally gathered from around the state.¹⁹²

Earl's efforts at the Nashville museum reveal his visionary leadership, intellectual curiosity, and entrepreneurial instincts, and he should consequently be viewed in the great context of early American cultural contributors such as Charles Willson Peale, and his sons, Rembrandt, Rubens, and Raphaele Peale.¹⁹³ His contributions to the cultural life of antebellum America helped expand the intellectual boundaries beyond the east coast and established Nashville as a desirable stop for visitors traveling beyond the northeast.

¹⁹⁰ Miles, 91.

¹⁹¹ George Tunstull to T. W. Lorrain, January 17, 1821. Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁹² "Tennessee Museum," *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, July 18, 1818.

¹⁹³ See William T. Alderson, ed., *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992).

Peale had opened The Philadelphia Museum, more often known as “Peale’s Museum,” in 1782 as a gallery to display his portraits of Revolutionary War heroes. The initial exhibition, displayed in a long gallery with skylights in his Philadelphia home, showed about thirty portraits, including his full-length paintings of President George Washington and French Ambassador Conrad Alexandre Gérard at each end.¹⁹⁴ The idea to add a natural history component was probably initiated the following year in 1783 when Dr. Christian Friederich Michaelis asked Peale to make drawings of the mastodon bones he had found in Ohio. When Peale brought the bones back to his Philadelphia painting gallery, they attracted considerable attention.¹⁹⁵ The mastodon became one of the Peale Museum’s leading attractions and is visible in the background of Peale’s iconic self-portrait, *The Artist in his Museum* (fig. 2.4). After consulting with friends, Peale began collecting objects of natural history and displayed them for exhibition beginning in 1786. The natural history collections actually became the dominant feature of his museum although he continued painting portraits for display the rest of his life (he died in 1827 at age 86).¹⁹⁶ At its height, the museum (fig. 2.5) boasted 269 portraits, mostly of the heroes of the American Revolution and the founding fathers of the nation, and Peale intended his exhibitions to instill a sense of America pride in its viewers.¹⁹⁷ In addition, Peale’s museum was envisioned for all types of people, and he “hoped that his natural science exhibits

¹⁹⁴ Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and their Influence* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 51.

¹⁹⁵ Alexander, 48.

¹⁹⁶ David Meschutt, “The Peale Portraits of Andrew Jackson,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XLVI:1 (Spring 1987), 3. See also Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale’s Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (Toronto: W.W. Norton and Co., 1979).

¹⁹⁷ Alderson, 19.

would teach their viewers a proper religion of nature and advance public morality, just as his portrait gallery of national heroes would inspire love of country.”¹⁹⁸

Earl was well-aware of Peale’s ventures in Philadelphia. At least one of his father’s paintings had been exhibited at the museum, and Earl referenced his predecessor on a number of occasions.¹⁹⁹ In 1820 he published a statement regarding the difficulty of establishing such an operation, justifying inevitable early struggles and citing Peale’s museum as an example:

institutions of this description have an infance, as well as growth and maturity, and that if they never were commenced, they could never become important and valuable to the community. It will also be recollected, that the original proprietors of similar institutions in the Atlantic states, have generally had to contend with great difficulties...The American Museum in New York, and Peale’s Museum in Philadelphia, might, it is presumed, be instanced in support of the above remark.²⁰⁰

Earl recognized that his museum venture would not be easy, but felt strongly enough about it to commit many years to building its collections. Peale was also a meticulous documenter and he had published a museum prospectus in addition to several museum catalogs, which Earl may have consulted.

As artists, amateur scientists, and museum founders, Earl and Peale’s lives offer many parallels. Most obviously both painted the most important men of his time and place, and exhibited those portraits in their galleries. In antebellum America, the nation’s heroes generally consisted of political office holders, especially the President, and military heroes. Therefore, Earl sought to paint portraits of the same

¹⁹⁸ Alexander, 53.

¹⁹⁹ Earl Sr.’s panoramic painting of Niagara Falls was shown at Peale’s museum in 1799. See chapter one.

²⁰⁰ *Nashville Whig*, May 24, 1820.

types of people as had Peale. Peale's collection of portraits contained every American President up through Jackson, and Earl succeeded in depicting James Monroe, Jackson, James K. Polk (fig. 2.6), and Martin Van Buren.²⁰¹ He also painted and exhibited the portraits of anyone significant in the area, including (in addition to his presidential portraits) military heroes, governors, senators, college presidents, clergy, and doctors and by doing so, hoped to bolster local pride.

Both artists also produced portraits of the greatest naturalists of their time. Earl, for example, included Judge John Haywood's portrait in his gallery. Haywood was the most prominent naturalist in the West and Earl worked closely with him in his Tennessee excavations. Earl's interest in personally investigating Tennessee's natural landscape might have also stemmed from Peale's example. Peale's archaeological excavations are well documented in paintings such as *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* (fig. 2.7), and he painted some landscape views, such as those of his estate in Belfield.

Their associations with politicians may have encouraged both Peale and Earl's interest in politics. After painting the portraits of many of the nation's founding fathers in Philadelphia, for example, Peale developed an interest in politics, even becoming a leader of his city's "Furious Whigs." Earl, as well, was intimately aware of regional and national politics. He had a unique interest in Jackson's political involvement on the national stage. He read local and national newspapers voraciously, often keeping clippings of special interest. His letters seem to speak just as often about politics as they do about his paintings.

²⁰¹ The portraits of Monroe and Van Buren are not extant. Polk's image is further discussed in chapter three and is located at the Polk Home in Columbia, Tennessee. Earl painted Jackson dozens of times and these paintings are discussed in chapter four.

In addition, both artists studied painting abroad, in London with Benjamin West. The exposure both men gained in England cannot be overestimated. The tradition of state portraiture and the grand manner of artists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds could be seen extensively in London. These grand portraits helped inspire both Peale and Earl to return to America and immortalize their own heroes in a similar fashion. Moreover, it is likely that both were inspired by the numerous collections of curiosities that could be found in England. For example, the two John Tradescants, father and son, from South Lambeth, outside London, had been collecting for their Cabinet of Curiosities since 1629. Their collection was eventually sold to Oxford University where it was established as the Ashmolean Museum in 1683. Furthermore, Sir Hans Sloane, a London medical doctor and amateur scientist began collecting various specimens from around the world in the late seventeenth century. His collection became a London landmark which eventually became the foundation of the British Museum.²⁰²

Earl received great support in the Nashville newspapers, as Peale had in Philadelphia. The media regularly updated the public on the museum's progress, advertised the museum's hours, and listed new items on view. Like Peale, Earl opened his first museum in his home, as well as taking many portrait commissions to pay for operational expenses of the museum. In operating their museums at a time when American culture had not quite caught up with their vision, both Peale and Earl faced problems of funding, audience, and presentation.²⁰³ Based on their many

²⁰² Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and their Influence* (Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 27-39.

similarities, it seems clear that Earl modeled his museum and his career on Peale's and shared a similar type of intellectual vigor.

In addition to his awareness of Peale's museum venture and other museum entrepreneurs, Earl consulted at least one other museum proprietor, Joseph Delaplaine, who had his own gallery, The National Gallery of Distinguished Americans in Philadelphia, about which Delaplaine claimed that "it is the most interesting exhibition in the United States."²⁰⁴ Unlike Earl, however, Delaplaine, a visionary businessman, did not produce the paintings in his museum, rather he collected them from various sources.

He began writing Earl in 1818, requesting a number of his paintings for display in his gallery, including portraits of Generals Jackson, Coffee, and Carroll.²⁰⁵ Delaplaine flattered his reader, saying he preferred Earl's portrait of Jackson to one that Thomas Sully was set to create: "The Society of Artists of this city have employed Mr. Sully to paint Genl. Jackson for them, but this portrait is nothing to me and I wait for yours to have it placed in my gallery."²⁰⁶ It appears that Earl was initially receptive to Delaplaine's interest in his portraits of the Generals. Rather than send Delaplaine the portraits on display in the Nashville Museum, however, Earl scheduled additional sittings with Coffee and Jackson to create works on commission for Delaplaine, although for reasons that remain unclear, the portraits were never

²⁰³ Peale's effort to secure federal or state funding for his museum failed, and Earl's museum was also privately funded (by himself).

²⁰⁴ It was originally called, "Delaplaine's National Panzographia for the Reception of the Portraits of Distinguished Americans." Quotation from a letter, Delaplaine to Earl, July 15, 1819. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²⁰⁵ Delaplaine to Earl, October 5, 1818, Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²⁰⁶ Delaplaine to Earl, February 19, 1819. Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

shipped.²⁰⁷ Earl did complete a large-scale portrait of Jackson but kept it permanently in his own gallery.

At this time Jackson was traveling throughout the North where he sat for many of the country's most notable artists. He also had the fortune of visiting some of the country's pre-eminent cultural institutions. He saw Delaplaine's National Gallery of Portraits, and according to Delaplaine, "all were pleased with the gallery."²⁰⁸ He also visited Peale's Philadelphia museum as well as a "splendid exhibition of landscape paintings" in Baltimore.²⁰⁹ Upon his return home, Jackson surely related information about these galleries to Earl.

Delaplaine wrote to Earl on February 19, 1819 that he "had the honor of lending to you a prospectus of my national institution."²¹⁰ The prospectus had been published in December 1818, six months after Earl's announcement appeared in the Nashville newspapers, and Delaplaine sought Earl's opinion of his project, as well the donation of paintings. Delaplaine's gallery opened in Philadelphia on January 1, 1819 using the portraits he had collected for his book project *Delaplaine's Repository of the Lives and Portraits of Distinguished Americans*.²¹¹ The book was the most ambitious fine art book project attempted in the United States up to that point and included engraved portraits produced especially for the volume, as well as original

²⁰⁷ Earl to Delaplaine, Dec. 6, 1818. Bassett papers, Library of Congress manuscripts.

²⁰⁸ Delaplaine to Earl, February 19, 1819. Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²⁰⁹ Quoted in James G. Barber, *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study* (Washington: National Portrait Gallery, 1991), 67.

²¹⁰ Delaplaine to Earl, February 19, 1819, Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²¹¹ Joseph Delaplaine, *Delaplaine's Repository of the Lives and Portraits of Distinguished Americans* (Philadelphia: printed by William Brown, 1817-1818).

biographies of each man represented. Ultimately, however, Delaplaine's Gallery did not achieve the same success that Earl found in Nashville, as he faced stiff competition from a half dozen other picture galleries in Philadelphia. A few years after opening, the collection was sold to Rubens Peale, who had plans of taking it to a city with less competition.²¹²

The unfolding history of Earl's museum may be traced through existing letters, newspaper articles, and Earl's personal notes, from its inception in 1818, to his handing it over in 1825 to the directorship of Doctor de St. Leger. The desire to open the Museum was first announced in the *Nashville Whig* on June 27, 1818 and in the *Clarion and Tennessee State Gazette* the following day. A lengthy article outlined the museum's inauguration, which said that Earl and Tunstull had "associated in the design of establishing a Museum of Natural and Artificial Curiosities for the State of Tennessee."²¹³ This initial prospectus functioned as a letter of introduction for the museum, as well as a call for donations stating that, "it is intended the museum shall contain much of whatever will illustrate the works of nature, stimulate inventive genius, inform the imitative, and gratify curiosity."²¹⁴

Museum as Patriotic Venture

From the outset it is clear that Earl had considered his museum a patriotic venture and developed it in the interest of advancing the burgeoning Tennessee culture in a similar manner to what Peale had done in Philadelphia. The prospectus

²¹² Wendy Wick Reaves, ed. *American Portrait Prints: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual American Print Conference* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1984), 38-45.

²¹³ "Tennessee Museum," *Nashville Whig*, June 27, 1818.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

also attempted to pique the public's interest in the museum by saying that the museum would "probably be [opened] very soon."²¹⁵

Earl repeatedly voiced his desire to improve the region with a successful museum. Indeed Earl's motives in opening and sustaining the museum seem to have been generous and altruistic. His initial prospectus appealed to the people of Tennessee, saying, "We have undertaken the task in the confident expectation of being able to advance in a very material degree the interests and reputation of the state."²¹⁶ In an advertisement for the museum in the *Nashville Whig* from January 19, 1820 he summarized many of the ways he believed his museum would be helpful to the community:

Such an institution is useful to youth, as an object exciting curiosity, and stimulating to enquiry. It is useful to the philosopher, because he finds the productions of nature under new forms. It is useful to the physician, in mineralogy and comparative anatomy. It is useful to the lawyer, because municipal regulation have their real foundation in the universal law and philosophy of nature. It is useful to the farmer, when it can be made to set before him, the fossil and vegetable kingdoms and their analysis.²¹⁷

In 1822 Earl again explained that his collections would enhance education, reveal local history, and encourage local pride stating that they "will throw more light on the ancient history of this state, than any other information that can be given."²¹⁸

Earl wrote Governor Blount in 1822 that "I flatter myself that no patriotic Tennessean

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ "Tennessee Museum," *Nashville Whig*, June 27, 1818.

²¹⁷ *Nashville Whig*, January 19, 1820, cited in *Southern Perspective: A Sampling from the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts* (Winston-Salem, North Carolina: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 2005), 78.

²¹⁸ Unknown newspaper clipping dated January 16, 1822. Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society. The article continues "With the assistance of that patriotic & generous spirit which characterized the people of this state, [Earl] flatters himself, in a few years, to make an establishment which will reflect some honor to the state."

will permit any curiosities to be sent out of the state while there is an institution of this nature in their own state.”²¹⁹ Although Earl had intended from the beginning for his museum to serve as a gallery for his paintings, he also showed true interest in the region’s history and sought to help preserve it and to educate the people as well.

Collecting for the Museum

Tunstull and Earl sought out a wide variety of items for display. They requested all manner of objects from a range of sources, including stones, soil samples, minerals, and models of labor-saving machines (an example of an “artificial curiosity”). According to the *Whig*, “Contributions of whatever is rare, curious, or useful, in the works of nature, or art, are respectfully solicited. It will be an object of importance with us to collect such materials and remains of the arts as may throw light upon the early history of this country and perpetuate a knowledge of the character, situation, and employments of its aboriginal inhabitants.”²²⁰ Earl and Tunstull promised to annually publish a list of donations thereby preserving their names for posterity, an idea that appealed to many potential donors.²²¹ One of these was Andrew Jackson himself, and he recommended the institution to others as well.

²¹⁹ Earl to William G. Blount, June 12, 1822. Tennessee State Library and Archives. Earl believed that Nashville was particularly well-suited for such a museum and he appealed to the people’s home-town pride in local newspaper articles stating, “it is believed that Nashville, from its extensive commercial intercourse with other towns and districts, and its central situation, is a place peculiarly favorable to the collection and display of the materials of a state museum...we earnestly invoke all who feel a just pride in the name of a Tennessean to unite in giving efficiency to our exertions.” *Nashville Whig*, June 27, 1818. The same notice appeared again in the *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, July 18, 1818.

²²⁰ “Tennessee Museum,” *Nashville Whig*, June 27, 1818.

²²¹ For example, Turner Lane wrote to Earl about a particular rock belonging to his friend saying, “The Judge directed me to inform him that if he would let the stone go for the museum, that his name should be perpetuated upon the Rolls of the museum and that posterity should learn that he had furnished that rock: upon hearing these words he surrendered up the rock cheerfully.” Lane to Earl, October 22, 1821. Jackson papers, 4:19, Tennessee States Library and Archives.

He wrote to his friend J. C. Bronaugh, for example, of a story that Sam Houston had recently told involving a duel and a bullet proof vest that had been worn in the skirmish, despite rules against such a protective shield. Jackson said that Houston promised to recover the shield and “place it in Mr. Earl’s museum for the inspection of the curious.”²²² Earl’s collection was obviously quite diverse.

Paintings in the Museum

Not surprisingly, however, like Peale, Earl intended his museum primarily as a gallery for his paintings. As his prospectus explained, “Portraits of distinguished characters in Tennessee, and of those elsewhere whose names belong to the nation, to the human race, and to posterity, will form a very considerable department. Many of these will be produced by the pencil of [Earl], and others will be procured.”²²³ Based on this statement, Earl’s initial plan was to paint images for the gallery, in addition to receiving donated art. Due to the scant availability of art in the region though, Earl’s paintings were the only examples ever exhibited in the Tennessee Museum, and based on Earl’s quick painting speed, his Gallery of Paintings seems to have opened long before the natural exhibitions were ready for public view. A January 1820 article noted that “Mr. E. will take the occasion further to observe, that the accessions already made to the institution, together with those which are hoped for, will soon enable him to make public exhibition in his Gallery of Paintings.”²²⁴ While Earl was civic-minded in the exhibition of his natural history collections, his decision to open

²²² Jackson to J.C. Bronaugh, June 2, 1822, Jackson Papers, Library of Congress. Cited in Marquis James, *The Life of Andrew Jackson: Complete in One Volume* (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1940), 23.

²²³ “Tennessee Museum,” *Nashville Whig*, June 27, 1818.

²²⁴ *Nashville Whig*, January 19, 1820.

his gallery of paintings also reveals him as an astute self-promoter. By showing the public examples of the well-known personages he had painted, and offering them a similar opportunity to be depicted, Earl promoted his business as a portrait painter. This exposure helped provide him enough commissions to support himself the rest of his life, as well as creating a comfortable niche in Nashville's best society.

In July a notice in the *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser* announced Earl's completion of portraits of President James Monroe (who had recently visited Nashville), as well as Major General Edmund P. Gaines (both unlocated). The portraits were painted to be hung in the museum, which was making good progress:

The preceding remark informs the friends of the Museum, that the idea of succeeding in its establishment, is not abandoned. Many valuable articles have been received, and others promised:-- Those who have given their aid in the prosecution of this design, will receive the thanks of the proprietors of this infant establishment. . . . A continuance of the friendly exertions already bestowed is respectfully solicited in the collection of natural and artificial curiosities.²²⁵

Earl exhibited the likenesses of most of Nashville's major public figures in his museum as well as many prominent visitors, such as Monroe and Gaines. Most of these portraits have been lost. Earl also exhibited the likeness of Brigadier General John Coffee, one of Jackson's principal lieutenants in the Battle of New Orleans, who along with Jackson and Carroll, Earl had come specifically to Nashville to paint (fig. 2.8). He also displayed Colonel Isaac Shelby's portrait, the first governor of Kentucky who in October 1818 had with Jackson secured a treaty with the Chickasaw Indians, which effectively removed them from Tennessee and Kentucky. In addition

²²⁵ *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, July 3, 1819.

to these Earl exhibited others such as portraits of Brigadier General James Winchester, and Colonels Robert Butler and Arthur P. Hayne.²²⁶

Earl's partner, George Tunstull was only involved in the Nashville Museum for a year and a half, and it seems that Earl actually spearheaded the entire enterprise. In January 1820, Earl announced that, "The firm of Tunstull and Earl, is now dissolved." But he graciously went on to say, "Mr. Earl takes this public occasion to express his thanks to Mr. Tunstull for the exertions he has made, to the advancement of this institution."²²⁷ The museum was, nevertheless, clearly Earl's project.

Progress of the Museum

Initially it seems the gallery was located in Earl's apartment and studio. In January 16, 1822 it was moved from the residence on Cedar Street (now Eighth Avenue) to a more prominent location in "the Square, over the Confectionary store of Mr. Decker,"²²⁸ where the proprietor had advertised "ICE CREAMS AND ICE PUNCH every day."²²⁹ Within a few years, the museum became a Nashville showplace, and both sections of the museum, the natural history and painting galleries, were thriving.²³⁰ A newspaper notice from January 1822 stated that Earl "has already made a greater collection of curiosities than could have been anticipated

²²⁶ All of these are listed by Earl in a memorandum book of his from 1819 located in the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Many of these paintings are unlocated, however Winchester's portrait along with that of his wife was recently discovered in a descendant's attic in Hot Springs, Arkansas and now hangs at Cragfont, their historic home near Gallatin, Tennessee in Castalian Springs. These are discussed in further detail in chapter three.

²²⁷ *The Nashville Gazette*, January 8, 1820.

²²⁸ Unknown newspaper clipping dated January 16, 1822. Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²²⁹ *Nashville Whig*, May 14, 1822.

²³⁰ Harriet Chappell Owsley, "The Tennessee Historical Society: Its Origin, Progress, and Present Condition," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XXIX:3 (fall 1970): 228.

in so short a period of time.”²³¹ Another announced the arrival of Earl’s portraits of Napoleon and Marshal Ney from France, via New Orleans, and proclaimed that “The department of portraits may now be considered rich.”²³² Taking the role of art critic, the reporter continued, “Judging by his strikingly correct portraits of Gen. Jackson, of the President of the U. States [Monroe], of Shelby, of Haywood, and of a number of others, which likewise grace and ornament the Museum, we have no hesitation in believing [the portraits of Bonaparte and Ney] to be very exact likenesses.”²³³ The eminent collection of portraits and the growing history collection were helping to cultivate public taste and cultural sophistication in Nashville.

Discussions about Earl’s audience and the reception of his museum are made difficult by the relatively scant information regarding the early history of the Nashville museum. It is not known exactly who was visiting Earl’s collections, however it may be assumed that visitors included the Nashville literati, as well as prominent visitors to the city. For example, the Tennessee Antiquarian Society held meetings in Earl’s rooms. According to Lawrence Levine, the antebellum period was more fluid in terms of class and cultural distinction than that of today, with lines between elite and popular culture not nearly as clearly drawn. Ordinary Americans

²³¹ Unknown newspaper clipping dated Jan. 16, 1822. Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²³² *Nashville Whig*, April 10, 1822.

²³³ *Nashville Whig*, April 10, 1822. While several of Earl’s earliest portraits of Jackson are still extant (and discussed in greater depth in chapter four), it is unknown which portrait this quotation refers to. Like the portrait of Monroe, those of Shelby and Haywood are not located. The Tennessee State Museum does own an unattributed, undated portrait of Haywood. It is possible that this was done by Earl, however, Haywood is depicted in profile in the painting, which Earl was not known to have done on any other occasion.

regularly attended concerts and plays, read Shakespeare, and visited museums.²³⁴

Peale's audience though, probably like Earl's, despite their mutual democratic intent, was largely elite and better educated than the Philadelphia (or Nashville) populace as a whole.

By 1822 the *Nashville Whig* encouraged Earl to begin charging admission to the museum:

Beside the department of portraits, which may now be considered rich, the Museum contains a very considerable collection of the Mineralogy of our state, besides many Zoological articles of interest, and articles illustrating the antiquities of this country. Nashville, I think, has reason to be proud of the unpretending talents of Mr. Earl, and the devotion of his time and means to the ornament of our town, and the accumulation of objects which necessarily tend to improve the minds and tastes of its inhabitants, and which serve to gratify the curiosity of enlightened strangers. A man who thus worthily expends his resources for our benefit, is worth a host of mere money makers. We would beg leave to suggest to Mr. Earl the propriety of demanding from visitors the customary compensation. Many who now feel a delicacy in obtruding on his time, would feel at liberty to enjoy agreeably a leisure hour at the Museum on such conditions. I am sure there is no man of liberal feelings, who would not rather claim as a privilege, what has hitherto been only a permission.²³⁵

Earl responded in the following week's newspaper by saying that "This plan [of charging admission] I have had in contemplation for some time past, but my being fearfull the collection was not of sufficient magnitude to authorize any recompense from visitors, has prevented me from making it a pecuniary object, having two years ago attempted the experiment to no effect." He went on to say that he was now "in hopes it will offer more amusement and interest to the public than heretofore." In 1822, the museum was still located in the rooms above Mr. Decker's candy store on

²³⁴ See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

²³⁵ *Nashville Whig*, April 10, 1822.

the public square, and Earl announced that, “Mr. Decker will have the Key to the door of the Museum, where tickets can be had for a single admission, or by the year.”²³⁶

Within a few years of opening, Earl’s museum became a favored Nashville tourist attraction. On a visit to the city in 1823, twelve-year-old Thomas C. Jones wrote to his mother, “I have today been to the Nashville museum and I saw a painting of General Jackson in as big as he is.” The young boy also mentioned Earl’s portrait of Napoleon.²³⁷ Another 1823 Nashville visitor, Horace Holley, the president of Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky also noted the impressive gathering of Earl’s portraits at his museum saying, “He has quite a gallery of heads, including Mr. Monroe, General Jackson, Governor Shelby, Governor Carroll, Chenevi, an Indian chief and others. Mine is to go among them.”²³⁸

Earl’s Tennessee Museum was actually one of a number of similar institutions that began appearing in southern cities contemporaneously. The North Carolina Museum was opened in Raleigh in 1813 by Jacob Marling, a painter, and advertised a reading room in addition to “Natural and Artificial curiosities, sketches, maps,

²³⁶ *Nashville Whig*, April 17, 1822. The ticket price for the museum is not given, but in 1825 the charge was twenty-five cents per person.

²³⁷ Thomas C. Jones to his mother. June 25, 1823. Jones Family Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives. The “big” Jackson portrait is probably the life-sized portrait Earl painted for his museum in 1818. He had also completed a second monumental portrait of Jackson by that time, but it was already in New Orleans. The details regarding both of these portraits are addressed in chapter four.

²³⁸ Horace Holley to Luther Holley, from Nashville, dated August 14, 1823. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN. Horace Holley’s portrait, along with the large Jackson, and Napoleon are still together in downtown Nashville at the Tennessee State Museum. The other listed portraits of Monroe, Shelby, Carroll, and Chenevi are unlocated. In my search for the Monroe painting, for example I contacted several Monroe scholars and Monroe historical sites, all of which were unaware of the whereabouts of Earl’s portrait of President Monroe. David Meschutt, whose 2005 dissertation was about portraits of James Monroe, had also searched for the Earl portrait and came up with nothing. See James Meschutt, “The Portraiture of James Monroe, 1758-1831” (PhD. diss., University of Delaware, 2005).

drawings, and paintings, rare coins and books.”²³⁹ In the summer of 1817 James Warrell, a portraitist and history painter, opened the Virginia Museum in Richmond and solicited artists works and other items hoping to maintain “a public repository of natural and artificial curiosities.”²⁴⁰ The Virginia Museum was in operation until 1836. A center for the arts also materialized in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1820s. Like Earl’s museum, these institutions struggled to succeed, however their existence reveals a desire to celebrate American culture beyond the artistic centers of the Northeast and Earl played a significant role in this artistic expansion.

In addition to the general management of the museum, painting portraits to be exhibited in his gallery, and organizing the exhibitions, Earl was also hard at work building up the museum’s natural collections. This often included traveling the state of Tennessee to engage in digs at Indian mounds, in caves and other locations where he often uncovered additional items for his museum. According to one source, “Among the late additions [the museum] has received are a corn cobb in a state of soundness, found by Mr. Earl in his late examination of the mound at Bledsoe lick, many feet under the surface, and a petrified egg.”²⁴¹ In September 1820 O.B. Hayes announced in a letter of introduction that Earl “is on his way to the cave in Perry County containing the bones of the extraordinary animal which have lately been discovered there – for the purpose of ascertaining what species of animal they are of, and adding to the museum at this place. Your assistance & information which may

²³⁹ *Painting in the South: 1564-1980* (Richmond: Virginia Museum, 1983), 71.

²⁴⁰ *Richmond Portraits in an Exhibition of Makers of Richmond, 1737-1860* (Richmond: Valentine Museum, 1949), 151.

²⁴¹ Unknown newspaper clipping, December 1, 1821. Ralph E. W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

facilitate the object of his enquiry will be thankfully recd by him, and confer an obligation on your friend of sport.”²⁴² In 1822 Earl also wrote to Governor Blount to ask for his assistance in obtaining a piece of Roman armor that had been “found within thirty or forty miles of Knoxville,” saying that if he could acquire it for his museum “I think it would excite as much curiosity and interest in the western country as Peale’s celebrated mammoth did when first exhibited in Philadelphia.”²⁴³ Blount’s response and whether the armor ever made it to Earl’s museum remains unclear.

In his collecting of curiosities, Earl frequently partnered with Judge John Haywood, Tennessee’s first unofficial historian and naturalist who wrote some of the earliest histories of the state. Like Earl, Haywood was a founding member of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, and its first president, and the artist corresponded with him about his acquisitions regularly. He wrote from Cragfont, General Winchester’s home near Gallatin, Tennessee on October 13, 1821 saying “I have the satisfaction to inform you, that ... I have been enabled to make a complete excavation of that extraordinary Mound at Bledsoe’s Lick, Sumner County, (Tenn:) of which the following are my notes.”²⁴⁴ Earl went on to precisely detail his excavations in pages of notes and sketches. Indeed, Earl took extraordinary measures in building up his collections, revealing his passionate interest in the advancement of the state of

²⁴² O.B. Hayes to unknown recipient. September 15, 1820. Andrew Jackson Papers, mf. 809, 4:14, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁴³ Earl to William G. Blount, June 12, 1822. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁴⁴ Earl to Haywood, October 13, 1821. Tennessee State Library and Archives. Earl’s relationship with Winchester dated to 1817, his first year in Nashville. He had painted Winchester’s portrait, along with several members of his family. Winchester also took interest in Earl’s museum, and wrote to him in 1818, “For your museum I send you...a petrified hickory nut; and two Indian arrow points, the latter [which exhibits] great skill in the aborigines...in the art of breaking flint.” Winchester to Earl, October 12, 1818. John Spencer Bassett papers, Library of Congress.

Tennessee, and his general intellectual curiosity. Earl's endeavors predate geological study of any kind in Tennessee and introduced intellectuals in the region (such as the professors at The University of Nashville) to the value of such a collection.

Over the years Earl received diverse responses to his calls for donations. He obtained offers for example, of "some very rare antiquities of Indian origin," a copper coin "from an Indian of the Cherokee nation," "a few shells from the Carolina sea coast and a stick cut at Mount Vernon."²⁴⁵ The donor of the Mount Vernon stick also recommended that Earl add something similar from Jackson's Hermitage. From Lookout Mountain, Tennessee he received an especially interesting note saying "Seeing you are about procuring materials for a Museum I take pleasure to send you...different samples of rock crystals. If found deserving a place in your repository they are at your service. The round coloured stones have been used by the Indians in playing their game called chunky."²⁴⁶ A notice in the newspaper that Earl wrote detailed the addition of a silver button, about the size of a half-dollar, one of roughly three-dozen that had been found on the land of a Mr. Williams of Lincoln County, Tennessee.²⁴⁷

By today's standards Earl's collection might seem rather varied and strange, but such diversity was both typical of the period's museums and evidence of Earl's interest in bringing together anything that might enlighten Tennesseans about their past. The most extreme case of this resulted from a discovery by Turner Lane, a

²⁴⁵ See the following letters at Tennessee State Library and Archives. Jeremiah Dwyer to Earl, Jan. 11, 1822, Cassedy to Earl, October 19, 1824, and J. Gadsden to Earl, May 11, 1823.

²⁴⁶ Dan Ross to Earl, July 13, 1828. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁴⁷ Unknown newspaper clipping, Dec. 1, 1821, presumably written by Earl. Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

Sparta, Tennessee farmer interested in natural history, who had uncovered skeletal “pigmy” remains on his farmland. He wrote to Earl on July 6, 1820, saying that with exception of the skulls he had found, the other bones were in an extremely decayed state. Therefore, he says, that there “arises the great probability that I shall not succeed in the full gratification of your wishes by being able to procure a skeleton to send to you, but probably I may succeed in procuring a scull [*sic.*]”²⁴⁸ Lane promised to search for additional remains in August after finishing with his corn crop and on August 26, 1820, Earl acknowledged receipt of his “box containing the bones,” adding that “the Surgeons of this place are now examining your skeletons.”²⁴⁹ Lane wrote again in October 1820, sending a curious rock that Haywood, the naturalist and President of the Antiquarian Society had shown interest in during a visit to Sparta. He also noted his growing impatience regarding news of the skeleton, “I have waited some considerable time to be informed on the result of the inquiry made by the Surgeons of Nashville of the fractured skeletons which I had the honour of sending.” Others had taken note: the *Nashville Whig* published a notice on the bones, and Lane was contacted by interested individuals as distant as Virginia, Raleigh, North Carolina, and the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.²⁵⁰ Though the results of the Nashville “Surgeons” are unknown, this correspondence provides a tangible example of the tireless work Earl was doing in building his collections, in addition to his awareness of similar institutions in other regions. Earl’s

²⁴⁸ Turner Lane to Earl, July 6, 1820. Andrew Jackson papers, mf. 809, 4:19, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁴⁹ Turner Lane to Earl, August 26, 1820. Andrew Jackson papers, mf. 809, 4:19, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁵⁰ Turner Lane to Earl, October 22, 1820. Andrew Jackson papers, mf. 809, 4:19, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

success with the Nashville museum hinged on donations developed from diverse interests and the tastes in the region.

Indeed, despite the challenges of establishing a museum in the West, Earl found success with his collections. Based on his publicity in newspapers, word of mouth, and his own emerging prominence as an artist, he was able to build a collection worthy of public exhibition. In addition to all of his duties in overseeing the museum, Earl was supporting himself and the museum through private portrait commissions. As a measure of his success as a portraitist, he received enough portrait commissions to sustain the museum in its early years.

In January of 1825, despite more than six years and countless hours devoted to the Nashville Museum, however, Earl turned over management of the fledgling institution to a man named Doctor De St. Leger. Presumably it was monopolizing his time, leaving him with little to devote to painting. Indeed, Earl was trying to finish a growing list of commissions that had been accumulating since he first appeared in Nashville in 1817. His memorandum book from 1817 listed several portraits that are “not finished as yet.”²⁵¹ As Earl’s seven year proprietorship of the museum came to a close, he prepared to embark on the next phase of his career, which would be less tied up with the advancement of life, art, and culture in Nashville, and more specifically devoted to helping advance the political aspirations of his dear friend, Andrew Jackson.

²⁵¹ The memorandum book is located in the Ralph E.W. Earl papers at the American Antiquarian Society. Several letters throughout his career attest to impatient patrons eager for their portraits, some of whom had been waiting for years. In one particular instance, Jackson stepped in, noting to George Washington Butler on May 21, 1827 that “I have seen Mr. Earl, on the subject of your father’s portrait. He assures me it shall be attended to; that it is nearly finished, & shall be completed as early as possible.” Jackson to Butler, May 21, 1827. Historic New Orleans Collection.

Earl's resignation was announced in the *Nashville Whig* on January 17, 1825.²⁵² The collection had grown and was well organized as the paper reported, it was "exhibited in orderly and tasteful symmetry." Alluding to the costliness of such a venture, the article explained that "the primitive methodical arrangement, correspondence, excursions, &c. of so laudable an institution, are considerably expensive, besides the labour and study its various branches, lectures, and explanatory notes require."²⁵³ The paper also acknowledged Earl's efforts saying that "Mr. R. E. W. Earl, who has indefatigably employed every plausible effort to give a celebrated fame to this repository, is well convinced Doct. De St. Leger will unexceptionably prove deserving its trust, augment its moral advantages in behalf of the human family, and continue to enrich its present magnificency."²⁵⁴ Earl clearly believed in the "moral advantages" a museum of this type added to the city and his decision to resign from his project was sure difficult. It did provide more time for his portraits, particularly those of Jackson, which became more strategic as the general positioned himself for national leadership.

The museum seems to have thrived under Doctor De St. Leger's directorship, although it moved "to the spacious front room of the Widow Elliston's on Market Street. Open from 9 till 12 A.M. and from 2 to 9 p.m. Admittance 25 cents."²⁵⁵ Continuing Earl's tradition of regional pride, the statement announced that De St. Leger's "sole object is to prove useful to the community and deserve their suffrage, as

²⁵² *Nashville Whig*, January 17, 1825.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, October 25, 1826.

disinterestedly devoted to the celebrity of so commendable a repository.”²⁵⁶ De St. Leger also maintained Earl’s earnest quest for objects to continue growing the museum’s collection with “arduous searches in the acquisition of additional petrifications, madrepores, fossils, minerals, quadrupets, reptiles, insects, foreign fishes sometimes happening to frequent our river...water fowls, land birds, specimens of antiquity and Indian attributes &c.”²⁵⁷

The tenure of the Nashville museum is not well documented, and until now no known primary or secondary research has been conducted on its history in any depth. Unfortunately, the fate of Earl’s collections remains unknown. Some of the paintings he executed for his museum, most notably his full-length Jackson portrait of 1818 (discussed in chapter four) and those of Napoleon and Holley were acquired for the Tennessee State Museum. Tracking down his collection of “natural and artificial curiosities” has proven more difficult. The objects may have passed to Dr. Gerard Troost after De St. Leger’s tenure sometime after Troost came to Nashville in 1827. Troost may have even taken proprietorship of the museum in the late 1820s.²⁵⁸ He was a prominent scientist in early Tennessee, a professor at the University of Nashville from 1828 through 1850, and the first person in America who had ever earned a living as a geologist, which he had done in Paris prior to coming to the United States.²⁵⁹ An esteemed geologist originally from Holland, Troost amassed an

²⁵⁶ *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, October 25, 1826.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ According to James C. Kelly, “Portrait Painting in Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XLVI:4 (Winter 1987): 216.

enormous collection of just the type of objects contained in Earl's museum and had begun writing to him about it as early as 1818, long before he came to Nashville.²⁶⁰ Troost became the state geologist of Tennessee in 1831, the first to hold that position.²⁶¹ After his death, Troost's enormous collection, which likely contained Earl's items as well, was considered one of the finest private mineral collections in North America and was dispersed to a certain extent. Much of his botanical and zoological specimens were sent to Europe, however his geological and mineralogical collections (possibly containing many of Earl's archeological finds and other donations) were maintained by the University of Nashville during the Civil War and purchased in 1874 by Louisville Polytechnic Society. As of 1932, the Troost collection, as it came to be known, was located at the museum of the Louisville Free Library, however, searches for what has become of the collection today have been fruitless.²⁶²

As Earl relinquished management of the museum he had more time to devote to painting and his work took on a greater sophistication, probably due to the extra care he was able to give it. 1825 was an especially productive year. The Coffee family donated six portraits to the Ladies' Hermitage Association in 1901, which they

²⁵⁹ James X. Corgan "Early American Geological Surveys and Gerard Troost's Field Assistants, 1831-1836," in James X. Corgan, ed. *The Geological Sciences in the Antebellum South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982): 39-72.

²⁶⁰ Specifically, at his death his collection totaled 13,582 minerals, 2,851 fossils, in addition to thousands of rocks and shells. For more information on Dr. Troost see Henry Grady Rooker, "A Sketch of the Life and Work of Dr. Gerard Troost," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* III:I (Oct. 1932): 3-19.

²⁶¹ See Troost to Earl, n.d. circa 1817 or 1818. Andrew Jackson Papers, mf. 809, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁶² Rooker, 11. The Louisville Polytechnic Society purchased it for \$20,500.

claim to have all been painted in 1825.²⁶³ This was also the year Earl completed one of his most ambitious paintings, *The Foster Family*, which is discussed in detail in chapter three. It was at this time as well that Jackson had resigned his seat in the Senate and returned home to Nashville to begin campaigning for the presidency for the second time. Earl had taken great interest in Jackson's campaign of 1824, and the general's loss may also have played a role in Earl's resignation from the museum to help refocus on the campaign of 1828.

Even though he had only been back in the United States since 1816, Earl's accomplishments in his early mature career are remarkable. He had gained success in his first year in Georgia as an itinerant artist. He had also accomplished his goal of traveling to Nashville and painting the heroes of New Orleans, thereafter establishing himself as a very successful *resident* portrait painter in Nashville, at a time and place where itinerancy was usually a portraitists' only option. In addition, through his unselfish interests in preserving Tennessee's history, he established a museum for Tennesseans. Personally, he also made many friends and supporters in Tennessee, most importantly Andrew Jackson. He also played a key role in the establishment of an intellectual organization called the Tennessee Antiquarian Society.

Tennessee Antiquarian Society

In addition to his painting projects and his archaeological collections, Earl took an active interest in preserving Tennessee history beyond his role in the museum. He was present, for example at a July 1, 1820 meeting of the Tennessee Antiquarian Society, the forerunner to the Tennessee Historical Society, and became

²⁶³ According to Jennifer Tilley's research located at the Hermitage archives dated June 25, 1984. See also Mary C. Dorris, *The Hermitage: Home of General Andrew Jackson* (Nashville, Ladies' Hermitage Association, 1909), 17-18.

a founding member of the group. The gathering of men (the first woman did not join the Society until 1890), included Judge John Haywood; Wilkins Tannehill, a cashier at the Nashville Bank and leading member of the literati; William Carroll, the hero of New Orleans whom Earl had painted and later became governor; William Hume, an early pastor and Nashville educator; and Governor Joseph McMinn, who met at the Courthouse in Nashville.²⁶⁴ The society was “for the collection and preservation of important events in the history of the state of Tennessee, and enquiries into the antiquities of the Western country,” and it became the first learned society in the region.²⁶⁵

The Tennessee Antiquarian Society investigated the pioneer history of the state, and their goals were quite ambitious. The society’s predominant interest was in “antiquity” as they called it, specifically in preserving and describing the aboriginal origins of Tennessee. They obtained the literature of other similar societies in the East to assist them in their endeavors. The American Philosophical Society had begun publishing a series in 1818 and the American Antiquarian Society published its first volume of *Proceedings* in 1820. At the first meeting, members were assigned different sections of the state and asked to collect “all such phenomena, relics of antiquity and organic remains, as may tend to reflect light upon the zoology both ancient and present,” as well as anything regarding the “geological history or upon the government, laws, customs, manners, religion, arts, sciences and civilization of

²⁶⁴ William E. Beard, “Joseph McMinn, Tennessee’s Fourth Governor,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* IV:2 (June 1945): 154-166.

²⁶⁵ Mary U. Rothrock, introduction to *Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee, up to the first settlements therein by white people in 1768*, by John Haywood (Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958), XIX-XXX. Hume was a close friend of both Jackson and Earl, whose portrait Earl had painted. He had married the Earls and then presided over Jane’s funeral less than a year later. He also presided over Rachel Jackson’s funeral in 1828.

the ancient inhabitants.”²⁶⁶ Their interests also extended to linguistics, as one member was appointed to learn the basic vocabularies of six local Native American dialects. Meetings were held roughly every three months, and the society recorded the fullest description of the state’s history published up to that time by interviewing some of the earliest settlers and their families. Earl served as the librarian throughout the Society’s three-year tenure and the last meeting was his museum, which reveals the innate ties between his project and the society.²⁶⁷

Although it is unknown who proposed the formation of such a society, it could have quite possibly been Earl. Much of his family lived in Worcester County, Massachusetts where the American Antiquarian Society was (and remains) located. Earl had already shown great interest in Native American history in his museum collections and knew the museum would certainly benefit from the Society’s endeavors. The first president, Judge Haywood (a close friend of Earl’s) probably had Earl’s museum in mind as a repository for the objects the group collected. Haywood’s books about the history of the state of Tennessee would also benefit from the Society’s investigations. Earl’s involvement was integral to the group and he showed concern for maintaining his membership status while he was away in New Orleans in 1821. He requested that the Society “suspend the application of the rule (making absence a forfeiture of membership) in his absence.” Ira Ingram responded to Earl

²⁶⁶ From the meeting’s minutes located at the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee, cited in Miles, 94-95.

²⁶⁷ Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, “The First Century of Library History in Tennessee,” *East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications* 16 (1944), 6.

that a vote was taken on this matter, and passed and that, “you are therefore, still a member.”²⁶⁸

Earl did in fact use his association with the organization to enhance his museum. In requesting the Roman armor from Governor Blount in 1822, he mentioned his membership in the Society, asking if he could “through your influence possibly obtain this shield of antiquity for the investigation of the Antiquarian Society of Nashville of which I have the honor of being a member.” He went on to concede, “I also wish to have it for the benefit of my museum.”²⁶⁹

Earl’s inclusion within the society also connected him to a large number of potential patrons. The group was comprised of professional and business men, and amateur scientists (the first trained scientist, Nathaniel Bown, a chemist, did not arrive in Tennessee until 1824). Twenty-two men are recorded as having regularly attended meetings, twelve of which were lawyers, two were ministers, three were doctors, and five (including Earl) were businessmen.²⁷⁰ According to the minutes, meetings were held at quite irregular intervals. The first year had four meetings, five the second year, two the third year, and after that the minutes stop.²⁷¹ However, in the fourth year one meeting was held at Earl’s museum, in July of 1823, the last meeting of the Society. Its demise remains unexplained but may have been due to political or

²⁶⁸ Ira Ingram to R.E.W. Earl, Jan. 30, 1821, Ralph E. W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²⁶⁹ Earl to William G. Blount, June 12, 1822, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁷⁰ Miles, 96-97. Of the members, it is known that Earl painted the portraits of Haywood, John Overton, Felix Grundy, William Hume, James Overton, and William Carroll. And he used Ira Ingram’s bookstore, Ingram and Lloyd’s Tennessee Bookstore for the distribution of his Jackson prints.

²⁷¹ Specifically, the meetings were held in July and October 1820, and January, February, and July 1821, two in January and two in February of 1822, as well as one in July and one in August of 1822. Miles, 100.

personal strife among the members.²⁷² The society was reconstituted in 1835, however, as the Tennessee Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge and finally organized as the Tennessee Historical Society in 1849, an organization which still thrives today.

Earl's active participation and early interest in preserving the history of the state marks him as an important, if unlikely father of Tennessee history, critical to the state's early identity. His inclusion within the Antiquarian Society also reveals the broad scope of his intellectual curiosity, marking him as an important member of the literati, and a social elite in Nashville

Earl as Cultural Designer

Earl's active role in the city's social life is almost as important to his cultural contributions as his work with the museum and his own achievements in portrait paintings. He helped establish a level of design and sophistication that elevated Nashville, and the South more generally into new realms of cultural consciousness. As a European-trained gentleman, he planned several major balls in Nashville, designed the invitations, and often prominently featured his paintings as decoration. For example, on the occasion of President James Monroe's visit in 1819, a ball was held at the Nashville Inn in his honor, and a number of Earl's paintings decorated the walls. According to the *Nashville Whig*:

A numerous assemblage of elegance and beauty attended a Ball given on Thursday last at the Inn, in honor of the President of the United States. We have never seen more taste and beauty than was displayed in arranging the room, or a more numerous and brilliant assemblage of ladies. The arrangements were highly creditable to the managers [one of whom was

²⁷² Two of the members specifically, Haywood and Patrick H. Darby, a lawyer, had a well-documented falling out. At one point Darby had referred to Haywood as "A fool; a wretch; a madman!!!" see Miles, 101-104.

Earl]. . . Fronting at the lower end of the room was suspended the portrait of gov. Shelby of Kentucky. On the right side of the hall was a full length portrait of Maj. Gen. Jackson, with a distant view of the British encampment before New-Orleans; fronting him were gens. Coffee and Carroll. These inimitable paintings were executed by our artist Mr. Earl; and are highly honorable to the talents and professional acquirements of that gentleman. Over the paintings and around the room were rich and beautiful festoons of evergreen and roses.”²⁷³

Earl’s portraits intermingled with “festoons of evergreen and roses” set the stage for the president in one of the city’s most important early events.

Another ball held in Jackson’s honor in 1825 again featured Earl’s full-length portrait of the General, this time in propagandistic fashion to lament Jackson’s loss in the presidential election. John Quincy Adams’ won by electoral votes, despite Jackson’s winning of the popular vote.

This portrait was surmounted by seven stars in a semicircle connected together by a wreath of flowers, - each star representing a state. The centre one Pennsylvania, on its right South Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama, on its left New Jersey, Indiana, and Mississippi. The names of the states attached to each star drawing to a point immediately above the head of the portrait, where was placed a circular wreath inclosing the figures 99, which was connected with two other wreaths of smaller size. The one enclosing the word “*electorial*” the other the word “*votes*.” One the top-moulding of the frame, “*the people’s choice*.”²⁷⁴

The application of Earl’s paintings in such an overtly propagandistic fashion reveals the artist’s awareness of the potential power of portraiture, especially in his Jackson images.

²⁷³ *Nashville Whig*, June 12, 1819. Quoted in Daniel and Marlana C. DeLong, *The Papers of James Monroe* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), 1: 677

²⁷⁴ *Sparta Review*, April 27, 1825.

Earl also designed the invitations for a ball held at the Masonic Lodge in Nashville in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette's visit in May 1825 (fig. 2.9).²⁷⁵ The invitation depicts two Corinthian columns wrapped in ribbon on which is written the names of various Revolutionary battles in which the United States was victorious. The portrait busts of Jackson and Lafayette sit atop each column. A band containing thirteen stars and wrapped in laurel rises from behind the busts to create a decorative arch. At the top the number seventy-six appears, representing the year of American independence. Below, an eagle crowns a laurel wreath on the portrait bust of George Washington and the words "Welcome La Fayette" appear. The arch was replicated from the grand entrance set up to greet Lafayette. According to his diarist, Auguste Lavoisier, "we entered the city by a wide avenue...entering the city the procession passed under a triumphal arch on the summit of which were the words...'Welcome, Lafayette, the friend of the United States.'"²⁷⁶ The words of invitation appear in the center of the program, as well as the names of the managers of the ball, and although Earl was not a manager this time, he was well-acquainted with most of them, some of which he had depicted in commissioned portraits.²⁷⁷ For the portrait of Lafayette on the invitation, whose likeness was not available in Nashville at the time, Earl requested an image from friends in Philadelphia. He received a letter in Nashville written on November 18, 1824 from Philadelphia saying, "By Mr. Marshall I send

²⁷⁵ Ann Harwell, "Lafayette in Nashville, 1825," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XXXIV:1 (Spring 1975): 30.

²⁷⁶ Auguste Lavoisier, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825, or, Journal of a Voyage to the United States* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1829), II: 150.

²⁷⁷ Including Ephraim Hubbard Foster, Boyd McNairy, and John Overton. The Foster and Overton portraits are both extant. Foster's is owned by Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, Tennessee, and Overton's is owned by Traveller's Rest, Nashville, Tennessee.

you the likeness of General Lafayette mentioned in my last letter. From personal knowledge having seen the General several times when here I think it is one of the most striking likenesses ever seen.”²⁷⁸

The Marquis’ visit to Nashville was cause for celebration, and Earl was not without benefit from it. According to one source, “The General’s visit had brought to Nashville a season of gayety hitherto unknown. Weeks ahead belles and beaux were all aflutter making preparations to attend the parties arranged in his honor.”²⁷⁹ One of these belles was Phila Ann Lawrence, a student at the Nashville Female Academy at the time who later married Stockly Donelson, son of John and Mary Purnell Donelson and brother of Emily, Jackson’s White House hostess. Phila Ann had written to her parents in anticipation of Lafayette’s visit, to which her mother replied, “We have no objection to your attending the ball given in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette. I can trust you in the kind care of Governor Carroll...I wish you to appear nice...you must purchase what you think you will need at such a time.”²⁸⁰ Earl later painted a striking portrait of the beautiful Phila Ann Lawrence (fig. 2.10) and another one of her husband, Stockly Donelson.²⁸¹ Knowing her status as a society belle, Earl depicted Phila Ann as such in her portrait. She wears a beautiful gown and is adorned with

²⁷⁸ Jno. Hocksey [illegible] to Ralph E.W. Earl, Nov. 18, 1824. Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society. The invitation was designed by Earl and printed by Charles Torrey and both men signed the bottom of the work. Charles Torrey was a printmaker and newcomer to Nashville, who was also working on an engraving after one of Earl’s portraits of Jackson at the time, which was published the following year in 1826 (see chapter five).

²⁷⁹ Quoted in Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee* (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett and Massie, 1941), 1: 139.

²⁸⁰ Mrs. William Lawrence to her daughter, Phila Ann Lawrence, April 6, 1825. Collection of Miss Fanny Owen Walton, Madison, TN. Cited in Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee* (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett and Massie, 1941), 1:140.

²⁸¹ These were two of the portraits stolen on Easter weekend on 1986 from Cleveland Hall, the Donelson’s home in Nashville.

jewels. Her graceful neckline is displayed since her dark hair has been gathered on her head. In the portrait, she sits against a dramatic sky view. Earl's social ease and intimacy with the Jackson/Donelson family gave him access to painting the members of Nashville's high society, as did his involvement in the city's social life.

In addition to designing the invitations and probably assisting the managers in planning the Lafayette events, it is likely Earl painted Lafayette's portrait, although this remains undocumented. His portraits probably also decorated the hall in which the ball was held, as they had done in many other fine gatherings. Earl also received other commissions as a result of the event. Catherine Hobson McNairy, wife of Nathaniel McNairy (brother of Dr. Boyd McNairy and Judge John McNairy both of whom Earl had painted in 1817) and the daughter of an aide to General George Washington, sat for her portrait at the time of the Marquis' visit and was depicted wearing the gown she wore to the ball.²⁸² Earl also painted a portrait of Lee Ann Dibrell Gibbs, wife of George Washington Gibbs, of Nashville with Mrs. Gibbs wearing the gown she wore to Lafayette's ball. Like that of McNairy, her portrait was almost entirely over-painted in a 1929 restoration, and both are nearly undecipherable.²⁸³

Earl also planned the event celebrating Jackson's presidential victory in 1828, although it was cancelled due to Mrs. Jackson's sudden death. His name is listed on

²⁸² The McNairy portraits of 1817 are listed in his memorandum book from that year in the Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society but are unlocated. Catherine's portrait is owned by the Tennessee State Museum, but was badly damaged as a result of a 1916 restoration. It was heavily over-painted and most of the finishing layers of the painting were obliterated. As a result, it is unrecognizable as an Earl work.

²⁸³ This is also owned by the Tennessee State Museum and has a piece of paper attached to the back of it stating that this is the gown she wore when she attended that ball given in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette when he visited Nashville in May 1825.

the invitation (which he likely had a hand in designing due to its similarity to the Lafayette invitation) as one of the fourteen managers of the event (fig 2.11). A letter dated December 1828 (from before Rachel's death) from Earl to Judge John Overton, a close friend of Jackson's displays Earl's involvement in the event's planning. Earl says "I have sent you the last remaining ticket out of between 8 and 900 which have been backed and sent out. You are authorized, by the managers to invite any friend of yours to the Ball that you may think proper."²⁸⁴ Earl's elevation to the role of manager, and his integral role in overseeing the party's operations reveal his increased role in the Jackson household. Earl had been treated as an intimate family since his marriage to Jane Caffery, but especially after Rachel's death he became indispensable to Jackson.

Once in Washington, Earl continued to exhibit his gentility. For example, he served as one of the floor managers for Jackson's second inaugural ball, and his fluent French acquired during his year in France, afforded him regular dinner invitations with visiting French dignitaries.²⁸⁵ Earl's social ease combined with his artistic training and knowledge helped him reform Jackson's personal image from that of a rough southern general to a nationally prominent statesman. This was a major factor in making Jackson publicly acceptable enough to win the presidential race of 1828.

²⁸⁴ Earl to Overton, December 1828. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁸⁵ Dinner invitations in French are found in the James Spencer Bassett papers, Library of Congress. For reference to the Inaugural ball see the *Washington Globe*, March 4, 1833.

The Hermitage

Part of Jackson's image was that of a gracious landowner and in this too, Earl played a role. The history of the Hermitage, Jackson's beloved home, is an interesting story in itself and offers an exemplary tale of southern architectural history, and the problems and promise of such large-scale ventures in early to mid-nineteenth-century rural Tennessee. Even as an on-again-off-again resident of the Hermitage for nearly twenty years, Earl's role in its architectural development was noteworthy. He had been present in Nashville when the Hermitage was begun in 1819 and probably had his first sittings with Jackson (in 1817) in his original log cabin on the estate.

The first Hermitage was a more modest two-story plantation home, although it was expanded in 1832 after Jackson's re-election to accommodate his growing family. General Coffee was an old friend and fellow veteran of the Battle of New Orleans and was known to have checked on the Hermitage regularly during the renovations of the early 1830s in Earl's absence (he had left for Washington in 1830). A letter to Jackson from Coffee from April 28, 1831 says, "Your mechanics were at work on the improvements making on the mansion house. I took the liberty of suggesting some immaterial alterations in the addition."²⁸⁶

One of the few reliable views of the original Hermitage is seen in the background of one of Earl's early Jackson portraits. Showing the original brick house, it is one of the few images of the structure before the wings were added (fig. 2.12). Another glimpse of the original building appears in an undated engraving produced

²⁸⁶ Stanley F. Horn, *The Hermitage, Home of Old Hickory* (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett and Massie, 1938), 24.

by H.B. Hall. Like Earl's view, it shows the same double chimneys at each end and the gabled roof.²⁸⁷

Earl suffered with the family through the burning of the home in 1834, losing an untold amount of paintings and personal items in the blaze. He also saw it rebuilt in the Greek Revival style and he contributed throughout to its architectural development. It was also expanded at this time, adding a two story columned portico to the façade and single level wings on each end.²⁸⁸ Although Earl's role is not documented, it is probable that Earl served as Jackson's artistic advisor after the fire. Some have thought that he also may have painted the original design for the extraordinary French Empire wallpaper that adorns the Hermitage's grand entrance. However, it is more likely that he assisted Jackson in choosing the wallpaper which was added after the fire of 1834. The wallpaper illustrates "*Les Paysages de Télémaque dans l'île de Calypso*" and was designed between 1815 (Earl's year in France) and 1820 by Xavier Mader for Dufour Wallpaper Manufacturer in France. This particular paper required 2,027 blocks and eighty-five colors, and the story is an interpretation of the adventures of Telemachus (the son of Ulysses) on the island of the nymph Calypso, from the 1699 prose by François Fénelon (1651-1715). Jackson ordered three sets of the paper from Robert Golder, a Philadelphia wallpaper dealer, for twenty-nine dollars apiece in 1836.²⁸⁹ Although French wallpaper was certainly an

²⁸⁷ Horn, 25.

²⁸⁸ See Stanley F. Horn, "The Hermitage: Home of Andrew Jackson," *Magazine Antiques* (September 1971).

²⁸⁹ Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America from the Seventeenth Century to World War I* (Toronto: The Barra Foundation, 1980), 218.

extravagance for Jackson's home, these papers were actually widely available in the United States in the nineteenth century.

Even when he had a residence of his own in his earliest years in Nashville, Earl was a constant presence at the Hermitage. His letters attest to the regular trips from his city apartment to Jackson's home, where had a private room and studio, and with Jackson's constant travel, Earl oversaw many plantation affairs in his absence. He also is said to have designed the concentric flower beds in the middle of Rachel's beloved Hermitage garden. In addition, according to family tradition, he painted the faux marbling at Tulip Grove, the home Jackson had built on the Hermitage property in 1836 for his nephew Andrew Jackson Donelson and his wife Emily Donelson.²⁹⁰

Earl also actively assisted Jackson in planning Rachel's burial plot and he oversaw its execution after Jackson left to take office in Washington. In doing so, he acted as a financial intercessor for Jackson, as he often had, ensuring proper payment for services rendered, which reveals the deep level of trust he received.²⁹¹ In a lengthy letter dated April 3, 1829, Earl updated Jackson on affairs at the Hermitage, and on the progress of Rachel's tomb, and the estate saying "Mr. Steel is making a new house over the Tomb of Mrs. Jackson, the plan of which I am much pleased with – There are three windows in it, one on the north side, one on the west, and one on the East with a foulding [*sic.*] door on the South side of the building – He intends painting it white – the four willows that you planted are growing finely – he is going

²⁹⁰ "Earl's Room" is still pointed out today to Hermitage visitors. For more information about Tulip Grove, see Stephen S. Lawrence, "Tulip Grove: Neighbor to the Hermitage," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XXVI:1 (Spring 1967): 3-22.

²⁹¹ For example, a receipt of Earl's lists "Recd. from Andrew Jackson for the use of Mr. Solomon Clark, to pay over to Major William B. Lewis, for his as pr contract, one hundred dollars. Hermitage, Jan. 17, 1829, \$100, R.E.W. Earl." Sam B. Smith and others, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980-), VII:12.

to plant rose bushes about the house, and a few running vines – he says it will be finished this week.”²⁹² The “new house over the Tomb” of Rachel Jackson was a temporary structure that was eventually replaced with a magnificent marble rotunda that is still in place today. Earl also assisted the family in plans for the now-famous guitar-shaped driveway at the Hermitage, which was added after Jackson’s presidency in 1837. The design was suggested by Sarah York Jackson and both Earl and Jackson personally superintended the construction of it, with Jackson taking special care in the planting of the cedar trees on either side of the drive, some of which are still standing today.²⁹³ The house stands about one-hundred yards back from the drive’s entrance.

Earl knew the Hermitage and its ground intimately. Not only did he reside there for extended periods of time from 1817 through 1838, but countless people had sat for portraits with him at the Hermitage, as the Jacksons did repeatedly over the years. He displayed his intimate familiarity with the Hermitage in a landscape painting of the Cumberland River on the Hermitage grounds (fig. 2.13). The work depicts a meticulously rendered landscape which attests to the skills in landscape painting Earl had acquired initially from his father and later as a member of the Norwich Society of Artists in England. Although Earl does not appear to have been painting landscapes with the Norwich School, he was certainly absorbing the developing landscape tradition in England while he was there.

²⁹² Earl to Jackson, April 3, 1829, transcribed in part in *American Art Association Auction Catalog*, April 8, 1926.

²⁹³ Horn, 58. According to Marsha Mullin at the Hermitage, many of the original cedar trees were destroyed in a 1998 tornado that damaged the Hermitage and grounds.

The painting focuses on the beauty and calm flow of the Cumberland River. In the middle-ground, two figures rest on a wooden raft, and in the back a sailboat floats down the river. A dead tree has broken off in the foreground, and the painting's muted tones reveal that it is either early spring or fall in middle Tennessee. The painting's rich detail and rolling hills clearly reflect the delight that Earl was taking in his new residence.²⁹⁴ Though Earl probably did not have the time or commissions to pursue painting landscapes, it was certainly something at which he excelled.

Earl probably received more than one request to sketch the Hermitage and its grounds since both were almost legendary due to the fame of their owner. A friend in Philadelphia wrote to Earl in Nashville on January 8, 1830, for example, saying, "You would oblige me by sending a view of the Hermitage by mail, as I have been called on by several persons for it."²⁹⁵ Although the Hermitage appears in the background of a couple of Earl's Jackson paintings, no singular views of the Hermitage have come to light, however.

²⁹⁴ The landscape painting descended in the family of Josiah Nichol, of "Belair" on Lebanon Road in Nashville. Nichol was an old friend of Jackson's and he is referred to in a letter from Earl to Major Lewis dated July 18, 1830 regarding Jackson's first visit home to Nashville after taking the presidency. Earl said, "After the party, the General retired to Mr. Josiah Nichol's, at which place lodgings were provided for him." Cited in Scott, 34. Josiah Nichol and his wife Eleanor were well known in the city of Nashville. They owned the entire city block between Cherry and Summer Streets (now Fourth and Fifth Ave), where they built their home. Nichol was a charter member of Masonic Cumberland Lodge number sixty and Eleanor Nichol was a founding member of the First Presbyterian (later Downtown Presbyterian) church in Nashville. Nichol became President of the Nashville branch of the Bank of the United States in 1827 and managed Jackson's financial affairs while he was in Washington. Unattributed portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Nichol can be seen in photographs owned by the Tennessee State Library and Archives and another of Mrs. Nichol born Eleanor Ryburn exists in a private collection and is attributed to Earl. The landscape painting was sold at auction in December 1953 and acquired in 1963 by the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

²⁹⁵ A. Howell to Ralph E.W. Earl, January 8, 1830, 31:7. James Spencer Bassett papers, Library of Congress.

As Earl's involvement in all of the various cultural activities in Nashville and the Hermitage shows, he was much more than an itinerant-turned-local artist and friend of Andrew Jackson. He displayed a committed passion to discovering and preserving Tennessee history and enlightening its citizenry through his museum and in the Antiquarian Society. He also elevated the status and culture of the burgeoning city of Nashville to one which a president would be proud to call home in addition to improving Jackson's personal residence. In his early years in Tennessee a commitment to the causes that Jackson stood for was born in Earl, and he went on to utilize his art, and his life, in every way imaginable to celebrate General Jackson and his state.

Using his knowledge of European customs, his passion for collecting, decorating, and display and his own modest, genteel nature Earl helped transform Nashville into a cultured and respectable city. His contributions to the city's early history reveal him as a significant instrument in a larger transformation of American culture, from youthful child of the founding fathers, to a quickly maturing entity on a world stage. Although Earl's career as a portraitist, was his most important contribution to art history, his other endeavors especially that of the museum, reveals the breadth of his abilities and the larger significance of his work to an emerging region in a still young nation.



Figure 2.1. George N. Barnard, *Nashville from the Capitol*, 1864. Albumen print, 14 1/8 x 9 7/8 in. The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans. Reproduced in Benjamin H. Caldwell, Jr., Robert Hicks, and Mark W. Scala, *Art of Tennessee* (Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2003), 187.



Figure 2.2. Attributed James E. Wagner, *Tennessee State Capitol from Morgan Park*, c. 1857-60. First Tennessee Heritage Collection.



Figure 2.3. Henderson Litho. Company, *Tennessee Centennial Exposition*, ca. 1896.



Figure 2.4. Charles Willson Peale, *The Artist in his Museum*, 1822. Oil on canvas, 103 ½ x 80 in. Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed January 10, 2010).



Figure 2.5. Charles Willson Peale, *The Long Room, Interior of Front Room in Peale's Museum*, 1822. Watercolor over graphite pencil on paper, 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 14 in. Detroit Institute of Arts. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed January 7, 2010).

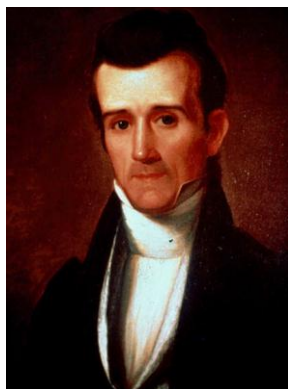


Figure 2.6. Ralph E.W. Earl, *James Knox Polk*, undated, perhaps 1819. Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in. James K. Polk Ancestral Home, Columbia, Tennessee. Reproduced from the *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed January 10, 2010).



Figure 2.7. Charles Willson Peale, *Exhumation of the Mastodon*, 1806-08. Oil on canvas, 61 ½ x 49 in. Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed January 8, 2010).



Figure 2.8. Ralph E.W. Earl, *General John Coffee*, 1818. Photographic reproduction from Tennessee State Library and Archives, original unlocated. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed March 2, 2009).



Figure 2.9. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Invitation to Lafayette's Ball*, 1825.



Figure 2.10. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Stockly Donelson (Phila Ann Lawrence)*, ca. 1830. Original lost, photograph from Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.



Figure 2.11. Ralph E.W. Earl, attr. Ball invitation, Nashville, Tennessee, 1828. Reproduced in Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee* (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, 1941).

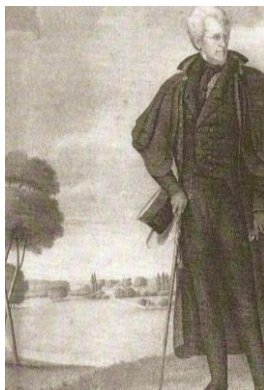


Figure 2.12. John Henry Bufford, after Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson* (det.). Lithograph, 1832.



Figure 2.13. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Cumberland River*, ca. 1820-1823. Oil on canvas, 36 ½ in. x 30 in. Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

CHAPTER THREE: EARL'S TENNESSEE PORTRAITS: A CASE STUDY IN SOUTHERN ART

Seen in the context of early nineteenth-century art in the South, Tennessee was fortunate to have gained the addition of Earl to its citizenry, and his presence there encouraged artistic development and helped establish a regional aesthetic.²⁹⁶ In Nashville, Earl found an eager, even knowledgeable patronage, and never suffered for lack of commissions. At a time and place where artists rarely had the luxury of settling down to practice their profession, Earl established a successful career utilizing the relative ease of his life there and drawing upon his European experiences to advance the arts in Nashville which were in their infancy when Earl arrived. In the early nineteenth century, most areas south or west of Washington D.C. were lucky if an itinerant artist even visited their area, and because most Southern cities did not offer a portraitist enough commissions to keep them afloat, artists rarely settled in the South, with the exception perhaps of Charleston and New Orleans.²⁹⁷ American artists who trained abroad at the time typically returned to Northeastern cities where population density was greater, most hoping to paint historical scenes and many begrudgingly making a living producing portraits. Therefore Earl's presence in middle Tennessee as the state's first resident artist is quite significant, and the timing

²⁹⁶ For further reading on the history of the arts in Tennessee see Benjamin H. Caldwell, Jr., Robert Hicks, and Mark W. Scala, *Art of Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2003), Carroll Van West, ed., *A History of Tennessee Arts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), Budd H. Bishop, "Art in Tennessee: The Early Nineteenth Century," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 29 (1970): 379-389, and James Kelley, *Portrait Painting in Tennessee* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1987). While all of these studies provide insight into the specific arts that were being produced in the South historically, they all fall short in terms of offering a contextual study, which has yet to be produced about art in the region.

²⁹⁷ And even New Orleans tended to be more of a temporary stop than a permanent place to settle down. Many artists descended upon the city in the winter months when the weather was more reasonable and the risk of disease lessened.

of his arrival into Nashville could not have been better. Combined with Jackson's rise to national prominence, the up-and-coming city offered Earl more than enough opportunities to establish a career and settle permanently.

Southern art ranged in quality in the early nineteenth century. The most elite patrons might go abroad to sit for their portraits, and itinerant self-taught artists produced portraits for the middle classes. As a European-trained artist whose work was somewhat affordable, Earl held broad appeal in the South. He did produce paintings of the most aristocratic families in Nashville, such as the Jackson family, but he painted the upper-middle classes as well.

Earl's Tennessee portraits are revealing of a number of important issues. First, because many of his commissions were obtained through Jackson's recommendation, they represent a kind of visual biography of Jackson's extended social network, offering insights into the General's developing allegiances. Many of the portraits depict Jackson's most elite political supporters and these aided Jackson's image beyond representations of the General himself. Specifically they reveal the high status enjoyed by Jackson and his circle in Nashville, and help refute outsiders' opinion of Nashvillians as being unsophisticated. Earl also produced dozens of portraits of members of Jackson's family. Not only do these display Earl's value to Jackson, who cherished the images of his relatives, but they also testify to the sitters' elite status.

More importantly, however, Earl's work in Tennessee provides insight into the developing visual and material culture of the state and the South more generally. Quite simply, there was no "Southern style" of painting when Earl arrived in the region and his prolific artistic output helped set the standard for portraits produced

there throughout the nineteenth century. He borrowed from a range of artistic influences (including Colonial portraiture and the European grand manner) to produce images that not only depict his clients but also display the tangible objects of early nineteenth-century Tennessee and provide a sense of the period's aesthetic values. For example, his portrait of the Foster Family (fig. 3.19), discussed later in the chapter, reveals fine colorful drapes, rich fabrics, and decorative neo-classical furnishings available in Tennessee at the time and sought out by the area's most elite families. In general, a wide range of artistic influences could be found in the limited existence of art in Tennessee and a unified style did not dominate artistic tastes there prior to Earl's arrival.

Having painted for nine years in New England, and expanded his artistic purview abroad for an additional six, Earl was now entering the third phase of his career, as a portraitist in the South, and his style changed yet again. While his works during his early career in New England directly reflect the style of his father and the other portraitists of the Connecticut school, by the time he reached Tennessee he had learned the importance of individualizing his sitters and responding to their desires. At the same time, his Tennessee portraits (apart from the Jackson images) display a uniformity in their simplicity and a straight-forward quality. Most present traditional bust or three-quarter length views of individual sitters against a non-descript backdrop. In comparison with his New England works, there is generally more attention given to the individual and their attire in his southern portraits. Earl spent more effort attentively individualizing the sitter's face, and usually, less attention filling in the background with landscape scenes or additional embellishment. Earl

could produce these portraits relatively quickly while satisfying the sitter with a correct likeness, and his services were in great demand.

As impressive as Earl's connections were, so too was the sheer quantity of his output. Earl was prolific. His memorandum book lists over fifty-five completed portraits from 1817, including at least nine of General Jackson, in addition to portraits of Mrs. Jackson, General John Coffee and Mrs. Coffee, Judge John Overton, and General James Winchester, among many others. Earl usually charged fifty dollars for a bust-length portrait and an additional twenty dollars for the framing. His total income for these portraits was listed as \$4721, a considerable amount for Nashville's first resident artist in his first year of business in Tennessee.²⁹⁸ Over the course of his career Earl painted dozens of portraits of Jackson, and more than sixty paintings of other sitters survive, with records of scores of additional unlocated works. Some of these depict friends or political allies of Jackson's, some portray prominent citizens whose likeness Earl sought to record for exhibition in his gallery, and still others record the likenesses of Jackson's family members.

Interestingly, most of these sitters are not painted in the courtly manner Earl reserved for Jackson (see chapter four), but rather in a refreshingly personal style that was individually tailored to the sitter. They reveal Earl's ability to adapt to different subjects, to help foster a unique identity for each sitter, and to utilize his artistic background to develop the beginnings of a Southern style of art.

²⁹⁸ These totals were compiled by James Barber, *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study*, 43 from Earl's memorandum book in the Earl papers at the American Antiquarian Society.

Portraits of Mrs. Jackson

The sheer numbers of Earl's portraits of Jackson's relatives reveal the artist's intimacy with the family and their desire for an elevated culture (in contradiction to their reputation elsewhere as being uncivilized). Despite his general disinterestedness in most artistic endeavors, Jackson placed an enormous value on Earl's portraits of his family, especially those of his wife Rachel during her life and even more so after. In Washington, Earl's portraits of his family were hung in the White House as a constant reminder of his loved ones. He appears to have used Earl's portraits to cling to those he loved as a link to the past, especially in regard to Mrs. Jackson. Jackson highly valued Earl's ability to produce portraits of his wife, to whom he was deeply, eternally, devoted. Her adoration for Earl was one of the qualities that endeared him to Andrew Jackson. According to Rachel, "I can say with truth a more Correct young man I never knew."²⁹⁹

Rachel Jackson was a child of the frontier who moved to Tennessee from Virginia with her parents and ten siblings at the age of twelve. When she was seventeen, she married Lewis Robards. However, because of his controlling and jealous nature she separated from him and moved to Nashville with her widowed mother. In 1790 she received word that he had filed for divorce and she proceeded to marry Andrew Jackson in 1791, but after two years, she discovered that Robards had not in fact obtained a divorce. After learning of her new marriage, Robards brought suit against Rachel on the grounds of adultery, a divorce was granted, and the Jacksons quietly remarried in 1794.

²⁹⁹ Rachel Jackson to Ralph E.W. Earl, February 23, 1819. John Spencer Bassett Papers, Library of Congress. Cited in Marquis James, *The Life of Andrew Jackson, Complete in one Volume* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1938), 304.

Rachel, who was known for her unwavering piety and her generous and gentle nature, was mortified by the ordeal. Her marriage to Jackson, however, was rock-solid. “Mr. Jackson,” as she often referred to him, was an eternally loving and devoted husband. Throughout their marriage the Jacksons regularly experienced extended periods of separation while Jackson tended in different periods to his business, military, and political duties. In an 1813 letter to Rachel he said he had been handed “your miniature – I shall wear it near my bosom, but this was useless, for without your miniature, my recollection never fails me of your likeness.”³⁰⁰ He kept his oath and wore a miniature portrait of her against his chest his entire life. Jackson actually owned multiple miniatures of Rachel and had asked Earl on at least one occasion to paint one for him.

Earl made his first portrait of Mrs. Jackson in 1817.³⁰¹ The portrait, for which Jackson paid fifty dollars, is probably among the earliest that Earl executed in Nashville, one of three that Jackson immediately commissioned after the artist’s arrival in Tennessee.³⁰² This portrait is no longer extant, but is known through a reproduction in S.G. Heiskell’s 1918 *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History* (fig. 3.1), and a copy from 1830 (fig. 3.2).³⁰³ The Jackson family referred to the portrait as “Rachel in her ball dress” since she appears in the white satin gown she

³⁰⁰ Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson January 8, 1813. *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, ed. By Harold D. Moser and Sharon Macpherson. vol II, p. 353.

³⁰¹ It is listed in Earl’s 1817 memorandum book, Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

³⁰² The first entry in his memorandum book for the year 1817 states: “Painted the portraits of Genl Coffee, Major Reid, & Mrs. Jackson for Genl. Andrew Jackson, at \$50 each is \$150 paid.” Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

³⁰³ S.G. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, vol. III (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Co., 1918), 440.

wore to the great ball hosted by the city of New Orleans after Jackson's heroics in the Battle of New Orleans. Her head is covered in an elegant lace veil and brown curls peak out from under it. To her left sits a round table with a vase of flowers. The somewhat flattened figure of Mrs. Jackson appears against an unadorned background. The work has an interesting history that parallels the sitter's complicated reputation.

Throughout the decades after her death, Rachel was often characterized as illiterate and uncultivated in part because of her infamous pipe smoking and tobacco chewing, which were actually commonplace activities among genteel southern women. She was also overweight, a fact Earl's unidealized portrait did not hide. An 1821 visitor to the Hermitage commented on her appearance in the portrait noting that "The parlors are hung with portraits of the General and his friends, Coffee, Bronaugh, Gadsden, Eaton, and others. There is a portrait of Mrs. Jackson in white satin, topaz jewelry, low neck and short sleeves; fat, forty, but not fair."³⁰⁴

Despite its lack of idealization, Earl's "ball dress" portrait of Rachel Jackson has great historical significance, and had presumably always hung in the Hermitage. In fact, it was most likely one of the few items that was saved from the home when the devastating fire destroyed most of the house and its contents in 1834. The painting may have also been damaged in the blaze, contributing to its subsequent lack of popularity.³⁰⁵

The portrait was significant enough, however, that a visiting artist, perhaps Washington Bogart Cooper, sought to make a copy of it in 1830. On his first visit

³⁰⁴ Cited in James Parton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, vol. II (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 650.

³⁰⁵ The painting was included in an 1889 inventory of the house by Andrew Jackson III and photographed by him in the front Parlor in 1892 as noted by Jennifer Thornton Tilley in her Hermitage research from June 15, 1984.

home to the Hermitage after taking the presidency, Jackson had authorized the artist to copy the painting at the Hermitage.³⁰⁶ However, in Jackson's absence the overseer of the estate allowed the painting in to be taken to Nashville and copied, and he subsequently wrote an apologetic note to his employer:

Sometime before you left home you told me that an artist who Resided in Nashville would Come up and take A cobby [*sic.*] of mrs. Jacksons portrait. this gentleman came up sometime after you left home and informed me that is was out of his power to copley this at your house and request me to let him take them to Nashville. I objected to this – this Gentleman's reply was that it your wish and earnest desire for him to Coppey them and send them on to you. No nowing but this was your wish and by the inflewnce of your friends who were present and under a solemn promise that is Should be taken ceare of and returnd without the least injurey which has been don. this my dear sir is the only reason that I have to give you for this transgression.³⁰⁷

Despite Jackson's anger over the endangering of a portrait of his beloved, the painting was safely returned. The subsequent copy is probably the portrait owned today by the State of Tennessee (fig. 3.2).³⁰⁸ It is very similar to Earl's original (as known through the 1918 publication), picturing the same topaz jewelry, the low-necked, short-sleeve-gown, and a similar body proportion and awkward pose. The gown, however, has been changed to black, perhaps a reference to Mrs. Jackson's death in 1828.

Earl's unflattering portrait did not fare well in the twentieth century. In 1941, perhaps in response to the negative characterizations Mrs. Jackson was still receiving, the portrait was removed from public view by the Ladies Hermitage Association

³⁰⁶ Barber (1991), 225. Washington Bogart Cooper was a Tennessee native who later studied in Philadelphia with Thomas Sully and Henry Inman. He was in Nashville working as a portraitist in 1830 in Earl's absence.

³⁰⁷ John Spencer Bassett and David Maydole Matteson, eds. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-1935), 4:218-19.

³⁰⁸ Which was probably the unfinished portrait found by state librarian Mrs. Paralee Heiskell among a collection of Cooper's unfinished works in the Capitol tower, and refinished to hang in the State Librarian's office about 1924.

Board of Directors to “a place where it not be seen from the hall.”³⁰⁹ In July 1948, perhaps unaware it was an Earl portrait, the board inspected the painting and called it “a distorted and poor likeness” and determined to have it cleaned, but only a month later the work was deemed “not worth preserving.” An artist, “Mrs. Jones” was commissioned to paint a similar but more idealized portrait and the board decided “to destroy the discreditable picture of Mrs. Jackson in ballgown.”³¹⁰

The history of Earl’s 1817 portrait reveals a number of important issues. Jackson’s reluctance to allow it to leave the Hermitage to be copied and the fact that it was saved from the fire bespeak its significance to the President. His attachment to his portraits shows his devotion to his family, but more importantly reveals a level of sophistication and refinement on Jackson’s part in treasuring the fine arts.

Earl’s earliest surviving portrait of Mrs. Jackson dates from 1825 (fig. 3.3), though he had certainly depicted her since his original effort in 1817. He may have even created a portrait of her for display in his museum (although it seems to have been reserved for male subjects).³¹¹ The 1825 commission seems to have originated not with Jackson, but rather General John Coffee, an intimate family friend who married Rachel’s niece Mary, who ordered it along with a pendant of Mr. Jackson

³⁰⁹ Ladies Hermitage Association meeting minutes, April 1941.

³¹⁰ Ladies Hermitage Association meeting minutes from August, September, and December, 1948, and May, 1949. Cited in Tilley’s typescript, June 15, 1984.

³¹¹ Earl listed at least three portraits of Mrs. Jackson in his 1817 memorandum book. He liked to gain publicity for his services by displaying his portraits of the most prominent Nashvillians in his gallery, therefore it seems possible that he would have included one of the Rachel Jackson portraits, however, there is no record of this.

when the couple was fifty-eight years old.³¹² Unfortunately, the works were severely damaged in a fire that destroyed the Coffee home, Hickory Hill, in Florence, Alabama during the Civil War.³¹³ As a result, the images, according to conservators are today “essentially all repainted.”³¹⁴

The Coffee portrait of Mrs. Jackson is probably a similar version of an earlier work by Earl, perhaps the 1817 original which he may have copied several times in his career. Earl was in the habit of producing varying copies of his portraits of Andrew Jackson to help meet demand and he worked similarly with Mrs. Jackson’s image although he often changed the paintings details (such as jewelry, costume, and hand position). The 1825 bust view is more idealized than the 1817 version and is one of Earl’s more sensitive portrayals of Mrs. Jackson (despite the painting’s damage), who wears a tender, gentle expression. Her double chin and round features appear beneath a fluted white bonnet and she wears a simple black dress. She is adorned by an elegant collar, pearl necklace and earrings. In 1825 Earl had recently resigned his position at his museum and thus had more time to devote to his paintings. Despite its heavy restoration, this work reflects the additional attention in its more refined features and subtle modeling. The additional embellishments perhaps also refer to Rachel’s increased visibility on a national level. Her husband had just recently lost his first presidential bid by the narrowest of margins, and her fancier attire might be intended to enhance her public image.

³¹² See Tilley’s typescript at the Hermitage, 1980. See also *The Hermitage: Home of General Andrew Jackson, Seventh President of the United States; a History and Guide* (Hermitage, TN: Ladies Hermitage Association, 1965), 18-19.

³¹³ Barber, 224.

³¹⁴ According to records from the Cumberland Art Conservation Center, condition report from November 1978, cited in Tilley’s typescript at the Hermitage, 1980-0-225.

Earl's personal favorite portrait of Rachel was commissioned in 1826 by Richard K. and Mary Call, friends of the Jacksons who were married at the Hermitage in 1824 (fig. 3.4).³¹⁵ This time, Earl included Rachel's left hand, which holds the chains of a gold purse. She dons a black dress with a double lace collar and a lace mantilla over a ribboned bonnet with long ties. She also wears long earrings and a ring and bracelet on her left hand. In preparation for the 1828 election, Earl felt that this was the most "correct likeness" he had created of Mrs. Jackson, and the only one he deemed worthy of making public by authorizing an engraving of it by James Barton Longacre. He gave greater attention to the portrait's details than he had in previous works. Beginning with the election of 1824, Rachel had been lambasted by Jackson's opponents, and Earl seems to have been encouraging a more positive public image of her by depicting her as a finely dressed and intelligent lady.

Jackson also commissioned several Rachel miniatures over the years, which are well-known today, because until the day he died, he always wore one around his neck. At least one miniature was made in Mrs. Jackson's lifetime and was originally attributed to Anna Claypool Peale, however this has been questioned because Rachel did not accompany Andrew to Washington on the 1819 trip when he sat for the Peales.³¹⁶ The best known miniature today is believed to have been painted after 1830

³¹⁵ Earl's letter to Jackson from April 3, 1830 stated that "the only one [of my portraits of Rachel] which I would wish to send forth to the world as a correct likeness representation of that good and pious woman is in the possession of Genl. Call." Earl to Jackson, April 3, 1830, Andrew Jackson papers at The Hermitage, mf 30, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville. In response to Call's initial commission of the portraits, Jackson wrote in March 1826 that "It will give Mrs. Jackson and myself pleasure to sit to Mr. Earl and I will see him shortly on the subject." *Correspondence of Jackson*, 6:483.

³¹⁶ For a reference to this miniature see Parton 3: 602.

by Louisa Catherine Strobel, after one of Earl's paintings.³¹⁷ Jackson also commissioned one from James Longacre after the Call portrait of Rachel while he had it in his studio prepared to engrave. In 1830 Earl reported to Jackson that "I wrote to Call, and also sent him an extract from that part of your letter in which you express'd a desire to have a miniature of Mrs. Jackson taken from one of my late portraits of her, and requested him, soon as convenient to send it to Longacre in Philadelphia."³¹⁸ In 1831 Longacre sent his completed miniature to Jackson with instructions to return it if the likeness was not correct. Apparently Jackson was disappointed with the image because he did, in fact, return it.³¹⁹ Jackson maintained his devotion to Rachel as he assumed the Presidency after her death, making it clear that he sought to remain a bachelor widower until his own passing, and in 1830 he appealed to Earl for yet another miniature of Rachel. Jackson's dedication to Rachel may have been enhanced by the fact that they had no children of their own. Though they never had any biological children, they legally adopted a nephew and named him Andrew Jackson Jr. and raised other nephews under their roof, including Andrew Jackson Donelson.

Earl also created posthumous portraits of Mrs. Jackson and these were especially moving to the President. Having lost his wife as he was preparing to leave the Hermitage to take the presidency, Jackson wrote his friend John Coffee about his bereavement: "My mind is so disturbed, & I am even now perplexed with company

³¹⁷ Margaret B. Klapthor, *The First Ladies* (Washington D.C., The White House Historical Association, 1975), 20.

³¹⁸ Ralph E.W. Earl to Andrew Jackson, April 5, 1830. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*.

³¹⁹ See Earl to Longacre, May 15, 1836, Longacre Papers, Archives of American Art, roll P-1, frames 1007-9.

that I can scarcely [*sic.*] write, in short my dear friend my heart is nearly broke. I try to summons up my usual fortitude but it is vain, the time, the sudden & afflictive shock, was as severe as unexpected.”³²⁰ The nature of the relationship between Jackson and Earl was extremely close, and made even closer upon Rachel’s passing, because Earl had been especially favored by Rachel Jackson before her death. As Nicolas P. Trist recounted:

As a Nashville artist, Earl had been a protégé of Mrs. Jackson, one of the many objects on which the kindness of heart recorded in the epitaph... This was enough. By her death this relative (Earl) became sanctified for the General’s heart. Earl became forthwith his protégé. From that time forward, the painter’s home was under his roof... And this treatment was amply repaid. His devotion was even more untiring than his brush, and its steadiness would have proved itself, at any moment the opportunity might have offered, by his cheerfully laying down his life in his service.³²¹

A later account from Francis P. Blair, a member of Jackson’s “kitchen cabinet” and editor of the pro-Jackson *Washington Globe*, from April 1831 demonstrates Jackson’s continued devotion and the deep effect Earl’s portraits had on the President:

Earl has a few days ago received from the Hermitage Mrs. Jackson’s portrait. He did not intend that the President should see it, but he stepped in by accident when Earl was copying from it. He stood and gazed at it for a few moments with some fortitude, until as the association rose in his mind he began to weep, and his sobs became so deep that Earl carried the picture away to relieve him.³²²

³²⁰ Jackson to John Coffee, from the Hermitage, January 17, 1829. Transcribed in Daniel Feller, Harold Moser, et al. *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 7:12-13.

³²¹ James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1888, 3:603-4.

³²² Blair to Mrs. Benjamin Gratz, August 20, 1831, cited in Thomas H. Clay, “Two Years with Old Hickory,” *Atlantic Monthly* 60 (August 1887): 193. This was perhaps the painting that Philadelphia printmaker James Longacre had borrowed to make a print after rather than the one from the Hermitage.

Uncle Alfred, one of the Jackson's last slaves who gave tours through the Hermitage in the decades following the President's death, emphasized his devotion to his late wife. During the tour, in Jackson's bedroom, he would point out Earl's portrait of Rachel over the mantel, and tell how every morning Jackson would kneel before it and thank God for sparing his life so that he could look upon her face for one more day. Another account recalled, "I found Jackson sitting at a little table with his wife's miniature, a very large one, before him propped up against some books, and between him and the picture an open book which bore the mark of long use. This was her Prayer-Book. ... The last thing he did every night before lying down to rest, was to read in that book with that picture before his eye."³²³

The painting hanging in Jackson's bedroom at the Hermitage and is a by Earl copy of the Call portrait, however like all of Earl's portraits of Rachel it contains slight modifications (fig. 3.5). As one Hermitage researcher noted, the painting was "executed in the harder style characteristic of Earl's years in Washington. His pigments are brighter and overall textures are smoother. The face has that ivory skin tone characteristic of his later work."³²⁴ In this portrait, Mrs. Jackson appears younger and thinner than the Call version, and she wears a more pleasant expression. A large red chair has been added as a backdrop and matched with a red curtain in the background. Rather than clutching the chains of a purse, she holds a single pink rose in her left hand. This might be the portrait Earl was creating in the White House that inadvertently upset the President perhaps reminding the bereaved widower of her love

³²³ From Jackson's private secretary, 1831. Cited in Jennifer Tilley's typescript at the Hermitage, dated June 25, 1984.

³²⁴ Tilley's typescript, 1980-0-218, The Hermitage.

of gardening and the flower beds that Earl had personally designed for her at the Hermitage. In all of the works created after 1824 (the year of Jackson's first presidential campaign) Mrs. Jackson is idealized and adorned with fine jewelry. She is shown as an elegant companion for future-President Jackson.

Earl's numerous portraits of Mrs. Jackson served both as personal mementos for the President and as a way to counteract the criticisms leveled against her. As an adult, she achieved significant status in her marriage to Jackson, but her reputation was tarnished by the scandalous circumstances of her first marriage to Lewis Robards. When Jackson ran for the presidency the thirty-year-old scandal was made public, and she was cast as an adulterer. Mrs. Jackson's reputation was tarnished. Earl's collection of portraits challenge that reputation, revealing her as cultured and modest. They also show the advancement of his style and the developing importance of arts in the region. Forty years earlier, the settlement of Nashville had begun, and now it attracted a resident artist and groomed a President, and as Earl had depicted, a proper first lady.

After Rachel's death in December 1828 just before Jackson took office, she was buried in the gardens of the Hermitage in the white gown she had ordered for her husband's inaugural ceremonies. Jackson blamed all of the political slander that was directed at them for her death, once saying, "They murdered her."³²⁵ Her epitaph reads "A being so gentle and so virtuous slander might wound, but could never dishonor," which reflects Jackson's bitterness at the many campaign slurs leveled against her character.

³²⁵ As stated in Barber, 186.

Jackson's other family members

In addition to his numerous portraits of Rachel, Earl painted dozens of portraits of other members of Jackson's family which reveals their elite status in Nashville society. That the Jackson/Donelson family could afford to employ Earl virtually full-time and that they desired to fill their home with "elegantly framed" portraits, reveals their social ambition.³²⁶ Earl's intimate acquaintance with many of them allowed him to create especially personal works, often at Mr. Jackson's request. These symbolize the patriarch's adoration for family as well as his social and cultural ambitions for himself and the sitters. The portraits also display Jackson's regard for Earl and his abilities, and Earl's reliance on the Jackson's commissions.

Earl depicted the Jackson's adopted son, Andrew Jackson Jr., on at least two occasions. Although General Jackson had legal custody of several relatives and had a long history of opening up his home to friends and family, Jackson Jr. was the only one he legally adopted. One of twin boys born to Rachel's brother and wife, who raised the other son but willingly gave up Jackson Jr. to their childless relatives, the boy came to the Hermitage as a newborn. Earl's first portrait of him was created about 1820 when he was ten years old (fig. 3.6).³²⁷ The portrait is a small, intimate bust view, 14 x 12 inches. Perhaps serving as a gift to his new patron, it was a quick

³²⁶ An 1827 visitor to the Hermitage described the house as such: "After breakfast, we went into one of the drawing rooms where is a number of portraits (elegantly framed) of the intimate friends of the general." Miss Julianna Margaret Conner, *Diary*, September 3, 1827, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

³²⁷ The painting hung in Jackson's bedroom and is attributed to Earl based on his listing of a "Bust of Master Andrew Jackson, an adopted son of Genl Jackson" in one of his memorandum books at the American Antiquarian Society. Unfortunately, however, a conservator's report from 1978 indicates that the painting has been heavily repainted and not much of the original paint remains. Cumberland Art Conservation Center's Report of Condition and Treatment, November, 1978. cited in Tilley, 1980-0-369

study and was smaller and more cropped and direct than Earl's typical works. The boy wears a ruffled collar, with tousled hair and a pleasant expression.³²⁸

Earl painted Jackson Jr. again as a young bachelor in his twenties (fig. 3.7).³²⁹ According to family legend, the painting was conceived as Earl and Jackson watched Jackson Jr. return from hunting in the neighboring woods. Jackson apparently said, "Earl, I want you to paint a portrait of Andrew as he is, gun and all."³³⁰ In the finished portrait, the young man is posed before a landscape, wearing hunting gear and holding a rifle across his chest. The head of his hunting dog can be seen in the foreground. This portrait gave Earl the opportunity to paint a landscape scene in the background, a favored device he rarely had the time or opportunity to employ in Tennessee, aside from a few of his Andrew Jackson paintings. Ironically, Jackson Jr. died years later in a freak hunting accident, so this portrait is both a rare record of him as a young adult and an unfortunate foreshadowing of his death.

Earl was quite adept at depicting children (which he had been doing since at least age twelve) and he later painted several of Jackson's grandchildren, who brought the President so much joy in their childhood. One of these was Jackson Jr.'s daughter with his wife Sarah, who was born at the White House on November 1, 1832 (fig. 3.8). Bearing her late grandmother's name, Rachel Jackson became her grandfather's "little pet." A year after her birth, Jackson wrote to his son from Washington on November 13, 1833 that "I wish I could see her walk, and hear her

³²⁸ The painting is now located in the Hermitage collection and it was purchased in 1897 by the Ladies Hermitage Association from Andrew Jackson III.

³²⁹ According to a letter owned by the Ladies Hermitage Association from Marion Lawrence Symmes to Mr. C. Lawrence Winn from Atlanta dated Dec. 10, 1949.

³³⁰ See letter owned by the Ladies Hermitage Association from Mrs. Marion Lawrence Symmes to Mrs. Walter Stokes, Sr. from Atlanta, March 6, 1944.

begin to prattle – it would be a great consolation to me. But I must console myself with looking at its very excellent likeness by Mr. Earle which I have in a frame, until providence may permit me to visit you at the Hermitage next year, or you Sarah and my little Pet shall return to me here.”³³¹ Earl had made the girl’s portrait in the late summer of 1833 while the family was visiting the White House, and after their departure, the painting clearly served as a surrogate for Jackson’s absent loved ones, which also reinforces Earl’s importance to Jackson. Rachel Jackson, “Little Rachel” is dressed in pink and surrounded by an ethereal, cloudy sky, a typical feature of Earl’s mature style. Earl tended to represent children in this sort of intimate, yet nondescript setting and these reflect an awareness of baroque portrait prints, which were readily available in the United States at the time. For example, Dario Varotari’s seventeenth-century etching of *A Portrait of a Young Person Pointing Left* (fig. 3.9), similarly features an oval format and nondescript background.

Earl similarly represented another granddaughter named Rachel, who was born to Andrew Jackson Donelson (Jackson’s nephew) and his wife Emily at the White House on April 19, 1834 during Jackson’s second term in office (fig. 3.10). Earl depicted her in a bust-length portrait dressed in blue and white and vignettted against a brown background. Since she appears to be at least three years old, the portrait was probably completed back in Tennessee, after the family had returned home, making it one of Earl’s last completed works.

Earl also painted portraits of most of the members of Rachel’s extended family. John Donelson (1755-1836), a great patriarch and Captain in the American

³³¹ Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr. Nov. 13, 1833. John Spencer Bassett and David Maydole Matteson, eds. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-1935), 5:224.

Revolution was Rachel Jackson's older brother and the father of Emily, the future White House hostess. Earl painted his portrait twice. Donelson gave one of these to John Coffee, his longtime friend, and kept the other (fig. 3.11). In a letter to Coffee, Donelson wrote, "Mr. Earl has finished the likeness which he was about to do...it is as good a likeness as perhaps he has ever made he says so himself, it has the appearance of a very healthy old man with a head highly powdered. The whole of them are well executed."³³² Donelson's work is typical of Earl's male Tennessee portraits, depicting a waist-length frontal view of the distinguished older gentleman. Seated before a plain, dark background, he wears a dark suit jacket and vest over a white shirt and cravat. His white hair curls over his ears. The old Captain Donelson was known to have derived great pleasure from his portrait, sitting before it frequently, displaying it for visitors, and remarking about it with pride.³³³ His son William Donelson told Coffee about his father's satisfaction with the image saying, "The old man I think is a good deal vain of his picture, or at least is quite fond of showing it – and Mr. Earl vainer, if possible than he is, he said it is better than the Last likeness that he took of the General and if I may be permitted to decide the case between them I think it at least as good as any he ever took."³³⁴

Earl also depicted Donelson's wife, Mary Purnell Donelson (1763-1848) wearing a black dress and shawl with a gray collar (fig. 3.12). Her hair is hidden under a gray bonnet with dark gray ribbon and bow (as he had done in New England,

³³² Captain John Donelson to General Coffee, June 12, 1827. Dyas Collection, Coffee Manuscript, Tennessee Historical Society, Nashville.

³³³ Burke, 147.

³³⁴ William Donelson to General Coffee, July 2, 1827. Dyas Collection, Coffee Manuscript, Tennessee Historical Society, Nashville.

Earl was still depicting his more mature female patrons wearing bonnets) and she is seated in a red chair, a prop he had been using since his days in the North. Both Donelson portraits are austere in design and sober in tone, typical of his Tennessee production. Before Earl came to Nashville, Tennesseans had few options for commissioning their own portraits, and the pride that John Donelson had in his portrait reveals how meaningful Earl's work was for him.³³⁵

Jackson especially cherished Earl's paintings when he was in Washington and portrayals of the family continued there. In 1830-31 Earl painted two portraits of John and Mary Donelson's daughter Emily, who had married her cousin and Jackson's nephew and ward, Andrew Jackson Donelson. Before Rachel's death, Jackson had planned to bring the promising young Donelson to Washington with him as private secretary along with Emily for Rachel's company. After Rachel's death the young, tactful Emily gained the role of White House hostess. As a bright and lovely young lady, she was welcomed into the society circles in Washington City, but ended up getting entangled in the so-called Eaton affair, taking a position against social outcast Peggy Eaton, and therefore her uncle, the President.

The "affair" concerned Margaret O'Neal Timberlake, a Washingtonian and daughter of a local inn-keeper, who had a tarnished reputation among society women of Washington. She was married to John B. Timberlake, a sea captain, but vicious rumors circled about her sexual promiscuity both before and during her marriage. She

³³⁵ The original portrait descended down to John Donelson VI and was donated to the Hermitage. It hangs in Tulip Grove, the home that Jackson had built on the Hermitage property for Emily and Andrew Jackson Donelson. Earl also depicted the Donelson's daughter, Catherine Donelson Martin (undated, private collection). One of Earl's more striking female portraits, it depicts the beautiful young woman in a form-fitting empire waist red dress with a large opaque white collar. She is seated before an abstracted landscape view with the appearance of a sunset behind her.

was thought to have been unfaithful to her husband with John Eaton before her husband died at sea. A rumor was even spread about Eaton's possible responsibility for the man's death. Eaton was a Nashvillian and long-time close friend of Jackson's who had accompanied the new President to Washington as Secretary of War. Ultimately, Margaret Timberlake and John Eaton fell in love and upon Jackson's advice, the two were quickly married. Eaton's marriage to Peggy, as she has become known, caused considerable controversy among the cabinet members and Washington City society in general. Jackson supported the couple unwaveringly, but even the White House hostess, Jackson's beloved daughter-in-law Emily Donelson, shunned Peggy Eaton. Because the women of Washington succeeded in wielding such great power and turmoil over the city and the political realm, the situation became known as "The Petticoat Affair."³³⁶

As a result of her involvement in helping shun Margaret Eaton, Emily was removed from her position and sent back to Tennessee in July 1830 and not called to resume her duties until the affair had ended a year later. Earl painted Emily Donelson upon her arrival in back into Washington in the fall of 1831 (fig. 3.13), and made a similar version for Mrs. Ingham (1831, Ladies Hermitage Association), wife of the Secretary of the Treasury Samuel Ingham and a Washington socialite who had served as a social mentor to Emily in Washington and had also shunned Peggy Eaton.³³⁷

³³⁶ The best re-telling of the story of the Eaton affair is found in Catherine Allgor, "The Fall of Andrew Jackson's Cabinet" in *Parlor Politics: in which the ladies of Washington helped build a city and a Government* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 190-238. Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York, Random House, 2008) provides additional insight about the events of the Eaton affair.

³³⁷ Emily's biography states that the painting was executed in the Spring of 1830, but this would have been highly unlikely because Emily was in Washington and Earl didn't arrive there until September. It

In the portraits, the fashion-conscious Emily is shown wearing a dark peacock-blue dress with green trim at the collar. She is also draped in a thin, feminine lace-edged apricot scarf, and seated against a reddish-brown interior. According to Pauline Wilcox Burke, a descendant of the Donelson family, and Emily's biographer, "Since its completion in 1830 this portrait of Mrs. Donelson had hung on the White House walls, admired not only as a speaking likeness but also as one of the best of Earl's works, its soft, mellow glow approaching the excellence of the better known artist, Sully."³³⁸

Emily's health had always been frail and she was on her deathbed from tuberculosis as Jackson's presidency drew to a close in 1836.³³⁹ At this time Earl's original painting of her, which had hung in the White House took on special significance. As he left the mansion in Washington Jackson had the painting packed with Earl's other portraits that decorated the house, writing to his nephew Andrew (Emily's husband) that "I have the pictures carefully boxed with mine."³⁴⁰ However, fearing it would be lost in transit, Donelson asked to have Emily's painting put aside so he could hand carry it back to Tennessee. Donelson said "I shall write you again in a few days, in respect to the portrait of my dear wife, which you inform me is packed up with the others you design sending out. I would remark that I prefer not to risk it to

is possible that the portraits were painted over the summer while the entire family was back at the Hermitage with Earl.

³³⁸ Burke, II:133. After descending through the family, the painting was donated back to the White House in 1946 by Mrs. Moncure Burke, Emily's great-granddaughter. Frick Art Reference Library notes.

³³⁹ Additional biographical information about Emily is available in Margaret Brown Klapthor, *The First Ladies* (1975, White House Historical Association, DC). Earl had written a letter to Andrew Jackson Donelson in Nashville lamenting Emily's failing health stating, "I regret exceedingly the situation of Mrs. Donelson – I pray god that she may speedily be restored again to health." Earl in Washington to Donelson, Oct. 3, 1836. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

³⁴⁰ Jackson to Donelson, January 2, 1837 in the private collection of Pauline Wilcox Burke.

the chances of a consignment either by water or land to Nashville. If I can so arrange my business as to be able to leave home in the spring I can bring it with me.”³⁴¹ The extraordinary care her husband took in personally returning the portrait home to Tennessee (like the pleasure Emily’s father took in his own portrait) is revealing of the value the family placed on Earl’s pictures, especially in the face of frequent family tragedies.

Earl’s remarkable number of portraits of Jackson and his relatives helped establish them as Tennessee’s first family. Jackson had been in Nashville since the 1790s and his friends and connections in the city were extensive. Earl intimacy with the Jackson family and their obvious approval of his work encouraged many others to commission Earl for their portrait. Because he painted nearly every prominent citizen in the city, Earl’s style (drawn from a number of sources) became the mid-South’s established manner of painting for much of the nineteenth century.

Military and Political Allies

In most cases, the circumstances of Earl’s commissions from Nashville’s elites are unknown. Most were connected to Jackson in some way, but whether or not Jackson was personally involved in arranging for the sittings is unclear. He was known to recommend Earl’s services, however, and Earl probably met many of his patrons at the Hermitage. From the start it seems, Earl bought into Jacksonian politics, looked to his patron as a national hero, and began supporting the general’s causes. Earl’s suite of portraits of military and political associates of Jackson’s demonstrate, among other things, these extended connections.

³⁴¹ Burke, vol. II, 132, 137.

One of Tennessee's oldest and most distinguished citizens, General James Winchester sat for Earl in 1817 (fig. 3.14). Winchester was later remembered as "a venerable relic of the revolutionary period, and an ardent and devoted patriot to the day of his death...celebrated for the good qualities of his heart."³⁴² Jackson personally recommended Earl to Winchester who wrote back that he would be glad to see Earl "gratify a little family pride" and "to promote the fine arts, and encourage merit and genius."³⁴³ Earl was accompanied to the man's estate, Cragfont, six miles east of Gallatin, Tennessee in Castalian Springs, by Charles Cassedy who was writing a defense of Winchester's conduct as a field commander in the War of 1812.³⁴⁴ Both Cassedy and Winchester befriended Earl and he subsequently visited Cragfont on a number of occasions, sometimes to conduct archaeological studies.

The Winchesters must have been pleased with the General's portrait because about the same time Earl also painted a separate canvas of the general's wife, the beautiful Susan Black Winchester (1777-1862), who was twenty-five years younger than her husband, as well as a portrait of their daughter, Selima Winchester Robeson (figs. 3.15 and 3.16). The Winchester portraits are some of the few of Earl's works that are definitively known to have been finished in 1817; they are recorded in the artist's 1817 memorandum book: "Genl. James Winchester to his portrait, Mrs. Winchester, and his daughter's Mrs. Robeson - \$150 – three frames at twenty dollars

³⁴² *Niles Weekly Register*, August 26, 1826, cited in Walter T. Durham, *James Winchester, Tennessee Pioneer* (Gallatin, TN: Sumner County Library Board, 1979), 253. Winchester's obituary appears in the *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, July 29, 1826.

³⁴³ Cited in Walter T. Durham, *James Winchester, Tennessee Pioneer* (Gallatin, TN: Sumner County Library Board, 1979).

³⁴⁴ James Winchester, *Historical Detail having relation to the Campaign of the North-western Army under Generals Harrison and Winchester during the winter of 1812-13 together with some particulars relating to the Surrender of Fort Boweser* (Lexington, KY: Worsley & Smith, 1818).

each is \$210 paid.”³⁴⁵ In addition, a note from Winchester to Earl from late that year verifies the date and provides further insight into the portraits: “Gen. Winchester...inquires if his portrait frames have come to hand because Mrs. Robeson sets out in the course of next week for the city of New Orleans and wishes to carry her own and mothers with her.”³⁴⁶ Winchester wrote Earl a note of apology on October 12, 1818 saying that “an apology is due for my long delay in remitting to you the price of the portraits frames...I send you sixty dollars with confidence of forgiveness.”³⁴⁷

Earl’s portraits of the Winchesters were painted only about a year after his arrival back in the United States from his European studies, and as such they display more of a clear influence of continental styles than do many of his later Tennessee pictures. In his portrait, Winchester is depicted as a forthright, if aging, United States General. In the background, Earl offers the hint of a cloudy sky, perhaps at sunset, a device he had certainly seen and utilized in Europe. Earl also took extra care in his portrait of the beautiful Susan Black Winchester. He depicted her seated in a red armchair before an open window. In her left hand she holds a small bouquet of red and white flowers, a symbol of her femininity. Her hair is hidden under a fancy lace bonnet adorned with a large blue ribbon bow that enhances her piercing blue eyes. She wears a stylish Empire-waist black satin dress offset by a thick lace collar.

³⁴⁵ Earl’s 1817 Memorandum Book, Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

³⁴⁶ Note transcribed for Earl from Gen. James Winchester, December 8, 1817, American Antiquarian Society.

³⁴⁷ James Winchester to Ralph E.W. Earl, October 12, 1818. John Spencer Bassett Papers, Library of Congress. The location of the portraits of General James and Susan Winchester was unknown for a long time until they were recently retrieved from the attic of a Winchester descendant in Hot Springs, Arkansas and donated to Cragfont.

Hanging at Cragfont alongside these images is the equally stunning portrait of the Winchester's daughter, Selima Winchester Robeson (fig. 3.16). Although the portrait is unsigned and unattributed, it is most certainly the image of Mrs. Robeson that Earl had listed in his 1817 memorandum book and that had been mentioned in Winchester's note to Earl. It is also similar in style to that of the Winchesters. In the portrait, Mrs. Robeson is standing outdoors before an enormous leafy green tree with the hint of a dramatic sunset in the background. Like her mother, she is also elegantly attired in a feminine white Empire-waist dress and draped in a bright blue shawl. She wears a pleasant expression and seems comfortably situated in the painting's dramatic setting. The painting perhaps served as a bridal portrait, which is underscored by her elegant white dress. Selima Winchester married William Lord Robeson on June 17, 1817, less than a month after her father had agreed to the commissioning of the paintings. Earl gave comparatively extra effort in all three of the Winchester portraits. Not only were the family members very important Tennessee citizens, but the works were some of Earl's first Nashville commissions, and he was trying to establish himself in his new location. The Winchester portraits are some of the most impressive of Earl's Tennessee creations.³⁴⁸

The portraits also serve as transition pieces between his work in Europe and in Tennessee with many elements borrowed from European portraits. For example, Earl's work was compared on more than one occasion with portraits by Sir Thomas Lawrence, and Mrs. Robeson's portrait bears common elements with Lawrence's style. In Lawrence's contemporaneous portrait of *Mrs. James Fraser* (fig. 3.17), Lawrence has placed Mrs. Fraser outdoors, before a sunset skyline, as Earl did with

³⁴⁸ Selima died shortly after at age 20 in 1820.

Robeson. In addition to being very similar in size, both portraits depict youthful female beauties wearing fashionable white Neoclassical gowns. Earl's early portraits owe a great deal to the stylistic elements he had learned abroad.

Also among Earl's extant works from his first year in Tennessee is a portrait of another Jackson political ally, Thomas Hamilton Fletcher (fig. 3.18). Fletcher (1792-1845) had legal practices in Nashville and Winchester, Tennessee and anonymously authored "The Political Horse Race" in 1824, a published statement which bemoaned the recent election of John Quincy Adams to President, stating that "in the cup of bitterness, this to me was the bitterest drop of all."³⁴⁹ Fletcher served in the Tennessee Legislature from 1825-1829, and as Tennessee Secretary of State from 1830-1832. He had also served under Jackson in the Seminole Indian wars. In Earl's bust-length view, Fletcher stands before a red curtain and a gray-green background wearing a dark gray coat, black vest, white shirt and stock. His arms are crossed over his chest and he looks rather haughtily to his right.³⁵⁰ The simplistic nature of the portrait forecasts the development of Earl's style in Tennessee, however Fletcher's confident stance probably also reveals something of his personality. Few of Earl's other sitters (beyond Jackson) were depicted standing, and like the portrait of Mrs. Robeson, Fletcher's portrait serves as an important transition piece for Earl between his European and American styles.

³⁴⁹ Excerpts of this may be found in a letter from Earl to Jackson dated, Feb. 4, 1827. Jackson Library of Congress papers, on file at Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

³⁵⁰ The portrait was acquired by the Tennessee Historical Society in 1879 from the Fletcher family.

The Foster Family

Earl's sensitive ability to represent children is displayed in the most remarkable painting of the period, his depiction of the Foster family, a significant group painting in the history of Southern art (fig. 3.19). This is one of only two known group portraits Earl painted, and it is one of his acknowledged masterpieces. At nearly six by over seven feet it is also his largest non-Jackson painting. The delightful work depicts Mr. Ephraim Hubbard Foster (1794-1854), his wife, Mrs. Jane Mebane Lytle Dickenson Foster (1792-1847), whom he married in 1817, and their five children. Though the group is divided by gender, it is a portrait of familial contentment conveyed in the family's variety of loving embraces. The dashing handsome Foster was an up-and-coming Nashville attorney and politician and is displayed in his prime. The oldest boy, who leans on Foster's shoulder at the left of the work is John Dickenson Foster, his adopted son from his wife's first marriage to John Dickenson, a Nashville lawyer under whom Foster had studied.³⁵¹ A younger boy, Robert Coleman Foster III (1818-1871, or 1820-1873), who later served as an officer in the Mexican War and was known to have a slightly crossed eye which Earl faithfully rendered, is embraced by his father.³⁵² The right grouping includes Jane Ellen Foster (1822-1851), Sarah Foster, Jane Mebane Foster (the mother) and Ephraim McNairy Foster (1824-1827). Baby Ephraim was born in March 1824 which

³⁵¹ John Dickenson Foster went on to become a physician who died in New Orleans while treating patients with Yellow Fever.

³⁵² Clara Hieronymus, "Foster Family Comes Home," *Nashville Tennessean Magazine* Nov. 22, 1970.

dates the painting to later that year or perhaps 1825 after Earl resigned from his museum.³⁵³

The Fosters are depicted on either side of an open window with their five children, the most flamboyant one, Jane Ellen, being precariously perched in the window wearing an extraordinary plumed turban.³⁵⁴ Without being constrained to paint a glorious national hero, Earl depicts the Fosters in the comfortable ease of their home. The large scale also alludes to the grandiose style of the Foster's home. The attention to detail offers a rich catalog of the period's material culture, and reveals the sitters' elite status.³⁵⁵ The portrait's fine furnishings and the sitters' garments demonstrate the availability of fashionable consumer goods, even in the "western country" of Nashville. Steamboats and canals had greatly expanded the shipping of these goods in the 1820s. The Fosters' wealth is on full display here and they sit in gilded chairs before elegant fringed red draperies. The overall stylishness of the portrait not only demonstrates Earl's awareness of these trends, but also the expansion of prosperity beyond the American coasts. They wear fashionable attire, which attests to their stylish life of "classical harmony and domestic virtue."³⁵⁶

³⁵³ The names are provided by Robert M. McBride "Historic Sites in Tennessee: Preservation and Restoration" *Antiques Magazine*.

³⁵⁴ About twenty years later, Jane Ellen Foster was depicted in a beautiful painting by Washington B. Cooper (now in the private collection of a descendant) after marrying Edward S. Cheatham. She died at age twenty-nine on June 20, 1851.

³⁵⁵ As a statement about Earl's influence on southern art of the nineteenth century, Washington Bogart Cooper attempted a similar, though less successful version of Earl's grouping for the Thomas J. Foster family about 1850. The portrait is also owned by Cheekwood Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁵⁶ Wendy A. Cooper, *Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 233. The painting was included in the exhibition, "Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840" which was held at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1993 and traveled to the Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina in 1994. See also Nadia Tscherny, "Review: Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840," *The Burlington Magazine* 135:1087 (Oct.1993): 716-717.

Earl had difficulty, however, obtaining painting materials and suitable frames for his portraits in Nashville. For example, this painting was completed on mattress ticking, probably due to the unavailability of a suitably sized canvas. On Jackson's trip through the north in 1819 in celebration of his heroics in New Orleans, he mentioned Earl's difficulty getting frames in Nashville to Thomas Sully while he was taking Jackson's portrait. Sully passed the information on to his Philadelphia frame-maker, James Earle (no relation) who wrote to Earl in Nashville: "Jackson has this day sat to Mr. Sully for a portrait, and mentioned that it was difficult to get good frames for your paintings, and as I make for Mr. Sully, and by his approbation, I wish to send you six frames of different patterns with the price to each."³⁵⁷ Thereafter, Earl purchased most of his frames from James Earle. The gilded frame for the Foster family's portrait is exquisite. With its cove molding, turned baluster ornamentation, and decorative corner shells, it was most likely a product of James Earle and was probably custom-made for this portrait, Earl's most ambitious to date.

Comparison with Earl's first group portrait, painted in 1804 (fig. 1.12) demonstrates that his style had clearly advanced by the time he painted *The Foster Family* in 1825, although Earl continued to apply some of the same ideas he learned from his father and was practicing early in his career in the Connecticut River Valley. Both *The Family Portrait* and *The Foster Family* depict images of upper-class familial contentment. Family members are finely dressed and depicted with trappings of the genteel, if provincial lifestyle enjoyed by each family. Both images also depict the respective families seated before a large window, revealing a landscape view in the background, a favored convention from Earl's New England style with a long

³⁵⁷ James Earle to Ralph Earl, Feb. 17, 1819. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

tradition. In both portraits Earl used a bold color palette. During his early career in New England he favored rich reds and greens, a tendency he learned from his father. *The Foster Family*, while still bright uses a more varied tonal range and the colors are warmer and more naturalistic. The painting's grand composition is enhanced by its vivid coloration. The bold color, which is daring in some of its juxtapositions, in addition to the beautiful frame, alludes to the decorative function of such a picture. Earl's choice of hues in both paintings was also probably heavily dependent on the availability of paints where he was working, although the Foster painting is noticeably brighter than Earl's other paintings from the period and shows that he consciously chose the stunning palette, perhaps based on the sitters' preferences.

The Foster Family was by far the most ambitious work Earl had attempted in many years. Since his arrival in Tennessee, Earl had been dashing off standard bust-length portraits of individuals to satisfy demand and make enough money to support himself and his museum. However, 1825 was the year he relinquished proprietorship of his museum to devote more energy to his painting production. He was financially secure, and living at the Hermitage, and was able to commit himself single mindedly to his artistic endeavors. Therefore, he was able to devote his attention to this picture, and *The Foster Family* should be considered the true mark of his ability.

The father of the group, Ephraim Foster, graduated from Cumberland College (later the University of Nashville) in 1813 and served as Jackson's private secretary from 1813 to 1815, during the Creek War, while he studied law in the office of John Dickenson.³⁵⁸ He served as color-bearer in the War of 1812 and afterward returned to Nashville where he opened his own law office. He supported Jackson unwaveringly

³⁵⁸ Clara Hieronymus, "Foster Family Comes Home," *Nashville Tennessean Magazine*, Nov. 22, 1970.

until 1835 when he broke all political ties with the General and helped form the Tennessee Whig party in opposition to his former commander and the Democratic Party. Earl's portrait of Foster and his family during this period of political transition is revealing of a range of issues, from the development of politics at a State level, to the inner workings of Jacksonian-era government.³⁵⁹

The significance of *The Foster Family* extends beyond its status as an Earl masterpiece. The extravagance of the portrait is unmatched in the art of the region and many of the painting's characteristics became standard in the area based on Earl's influence. Only a handful of group portraits had even been attempted in the South at the time and portraits of individuals dominate. Whereas eighteenth-century group portraits created in New England typically included only mothers and children, in the nineteenth-century South the entire family unit was usually shown.³⁶⁰ For example, Chester Harding, a self-taught artist, produced a contemporary group portrait in Richmond, Kentucky. *The John Speed Smith Family* from 1819 represents a finely dressed couple with their young barefoot daughter (fig. 3.20). The price paid for this painting is unrecorded but Harding's portraits typically fetched twenty-five dollars apiece, half of Earl's price.³⁶¹ Another group portrait, produced by Joshua Johnston in 1818, *Mrs. Thomas Everett and Children* (fig. 3.21) represents Mrs. Everett and her five young children. It was painted in commemoration of the recently departed Mr.

³⁵⁹ The painting is owned by the Cheekwood Museum of Art in Nashville, Tennessee. It was donated to the museum in 1970 by Mrs. Josephus Daniels Jr., a descendant of Robert Coleman Foster II.

³⁶⁰ Although there are notable exceptions to this such as Robert Feke's *Isaac Royall and Family* (1741, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts), Joseph Blackburn's *Isaac Winslow and Family* (1755, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), and John Greenwood's *Greenwood-Lee Family* (1747, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

³⁶¹ Jessie Poesch, *The Art of the Old South, 1560-1860* (New York: Harrison House, 1983), 170.

Everett. Johnston was one of the earliest black artists in the United States. He worked in Baltimore and claimed to be self taught, although some scholars link him to Charles Peale Polk. He represented the group with direct simplicity, stiffly posed with rather ovoid arms in a simple interior room. The two aforementioned portraits represent typical production in the South at the time Earl was working there. While the portraits are charming, they are rather stiff. Earl's style clearly benefitted from his time abroad and he was by far the most experienced artist in the region.

Earl also depicted Ephraim Foster's parents, Robert Coleman Foster (1769-1844) and Ann S. Foster (1770-1850), in a pair of pendant portraits (figs. 3.22 and 3.23). The senior Foster had preceded his son in Tennessee politics. In the paintings, the mature sitters are presented in a stoic manner. They may have been painted at two different times since the portraits are less well matched than Earl's other pairs. Mr. Foster is seated before Earl's standard red curtain. Mrs. Foster holds an open book and marks her place with her finger, a visual device Earl had applied in his New England period works and which he had probably learned from his father. As he did for most of his older women, Earl hides Mrs. Foster's hair beneath a bonnet.³⁶² Earl probably painted the Fosters in his early years in Nashville, certainly long before the family's 1835 split with Jackson (when they joined the Tennessee Whig party), which was by extension also a split with Earl. Depicting three generations of one of Tennessee's first and premier families, Earl's portraits of the Foster's demonstrate Earl's popularity in the region in addition to the strong family ties in the South.

³⁶² Mr. Foster's portrait is at Cheekwood, and Mrs. Foster's is known through a photograph at Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Earl's Portrait of James Monroe

In 1819 James Monroe made an extended trip through the United States to promote unity after the War of 1812, following George Washington's example of taking an American Presidential tour. Leaving Washington on March 30, 1819 he headed south to Augusta, Georgia. From there he turned west into Tennessee, arriving in Nashville on June 6, 1819. Monroe spent five days in Nashville, and another three at Jackson's home, the Hermitage, outside the city. According to David Meschutt, "Jackson was a prickly character and his relations with Monroe were not always friendly, but at this time the two men were on cordial terms."³⁶³

Earl met Monroe through Jackson and painted him at the Hermitage.³⁶⁴ Earl eagerly capitalized on the chance to depict the sitting U.S. President for his museum, and wasted no time in painting Monroe's portrait, as well as that of his General, Edmund P. Gaines. A notice appeared in the Nashville paper on July 3, less than a month after the visit, saying that "We have viewed with much pleasure, the Portrait of the President of the United States, and that of gen. GAINES, just finished by Mr. Earl...they are certainly most excellent and striking likenesses of the originals."³⁶⁵ Though nothing is known about the appearance of either portrait (both have been lost), Earl's picture of Gaines offers one of the few instances in which he depicted a Jackson rival. Though Monroe and Gaines were pleasant on their visit with Jackson,

³⁶³ David Meschutt "The Portraiture of James Monroe, 1758-1831" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2005), 130.

³⁶⁴ On page eight of a list he compiled of the portraits he executed for his museum Earl records a "Portrait of James Monroe Esquire President of the United States, painted from the life, when on his Southern Tour." T. Harvey Gage papers, American Antiquarian Society.

³⁶⁵ Earl described Gaines's portrait in his museum list, which may have been publicly available at the museum: "Portrait of Major General Edmund P. Gaines, who signalized himself in the gallant defense of Port Eerie." *The Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, July 3, 1819.

Gaines opposed Indian removals and became a harsh critic of Jackson throughout his presidential years.³⁶⁶

A good friend of Earl's from Nashville, Doctor J.C. Bronaugh, wrote to the artist from Washington on March 2, 1822, requesting that Earl send his portrait of Monroe to Washington. According to Bronaugh, "Mrs. Monroe is extremely anxious to get the Portrait of the President which I promised her and I informed her that she may calculate certainly upon receiving it during the spring. If you have not already sent it I will that you lose no time in doing so. Send in with Col. Gadsden via New Orleans and to his care at this place."³⁶⁷ Mrs. Monroe's eagerness to get the portrait reveals President Monroe's approval of the work. This was not simply a quick study soon forgotten, but a fine, finished portrait that the First Lady was eager to have in her possession. Unfortunately, the painting's appearance is unrecorded and it is currently unlocated.

In addition to Monroe, Earl also depicted two other U.S. presidents, Martin Van Buren, and James K. Polk, in addition to his Jackson suite. However, little information exists on the Van Buren work and, like the Monroe, it is also unlocated.³⁶⁸

Polk and Overton Portraits:

Earl actually pictured James K. Polk long before he became President, while he was an up-and-coming politician from Columbia, Tennessee (fig. 2.6). Polk

³⁶⁶ John Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 148.

³⁶⁷ Bronaugh to Earl March 2, 1822. Ralph Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

³⁶⁸ Inquiries at Van Buren's home, Lindenwald as well as with the National Portrait Gallery turned up no further information regarding the portrait.

commissioned Earl through their mutual friend John Overton (1767-1833). Overton wrote to Earl that “Young Mr. Polk is at my house and wishes to sit for his picture tomorrow and in the succeeding days if in your power: - And to increase the job, I will sit for mine.” Overton’s plantation, Traveller’s Rest, was located seven miles south of Nashville, and Overton wrote Earl that, “I hope the country may prove as pleasant to you” as the city and that “Mr. Polk wishes to go home on Saturday.”³⁶⁹ Earl’s resulting portrait depicts a youthful but modest Polk, dressed as a gentleman, against a brown background. Later, Earl painted Mrs. Polk, probably at the White House when Polk was serving as a Senator from Tennessee (ca. 1829, James K. Polk Ancestral Home, Columbia, Tennessee).

The Overton portrait, painted at the same time as Polk’s pictures a brown interior with a red drape to the left and a green table on the right (fig. 3.24).³⁷⁰ On the table, a silver inkwell with a white feather pen is visible, along with three volumes, *Pope*, volume 5, and two volumes of the *Overton Reports*. Overton owned a substantial law library and served as an agent for eastern publishers of law treatises in Nashville. The “Overton Reports” were his own collection of writings detailing many of the early decisions in Tennessee courts. They were edited by his colleague, Judge Thomas Emmerson and they did much to establish precedent in the state of Tennessee judicial system.

Overton was one of Jackson’s oldest friends, and perhaps the only one who knew the actual circumstances surrounding Jackson’s courtship and marriage to

³⁶⁹ Polk’s home was in Columbia, Tennessee, forty miles south of Traveller’s Rest. Overton to Earl. Nov 23 (no year), Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

³⁷⁰ The painting descended through the Overton family and was given in 1956 to Traveller’s Rest Plantation (now a historic home) by Mrs. Henry M. Dickenson and hangs today in the house.

Rachel Donelson Robards. He was quiet, modest, and ambitious, probably offering a good foil, as Earl did, to Jackson.³⁷¹ Overton was well-acquainted with Rachel even before she met Jackson. When Overton moved to Mercer County, Kentucky in 1787 to begin his law career he boarded with the family of Lewis Robards and his then-wife, Rachel. Later when he moved to Nashville in 1789, he boarded with Rachel's mother, the widow of John Donelson, and shared a room with Andrew Jackson. Rachel soon followed when her marriage to Robards became rocky and living under Mrs. Donelson's roof, the three became extremely close. Earl may have taken extra care with Overton's portrait because his special friendship both with Andrew and Rachel Jackson.

Although the letter that commissioned the Polk and Overton portraits is undated, the pair were probably painted in 1817. Overton was a bachelor until 1820, when at age fifty-four he married Mary McConnell May, sister of Hugh Lawson White, a Tennessee lawyer and United States Senator whom Earl also painted (1820s, Tennessee State Museum, Nashville), and with whom Jackson also developed a rift. Because Earl did not initially paint Mrs. Overton, it seems likely that the Polk and Overton sittings occurred before their 1820 marriage. In addition Earl recorded a portrait of Overton in 1817 in his Memorandum book. Earl noted that he "Painted for the Hon John Overton a portrait of Genl. Jackson & one of himself - \$100 paid. p.s. the portrait of the Genl not quite finished as yet."³⁷² This portrait is similar in nature to Earl's other Tennessee portraits, but particularly interesting for the extra care Earl

³⁷¹ For more information about Overton see Henry Lee Swint, "Traveller's Rest: Home of Judge John Overton," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 26 (Summer 1967): 119-136.

³⁷² Memorandum book from 1817, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

took in its execution. Like Polk's image, the majority of Earl's Tennessee portraits are rather plain and simplified, and typically depict the sitter before a nondescript background. However, Earl included extra details in the execution of John Overton's portrait. He added the red curtain, and the legal volumes, making it one of Earl's more carefully executed Tennessee works.

The painting also offers another example of a transition piece between the Grand Manner he learned abroad and his more pared down Tennessee style. The inclusion of books signifies Overton's status as a learned man and the presence of the rule of law in Tennessee. They also offer a parallel with European portraits which so frequently utilized books as visual and meaningful components. For example, Jean-François de Troy's 1750 portrait of the Marquis d'Marigny (fig. 3.25) represented the future director general of the king's buildings as he appeared on his two year grand tour in Italy. Insecure about his humble origins, the Marquis is depicted as learned, shown seated at his desk with a book in hand. Earl had become very familiar with this style of portrait in the months he spent in 1814-15 copying paintings at the Louvre and producing portraits in Paris.

Portrait of Dr. Horace Holley

Like Monroe's portrait, Earl's painting of Horace Holley (1781-1827) is also well documented (fig. 3.26). According to a letter from Holley to his brother, "I have been asked and consented to sit for a portrait here by Mr. Earl, a distinguished painter from eastward. He has quite a gallery of heads...mine is to go among them."³⁷³

³⁷³ Horace Holley to Luther Holley, from Nashville, dated August 14, 1823. Tennessee State Library and Archives. The portrait was given to the Tennessee Historical Society on April 6, 1858 by Mrs. Catherine Steward and is Earl's standard size. Horace Holley's portrait, along with the large Jackson,

Holley was the President of Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky from 1818 to his death in 1827. It was the oldest and most highly esteemed school in the region at the time. Andrew Jackson Donelson attended law school there after the Florida campaigns in the early 1820s. This is one of the few portraits from this period where the date can be firmly documented to 1823, based on Holley's letter to his brother.

Earl's portrait of Holley displays a simplified view of the distinguished college President. Its lack of extraneous details perhaps bespeaks of Earl's busy schedule at that time. Earl was collecting objects and managing the museum in 1823 in addition to painting portraits to support himself and build the gallery's collection. Jackson was also in the midst of his first Presidential campaign, and Earl was promoting his image as well as beginning his printmaking enterprise (discussed in chapter 5). Earl may have also sought a uniformity in his "gallery of heads" by not including additional objects in these paintings. As the letter from Holley indicates, it was upon Earl's request that he sit for his portrait, rather than having commissioned the work himself, which shows that Earl was soliciting portraits for his museum in addition to taking private commissions. Based on this canvas, it seems that Earl may have had a different manner of working for this type of portrait (and the time he had to complete it).³⁷⁴ The "gallery of heads" in his museum, which were not commissioned works but rather were sought out by Earl, seem to be his simplest. For other private commissions, such as Overton's, the Winchester's, or the Foster

and Napoleon, which were all part of Earl's museum collection, are still together in downtown Nashville at the Tennessee State Museum.

³⁷⁴ For example, Polk's portrait was an equally simplistic example, however as Overton's letter stated, Earl only had a few days to work on it.

Family's, he added meaningful details. In addition, the Jackson family had an established connection with Transylvania University and a portrait of the school's distinguished President reveals an example of the type of learned and regionally significant individual that Earl sought for his museum.

Ann Phillips Rodgers Grundy

One of Earl's most appealing, and best preserved portraits from his years in Tennessee depicts Ann Phillips Rodgers Grundy (1779-1847, fig. 3.27). Born in Lunenburg County, Virginia, her parents John and Sarah Daugherty Rodgers moved to Kentucky when she was two years old. There in 1797 she met and married Felix Grundy (1777-1840), an attorney, United States Senator, and later U.S. Attorney General in the Van Buren administration. The couple moved to Nashville in 1807 and had twelve children. Ann Grundy is known for having, along with Samuel Ament, organized Nashville's first Sunday School in 1820 to which there was surprisingly a great deal of resistance. People did not like the leadership of a woman and felt that to teach "school" on Sunday was a "desecration of the Sabbath," according to a note posted on the door of the building where they met (they could not meet at the church). Within a couple of years however, churches began to realize the virtues of Sunday school, the opposition faded, and most churches began holding their own bible lessons on Sundays.³⁷⁵

Earl's portrait depicts Mrs. Grundy wearing a dark dress with a thin light blue scarf around her neck. Her dark hair is tucked under an ornate blue and white bonnet, and she is seated in a red chair against a plain brown background. In this case, he

³⁷⁵ *Portrait Painting in Tennessee*, 208. See also Joseph Howard Parks, *Felix Grundy, Champion of Democracy* (Baton Rouge, 1840).

succeeded in capturing the woman's pious simplicity, and her piercing blue eyes stand out as a remarkable feature. Although the work is not dated and there is no record of the commission, the care that Earl took in its execution reveals that it was probably painted in 1825 or later, and the features of the work make it a wonderful example of his Tennessee works. Because Mrs. Grundy's husband was so prominent and well known to Jackson and Earl, it is likely that Earl painted Felix Grundy as well; however if it exists, that portrait is undocumented and unlocated. Earl rarely depicted female sitters without also painting their husbands, and the Grundy's were avid Jacksonians.³⁷⁶

Though the examples mentioned here offer only a small sampling of Earl's Tennessee portraits, they reveal a great deal about the continued development of art in the South and Earl's critical role in it. The Jackson family portraits reveal a close-knit family, eager to gaze upon each other's likenesses, but also cultured enough to afford them and to realize their significance. The ambitious *Foster Family* set the standard for elite portraiture in the region, and evidences Earl's grandiose manner. All of these varied citizens and their portraits offer documentary evidence of the emerging culture of the South, which, without Earl's help, might not be visible.

The portraits Earl produced in Nashville also reveal the powerful impact Andrew Jackson had on Earl's career. Doctors, lawyers, politicians, landed gentry, academics, it seems that anyone that could afford a portrait, sought out Earl's services. The vast majority of them had connections with Andrew Jackson. Earl's popularity reveals that there was a desire for fine arts in the mid-South in the early

³⁷⁶ Earl mentioned Grundy's election to the Tennessee Senate in a letter to Jackson at the White House in October 1829. Ralph E.W. Earl to Andrew Jackson (from Nashville to Washington) October 19, 1829, "Mr Grundy is elected senator." Feller, Moser, et al., 7:501.

nineteenth century even though none had been available there before. In the succeeding decades, many artists would travel through the area and others, such as John Wood Dodge, Washington Bogart Cooper, and Samuel Shaver would establish residence in Tennessee and continue the artistic precedent set by Earl in the region. Although there certainly were artists working in the South prior to Earl's arrival, there was not an already established style. Southern patrons had tended to favor European trends, over a Colonial New England manner, and Earl's training abroad helped him win favor in the South. In the end, Earl's own unique brand of Colonial simplicity combined with European Grand Manner suited his patrons well, and became the area's dominant artistic style. All of this experience further enhanced Earl's ability to convey the general/President in a variety of ways.



Figure 3.1. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Rachel Jackson*, 1817. Oil on canvas. No longer extant. Reproduced from S.G. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, vol. III (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Co., 1918), 440.



Figure 3.2. Unknown artist, possibly Washington Bogart Cooper, Copy of Earl's *Mrs. Rachel Jackson* (1817), 1830. Oil on canvas, 28.5 x 23 inches. Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 18, 2010).



Figure 3.3. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Rachel Jackson*, 1825. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. The Hermitage, Hermitage, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 21, 2010).



Figure 3.4. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Rachel Jackson*, 1827. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 19, 2010).



Figure 3.5. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Rachel Jackson*, ca. 1831. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 inches, The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 21, 2010).



Figure 3.6. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson Jr.*, ca. 1820. Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 in. The Hermitage, Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 21, 2010).



Figure 3.7. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson Jr.*, ca 1829. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. The Hermitage, Home of President Andrew Jackson. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 21, 2010).



Figure 3.8. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Rachel Jackson Lawrence*, ca. 1833. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 27, 2010).



Figure 3.9. Dario Varotari the Younger, *Portrait of a Young Person Pointing Left*, 17th century. Etching, 16.3 x 12.7 cm. Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, California. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed February 27, 2010).



Figure 3.10. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Rachel Jackson Donelson*, ca. 1838. Oil on canvas, 23 ½ in. x 16 in. Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 27, 2010).

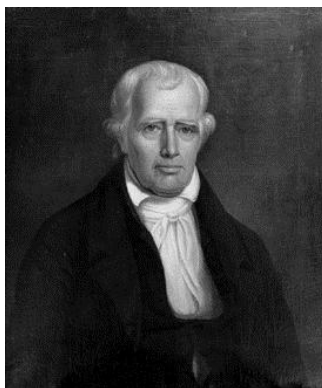


Figure 3.11. Ralph E.W. Earl, *John Donelson*, ca. 1825. Oil on canvas, 30 in. x 20 in. The Hermitage, Home of President Andrew Jackson. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 27, 2010).



Figure 3.12. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mary Purnell Donelson*, ca. 1825. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. The Hermitage, Home of President Andrew Jackson. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 27, 2010).



Figure 3.13. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Emily Tennessee Donelson*, 1830. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 in. The Hermitage, Home of President Andrew Jackson. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 27, 2010).



Figure 3.14. Ralph E.W. Earl, *General James Winchester*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 29 ½ x 24 in. Historic Cragfont, Castalian Springs, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed March 10, 2010).



Figure 3.15. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Susan Black Winchester*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 29 ½ x 24 in. Historic Cragfont, Castalian Springs, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 28, 2010).



Figure 3.16. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Selima Winchester Robeson*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 28 x 23 ½ in. Historic Cragfont, Castalian Springs, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 27, 2010).



Figure 3.17. Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Portrait of Mrs. James Fraser of Castle Fraser*, c. 1817. Oil on canvas, 30 1/8 x 25 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed February 28, 2010).



Figure 3.18. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Thomas H. Fletcher*, 1817. Oil on canvas, Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed March 10, 2010).



Figure 3.19. Ralph E.W. Earl, *The Foster Family*, ca. 1825. Oil on mattress ticking, 70 1/16 x 53 1/16in (framed). Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Painting in the South: 1564-1980* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Art, 1983), 47.



Figure 3.20. Chester Harding, *John Speed Smith Family, Richmond, Kentucky*, c. 1819. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky. Reproduced from Jessie Poesch, *The Art of the Old South, 1560-1860* (New York: Harrison House, 1983), 169.



Figure 3.21. Joshua Johnston, *Mrs. Thomas Everette and Children*, 1818. Oil on canvas, 55 3/16 x 38 7/8 in. Maryland Historical society, Baltimore. Reproduced from Jessie Poesch, *The Art of the Old South, 1560-1860* (New York: Harrison House, 1983), 159.

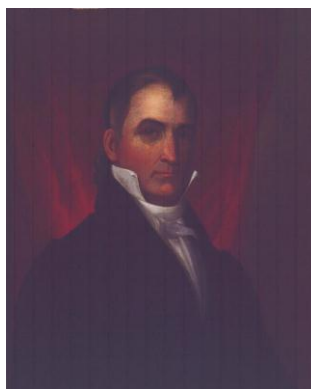


Figure 3.22. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Robert Coleman Foster*, ca. 1825. Oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 25 1/4 in. Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 28, 2010).



Figure 3.23. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Mrs. Ann S. Foster*, ca. 1825. Original unlocated. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 28, 2010).



Figure 3.24. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Judge John Overton*, ca. 1817. Oil on canvas, 28 ¼ x 24. Travellers Rest Plantation and Museum, Nashville, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 28, 2010).



Figure 3.25. Jean-François de Troy, *Portrait of the Marquis d'Marigny*, 1750. Oil on canvas, 132 x 96 cm. Musée national du château, Versailles. Reproduced from André Chastel, *French Art: The Ancien Régime, 1620-1775* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 84.



Figure 3.26. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Dr. Horace Holley*, 1823. Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed March 10, 2009).



Figure 3.27. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Ann Phillips Rodgers Grundy*. Date unknown. Oil on canvas, 30 in. x 24 in. Downtown Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed February 28, 2010).

**CHAPTER FOUR:
IMAGERY IN THE SERVICE OF POLITICAL AMBITION: EARL'S
JACKSON PORTRAITS**

“He is the greatest man I ever saw.”³⁷⁷

Jackson's victory over the British at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 ended the War of 1812 and launched him to the status of a national hero, eclipsing even the reputation of George Washington for a time. Philip Hone, a Henry Clay supporter and New York merchant admitted in his diary that Jackson was “a *gourmand* of adulation...no man ever lived in the country to whom the country was so much indebted. Talk of him as the second Washington! It won't do now; Washington was only the first Jackson.”³⁷⁸ Within a few years of the battle, portraits of the general were in high demand and were being produced in significant numbers. By the time of his death thirty years later, Jacksonian portraiture was seemingly endless and in myriad formats, not only paintings but also prints, on dinnerware, and in statuettes. As the artist closest to the man, Earl produced dozens of Jacksonian portraits over a twenty-one year period, and these constitute an extraordinary study of the life and politics of a heroic general turned President. Jackson's patronage also allowed Earl to draw from the varied artistic source material he had acquired in his younger years from his father and in Europe. His Jackson portraits often recalled portrayals of leaders of the past even as they displayed a regional style. They also presented a new type of leader who exemplified the maturing nation. Over the years, Earl variously

³⁷⁷ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Whiteside Earl, from Nashville, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett Papers, 31:3, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁷⁸ Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone*, 1828-1851, ed. Allan Nevins (New York, 1927), 1:96-97, cited in Robert Remini's introduction to James G. Barber, *Old Hickory: A Life Sketch of Andrew Jackson* (Washington: National Portrait Gallery, 1990), 16.

portrayed Jackson as a romantic gentleman farmer, a distinguished citizen, and a noble statesman, depending on the situation. Taken together, Earl's portraits of this intriguing individual, considered chronologically and in the context of contemporary portrayals of other generals turned statesman, such as George Washington and Napoleon Bonaparte, as well as within the tumultuous Jackson administration, offer a fascinating glimpse into a critical era, both in art and history.

Earl's portraits of Jackson present a specially crafted persona informed by an intimate friendship. The artist called him "the most amiable man...I ever saw, and a most perfect gentleman...he is a strong friend...and a formidable enemy."³⁷⁹ Earl painted his friend's image continuously from his arrival in Nashville 1817 to the artist's sudden death in 1838. He personally witnessed Jackson's numerous triumphs, defeats, and scandals, both private and political, and he built a comprehensive portrayal of this divisive figure which comprises a visual celebration of the hero of New Orleans.

It is also nearly impossible to tell which portraits Earl produced directly from sittings with Jackson who seems to have been in Earl's presence constantly, and which were copied from other portraits. Earl had everyday access to his subject, both at the Hermitage and at the White House and his studio in both residences became a central room where important matters often transpired. The confusing nature of Earl's Jackson images, in addition to the frequent similarities in multiple portraits, makes assessing Earl's work especially difficult.³⁸⁰ For these reasons and because of the lack

³⁷⁹Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Whiteside Earl, from Nashville, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett Papers, 31:3, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

of portrait records from the presidential years, it is likely that the extent of Earl's Jacksonian imagery will never be completely understood. Despite this, the wealth of extant portraits offer enough visual evidence to demonstrate their importance for Jackson, for Earl, and for the history of American art.

Jackson's Appearance

Andrew Jackson's striking and unique appearance, with his trademark brushed-back white mane is still recognizable to all Americans (in part due to his portrait having been on the twenty dollar bill since 1913), and much has been made of it both in his own time and since. Throughout his life, journalists and many others commented on his looks, which in combination with his vibrant personality made him an especially appealing subject for portraitists. According to one English traveler, General Jackson had:

an erect military bearing, and a head set within a considerable fierté upon his shoulders...and his frame, features, voice, and actions, have a natural and most peculiar warlikeness...His face is unlike any other: its prevailing expression is energy; but there is, so to speak, a lofty honorableness in its thin worn lines, combined with a penetrating and sage look of talent, that would single him out, even among extraordinary men, as a person of a more than usually superior cast...In the days of chivalry he would have been the mirror of tried soldiers – an old iron-gray knight invincible and lion-like, but something stiff in his courtesy. His eye is of a dangerous fixedness, deepset and over hung by bushy gray eyebrows, his features long...In his mouth there is a redeeming suavity as he speaks; but the instant his lips close, a vizor of steel would scarcely look more impenetrable. His manners are dignified, and have been called highbred and aristocratic by travelers; but, to my mind are the model of republican simplicity and straightforwardness. He is quite a man one would be proud to show as the exponent of the manners of his country.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ I am indebted to the extensive research undertaken in James Barber's book, *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study*. Susan Clover Symonds' master's thesis has been an important addition. In the 1980s LeeAnn Tilley worked as a researcher at the Hermitage and her notes have been invaluable to this project as well.

³⁸¹ English Traveler, *New Monthly Magazine*, cited in James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (New York: Mason Brothers, 1960), III:598, and also in Reda C. Goff "A Physical Profile of Andrew Jackson" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XXVIII:3 (Fall 1969): 301-2.

Perhaps surprisingly, considering the criticism Jackson received for his lack of sophistication, many remarked on the man's dignified manner throughout his life. British actress Fanny Kemble described him as "very tall and thin, but erect and dignified."³⁸²

Despite the reputation Jackson had made for himself in his younger days as a dueling gambler, his distinguished appearance and manner had been noted even then. A young woman from Rowan County, North Carolina for example, remembered a young Jackson at the age of twenty (around the late 1780s), saying:

He was full six feet tall and very slender, but yet of such straightness of form and such proud and graceful carriage as to make him look well-proportioned...His eyes were handsome. They were very large, a kind of steel-blue, and when he talked to you he always looked straight into your own eyes. I have talked with him a great many times and never saw him avert his eyes from me for an instant. It was the same way with men...When he was calm he talked slowly and with a very good selected language...But either calm or animated there was always something about him which I cannot describe except to say that it was a presence, or kind of majesty I never saw in any other young man.³⁸³

Another acquaintance remembered his appearance in 1828, the year of his first election to the Presidency:

Picture yourself a military-looking man, above the ordinary height, dressed plainly, but with great neatness; dignified and grave...but always courteous and affable, with keen, searching eyes, iron-gray hair, standing stiffly up from an expansive forehead, a face somewhat furrowed by care and time, and expressive of deep thought and active intellect, and you have before you the general Jackson.³⁸⁴

³⁸² Cited in Goff, 302.

³⁸³ Cited in Goff, 303, as well as Augustus C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson, Pioneer, Patriot, Soldier, Politician, President*, 2 vols. (New York, 1904), 1:67-69.

³⁸⁴ Cited in Parton, 3:160.

During Jackson's second term James Longacre and James Herring prominently featured him in their *National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans*:

The person of Jackson is tall and thin, and indicates a life of arduous toil. His countenance, though affected by the same cause, is animated and striking. In his manners, he is as though he had never dwelt in camps, nor been removed from scenes of the gentlest courtesy. His name will go down to posterity as the HERO OF NEW ORLEANS, whose military ability and covered with glory our citizen soldiers: and his presidential career will afford to the future historian and the political economist many important incidents and lessons of wisdom.³⁸⁵

Earl's repeated imagery of Jackson pictured him in ways similar to what these texts describe and reinforced a new widespread viewpoint for Jackson. His portraits cemented these positive ideas about his sitter in the popular imagination.

Jackson's demeanor also received a great deal of negative attention in history books, despite his elegant carriage, language, and manners, especially in his later years. Historical sources offer conflicting reports about the man's comportment, although it seems that he did become more polite and genteel with age. According to Nicholas P. Trist of Virginia, the husband of one of Thomas Jefferson's grand-daughters, and also a friend and secretary of Jackson's, Thomas Jefferson, who had met Jackson at Lynchburg, Virginia in Jackson's younger years dwelled upon his impeccable manners as the most surprising thing about him. According to Trist, "How [Jackson] could have got such manners – manners which, for their polish, no less than their dignity, would have attracted the attention of every one at any court in Europe – was to [Jefferson] an enigma."³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ James Barton Longacre and James Herring, *National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1834), 1:188.

³⁸⁶ Cited in Parton, 3:603.

Women were often particularly fearful of meeting Jackson due to his reputation for having a furious temper, but were almost always charmed by him. He was particularly sensitive to women and their feelings, even early in his career. Upon his arrival in New Orleans for the battle, for example, Jackson had been invited to dinner by Mr. and Mrs. Edward and Louise Livingston (he, a lawyer and chairman of the New Orleans Committee of Public Defense).³⁸⁷ Female guests, hearing of their famous dinner companion's arrival wondered what to do with the wild General from Tennessee, but at the end of the evening, asked their hostess, "Is *this* your back woods-man? Why, madam, he is a prince."³⁸⁸ Livingston later described Jackson as "erect, composed, perfectly self-possessed, with martial bearing...One whom nature had stamped a gentleman."³⁸⁹ Earl's portraits went on to depict Jackson as nothing less than the 'self-possessed' gentleman that Livingston described.

Earl's Jacksonian Style

Earl brought together numerous artistic ideas in crafting a complete image of Andrew Jackson. The Colonial portrait style of New England which he had learned from his father and practiced in his early portraits of the rural gentry formed a strong foundation. While he depicted his sitters with great dignity, his provincial portraits often celebrated the sitter in a straightforward and simplified manner as in the portrayal of an unknown gentleman from 1802 (fig. 1.4). Many of Earl's portraits of Jackson represent him in a similarly direct manner, bust-length frontal views of a

³⁸⁷ Livingston impressed Jackson greatly and went on to become his secretary, translator, confidential advisor and aide-de-camp. After this, the two maintained a lifelong friendship.

³⁸⁸ Parton, 2:31. Recounted in Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988): 90-99.

³⁸⁹ Louise Livingston Hunt, *Memoir of Mrs. Edward Livingston with Letters Hitherto Unpublished* (New York, 1886) p. 53-54. Cited in Remini, 89.

well-dressed gentleman. Earl utilized this mode to offer a sense of Jackson's honesty and humanity, and since he produced them quickly, it was a good way to meet the high demand for Jackson's image. William B. Lewis, a close friend of the general's, remarked that one of Earl's portraits of Jackson at the Hermitage "gives that expression of frankness and mild benevolence which everyone who has seen him always speaks of and which have been remarkably characteristic of his works of his whole life."³⁹⁰

Earl's exposure to the rich tradition of Grand Manner portraiture in Europe from 1809 to 1815 also aided his portrayals of Jackson. In England he undoubtedly encountered the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Benjamin West, who had tutored Earl, was known to recommend Reynolds' paintings to any young artist interested in portraiture. Earl owned a copy of James Northcote's *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, and it seems that he took heart in the renowned artist's advice "that a painter must not only be of necessity an imitator of the works of nature...but he must be as necessarily an imitator of the works of other painters."³⁹¹ Privileged to have hundreds of live sittings with his patron, Earl combined nature with the works of other painters in developing Jackson's image. Copying paintings at the Louvre alongside fellow Americans such as his friend John Vanderlyn, Earl had also seen, as he put it "all the fine paintings...on the continent [which Napoleon had brought] to Paris for the

³⁹⁰ Cited in Georgia Brady Bumgardner, "Political Portraiture: Two Prints of Andrew Jackson," *American Art Journal* 18:4 (Autumn 1986): 90.

³⁹¹ Earl listed "Northcote's *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds*" among the books in his library. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society. James Northcote, *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Comprising original anecdotes, of many distinguished persons his contemporaries, and a brief analysis of his Discourses, to which are added, Varieties on art* (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Son, 1817). The quotation above is cited in Linda J. Docherty, "Original Copies: Gilbert Stuart's Companion Portraits of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison" *American Art* 22:2 (Summer 2008): 93.

benefit of the arts and his own aggrandizement.” He became aware of Imperialistic portrait styles as well and the power of propagandistic imagery, and even “had the satisfaction of seeing all the allied Monarchs of Europe in the city of Paris.”³⁹² As a result, Earl had rich source material upon which to draw in formulating an image of Jackson.

Earl’s early full-length portrait of Jackson which won him his reputation depicts a monumental general at the Battle of New Orleans with combat raging in the background (fig. 4.1). The loose, romantic brushstroke of the sky combined with the heroic figure before the battlefield, as well as the large scale of the portrait recalls heroic eighteenth-century English historicized portraits created by the likes of Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, and Thomas Lawrence. Reynolds’ 1766 depiction of General John Burgoyne, for example, similarly shows a commanding presence silhouetted against a stormy romantic landscape background (fig. 4.2). Burgoyne became a national hero after he led British forces in a decisive victory over the Spanish in the Seven Years’ War.³⁹³

Several of Earl’s Jackson portraits also have parallels to Napoleonic imagery, something that may have been controversial for those who feared President Jackson’s heavy handed administrative approach. During his presidency, Jackson increased the authority of his position immensely, effectively changing the office’s role. Although this set the model for many future Presidents, some feared the power that Jackson placed in his own hands. Upon his election he fired many government employees,

³⁹² Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Whiteside Earl, from Nashville, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett Papers, 31:3, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁹³ Lisa Duffy-Zeballos, “Sir Joshua Reynolds’ *General John Burgoyne*,” *Archives of Facial Plastic Surgery* 3 (Oct-Dec. 2001): 300-301

some of whom had been there since Washington's day, removing more government officials than all of his predecessors combined. He saw them as corrupt or incompetent, but his detractors saw his actions as imperial ambition. Perhaps because of this criticism, which in addition to his status as a self-made man drew parallels with Napoleon, Earl was not overt in referencing imperialistic imagery. Some of the images, especially his equestrian portrait of Jackson (fig. 4.18), do subtly recall that style though. Earl was certainly aware of the powerful tradition of Napoleon-era portraiture which he had studied in Paris, but he carefully combined many past artistic styles with his own personal manner to craft what he and the Jackson circle saw as the appropriate image for the heroic general turned political leader.

Encountering Jackson

Though not everyone agreed with Jackson, people were fascinated by him. He was incredibly charismatic, with a magnetic personality. After training as a lawyer, he served as attorney general for Tennessee in its frontier days in 1791. He went on to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1796 as the first representative from his state. In 1797 he moved into the Senate. He found these posts stifling however, despising corruption and back room deals, and he resigned after only a year allegedly stating "I was born for the storm and the calm doesn't suit me." He then served as a Tennessee judge from 1798 to 1804, and in 1802 he became major general of the state militia. He also maintained his own private commercial interests during this time, buying huge amounts of land, building his plantation, and even running a frontier store. In his military service, during both the War of 1812 and the Seminole Wars, he galvanized thousands of young, untrained volunteers into an effective army. He

served as governor for the newly acquired Florida territory in 1821 and oversaw the transfer of the state from Spanish control to the United States. He then served another short term in the Senate before retiring to his beloved Hermitage. After an unsuccessful presidential bid in 1824, he ran again in 1828, this time successfully against John Quincy Adams. He was resoundingly reelected in 1832, after which he retired to the Hermitage for good in 1837, where he died in 1845, having lived much longer than anyone expected.

Although Jackson had already gained some national exposure before 1812, there are no known portraits of him before his heroics at the Battle of New Orleans. Congressman and fellow commissioner at Ghent with John Adams, Albert Gallatin remembered him during his early years as “a tall, lank, uncouth-looking personage, with long locks of hair hanging over his face, and a queue down his back tied with an eel skin; his dress singular, his manners and deportment those of a rough backwoodsman.”³⁹⁴ With such characterizations, Jackson needed an artist to build his public image.

Earl was not the first to make a portrait of Jackson. One of the earliest extant examples is an 1815 miniature of the General by Jean François de Vallée, a French artist who was living in New Orleans (fig. 4.3). In Vallée’s crude yet idealized image, Jackson appears quite young and healthier than he actually would have been at the end of a hard-fought war; he was forty-seven years old and in very poor health. Early Jackson biographer, James Parton noted that the painting, “is so unlike the portraits familiar to the public, that not a man in the United States would recognize in it the features of General Jackson... The miniature reminds you of a good country deacon

³⁹⁴ Cited in James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860) 1:196.

out for a day's soldiering.”³⁹⁵ In the first oil painting of the General, made by Nathan Wheeler the same year (fig. 4.4), Jackson's distinctive features were also nearly unrecognizable.³⁹⁶ As in the Vallée image, Jackson wears his general's attire, but, the painting has been called “more of a caricature than a lifelike representation.”³⁹⁷ The crudity of these early Jackson representations only worked in Earl's favor when he began painting the general just over a year later in early 1817. Earl's representations were much more accurate and this helped solidify his status as Jackson's painter.

Earl and Jackson's first meeting went unrecorded but Jackson was clearly pleased with the artist's work. Only four months after the artist's arrival in Nashville Jackson personally provided one of his portraits to John Eaton, the author of an 1817 biography of his life, saying it was “one of the best likeness [*sic*], taken by an excellent artist here – a Mr. Earles.”³⁹⁸ The portrait could have been any of the handful of images Earl created in 1817, but it was probably the one of a youthful General Jackson in bust-length view before the blazing Battle of New Orleans (discussed below). It appears that Jackson's assistance was too late in reaching Eaton, however, because his book was published with a crude reproduction of Nathan Wheeler's 1815

³⁹⁵ Cited in Barber, *Old Hickory: A Life Sketch of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D.C: National Portrait Gallery, 1990), 43.

³⁹⁶ A copy is in the Tennessee State Museum. Wheeler was a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans and worked there after the battle as a distiller and artisan painter.

³⁹⁷ Barber, *Old Hickory*, 44.

³⁹⁸ John Spencer Bassett and David Maydole Matteson, eds. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926-35), 6: 463. The pro-Jackson biography was actually commenced by John Reid and completed by John Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson, major-general in service of the United States, comprising a History of the War in the South, from the commencement of the Creek Campaign to the termination of hostilities before New Orleans* (Philadelphia, M. Carey and Son, 1817).

image.³⁹⁹ Over the years, Jackson's correspondence was dotted with praise for Earl and his work. For example, he endorsed one of Earl's 1820 portraits, saying that it was, "a more correct likeness of myself than perhaps you have ever seen."⁴⁰⁰ In fact, Earl's portraits were regularly complimented as exceptional physiognomic likenesses of Jackson.

Earl's most charming images of Jackson may be his earliest. One of his first portraits of Old Hickory was painted for Alexander Porter Sr. a prosperous Nashville dry goods merchant who did business with Jackson (fig. 4.5).⁴⁰¹ Porter commissioned the work along with a portrait of himself (unlocated), and Earl recorded them in his 1817 memorandum book as "Mr. Alexander Porter's Portrait and one of General Jackson - \$100 – Paid."⁴⁰² In the painting Jackson appears in full military garb looking to his right where smoking fires and the New Orleans battlefield appear in the distance. His dark grey hair is disheveled, yet despite the toll the arduous war had taken on his health and appearance, he is depicted as an almost youthful, confident military leader. Although this portrait never hung in the Hermitage in Jackson's time, it is probably similar to one (or more) of Earl's earliest portraits that burned in the Hermitage fire of 1834. As Jackson recounted, "I have no likenesses of myself or

³⁹⁹ The painting was recently identified at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and it is possible that the painting was sent there originally to be copied for inclusion in Eaton's biography, since it was published in Philadelphia. See also, Barber, *Old Hickory: A Life Sketch of Andrew Jackson*, 44.

⁴⁰⁰ Cited in Reda C. Goff, "A Physical Profile of Andrew Jackson," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 28:3 (Fall 1969), 297.

⁴⁰¹ Porter was related to Felix and Anne Grundy, leading Nashville citizens, whose portraits Earl also took. Ann's portrait is discussed in chapter three. According to records at the Catalog of American portraits, the painting of Jackson descended to Mrs. Thomas M. Steger (daughter of Felicia Grundy Porter and Granddaughter of Felix and Anne Grundy) and she gifted it to the Ladies' Hermitage Association on October 4, 1894.

⁴⁰² Located in the Earl papers at the American Antiquarian Society.

Mrs. Jackson, in our early days; have no plan of our battle ground; they all got burned with my house.”⁴⁰³ Here, in his earliest portrayals, Earl established a formula that was to become standard in many of his depictions of Jackson for the rest of his life. He shows his subject’s body nearly fully frontal, with his head in three-quarter profile. This pose along with the military garb with a hint of battlefield activity behind all became standard in Earl’s repertoire, especially in his first years in Nashville.

Earl’s typically painted similar versions of the same painting numerous times, and by varying only minor details was able to create original oil paintings rather quickly. By doing so he could satisfy the high demand for the Jacksonian image and provide himself income for his many other endeavors. For example, at least four versions of the Porter portrait of Jackson exist. The National Portrait Gallery owns a stunning example, in which Earl only slightly altered the background details (fig. 4.6). While the Porter original depicts four mounted soldiers to Jackson’s right, in the Portrait Gallery’s painting only one of the soldiers rides horseback and he directs the other three soldiers on the ground. These changes are only minor shadowy details, however, and Jackson’s appearance is virtually the same in both. The National Portrait Gallery’s work was originally painted for John Decker, the owner of the confectionary store who rented his upper room out to Earl for his museum. Decker had served with Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans and was a lifelong friend and admirer.⁴⁰⁴ Jackson’s coat in all of the versions of this picture is probably the uniform

⁴⁰³ Bassett, *Correspondence*, 6:180.

⁴⁰⁴ According to notes from the Catalog of American portraits, the painting was commissioned for the Decker home in Nashville, Vaux Hall. It descended in the Decker family until 1885, when it was lent to the National Gallery of art. In 1920 it was purchased through a gallery by Thomas B. Clarke and in 1942 by the Mellon Trust, and transferred to the National Portrait Gallery.

he actually wore in the Battle of New Orleans (fig. 4.7). The buttons, referred to as “bullet buttons” are original to the coat and would have been worn in battle; only the epaulettes have been replaced, and are not the 1812 originals.⁴⁰⁵ This coat was one of the main attractions at the Hermitage throughout Jackson’s life and it was presented to the U.S. Government in 1845, the year of his death.

Two other similar versions of the work are owned by the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the Historical Deerfield Collection in Deerfield, Massachusetts. In the Alabama work, Jackson’s portrait-bust and costume are the same, but he is seated against a plain, muted backdrop (fig. 4.8). It was from this portrait that Charles Cutler Torrey took his engraving that was completed in 1824 (see chapter five regarding the engraving). The Deerfield portrait is unsigned, and differs slightly from the other three portraits in subtle details, however it is the standard standard size of most all of Earl’s canvases. The painting was originally attributed to Earl by Susan Symonds, a fellow at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware in the late 1960s who wrote a master’s thesis on images of Jackson for the University of Delaware, however, James Barber has questioned the attribution, noting that the painting could be a copy due to its slight differences from the other versions.⁴⁰⁶

Earl’s early group of Jackson portraits was much more successful than the other, earlier attempts by Vallée and Wheeler. While all three artists pictured Jackson in his military uniform, only Earl created an accurate likeness. By adding minor

⁴⁰⁵ According to M. Christman from 1974 notes in the Catalog of American Portraits of the National Portrait Gallery. The coat is now located in the collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

⁴⁰⁶ Barber, 1991. The canvas was prepared by Charles Roberson, the Nashville bookseller, who was known to have prepared other canvases for Earl’s paintings in addition to helping distribute his Jackson prints. This points to the work having been created by Earl because of the lack of other artist’s working in Nashville at the time.

dramatic detail, in the depiction of the militiamen against a dark, cloudy sky, Earl furthermore reminded the viewer of Jackson's heroic acts. The multiple commissions for this composition demonstrate its success and helped prepare Earl for his most ambitious work to date, a life-sized, full length image of Jackson on the battlefield which he began in 1817.

The Tennessee State Portrait

It is hard to imagine today the immense love, honor, and respect the nation felt for Jackson after his impressive victory over the British in the Battle of New Orleans. The War of 1812 has been somewhat forgotten today, but at the time, Americans legitimately feared losing their young country to the British. Repeated land defeats in the war furthered this anxiety. The British had a formidable army and after having defeated Napoleon, they sent 10,000 of their experienced troops to take the city of New Orleans. With his motley crew of 4,000 Tennesseans, Kentuckians, slaves, and pirates, none of whom had any formal military training, Jackson galvanized perhaps the most resounding victory in American history. At the end of the battle, British casualties numbered about 2,000 with Jackson having lost less than twelve. It was a smashing defeat that made the general an instant hero.

Only a couple of years after the war's conclusion, freshly arrived in Nashville, Earl began his life-sized portrait of the General on the battlefield. The resulting painting became the Tennessee museum's major attraction, and helped establish Earl's reputation as Jackson's personal artist. While the Porter group pictured Jackson in uniform on the battlefield, those smaller, bust-views only hinted at battlefield activity. Now Earl created a monumental work, picturing Jackson's entire body, with

a full battle scene in the back. Earl described the portrait in his notes as follows: “A full length Portrait of Major General Andrew Jackson standing in the attitude of reconnoitering the position of the British Army before New Orleans, on the Morning of that memorable day of the 8 of January – 1815.”⁴⁰⁷ Standing before a field tent with the American flag flying atop it, Jackson holds a spyglass in his outstretched right arm, and his hat in the left, and surveys the scene (fig. 4.1). The youthful, but contemplative general stands erect and unaccompanied, although a puff of smoke in the background and the tempestuous sky hints of battlefield activity. Although today the painting is in poor condition and has darkened over time, the background once revealed “an Indian of youthfull appearance...holding [Jackson’s] horse, furnishing us with the idea of his victories over the Seminoles, and of the Indian boy taken in battle, whom the general has ever since trusted about his person.”⁴⁰⁸ A contemporary newspaper account observed that Jackson “seems to be contemplating the means of seizing the moment which must ensure a decisive victory.”⁴⁰⁹

Earl took it upon himself to create the work, it was not commissioned by a particular patron. He created it to hang in his gallery and he also planned to travel to New Orleans with it, in hopes of gaining a commission for a copy. He probably finished it in early 1818. He had asked his friend, Noah M. Ludlow, an early Nashville actor, to pose for Jackson’s body. According to Ludlow, Earl had started the full-length portrait of Jackson from life, only completing the head and neck before

⁴⁰⁷ Memorandum book, 1818, Ralph E.W. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴⁰⁸ *Nashville Whig*, July 18, 1821. During the battle in New Orleans, Jackson had adopted Lyncoya, a Native American infant, who had been orphaned in the war. He sent him to his wife at the Hermitage and raised him as a son. Lyncoya died of tuberculosis at age 14.

⁴⁰⁹ *Sparta Review*, April 27, 1825.

Jackson was ordered back into military service in December 1817 by President James Monroe (serving as Major General of the United States in charge of the South. He was subsequently sent during the First Seminole War to lead a campaign in Georgia against the Seminole and Creek Indians.) Earl had planned to sail for New Orleans as soon as possible to exhibit his painting (in hope of receiving a commission for a second one), but not having finished the portrait and not knowing when Jackson was to return, he asked Ludlow to stand-in for the figure. According to Ludlow, “being intimate with Mr. Earl, he asked me one day if I would oblige him so much as to dress and stand as the general’s representative for a few times, that he might finish the picture for the city of New Orleans. Having strong feelings of regard for Mr. Earl as a friend, and being a great admirer of Gen. Jackson, I consented.”⁴¹⁰ This large painting was the first ever life-sized painting of the New Orleans hero, and probably served as the first publicly exhibited image of Jackson when it was hung in Earl’s gallery in 1818.

People were extremely impressed. An article appeared in the *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser* on May 9 describing the painting’s value to the local citizens, “This piece may be said to bear a competition with the best modern productions – and great credit...must always be due to the abilities of a man who has enabled himself to transmit to posterity, an accurate likeness of THE MAN, who will always be remembered with interest and affection, as one of the saviours of his country.”⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It; A Record of Personal Experience* (St. Louis: G.I. Jones and Co., 1880), 179.

⁴¹¹ *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, May 9, 1818.

Earl's portrait of Jackson received great publicity and museum operator Joseph Delaplaine sought to buy it for his own gallery in Philadelphia. He wrote to Earl in May of 1818 asking the price.⁴¹² Trying to play to Earl's ego he told him that Charles Willson Peale, John Wesley Jarvis, and Thomas Sully had all painted Jackson's likeness, but he desired Earl's for his gallery.⁴¹³ Earl was quite busy with his own museum venture at the time, however, as well as painting portraits, and had also recently gotten married. Possibly due to the sudden death in February 1819 of Earl's new and expectant wife, or to the fact that the painting was the toast of Nashville, Delaplaine never got the painting. It remained at Earl's museum and today is in the Tennessee State Museum.

The New Orleans Portrait

Earl took the painting to Natchez, Mississippi and then to New Orleans in the winter of 1819-1820 on a publicity tour, where he was encouraged enough to begin painting a second life-sized portrait of Jackson after he returned home. He wrote his mother that "the particulars of my jaunt last winter to New Orleans you will see in the Nashville paper which I have sent to you. I shall descend the river again this winter to Natchez and Orleans."⁴¹⁴ Earl had been intending on traveling south since before the death of his wife, Jane Caffery in May 1819. Donelson Caffery had written to his sister Jane in 1818 from Mobile, "Mother informed me some time ago, that Mr. Earl had an idea of descending the river this winter, should he do so you will certainly pay

⁴¹² Delaplaine to Earl, May 9, 1818. Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴¹³ Delaplaine to Earl, Feb 9 and 19, 1819. Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴¹⁴ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress manuscripts, Washington, D.C.

me a visit, and should Mr. Earl choose to practice his profession, he would not find it an unprofitable trip over here, indeed Mr. A. Porter and several others have spoken to me on the subject, wishing him to come over.”⁴¹⁵ This letter reveals that had Earl continued to work as a traveling artist, it seems he would have plenty of patronage to keep him afloat. However, after he began producing Jacksonian portraiture, he rarely traveled except as a companion for Jackson the rest of his life.

Nevertheless Earl did return to New Orleans in the winter of 1821 and sold the second life-sized Jackson portrait (which is unlocated) to the city.⁴¹⁶ Before doing so he impressed the Nashville citizens by exhibiting both versions together in his museum. Before leaving Nashville, Earl published a notice in the *Nashville Gazette* regarding his museum and the portrait, saying:

Mr. EARL presents his compliments to the public, and respectfully acquaints it, that his presence being indispensably necessary in NEW-ORLEANS for a few months, in order to make arrangements concerning his lately finished painting of GEN. JACKSON, he invites the public to the exhibition of the Painting at his room on Cedar street previous to its taking its final departure for New-Orleans. Mr. Earl intends returning in the spring, and in the meantime requests those having articles to furnish for the Museum, to call on Doc. ROANE of Nashville, who has the key of the Museum in his possession.⁴¹⁷

To facilitate his work in New Orleans, Earl enlisted some of his many friends in Nashville to write letters of recommendation on his behalf. The letters reveal the success Earl found in his travels as well as the general excitement in the area regarding Andrew Jackson. A Tennessee friend, Edward Turner, wrote to his brother

⁴¹⁵ Donelson Caffery to his sister Jane Caffery Earl, November 26, 1818. John Spencer Bassett Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴¹⁶ Unfortunately, there are no known reproductions of the second life-sized portrait of Jackson.

⁴¹⁷ *The Nashville Gazette*, December 23, 1820.

F.L. Turner in Natchez about Earl. After introducing him he says that Earl “visits your city with a painting, executed by him, representing Genl Jackson & for the purpose of exhibiting and disposing it. Mr. Earle [*sic.*] sustains a high standing with his acquaintances, and is highly recommended by Genl Jackson, as an artist, & as a gentleman.”⁴¹⁸ George Tunstull, Earl’s former business partner in formation of the museum, and editor at the *Nashville Whig* also wrote in recommendation of Earl’s painting saying, “Connoisseurs in the fine arts have pronounced this an admirable production, both in regard to design and execution.” Tunstull also stated that he cherished “a hope that the liberality of your state will handsomely reward Mr. Earl for the labours he has bestowed on this production.”⁴¹⁹

Earl’s trip to the deep south is significant, and served as a type of grand public tour of Earl’s monumental painting. Earl was astute, knowing precisely where to go to market Jackson’s image. After displaying it in Nashville, Earl took it to Natchez where Jackson had many family and friends. New Orleans was the most developed cultural and artistic market in the South at the time and was, of course, the site of Jackson’s great victory. Earl took his second life-sized Jackson painting there, hoping to sell it to the city and possibly gain more commissions.

Earl headed west from Nashville in early 1821 and by January 20, he was in Clarksville, Tennessee.⁴²⁰ Earl had planned all along to go to New Orleans, after making the generals’ portraits, to sketch the battlefield there for his intended history

⁴¹⁸ E. Turner to F.L. Turner, February 22, 1821. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴¹⁹ George Tunstull to T. W. Lorrain, January 17, 1821. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴²⁰ Judging from a letter acknowledging receipt of a letter from there on that date. Ira Ingram to R.E.W. Earl, January 30, 1821. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

painting. However, he had found such success in Nashville, his career swung in a different direction and now, he travelled again, taking the subsequent Jackson portrait with him.⁴²¹

Stopping for a time in Natchez, Mississippi, Earl exhibited his newly completed portrait publicly, and there according to the *Nashville Whig*, he “was evinced by an immediate application for a copy.”⁴²² A letter from Isaac L. Baker to Jackson from Natchez on February 18, 1821 states, “I was gratified on reaching this place yesterday to find Mr. Earle in this country. He has done well in exhibiting his full length likeness here as it has gratified the citizens and not been unprofitable to himself.”⁴²³ Baker helped Earl in Natchez by writing letters of introduction for him. In one dated February 23, 1821 Baker explained to R. Clague, “Your love for the fine arts and your hospitality to strangers in a strange land induce me to recommend to your particular attention Mr. Earl of Nashville, a portrait painter of considerable celebrity and a great favorite and connection of our friend Genl. Jackson.” Baker tells Clague about Earl’s portrait, saying that it “is not only the most accurate likeness I have ever seen of that extraordinary man but also executed in a very superior style.” Baker calls Earl “a gentleman of much merit and every way entitled to your consideration.”⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ See the following letters at American Antiquarian Society, George Tunstull to T.W. Lorrain, January 17, 1821, Edward Turner to F.L. Turner, Feb 22, 1821, and Isaac Baker to Richard Clague, Feb 23, 1821.

⁴²² *Nashville Whig*, July 18, 1821.

⁴²³ Isaac L. Baker to Jackson, February 18, 182, cited in John Spencer Bassett *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1925-36), 3:40. The letter continues “...I will return as far as Plaquemine on my way home with him and will give him such letters to my friends in the city as may be of service to him,” which shows Baker helping Earl with patronage.

Impressed with the Jackson portrait, the city of Natchez agreed to raise one-thousand dollars if Earl could furnish a copy within four months. The city planned to hang it in the large room of its new Courthouse, saying that it would “do credit to the taste as well as the genius of the country.” Subscribers were solicited to help raise funds and their circular lauded Earl and his efforts, saying “we shall do justice to an American Artist, evince our high respect for the character and services of General Jackson, and afford to our fellow-citizens, throughout the Republic, proof, that in this frontier section of it there is neither want of taste in the fine arts, or a deficiency of liberality to maintain it.”⁴²⁵ This statement is significant not only in its acknowledgement of Jackson’s significance, but also in revealing the power of Earl’s art to distinguish southern culture.

Ultimately, however, Natchez painting did not received sufficient funding. Earl received the disappointing news from his friend Edward Turner who blamed “these hard times” for preventing people from spending money “for ornamental purposes,” and he warned Earl that he “better not calculate on our taking the painting.” Turner was “mortified at the disappointment we have experienced in relation to this subject” but was hopeful that the money could be raised for the painting the following winter.⁴²⁶ There is, however, no record of Earl ever completing the painting, or the city of Natchez ever purchasing it.

⁴²⁴ Isaac L. Baker to R. Clague, February 23, 1821. American Antiquarian Society.

⁴²⁵ Cited in the *Nashville Whig*, July 18, 1821 from a subscription list for the Natchez copy of the painting. Located in the Andrew Jackson papers, 1:9. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

⁴²⁶ Edward Turner to Earl, July 12, 1821. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

Earl remained in Natchez about a month but by early March traveled on to New Orleans with his portrait, carrying letters from Jackson to his old friend Edward Livingston, a distinguished citizen there, and to the Mayor, Joseph Roffignac. His letter to the Mayor praises Earl's talent and reveals the critical importance of his connections with Jackson to his success:

Permit me to present to your acquaintance and attention Mr. Earl, a particular friend of mine and resident of this place, who is about to visit your city with a view of presenting to its corporation a full length painting of myself. Mr. Earl has spent much time and labor upon this painting, and will exhibit to view a more correct likeness of myself than perhaps you have ever seen. Mr. Earl possesses very distinguished merit as a painter – is a respectable and worthy man, and as such I present him to you. Should his painting meet the approbation of the Corporation, he will offer it for sale, and any attention which you may favor him will be thankfully acknowledged by me and gratefully received by him.⁴²⁷

Earl had his own modest letter for the Mayor and the city council, announcing his arrival in the city of New Orleans and offering his painting for sale:

I have now in New Orleans a full length portrait of Genl. Andrew Jackson. The scene, the Battle-ground near the city. It would not become me to say anything of the merits of this picture. It has for some days been submitted to the public examination. Should it be found worthy the patronage of your body, the feelings of regard and munificence already manifested by you towards the subject of the painting induces me to submit it to your disposal. I will say nothing in regard to price – should it be deemed of sufficient value as it regard the artist, to find a place in the Council Hall, I will be satisfied with the compensation; measured only by the merit of my production.⁴²⁸

These letters, especially Jackson's, impressed the city council which met the following day and appointed members to a committee to examine the painting. Finally, on April 14, 1821 the City Council resolved to buy Earl's painting for one

⁴²⁷ Jackson to Joseph Roffignac, Jan. 16, 1821, typescript in the Historic New Orleans Collection. The letter from Jackson to Edward Livingston, Jan 3, 1821 is located in the Edward Livingston Papers, Princeton University Library.

⁴²⁸ Ralph E.W. Earl to "The honbl. Mayor and members of the City Council of New Orleans," March 9, 1821. Historic New Orleans Collection.

thousand dollars. The *Nashville Whig* reported that “On its being announced that [Earl] had arrived in [New Orleans] he was waited on by a number of the most distinguished gentlemen of Louisiana, and a meeting of the City Council was soon thereafter had, and a unanimous order made for the purchase of the painting.”⁴²⁹ In actuality, the vote for the painting was not quite unanimous, with six members voting for the painting and five members against it, however, with the decision Earl had succeeded in gaining a remarkable price for his hard work.⁴³⁰

In addition to this favorable reception Earl also met in New Orleans with Andrew Jackson Donelson, Rachel Jackson’s nephew whom the Jackson’s had raised after the death of his father, Samuel Donelson (Rachel’s brother) when the youngster was only four years old. In 1821, Jackson had sent Andrew to New Orleans to introduce himself to some of the most important men in the area, and to work on improving his French language skills. Donelson wrote to his uncle from New Orleans on March 3, 1821 about Earl: “Mr. Duncan has favoured Mr. Earl with a room in his private house, in which hangs the portrait of Genl. J. It is pronounced by all who have seen it, the best likeness ever exhibited in the city...Mr. Earl is well and sends his best wishes to yourself and Aunt.”⁴³¹

Earl was far from the first artist to visit New Orleans, which by 1820 was an important American port city with a booming population. New Orleans had a resident population of 27,176 in 1820 and by 1830 it had grown to 50,122. In the winters, the

⁴²⁹ *Nashville Whig*, July 18, 1821.

⁴³⁰ Typescript of New Orleans City Council Proceedings, April 14, 1821. Historic New Orleans Collection.

⁴³¹ Andrew J. Donelson to Andrew Jackson, March 3, 1821. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, III: 40.

population of New Orleans increased by forty or fifty thousand since many did business during the city's favorable winters, but stayed away during the brutally hot summers that were often plagued by epidemic.⁴³² Earl was among those business visitors to the city in both the winters of 1820 and 1821. Several artists of national distinction visited New Orleans in the early years of the 1820s, among them John James Audubon, John Wesley Jarvis, and John Vanderlyn.⁴³³ With the \$1,000 purchase of his painting by the city, however, Earl gained the most measured success.

New Orleans' purchase of Earl's painting was greeted with approval in the local press. The *Louisiana Advertiser* reported, "We also understand the corporation have recently purchased a fine painting of General Jackson, executed by Mr. Earle, a young American artist. It is said by those competent to judge, to be a painting of great merit, and on which much labor and pains have been bestowed. In addition to the value of such a painting as a decoration to the council chamber, we have the pleasing considerations that it is the production of an American."⁴³⁴ This success, following that in Nashville and Natchez demonstrated Earl's ability to produce works with broad appeal, a point of pride for both the region and the nation.

Earl's New Orleans painting has been unfortunately lost. For years it was confused with another life-sized Jackson portrait that was misattributed to Earl. In 1844 the city of New Orleans held a competition for a life-sized equestrian portrait of Jackson, a contest won by two artists, Jacques Amans (who had earlier painted

⁴³² Virginia Museum, *Painting in the South: 1564-1980* (Richmond: Virginia Museum, 1983), 74.

⁴³³ Isaac Monroe Cline, *Art and Artists in New Orleans in the Last Century* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Museum, 1922).

⁴³⁴ "City Council of New-Orleans, sitting of April 14, 1821," *Louisiana Advertiser*, April 28, 1821, clipping in the Ralph E. W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

Jackson from life on his 1840 visit to New Orleans in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans), and Theodore Moise. The Amans-Moise portrait was misattributed to Earl sometime in the early twentieth century, and is illustrated as an Earl portrait in James Marquis' 1933 biography.⁴³⁵ However, after later cleaning the signature "Amans & Moise, 1844" was revealed, and Earl's portrait remains unlocated.⁴³⁶

Earl's Artist Connections

In his life-sized 1818 image of Jackson on the battlefield (*The Tennessee State Portrait*, fig. 4.1), Earl sought to valorize Jackson in a manner similar to what Trumbull and Peale had earlier done for George Washington. Peale produced at least seven portraits of Washington from live sittings between 1772 and 1795 and made numerous copies of these in addition to two mezzotint engravings.⁴³⁷ Peale's works include both bust and full-length views of the Founding Father in addition to showing him in both military and civilian attire. Direct comparisons can be drawn, for example, between Peale's life-sized portrait of *George Washington at Princeton* (fig.

⁴³⁵ Marquis James, *Andrew Jackson: The Border Captain* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1933).

⁴³⁶ Anna Wells Rutledge, who did extensive research on art in the South in the 1940s tried to locate the Earl portrait. She received a letter from Ethel Hutson of the Southern States Art League which stated: "what became of the Earle portrait – no one knows – it is supposed to have been destroyed a few years ago by a ruthless janitor in the State Capitol at Baton Rouge during the administration of Gov. R.M. Pleasant." Ruffin Pleasant was Governor of Louisiana from 1916 to 1920. Ethel Hutson was Secretary-Treasurer of the Southern States Art League and wrote to Anna Wells Rutledge on December 9, 1944. The letter is in Wells' miscellaneous Jackson notes in the *Catalog of American Portraits*, Washington, D.C. According to Rutledge's notes, Earl's painting had been transferred to the State Capitol building in Baton Rouge "sometime later – perhaps after the Civil War." Among her research was an earlier letter, dated 1921 from W.O. Hart, one-time president of the Louisiana Historical Society, which stated "I remember when several paintings in Baton Rouge were destroyed by painters and carpenters, a few were rescued and are now in the Cabildo," a museum in New Orleans opposite Jackson square. W.O. Hart to I.M. Cline, New Orleans, May 5, 1921. *Miscellaneous Jackson notes, Catalog of American Portraits*. Regardless of what happened to it, the painting that was perhaps one of Earl's masterpieces, for which he was paid \$1000, is gone.

⁴³⁷ See Charles Coleman Sellers, "Charles Willson Peale's Portraits of Washington," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 9:6 (Feb. 1951): 147-155.

4.9) and Earl's grand Jackson portrait. Both images place their confident military commander front and center wearing meticulously rendered officer's uniforms. Like Peale's Washington, Earl's Jackson has removed his hat in the portrait, and holds it in his hand. Similarly too, a battlefield stretches behind each general and the drama is underscored by stormy skies. Earl's work also originally picture Jackson's horse being attended to by a young man (although this scene is no longer evident), and he might have directly borrowed this idea from Peale's famous portrait (of which Peale made many copies and variations). As Peale had for Washington, Earl's image did much to instill Jackson's image in a positive manner in the minds of the American people.

Peale's art actually creates an interesting link between Washington, Jackson, and by extension Earl. In 1795 George Washington sat for Peale and his then seventeen year old son Rembrandt.⁴³⁸ Two decades later, Andrew Jackson sat for Peale and his niece Anna Claypool Peale. Peale had traveled to Washington in November 1818 to paint President James Monroe and other national figures for his Philadelphia gallery. He stayed three months in the nation's capital and wrote to his sons, "I am not without hope that General Jackson may arrive here in time for me to take his portrait."⁴³⁹ Jackson was rumored to have been en route to Washington to clear up what he considered to be false accusations about his conduct in the Seminole War in Florida.

⁴³⁸ See Charles Coleman Sellers, "Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 42:1 (1952): 1-369.

⁴³⁹ Charles Willson Peale to Raphaele and Rubens Peale, December 31, 1818. Peale-Sellers Papers, American Philosophical Society. Cited in David Meschutt, "The Peale Portraits of Andrew Jackson," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XLVI:1 (Spring 1987), 3.

The United States government was investigating Jackson's actions in response to the Indian uprisings along the Georgia and Spanish-held Florida border. Acting on vague orders from President Monroe, by the end of the campaign, Jackson had driven off the Spanish and gained control of the Florida territory. He seized unauthorized control of St. Marks and Pensacola, however, destroying Indian villages in the process, and the military court under his command hanged two British subjects for suspected spying and aiding of the Indians. Although Monroe had sought the Florida land, Jackson's actions brought unwanted confrontations with England and Spain and in January 1819, Congress was considering censuring the general. Ultimately he was cleared of all wrongdoing, but rather than waiting idly by, Jackson traveled to Washington to defend himself. He arrived in time for Peale and made a heroic entrance into Washington on January 22, 1819. Peale immediately requested a sitting with him to which he agreed. They began on January 24th and by the 27th Peale was almost finished with the portrait, reporting that "Tomorrow morning I shall put the finish to Gen'l Jackson's Portrait... a good portrait of Jackson will be important to the museum."⁴⁴⁰ Peale's bust-length view depicts an idealized image of Jackson, age fifty-one at the time, but appearing to be much younger (fig. 4.10). Glancing to his left with a mischievous glimmer in his eye, Jackson sits erect in his general's uniform, his hair disheveled. After finishing the portrait, Peale took it back with him to his museum where it hung the rest of his life. The value Peale placed on the

⁴⁴⁰ Meschutt (1987), 3.

general's portrait in 1819 reveals his national stature long before his election to the presidency.⁴⁴¹

After his testimony in Washington, Jackson traveled through the country's major cities, his first trip north since being catapulted to national stardom. He received a hero's welcome along the way and was approached by many artists who requested sittings. The Baltimore City Council gave a reception for him and commissioned Rembrandt Peale (who had settled there in 1814 and opened a museum similar to his father's) to paint his portrait. Elsewhere, Jackson also sat for John Vanderlyn, John Wesley Jarvis, Samuel Lovett Waldo, and Thomas Sully on the trip.⁴⁴²

The sitting with Sully was the beginning of a long connection with Earl as well as Jackson. The Association of American Artists in Philadelphia commissioned Sully to paint a portrait of Jackson and during the sitting Jackson told him about his new artistic protégé and Sully wrote to Earl offering assistance the next day.⁴⁴³ A week later, Sully finished his study of Jackson for which he was paid one-hundred dollars. Unfortunately, it is no longer extant, but from the study, Sully produced a three-quarter length portrait. In the image, Jackson stands in the foreground leaning

⁴⁴¹ While Jackson was sitting for the senior Peale, Anna Claypoole was also painting a miniature portrait of Jackson, and the finished product so closely resembles her uncle's oil painting that it could pass for a copy. Anna's miniature of Jackson was included in the Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, May 1819. Meschutt, 6. For more info on this miniature see Hart's "Life Portraits of Andrew Jackson" as well as Susan Clover Symonds, "Portraits of Andrew Jackson, 1815-1845" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1968).

⁴⁴² Meschutt page 6 and note 26. Beyond Earl's, other significant portraits of Jackson include one by Asher B. Durand, painted at the White House during Jackson's Presidency. George P.A. Healy painted the last living portrait of Jackson at the Hermitage under the commission of Louis-Philippe.

⁴⁴³ James Earle to Ralph Earl, Feb. 17th, 1819. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society. Accounts of the Sully-Jackson sitting are in the *Democratic Press* (Philadelphia), Feb 16-22, 1819.

against a large horse (fig. 4.11).⁴⁴⁴ Wearing the same military jacket as he had in Peale's image, with the same eagle belt buckle, he also has a large dark overcoat in this image. Sully's romantic style is evident here in his disheveled treatment of both Jackson and the horse's hair, and they appear before a vibrant, cloudy sky with a hint of battlefield activity in the lower left.

The portrait was exhibited for a few days in the Association's room for a twenty-five cent admission charge and also at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. As a business venture, the Association had the work engraved by James Barton Longacre and sold as a print, thus realizing the money-making potential of the Jacksonian image at an early date. Longacre's finished print was copyrighted on November 2, 1820 and ended up being the largest he ever did (approx. 14 ¾ x 11 13/16 inches), helping establish him as one of the nation's leading engravers. The print was also exhibited in the annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, although Longacre made no money from it, writing in 1821 that the venture "so far, has been a losing concern for me."⁴⁴⁵ This was his first experience with Jackson prints, but it would not be his last; a few years later he would produce an engraving after one of Earl's Jackson portraits (detailed in chapter five.)

In 1836 Sully was again in contact with Earl, although they had certainly been aware of each other's career and probably in contact since the 1819 correspondence. Sully appealed to Earl (then in Washington) with a letter of introduction for the sculptor Ferdinand Pettrich. In the letter, dated March 20, 1836 Sully closes by asking

⁴⁴⁴ The portrait was produced between March 26 and April 15, 1819 for the Association of American Artists. Barber (1991), 55.

⁴⁴⁵ Longacre to G. Fairman, October 30, 1821, James Barton Longacre papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., cited in Barber, 56.

“to be remembered to your uncle [Jackson] with sentiments of great respect and regard.”⁴⁴⁶ With Earl’s facilitation, Pettrich, as it turned out, produced one of the most memorable sculptures of Jackson.⁴⁴⁷ The following year, Earl and Sully were in contact again when Earl sought advice from the Philadelphia artist about the Jackson portrait on which he was working (discussed below).

During the course of his career, Sully produced about a dozen portraits of Jackson, by far the most by any artist other than Earl. Together his Jackson commissions earned him more than \$1400, however, unlike Earl and despite his continued contact with the artist and his great patron, only his commissioned painting from 1819 was known to have been produced from a live sitting. In mid-1845, at the end of Jackson’s life, and long after Earl’s death, Sully painted three more likenesses of Jackson. Two of them only depicted Jackson’s head, but the third is the largest portrait of Jackson ever produced and shows a full-length, life-sized Jackson on the New Orleans battlefield. The head in all three images is virtually the same and became the inspiration for Sully’s image that now appears on the twenty-dollar bill. According to Sully’s ledger, he copied the likenesses from a study he had done in 1824 (and now owned by the National Gallery of Art).⁴⁴⁸ In general, Sully’s style was much less literal than Earl’s and generally more poetic. His Jackson likenesses are highly romanticized and thus less authentic.

⁴⁴⁶ Sully to Earl, March 20, 1836. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴⁴⁷ The interesting story of his sculpture is recounted in Barber (1991), 126.

⁴⁴⁸ Capitalizing on Jackson’s fame, Sully began his full-length Jackson a month to the day after his death and it was finished July 31, 1845.

Of the other artists for whom Jackson sat on his 1819 travels, John Vanderlyn was already a good friend of Earl's, from their time together in France. Vanderlyn's sitting with the general was commissioned by the City of New York, however, Vanderlyn was a slow and meticulous worker and according to him, "The Genl's stay here was only a few days & not sufficient to allow me to paint a portrait of him requested by the Corporation of this City. I was induced with this motive to follow the Genrl. to Washington in order to satisfy myself in obtaining a likeness."⁴⁴⁹ Vanderlyn wrote to Earl requesting his help in completing the portrait of Jackson "which shall merit public approbation." He asked for "a portrait painted by you of the Genl. in small—a Bust—the head to be about three inches long." Vanderlyn continued,

I have here [accompanying sketch in the body of the text] given you the position & view of the side of the face I have painted him. This sketch is rather too small for the size I should wish to have his portrait by you. Let the Length of the head be between 3 & 4 inches in length from the chin to the top of the hair; such a size portrait painted on a piece of good elastic piece of canvass or on stout paper such as I have painted on in France might be sent to me by mail.

His main goal in requesting Earl's help was to create a correct likeness of Jackson's face. Vanderlyn said, "In conversing with Major Young and Capt. Cawl [actually Call], two of the General's staff, I learnt that you had been very fortunate in your portrait of Genl. Jackson, having had the advantage of full sittings." He went on "The head is the main object the rest is merely accessory & you need not spend much time upon it." It seems as though Vanderlyn was quite pleased with the small portrait that Earl apparently sent him because recorded in a list of moneys received, Earl noted

⁴⁴⁹ John Vanderlyn to Ralph E.W. Earl, New York, April 2, 1819. Private collection of Harry Bland. Letter reproduced in its entirety in Louise Hunt Averill "John Vanderlyn: American Painter, 1775-1853" (PhD diss, Yale University, 1949), 254-55.

“Mr. Vanderlyn -- \$100,” which is twice that of what Earl usually charged for fully executed portraits.⁴⁵⁰

The last artist for whom Jackson sat before his death was the renowned George P.A. Healy who was commissioned by King Louis-Philippe of France to travel to the Hermitage to get a final portrait of the sickly old general.⁴⁵¹ After finishing his sitting with the President, Healy continued to Ashland, Kentucky to paint Henry Clay, Jackson’s longtime political rival. During one of the sittings Clay asked Healy, who he considered an “impartial judge” if he thought that Jackson was sincere. To this, Healy replied, “I have just come from his death-bed, and if General Jackson was not sincere, then I do not know the meaning of the word.” About this, Clay observed “I see that you, like all who approached that man, were fascinated by him.”⁴⁵²

Jackson as President

In the 1820s, Jackson’s national identity began to shift from war hero to Presidential candidate and Earl’s portrait production changed along with it. As the most popular man in the country, Jackson was nominated for the presidency in 1824, against Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, Speaker of the House Henry Clay, and Secretary of the Treasury, William Crawford. Though Jackson gained the most popular votes, he did not receive the Electoral College majority and the decision was sent to the House of Representatives. After Henry Clay threw his support behind

⁴⁵⁰ Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴⁵¹ Barber, 1991, outlines his visit on p 197-200. See also G.P.A. Healy and Margaret Armstrong, *Reminiscences of a Portrait Painter* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1894), and *A Souvenir of the Exhibition Entitled Healy’s Sitters* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1950).

⁴⁵² Healy, *Reminiscences*, 149.

Adams, Adams was elected President and five days later, Adams' selected Clay as Secretary of State. Jackson believed this was a corrupt bargain, that Clay had given his backing to Adams in exchange for the post, and Clay and Jackson became lifelong enemies. Jackson subsequently retired from the Senate and returned to Tennessee to assume as he put it, "the image of a gentleman farmer."⁴⁵³ Afterward Jackson modestly wrote in December 1824, "I would rather remain a plain cultivator of the soil as I am, than to occupy that which is truly the first office in the world."⁴⁵⁴ Despite his claims, Jackson still harbored presidential ambitions, although it was considered inappropriate at that time for candidates to promote themselves. Conveniently, however, and perhaps not coincidentally, Earl's portraits of Jackson as a civilian rather than a general began to appear in large numbers about the same time. These may have ultimately helped shape the image that led him to the White House in 1828.

According to recent Jackson biographer, Jon Meacham, "The rise of a nation with a large number of voters, living at great distances from one another, dependent for information and opinion on partisan newspapers, meant that a President had to project an image at once strong and simple."⁴⁵⁵ For Jackson there was no better articulator of this message than Earl. On the strength of that visual message among other attributes, Jackson won the 1828 vote decidedly, both in the popular vote and the electoral college. He left his beloved Hermitage as "a plain cultivator of the soil," to assume the presidency on March 4, 1829.

⁴⁵³ James G. Barber, *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study* (Washington D.C., National Portrait Gallery, 1991), 75.

⁴⁵⁴ *Correspondence of Jackson*, 3:268-69, cited in Barber, 97, note 2.

⁴⁵⁵ Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 59.

Despite the fact that Jackson's presidential election broke all previous conventions, or perhaps because of it, Earl sought to place his subject in a direct sequence with those who preceded him. His portraits were carefully crafted to respond to the criticisms the leader received throughout his political career. To counteract Jackson's humble upbringing, for example, Earl's portraits liken him to his famous Presidential predecessors, especially Washington and Jefferson. Washington and Jackson's common rise to fame through military service is especially reflected in their portraits; several of Earl's portraits as already described, glorify Jackson, like Washington before him, as a romantic military hero. Earl's early life-sized portrait of Jackson (fig. 4.1) heroizes the general much as John Trumbull's 1780 portrait of George Washington at Valley Forge (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Although Jackson was the first President since Washington to have his likeness so frequently recorded, Earl did not stray far in format from what had come before. Bust length portraits of stately American Presidents had become the norm in presidential portraiture.

Since little about Jackson's persona adhered to the established model of a President, the old guard of the Washington elite who had regulated the city's conduct up to that point were worried about how a commoner President, a backwoodsman with a pipe-smoking wife, might affect the city's established social order. Earl's portraits helped this issue by depicting Jackson as presidential, and the presence of a cosmopolitan, European-trained artist within the Jackson circle also helped provide a measure of credibility.

If Jackson's image had been in demand before the election, the desire for his portraits skyrocketed afterward, and during his Presidency in addition to frequent sittings for Earl, Jackson sat for more than a dozen artists.⁴⁵⁶ Unfortunately, Jackson and his administration were generally disinterested in the advancement of the fine arts in America, which makes Earl's position as his personal artist, rather than an artist of greater national distinction at the time of his election, seem logical. Jackson's predecessor, John Quincy Adams, for example was much more innately aware of the importance of having his portrait painted. Adams was in France when the treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812 was signed and he sat for his portrait to mark the treaty's signing. According to visual historian James Barber, "Portraiture personified social prestige and diplomatic privilege," and it seems that Jackson realized from previous Presidents' models, including Washington and his immediate predecessor Adams that portraits were key to crafting a national persona.⁴⁵⁷

According to Barber, "the supreme irony is that, for a President who was ridiculed for ignoring the advancement of the arts in America, Jackson had in Earl what many considered a court painter."⁴⁵⁸ Earl even lightheartedly referred to himself in this manner. After Earl's death, Francis P. Blair, an intimate of the Jackson circle and Jackson's hand-selected editor for the *Washington Globe* recounted in a letter to Jackson that, "I felt a sincere friendship for him, indeed a sort of fraternal affection; for during seven years both of us were in the habit of looking to you as a common

⁴⁵⁶ In addition to those already mentioned, Jackson also sat for Robert Street, Aaron Corwine, Francis Alexander, John P. Merrill, John Wood Dodge, and sculptor Hiram Powers, among others.

⁴⁵⁷ Barber, 27.

⁴⁵⁸ Barber, 28.

Patron. Poor Earl, in his facetious way, frequently spoke of our relationship, saying that he was the *King's Painter* and I the *King's Printer*.⁴⁵⁹ In fact, Jackson was the first President to employ a full-time artist, a practice that many twentieth-century Presidents have done with photographers, beginning with John F. Kennedy.

Earl in Washington

Jackson's first year and a half in office were some of the most trying times of his life. In addition to grieving the death of his wife, and facing numerous opponents, his health seemed to be failing. Some thought he was too weak to even make the trip to Washington. Daniel Webster had written "General Jackson will be here, in a day or two. I am of the opinion his health is very feeble, and that there is not much chance of his lasting long."⁴⁶⁰ He had suffered with pain throughout his life and seemed to never be entirely well but according to Emily Donelson when he arrived in Washington he "had a very bad cough and has been a good deal troubled with headache and fever."⁴⁶¹ The ensuing social upheaval caused by the women in Washington who shunned Margaret O'Neal Eaton, the wife of Secretary of War and close friend of the President, John Eaton due to her immodest reputation became a political matter as well and caused an enormous amount of emotional trouble for Jackson. Jackson blamed the recent death of his wife on the harsh criticism the couple faced during his 1828 election campaign and he might have seen protecting Margaret

⁴⁵⁹ Francis P. Blair to Andrew Jackson, October 19, 1838, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*.

⁴⁶⁰ Webster to his brother, February 5, 1829. Charles Wiltse, ed., *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1974-1989), II:394, cited in Meacham, 390.

⁴⁶¹ Emily Donelson to Mary Donelson Coffee, March 27, 1829, Andrew Jackson Donelson papers, Library of Congress, cited in Meacham, 49.

Eaton as a duty similar to protecting the honor of his wife. He fiercely defended Mrs. Eaton.

After losing his beloved Rachel just prior to moving to Washington, Jackson longed for Earl's familiar and comforting presence. Upon arrival at the White House in early 1829, the lonely recent widower immediately began beckoning Earl to join him. Even before he left the Hermitage, Jackson wrote to his friend John Coffee that "I shall expect to see you and Mr Earle [*sic*] at the city in the Spring."⁴⁶² A couple of months after his arrival in Washington, Jackson wrote a letter to Earl marked "private" saying, "This is the only letter I have written to a friend except one, since I left Nashville...I find myself very lonesome, I wish you were here – my late bereavement has left a solemn gloom upon me, with which I am oppressed when alone. In your Society, I would find some solace to my grief." Jackson went on to ask about Mrs. Jackson's tomb, the construction of which Earl was overseeing, "My Dr. friend: Write me whether the overseer has secured the tomb as I had directed. I shall expect you on in June, for the present; adieu."⁴⁶³ Based on this, it seems that Jackson expected Earl to follow him to Washington in June 1829, however it was more than a year (despite what most scholars have written) before Earl actually made it to the capitol city.

Throughout 1829, Jackson continued writing to Nashville, asking Earl to join him. In June, General Coffee was on his way to Washington and Jackson wrote him

⁴⁶² Jackson to John Coffee, January 17, 1829. Written from the Hermitage, Feller and Moser, eds *Papers of Andrew Jackson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1980-2009), 7:12-13.

⁴⁶³ Jackson to Earl March 16, 1829, Winn Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

that he hoped “Mr. Earle is with you.”⁴⁶⁴ In a letter to Andrew Jackson Jr., the General wrote on August 20, 1829, “Say to Mr. Earle it would afford me great pleasure to hear from him, I would be glad to see him at Washington.”⁴⁶⁵ Jackson apparently heard from his son because he wrote back to him on September 21 that he was “happy to find that you and Mr. Earle will be on about the 18th [of October]... This is the last letter I will write you to Nashville. Present my respect to Mr. Earle and say I shall certainly expect to see him on with you next month.”⁴⁶⁶ Earl responded personally the day after he was supposed to leave for Washington, sending his regrets to the President on October 19, 1829 for not having accompanied Andrew Jackson Jr. as expected. Earl stated, “I regret it was not in my power to have accompanied your son Andrew on to the City as I would have wished and anticipated [*sic*] at the time I wrote to you last – it will however be *very* shortly before I shall follow him.”⁴⁶⁷ Earl was busy in Nashville finishing up portrait commissions that had been accumulating for over ten years and it took him longer than expected to close business in Nashville and move to Washington.

When Earl finally made the trip it was Jackson who personally accompanied him. During his second summer, seeking respite from the difficulty of his first year in office, Jackson returned home to his beloved Hermitage. After a summer at home, Jackson was preparing to return to the capitol and reported to Major Lewis that “No

⁴⁶⁴ *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:43

⁴⁶⁵ *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:63

⁴⁶⁶ *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:76

⁴⁶⁷ Another friend wrote Earl from Philadelphia on January 8, 1830 (almost a year after Jackson’s arrival at the White House) saying he had been to see Jackson in Washington a few weeks earlier and that Jackson “was very anxious that you should come on – indeed he is extremely anxious to see you.”

ladies will return [to Washington] with me. Major A.J. Donelson, my son, and Mr. Earl will constitute my family, and I hope Major Eaton will accompany me, and leave his Lady until the rise of the waters.”⁴⁶⁸ Here Jackson was referring to the Eaton scandal. He had decided to proceed temporarily without the services of Emily Donelson, his niece and White House hostess, who was embroiled in the ordeal and hoped Peggy Eaton would stay behind in Nashville as well, which she did do. The masculine group (including Earl) departed the Hermitage for Washington on September 1, 1830.

Before they left, Earl painted a small, full-length study of the President on the grounds of the Hermitage (fig. 4.12). For this painting, perhaps one of his first non-commissioned works since his initial, life-sized image of General Jackson from 1818, Earl took extra care.⁴⁶⁹ He also drew from his European training in a more explicit way than for the majority of his straight forward, bust-length views that had been quickly turned out for demanding patrons. According to a newspaper article, “this fine picture, of which the Lawrence-like style has been much admired, is now in the possession of Mr. Blair, of the *Globe*; but the artist is engaged upon a single one, in which the genuine appearance of the first will be preserved with some improvements.”⁴⁷⁰ It is probable that this information came from Earl himself, who was in daily interaction with Francis P. Blair at the *Washington Globe*. If these statements are indeed from Earl, this is one of the few recorded instances where Earl

⁴⁶⁸ Jackson to William B. Lewis, August 7, 1830, *Correspondence* 4:173.

⁴⁶⁹ Because it is so different than everything else he had made up to that point, and because it is a small work, I believe that Earl initiated it upon his own accord after witnessing Jackson at home again on his beloved land with the intention of having it engraved, which he later did.

⁴⁷⁰ Undated newspaper clipping, Ralph E.W. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

cites his artistic influences. Presenting Jackson as a country gentleman surrounded by his property, Earl was obviously drawing from his English training.

In the “Farmer Jackson” painting, which is a small study (29.5 x 24.5 inches), Jackson’s right hand clutches his trademark white beaver skin hat (with black mourning band) as well as his cane as he walks the grounds of his plantation wearing an elaborate open cape. Jackson loved the theatricality of his cloak, and was known to wear it around Washington and to and from official duties, such as the 1833 inaugural ceremonies.⁴⁷¹ The hat was made “expressly for His Excellency Gen’l Andrew Jackson” by Orlando Fish of New York and Washington and is seen in many of his presidential portraits, as is his cherry cane with a gold head.⁴⁷² In this regal and sentimental portrait, Earl displays his sensitive landscape abilities, which had been cultivated first by his father and then in the Norwich Society in England. The portrait even recalls the English tradition of depicting a country gentleman on his estate, in the manner of Thomas Gainsborough, for example. The Hermitage mansion is depicted in the background as it appeared in 1830, before the portico and wings were added a year later, and offers one of the few reliable views of the house from the period. In addition, the columned, circular domed tomb of Jackson’s beloved Rachel is clearly visible beside the house. Interestingly, the domed tomb was not built until December 1831, months after Earl’s painting was finished. In the original painting, the gable-roofed structure with a window that initially covered the site is shown. Jackson was proud of the completed rotunda, as was Earl, who had helped oversee its

⁴⁷¹ Meacham, 251, see also Remini, III: 48.

⁴⁷² Barber, 141. The hat is in the Tennessee Historical Collection at the Tennessee State Museum and the cane is at the Hermitage.

construction in Jackson's absence and once finished, he corrected its appearance in the painting.

Perhaps the "single one" described in the article was the portrait of *The Tennessee Gentleman* (discussed below), but probably even more likely, Earl was working on a life-sized version of the "Farmer Jackson" painting. Its size was similar to other study images of Jackson Earl later created, but the larger version of the work never came to fruition. Interestingly, however, the image served as the basis for a life-sized sculpture by William Rumney. It also gained recognition by being reproduced in an engraving that Earl commissioned from Henry Bufford for the firm of William Pendleton of Boston (discussed more extensively in chapter five).

Around the same time he executed "Farmer Jackson," Earl created another small, full-length portrait of Jackson on the ground of the Hermitage entitled, *Andrew Jackson, The Tennessee Gentleman* (1830, fig. 4.13). A unique painting in Earl's oeuvre due to its loose brushstroke, it also reflects his familiarity with Thomas Gainsborough and Thomas Lawrence's method of depicting country gentry. The painting reveals the multi-dimensional range of the artist's portrait style and his ability to draw from a number of sources based on each painting's particular context. Jackson's friends liked to think of him as possessing the simple domestic virtues of the gentleman-farmer and he was also happiest at home at the Hermitage. Both *The Tennessee Gentleman* and "Farmer Jackson" were painted shortly after Jackson became president and depict him at ease on his estate.

The Tennessee Gentleman shows him at age sixty-eight, as he frequently appeared on the streets of Washington, hat on and cane in hand though the setting is

that of his beloved Tennessee. Jackson appears dramatically in the portrait in full length, wearing his hat, using his cane, and walking the grounds of the Hermitage in a dashing black suit. A vibrant sky has been dashed in and Jackson is framed by loosely rendered trees. In the background a couple of horses graze on land that stretches to the horizon. In the original portrait, Jackson wore spectacles, but they were later removed after Vanderlyn had remarked that they would “be obstacles to his fine deep set eyes.”⁴⁷³ The painting was intended for “a successful politician,” and in the background, Earl captured the picturesque hills of Jackson’s homestead, reminding viewers of the subject’s gentility and status as a plantation owner.⁴⁷⁴ The painting is one of the most romantic of Earl’s American portraits.

Once he was finally in Washington, Earl was frequently seen accompanying the President on his afternoon walks and was given a second-story room on the northeast side of the White House from which he enjoyed intimate access to the day-to-day business of the Jackson administration. Jackson insisted on spelling Earl’s name with a final -e, and after his election to the Presidency, he conferred on him the title “Colonel Earle” out of courtesy and respect. Earl also vacationed with the family

⁴⁷³ John Pemberton to Earl, Dec. 19, 1836, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA. A print, appearing in Charles Henry Hart, “Life Portraits of Andrew Jackson,” *McClure’s Magazine* IX (1897): 795 was made of the portrait while Jackson still appeared in glasses. A version of this portrait without the background was engraved by H.B. Hall in 1860, and appears on the frontispiece for the first volume of James Parton’s 1860 biography of Jackson, which shows Jackson wearing the eye-glasses that appeared in the original painting but were later removed.

⁴⁷⁴ According to notes from the Catalog of American Portraits, this work was painted by Earl for “a successful politician,” supposedly William C.H. Waddell of New York. From there it was transferred to Seymour Van Santvoord of Troy, New York and then to his brother George B. Santvoord. Interestingly, the city of Troy was Earl’s childhood home, where he still had relatives on his mother’s side. The painting was then purchased by William Frear and donated in 1944 to the Hermitage by Mrs. Charles Frear, also of Troy, New York in memory of her husband.

at the Hermitage and the Rip Raps in Virginia and always accompanied Jackson in his Presidential travels around the United States.⁴⁷⁵

For example, in the summer of 1833, Jackson decided to take a grand tour of New England, where he had never visited and his identity was little understood. The presidential party consisted of Secretary of State Louis McLane, Secretary of War Lewis Cass, Secretary of the Navy Levi Woodbury, Andrew Jackson Donelson, and Earl, who was there for companionship more than anything.⁴⁷⁶ Although he was ill as usual, the trip restored Jackson's confidence in his presidential role. He wrote to Andrew Jr. that, "never before have I witnessed such a scene of personal regard... I have bowed to upwards of two hundred thousand people today – never has there been such affection of the people before I am sure evinced."⁴⁷⁷ This trip north also offered Earl the opportunity to visit his extended family in upstate New York especially his sister and two nieces, with whom he had been corresponding for years but not taken the opportunity to visit.⁴⁷⁸

While in Washington, Earl became a favorite around town as he had been in Nashville. His sociable gentility appealed to the society's elite, and his extremely close associations with the President alone made him a popular guest. Earl's various personal papers are stocked with regular invitations and visitation cards. His fluency in the French language allowed him to host visiting dignitaries, and he frequently attended balls and parties and became well-known both as an artist and a member of

⁴⁷⁵ Bassett, *Correspondence* 5:168 (receipts).

⁴⁷⁶ Jackson to Van Buren, June 6, 1833, *Correspondence* 5:106-7.

⁴⁷⁷ This was written from New York. Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., June 14, 1833. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 5:109. Cited in Meacham, 261.

⁴⁷⁸ These letters are in the John Spencer Bassett Papers, Library of Congress.

society. For example, one letter from 1830 stated that, “Mrs. Ingham gave a splendid party last night and left out Mrs. Eaton. Barry & wife did not go. Lewis was not there. Donelson & Earl were there.”⁴⁷⁹ Earl also was among the intimate group that represented Jackson at his inaugural balls, when the President was too tired to attend himself.⁴⁸⁰

Earl’s painting room became a common meeting spot for Jackson’s inner political circle. Secretary of State Martin van Buren recounted an 1830 meeting with Jackson remembering, “I was sitting with him, one day, in one of the rooms of the White House which had been appropriated as a studio by his friend, Col. Earle, who was painting his portrait.”⁴⁸¹

Earl painted Jackson while witnessing important events such as the drafting of the “Bank War Manuscript.” The “Bank War” struggles were significant in American history. Jackson viewed the second Bank of the United States as a politically corrupt group of elites. The bank had many supporters in Congress and among wealthy business men, and they had hoped to recharter it, ensuring its continued power. The bank had aligned itself politically with the Whig Party in support of Henry Clay who ran against Jackson in the 1832 election and Jackson sought to bring it down. Jackson vetoed Congress’s charter and cancelled deposits of federal funds there, ultimately causing the bank to close. In 1834 Jackson was censured by Congress for his refusal to turn over documents related to the bank veto. His actions effectively decentralized

⁴⁷⁹ John Campbell to his brother David, November 6, 1830. Campbell Papers, Lemuel R. Campbell, private collection, cited in James, 270.

⁴⁸⁰ The others in the group were Jack and Emily Donelson, Andrew Jr. and Sarah, General Coffee and his daughter Mary, Lucius Polk and his wife Mary Eastin, and Mary McLemore. James, 327.

⁴⁸¹ John C. Fitzpatrick, *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1973), 1:377.

banking in the United States until the Federal Reserve System was established in 1913. Roger B. Taney was attorney general at the time. A strong ally of the General, he eventually served as Chief Justice of the United States. He was intimately involved in drafting the bank's recharter and recorded his memories of the bill's drafting, the so-called "Bank War Manuscript," which mentions Earl's presence. Taney had worked closely with Donelson, Jackson's secretary in drafting the veto and according to him:

I passed three days in this employment; the President frequently coming in; listening to the reading of different portions of it from time to time as it was drawn up, and to the observations and suggestions of Mr. Donelson and myself, and giving his own directions as to what should be inserted or omitted. The first day there was no one in the room but Mr. Donelson and myself, except the President and Mr. Earle – It was the room which Mr. Earle who lived in the President's family, always occupied as his painting room. Mr. Earle however was all the time engaged in painting, taking no part in the preparation of the veto.⁴⁸²

Taney went on to refer to Earl as "highly respectable as an artist" and a "pure and elevated" man. Although Earl played no role in drafting the charter, this episode makes clear that he was intimately involved in Jackson's daily personal and political life.⁴⁸³

Earl's Political Involvement

Even though he was not directly involved in policy making, Earl took an active interest in Jacksonian politics from the very beginning and his letters often involve frank discussions about political events and developments. Various letters and newspaper clippings attest to his engagement with Jackson's ever-evolving

⁴⁸² "Roger B. Taney's 'Bank War Manuscript,'" ed. by Carl Brent Swisher, *Maryland Historical Magazine* (Sept. 1958): 227.

⁴⁸³ See also Remini, 3: 384, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1945), 89-90.

political situation. For example, one clipping found among Earl's possessions and taken from a section with news from around the country had a notice from Nashville recounting a Presidential Election meeting that occurred in Bowling Green, Kentucky in 1823 in which Clay received thirty-five votes, Jackson – twelve, and Adams – three. Attesting to how far presidential elections have come since the nineteenth century, the article goes on to state that “The meeting did not take place for four hours after the appointed time; that many of Jackson's friends did not know that the meeting had been called; and that the friends of Mr. Clay [tried] every possible means to get him nominated.”⁴⁸⁴

On his move to Washington, Earl pledged his loyalty to Jackson saying, “I will assure you my dear friend my heart is with you, and the only pleasure I have in this life is identified with that of yours.” In this particular letter, as in most between the two men, after discussing the issue at hand, Earl began to discuss political matters and closed his letter saying, “No Administration for its time has ever given more general satisfaction than that of yours, and may God grant you with health to go through with this arduous task of reform, is the prayers of yours sincerely.”⁴⁸⁵ Earl's letters are actually replete with discussions involving Jacksonian politics. He was an active and well-informed citizen on the political realm which allow his paintings to be interpreted in a political context.

Earl's political role is clear from his active involvement in Jackson's election to his second term as President. For example, Earl received a letter in Washington on October 16, 1832 on the eve of Jackson's re-election bid from a supporter in

⁴⁸⁴ Unknown source, dated June 4, 1823, in Earl papers, 1:1, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴⁸⁵ *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, 7:501

Philadelphia, promising to deliver Pennsylvania's votes. A.M. Harvey wrote, "This state is for Jackson the people's candidate and he will receive the vote of Penn[sylvania] by at least from 30 to 40,000 majority – There is no mistake in this."⁴⁸⁶ An extract of another letter to Earl, written from New Orleans on May 21 (no year, but presumably from 1832) states: "General Jackson I think will still have the vote of this state: the caucus that nominated Clay, did not consist of a majority of the Legislature, and their time of service expires before the elections comes on."⁴⁸⁷ The receipt of political news, and the writing about Presidential elections were common practices for Earl, revealing his unwavering loyalty to Jackson.

According to presidential historian Noble Cunningham Jr., no president before Jackson seems to have had much concern with ensuring positive images of themselves were presented to the public, nor did they need to.⁴⁸⁸ However, Cunningham and others believe that Jackson employed Earl more "to provide employment for a favorite in-law of his late wife," than to ensure his political success.⁴⁸⁹ This idea, however, over-simplifies the complex relationship between the two men, and Earl's employment was certainly much more significant than providing a favor in Rachel's memory. Even if his position was initially based more on family ties than anything else, Jackson, more than any President before him, needed the visual reinforcement that Earl's portraits provided. Jackson's first election initiated a new era in American presidential politics, and as chapter five explains more fully,

⁴⁸⁶ A.M. Harvey to Earl. October 16, 1832. Earl papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

⁴⁸⁷ Parts of letter illegible. Unknown to Earl, May 21, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴⁸⁸ Noble E. Cunningham, *Popular Images of the Presidency: From Washington to Lincoln* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 283.

⁴⁸⁹ Cunningham, 283.

became the most bitterly fought race for the White House up to that point. As Jackson quickly realized, he needed an artistically-inclined political ally to promote his image.

Earl's portraits of Jackson were in particularly high demand while he was in the White House and functioned as a type of political marketing tool, working in direct counteraction to those who cast Jackson as a rabble-rouser. Contemporaries recognized Earl's advantage in proximity to the President and according to a newspaper article: "Colonel Earle enjoys advantages for painting our venerable Chief Magistrate, rarely possessed by an artist; residing under his roof: familiar intimacy with his subject enables the painter to give the fullest effect to that expression of the individual's character, for which alone a portrait is to be valued."⁴⁹⁰ Another historian has noted that, "It pleased Jackson for his subjects to commission portraits of him, and probably those who sought favor felt the word would best reach him if they commissioned Earl."⁴⁹¹ In addition, according to James Parton, an early Jackson biographer, "It was well understood by the seekers of Presidential favor that it did no harm to order a portrait of General Jackson from this artist, who was facetiously named the king's painter. Mr. Earl never stood still for lack of orders."⁴⁹² Earl's friendship was obviously an asset to anyone wanting to gain favor with the President.

Images of Jackson as President

Even in Washington, Earl often painted multiple versions of his presidential portraits. He created at least six similar versions of the so-called Jockey Club Portrait

⁴⁹⁰ *Nashville Republican*, December 22, 1835, from the *Georgetown Metropolitan*.

⁴⁹¹ Budd H. Bishop, "Art in Tennessee: The Early 19th Century," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 29 (Winter 1970-71): 385.

⁴⁹² James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 3:165

depicting Jackson as the nation's leader. All of the works in this group are nearly identical in size, measuring approximately 30.5 x 25.5 inches. As probably the first set of portraits Earl produced in Washington, the grouping is less finely finished than many of Earl's other works, especially those from 1825 - 1829. This attests to the demand for Jackson paintings after his election. According to historian James Barber "The variety of sizes, settings, and poses in Earl's canvases [of Jackson] was seemingly endless and the demand seemingly insatiable."⁴⁹³

Among the finest and most finished of this group of works is the so-called "Jockey Club Portrait" (fig. 4.14). The painting is owned today by Daughters of the American Revolution and displayed in the "Tennessee Room" at their headquarters in Washington D.C., but hung for most of the nineteenth-century in the White House. The circa 1830 bust view depicts an idealized Jackson seated at the White House. Behind him a red curtain is swept back, reminiscent of the technique often employed by the young Earl (and his father) in New England. A window is revealed and through it, the base of a White House column can be seen and in the background, the Capitol building. The sky is a sunset view, possibly alluding to the fact that Jackson had been predicting his death for years at this point and was constantly encumbered with pain and illness. The sunset might also refer to the trouble Jackson had adjusting to life in Washington.

The extra care Earl took in executing this work in particular is evidenced by the original large, ornate, and gilded frame, which is much more elaborate than his standard simplified version and still holds the painting. Jackson is seated in a pink Bellangé chair that was originally part of a fifty-three piece set ordered from French

⁴⁹³ Barber, 135.

master craftsman Pierre-Antoine Bellangé by President James Monroe for the Oval Room (now the Blue Room) of the White House in 1817. At the time Congress criticized these chairs for being too ornate and not of domestic origin.⁴⁹⁴ The painting is also significant to the history of White House decorative arts because according to tradition, it was especially favored by Abraham Lincoln, who often looked to Jackson's actions for inspiration, and it hung in the Lincoln bedroom during his Presidency.⁴⁹⁵ Though a Southerner, like Lincoln, Jackson was strongly anti-secessionist. Lincoln frequently looked back to Jackson's actions and modeled his own on them. He liked that Jackson had imposed martial law in New Orleans on the eve of the battle there, and he did something similar during the Civil War. Lincoln, like Jackson, believed above all in the preservation of the Union, and he looked back to Jackson's strong presidency for inspiration in preserving it at any cost.

A similar, if less-refined portrait of Jackson is owned by the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh (fig. 4.15).⁴⁹⁶ In this version, a wooden chair with red upholstery has replaced the Bellangé chair. It emphasizes Jackson the leader of a nation of law since on the red table to his left a book of U.S. Laws can clearly be seen atop a pile of papers. As in all of the paintings in the Jockey Club group, Jackson wears a black suit and stock, white shirt, gold spectacles, and has a gold ring on his left hand. Earl had rarely depicted Jackson in eye-glasses in his earlier portraits but

⁴⁹⁴ One of the well-preserved Bellangé chairs is on display in the Tennessee Room at the DAR museum's period room, just below Earl's portrait.

⁴⁹⁵ According to notes on this painting from the Catalog of American Portraits, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. The painting was gifted to the Daughters of the American Revolution in the 1950s by Mrs. Cyrus Griffith Martin, but its nineteenth-century provenance is unknown.

⁴⁹⁶ The portrait was purchased by the State of North Carolina from Mrs. Anson Moran of Wilton, Connecticut. Where the term "Jockey Club Portrait" came from is also unknown but Jackson was a regular at the Washington Jockey horseracing Club.

included them more frequently in the presidential years. Here too is the familiar red curtain pulled back to reveal a blue, pink, and gray sky. The same Doric column appears as well, underscoring Jackson's role as the leader of the republic. Although the painting is undated, as are most of Earl's works, it is clearly a part of the same grouping as the Jockey Club portrait.

An even more hurriedly executed portrait of Jackson also belonging to the same group, but which has suffered the effects of time, is owned by the Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino, California (fig. 4.16). As with the others in this group, Jackson is bespectacled here and seated before a column, law book, and loose papers. Unlike the others though, this portrait is signed on the back "R.E.W. Earl, pinxt. 1830," which allows the entire group of similar images to be dated to around the same time.⁴⁹⁷ Though these works make seemingly little overt reference to events of the early Jackson White House, they are reflections of the early Jackson presidency. Jackson is depicted as a strong national leader. He saw himself as the voice of the people, and the presence of books of law reveal his willingness to impose his will, which he saw as being in tune with that of the people.

Earl returned to depicting Jackson in military garb in the 1830s, perhaps just in time for the re-election bid of 1832. Although he rarely signed his paintings, his stunning half-length portrait of Jackson now owned by the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is signed in the lower right corner "R.E.W. Earl Pinxt 1833" (fig. 4.17). The

⁴⁹⁷ According to a letter from Robert R. Mark, Curator of Art at the Huntington Library in 1968, "I'm sorry to say we know very little about our R.E.W. Earl portrait of Jackson. It is signed and dated (on the back of the painting), 1830, and it was acquired by Mr. Huntingdon [from George D. Smith of New York] for a modest sum in 1916. I have no idea how many versions of the portrait may exist." This letter is located in the painting's files at the Catalog of American Portraits. Other more simplified but similar portraits in this grouping are owned by the Georgia Governor's Mansion, the Daughters of the American Revolution (a second portrait located in the Michigan room), and one in a private collection handled by Vose Galleries, Boston in 1955.

portrait is considered by many to be among the artist's finest, and he felt the same way, declaring that "the portrait...is, of all that I have painted, my favorite."⁴⁹⁸ With this work Earl returned to the image of Jackson as military victor to remind the voting public of his status as a national war hero.

The Brooks' likeness of Jackson is idealized and shows Jackson as young and robust, despite his declining health. He is pictured as a Major General of the United States Army, but the uniform was a propagandistic ploy since it was a new double-breasted style only introduced in the 1830s.⁴⁹⁹ Rather than directly reminding the public of Jackson's past achievements at the Battle of New Orleans by appearing in the jacket he had originally worn in battle twenty years earlier (which Earl was well-accustomed to depicting), he reveals Jackson as a current, virile, military leader (in contemporary dress), ready to direct the path of the nation.

Typically, Earl placed the Capitol building in the background of the painting, and Jackson gallantly holds a sword across his chest, the scabbard of which bears the inscription "Our Federal Union – it must be preserved," Jackson's famous toast given at the banquet held in 1830 in honor of Thomas Jefferson's birthday. In the midst of frequent trouble in South Carolina, and threats of secession, Jackson was a fervent proponent of the sanctity of the federal union. The sword was a gift from the citizens of Nashville. The painting was well-received in Washington. Writers at Francis P. Blair's *Washington Globe* remarked that "the attitude, the coloring, and the accessories combine to present an almost speaking portrait of the Chief

⁴⁹⁸ Ralph E.W. Earl to Sir Edward Thomason, October 22, 1834. Transcribed in Edward Thomason, *Memoirs During a Half a Century* (London, 1845), 290-292.

⁴⁹⁹ Barber, 142.

Magistrate... The reputation of the modest, but gifted painter, is well established, and this painting is calculated to elevate him to high rank among the distinguished artists of the age.”⁵⁰⁰

As evidence of his approval of the portrait, Jackson presented it in 1834 to Sir Edward Thomason, an English inventor and merchant, in thanks for a series of medals he had given to the President.⁵⁰¹ The carrier of the portrait expressed regret that such a fine work of art was leaving the country saying, “I assure you that it is not without much regret that I shall part with that fine specimen of American genius, which would form such an appropriate decoration for the delegation of the United States.”⁵⁰² A pleased Sir Edward Thomason expressed his appreciation, writing to Earl that the picture was “a work which does honor to your pencil, and in a peculiar style extremely imposing; and for the polite manner which you are pleased to communicate the whole circumstance of this gratifying present to me, I return my best thanks.”⁵⁰³ With the painting in such a prominent collection, it seems that Earl’s career had come full circle, revealing both the level of success that he had attained in his American career, and the fruits of his English training as a young man over twenty years earlier.

⁵⁰⁰ *Washington Globe*, February 23, 1835.

⁵⁰¹ *Nashville Republican*, March 10, 1835 and *Nashville Union*, June 10, 1835. The portrait was delivered to Thomason on December 14, 1834.

⁵⁰² Mr. A. Vail to Major A.J. Donelson, letter at American Charge des Affaires at London and reproduced in the *Nashville Republican*, March 1835. From typescript at Catalog of American portraits.

⁵⁰³ Sir Edward Thomason to Col. R.E. Earle, December 24, 1834. Reproduced in *Nashville Republican*, March 1835. The work descended through the Thomason family and was sold by P.R. Thomason, Esq., great grandson of Sir Edward Thomason to Knoedler Galleries, New York and purchased by the Brooks museum. It is still in its original ornate frame as evidenced by a reproduction of the work from 1845 in Sir Edward Thomason, *Memoirs During a Half a Century* (London, 1845), vol. II facing page 290.

Including the smaller *Sam Patch* study at the Hermitage (discussed below), Earl made at least six variations of the Brooks Museum painting. The 1833 Brooks' portrait may be the earliest, although this cannot be confirmed. Another very similar work was probably completed in 1835 or 1836 by Earl and like the Brooks Museum portrait, it was also presented as a gift to a European dignitary. This one went to N.M. Rothschild in London. Rothschild was the United States government's official banker in Europe in the 1820s. The painting was personally delivered to the late Rothschild's sons by John Eaton, then serving as envoy to England, as evidenced by a letter dated September 6, 1836 which acknowledges receipt of the painting. It seems that the portrait was intended as a diplomatic gift and according to the Rothschild sons "we shall not fail to estimate very highly your presentation of a portrait which you induced your President to give a sitting for and which you state to be a faithful resemblance."⁵⁰⁴ This portrait is still owned by the Rothschild collection and hangs proudly in their bank offices in London. The portrait (40 x 30 inches) is a very close match to the Brooks Museum portrait, however, in this image, Jackson is wearing a belt rather than a red sash, and the background architectural details were omitted in the Rothschild version. The painting, like several of the other versions of the image is encased in an elaborate gilded frame making this grouping one of Earl's most spectacular.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ N.M. Rothschild & Sons, London to Messrs JJ Cohen, Baltimore, Sept. 6, 1835. Courtesy of N.M. Rothschild & Sons, copy in the Catalog of American Portraits, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁰⁵ Another similar version of the work, originally belonging to Edward Livingston, is owned by the Historic Hudson Valley collection in Tarrytown, New York. A final similar version of the painting is owned by the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. having been transferred from the National Gallery, and signed in the lower right of the painting "R. Earl pinxt, 1835." This work is the most closely related to the Brooks' portrait and the only other known version with the Capitol building in the background. Unlike many of Earl's portraits, the provenance for this particular work is

Not all of Earl's portraits of Jackson in Washington were frontal portrait busts and he varied his production as time allowed. One especially unique work is Earl's equestrian portrait. In it the General is mounted on the famous white steed, Sam Patch, who had been presented to him by the citizens of Philadelphia in 1833 while Jackson was making his northeastern Presidential tour (a trip during which, like most, Earl accompanied him, fig. 4.18).⁵⁰⁶ Summoning up his fortitude in his bid for reelection, Jackson rode the horse for five hours through the Philadelphia parade route of cheering citizens.⁵⁰⁷ The horse went on to become one of the President's favorite mounts, and was quartered in the White House stables during his Presidency, returning with him to the Hermitage in 1837. Jackson's beloved granddaughter, "Little Rachel" remembered the animal fondly saying, "It was on this old horse, after our return from Washington, that my grandfather took me, every morning after breakfast, and rode around the farm to see the stock."⁵⁰⁸ The portrait originally hung on the south wall of the Hermitage parlor where it still hangs today.⁵⁰⁹ Although the work is undated, the bust view of Jackson and the double-breasted military coat are similar to the Brooks Museum portrait of 1833 and this image was possibly painted to commemorate the tour that year.

clear. The National collection of art has been in possession of this painting since 1844 when it was donated by the painting's original owner, Major William H. Chase. The painting is dated 1835, two years later than the Brooks painting, presumed to be the original version. There are two known copies of this portrait in the Museum of American Art, and Montgomery Place (for provenance see Barber, 148.)

⁵⁰⁶ Scott, 31.

⁵⁰⁷ *Philadelphia Enquirer*, June 11, 1833.

⁵⁰⁸ Rachel Jackson Lawrence, "Andrew Jackson at Home," *McClure's* (1898): 793.

⁵⁰⁹ Sam Patch got his name from a daredevil who died in 1830 after attempting to jump 125 feet over the Genessee fall near Rochester, NY. See *Nashville Banner*, Sept. 3, 1966.

The painting, Earl's version of a Baroque equestrian state portrait, depicts Jackson in a traditional pose for military heroes, a uniformed general riding through a landscape with the United States Capitol building in the distance. As with the "Farmer Jackson" painting, Earl's awareness of an art historical tradition is revealed with this painting and was noted by Washington and Nashville newspapers. It "is a splendid picture. The charger has been copied from that celebrated model to succeeding artists, in Vandyke's [*sic*] Charles I, and has all the grace and spirit of the original...the dignified bearing of the General, and his habit of command, tell with fine effect in the upright figure and firm countenance, every line of which the painter has made alive with expression. We consider this portrait, as a painting, one of the best efforts of American art which we have seen."⁵¹⁰

The equestrian portrait was a very common court artform whose roots can be traced back to antiquity. In the Baroque era, European monarchs were frequently depicted mounted on horses. Anthony van Dyck, for example, painted dozens of portraits of his patron Charles I, many of them equestrian, two hundred years before Earl works for Jackson. These images became canonical and similarly to Earl and Jackson's relationship, the connection between Van Dyck and Charles I was said to have been "one of intimate and sympathetic collaboration."⁵¹¹ Earl's equestrian image of Jackson and Van Dyck's *Portrait of Charles I* are a case in point (fig. 4.19). Both show their hero in full military regalia elevated on the back of a large white horse.

⁵¹⁰ *Nashville Republican*, December 22, 1835, from the *Georgetown Metropolitan*. The article actually reviewed three Jackson paintings by Earl and notes the circumstances of the unknown authors' visit to Earl's studio: "We have had the pleasure lately of examining, at his rooms, several portraits of General Jackson, now finished, or in preparation by Col Earl, and can say with safety, that they are an honor to the American school of portrait."

⁵¹¹ John F. Moffitt, "'Le Roi à la crosse'? Kings, Christian Knights, and Van Dyck's Singular 'Dismounted Equestrian-Portrait' of Charles I," *Artibus et Historiae* 4:7 (1983): 79.

Seen from a low vantage point a tempestuous sky fills each painting's background. Earl would have been aware of Van Dyck's painting from many sources. He certainly came in direct contact with Van Dyck's originals in his year in London, and Van Dyck's famous *Charles I Dismounted* was in the Louvre (1636). Prints of Van Dyck's paintings were also available in the United States.⁵¹²

Earl's creation of an equestrian portrait of Jackson is especially telling. Not only does it have grand sources, but it also relates to Jackson personally. Jackson was an experienced and avid horseman who had enjoyed horseracing since his early days in the Carolinas. His infamous 1806 duel with Charles Dickinson, in which Jackson was shot in the shoulder and Dickinson was mortally wounded, had begun as an argument over a racehorse. He raised and bred racehorses at the Hermitage, which earned him great wealth. While at the White House he stabled many horses and enjoyed visiting the horseracing track in the city.

According to Barber, this painting is "perhaps the most widely illustrated and popular of all Jackson images."⁵¹³ The portrait has also been criticized, however for the Earl's awkward portrayal of the horse, as well as the lack of naturalism in Jackson's pose and facial features. These characteristics may suggest that this painting was a study for a larger work. It is smaller and narrower than the standard canvas Earl usually used and is very close to the same size of another study for *The*

⁵¹² Leo Steinburg has noted that John Trumbull's 1790 *Portrait of General George Washington* (New York City Hall) was based on an engraving by Robert Strange after Van Dyck's portrait of *Charles I Dismounted*. Steinburg, "The Glorious Company," in *Art About Art*, J. Lipman and R. Marshall, eds. (New York: Dutton, 1978), 8-31.

⁵¹³ Barber, 143, see quotation about painting in *Nashville Republican*, Dec. 22, 1835

National Portrait (discussed below) which also displays similar awkwardness.⁵¹⁴

Unfortunately, Earl never managed to execute a grand life-sized equestrian portrait of Jackson, which might have helped seal his reputation alongside Clark Mills (who executed several equestrian monuments of Jackson, most notably for Jackson Square in New Orleans) as the great artist of Jackson the equestrian hero.

As with most of his Jackson portraits, Earl created a number of bust versions based on the head and shoulders in the *Sam Patch* equestrian image. Perhaps the most striking, if unfinished of the group is the Jackson portrait owned by the Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, South Carolina (fig. 4.20). The image bears the greatest resemblance to Jackson's appearance in *Sam Patch* and was possibly created as a more finished bust study for the planned large-scale work. Although it is unsigned on the front, the back is inscribed "Original Portrait of General Jackson painted...from Life by Col Earl at the President's House, Washington, 1836, J.K. Kane."⁵¹⁵ Like *Sam Patch*, it is also smaller than Earl's standard portrait, at 22 x 17 inches, which underscores the idea that it was probably intended as a study for a larger work.

Earl depicted Jackson as a statesman at least as often as a military hero, and in his second term, the "statesman" became the dominant mode of portrayal. Earl made many versions of the same simple image of a solemn Jackson, dressed as a dignitary, against a muted background (fig. 4.21). Most of these images depict the President wearing his favorite black cape with red lining over his standard black jacket and date to the mid-1830s. They also have a softer, more refined, painterly touch than many of

⁵¹⁴ Thank you to Marsha Mullin at the Hermitage for initially pointing out the possibility of the *Sam Patch* portrait being a study. The study for the *National Portrait* is also at the Hermitage.

⁵¹⁵ John K. Kane was a jurist and Jackson supporter who helped Jackson in the so-called Bank War, Barber, 196.

Earl's earlier more hastily executed portraits. Especially during Jackson's second term, Earl had fewer demands on his time and his images were no longer needed as campaign tools, and therefore he was thus freed from propagandistic imagery to delight in the painting's surface. This grouping differs from the others because in some of the images Jackson faces his right (he almost always faced his left in Earl's previous images). Almost all of the so-called 'statesman' group are also unsigned and undated. And their similarities make them hard to distinguish, date, or trace the provenance. Most importantly, however, as a group this exquisite collection of Jacksonian imagery creates a unique set of Presidential portraits in the history of America.

Many of these portraits have been overly restored, but others, such as the version belonging to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, which descended in the Donelson family, retain Earl's original soft touch. One of the most exquisite examples of these images is owned by the Friends of Linden Place in Bristol, Rhode Island.⁵¹⁶ The Tennessee State Museum's version (fig. 4.22) is somewhat damaged, but is significant for its provenance since Jackson gave it to Judge John Catron. Catron was a self-educated man who served under Jackson in the War of 1812, after which he was elected state attorney by the Tennessee legislature. By 1824, he was a member of Tennessee's highest court, the Court of Errors and Appeals, and eventually became the court's Chief Justice. Catron was active in politics and directed Martin Van Buren's successful 1836 campaign for the Presidency. On March 3, 1837, the last day of his Presidency, Jackson nominated him to the Supreme Court, a post which he held

⁵¹⁶ Others may be seen in the Yale University Art Collection, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, The White House Collection, Tennessee State Museum and the Ladies Hermitage Association.

until his death in 1865.⁵¹⁷ Based on this, the portrait was probably executed toward the end of Jackson's second term. Similarly, Earl seems to have created a series of similar portraits to serve as gifts for some of Jackson's most cherished and long-time supporters, or as mementos at the end of his Presidency.

Earl's portraits of Jackson were cherished by their owners, particularly when they were close friends of The President's. After Martin Van Buren retired from public office to his estate in Kinderhook, New York, his portrait of Jackson became one of his most cherished possessions. He related to Jackson, "How greatly would be my [residence of Lindenwald's] value increased if I could promise myself to see you at it. To come as near as practicable I have our friend Col Earles likeness of you well framed...[for] my dining room."⁵¹⁸

One of the most effective and emblematic of this simplified grouping depicts Jackson wearing the garb of both statesman and general (fig. 4.23). In this image, Earl employed the Gainsborough-inspired sky, included to evoke the setting sun, and hence the impending end of the Jackson regime. He wears the double-breasted military jacket, but with the statesman's black and red cloak draped over his right shoulder, effectively summarizing both Jackson's career and Earl's visual conception of it. Jackson appears advanced in age, but still forthright, strong, and upstanding, and proudly wears the two garments that symbolize both parts of his distinguished career. Earl's style is similarly summarized. His carefully detailed, yet idealized rendering

⁵¹⁷ The portrait was passed from Mrs. John Catron, to her friend, Jane Marshal, and given in 1887 to the state of Tennessee.

⁵¹⁸ Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, May 15, 1841, *Correspondence*, 6:112. Van Buren's portrait of Jackson also belonged to the "statesman group" and is discussed in chapter five and reproduced in image 5.14.

with a smooth but softened brushstroke, recalls his Tennessee portraits, and the loosely brushed, romantic sky behind Jackson suggests the climax of his synthesis of European models for presidential portrayals. At the end of Jackson's presidency, Earl combined the sitter's identity of General and President, while also alluding to his own artistic mastery of European and American history.

The National Picture

Just as Gilbert Stuart had done thirty years earlier in his Lansdowne Portrait of George Washington, Earl depicted Jackson in a life-sized work in the last year of his patron's two-term presidency. Here he fully acknowledged the American art historical tradition that preceded him. As the last completed work of Earl's career, the painting summarizes his life's work. Earl had not painted a life-sized image of Jackson since 1821, when he created the now-lost grand portrait for the city of New Orleans.⁵¹⁹ After consulting with Thomas Sully and creating a small study in December 1836, Earl painted the monumental (126 x 93 inches) image for the city of Washington, a work that became known as "the National Picture," and Earl considered it his masterpiece (fig. 4.24). The portrait is still on public view in Washington today in the National Portrait Gallery.⁵²⁰

Jackson is a commanding presence in the painting, standing within the south portico of the White House, an 1824 addition, in contrapposto pose with weight on

⁵¹⁹ There are no known images of this painting.

⁵²⁰ For more info on this painting see *Spirit of the Times* (New York) March 25, 1837, and *Boston Statesman*, Feb. 25, 1837. He began by executing a small-scale study (now hanging in the Hermitage and of the exact size of the Sam Patch study), which he consulted with Thomas Sully about. See John Pemberton to Earl, Dec. 19, 1836. Earl papers, AAS. See also *Nashville Union* April 11, 1837. As Pemberton says, "I have as you requested seen Mr. Sully and described to him your excellent full length Portrait of our inestimable, and venerated President, General Andrew Jackson, God bless him. Mr. Sully does not approve of spectacles, he says "They will be obstacles to his fine deep set eyes."

his right leg. He has a pleasant expression with closed mouth, steel blue eyes, and his well-known white hair is swept back. From the porch the scene looks toward the southeast, where a magisterial landscape unfolds behind him with a view of the U. S. Capitol building rising in the distance. In the middle-ground, two weeping willows surround a stone gateway which was clearly inspired by a Roman triumphal arch. This was an embellished detail invented by Earl and not based on an actual monument at the site. It might reference Jackson's republican virtue, the Jeffersonian model he embraced over the Federalist view of centralized government. It also acknowledges Earl's awareness of the importance of architectural elements in a painting and the gateway creates a direct visual link between Jackson and the capitol in the background. Jackson is shown resting a gloved right hand on his trademark cane, a gift from the American people. His bare left hand (wearing a gold pinky ring with a red stone) holds the other glove and rests on a waist-high pedestal from which rises a large column. Jackson stands erect in civilian attire wearing black pants and shoes with a black vest and jacket, ruffled white shirt, with a stiff white collar. Over his shoulders and hanging off his left arm is his dramatic black cloak with striking red lining that enframes his commanding figure as it had in many other Earl images. To the left is one of the White House's gilded round-backed chairs with red upholstery emblazoned with gold stars. Resting on the chair is Jackson's trademark white beaver-skin hat, upside-down with its very wide, black mourning band "which he has always worn since the decease of the partner of his bosom."⁵²¹ Earl has depicted Jackson at the conclusion of his Presidency, and thus the scene is set at dusk, with the sunset reflecting on the eastern clouds.

⁵²¹ *Nashville Union*, April 11, 1837, reprinted from *Boston Statesman*, February 25, 1837

The commanding figure of Jackson in the foreground contrasts starkly with the miniscule Capitol in the distance. This juxtaposition has been noted as a literal representation of the increase in presidential power initiated by Jackson.⁵²² During Jackson's administration, the power of the President far exceeded that of the Congress for the first time. Rather than deferring to Congress, Jackson increased presidential authority. According to historian C. Perry Patterson, "Jackson was the first President to advance the theory that the President was the representative of the people and that a mandate from the ballot box warranted his intervention in the legislative process."⁵²³ Jackson vetoed more congressional decisions during his time than all of his predecessors combined. John Quincy Adams feared Jackson's power, noting that "The presidential veto has hitherto been exercised with great reserve. Not more than four or five Acts of congress have been thus arrested by six presidents, and in forty years. He has rejected four in three days. The overseer ascendancy is complete."⁵²⁴ By his own admission, Jackson wrote to friend that "The veto, I find, will work well."⁵²⁵

The National Portrait obviously references Gilbert Stuart's *Lansdowne Portrait*, (fig. 4.25) the "national" George Washington image, about which Earl was certainly aware. Like Washington, Jackson is shown as president/civilian, not in military garb. Stuart's pose and composition was perhaps copied from an image by

⁵²² As mentioned by National Portrait Gallery historian Sid Hart on July 23, 2009 in a public presentation about Jackson and this painting.

⁵²³ C. Perry Patterson, *Presidential Government in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1947), 51, cited in Meacham, 141.

⁵²⁴ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, comprising portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1874-77), 8:230-231, cited in Meacham, 140.

⁵²⁵ *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:156.

French portraitist to Louis XIV, Hyacinthe Rigaud's portrait of Bishop Bossuet, known to Stuart through an engraving by Pierre Drevet, but the symbols were altered to reflect American ideals. Earl's portrayal is far more romantic than the restrained Federalist painting of the first President. As Presidential historian Noble Cunningham has observed, "the commanding pose and the cape draped over Jackson's shoulders give Earl's portrait a majestic tone rare in Presidential portraiture."⁵²⁶ The painting's "majestic tone" also reveals Earl's awareness of the European state portrait which has been classified as "works that depict people of great political power or achievement in their public character. The primary purpose is not the portrayal of the individual, but the evocation through his image of those abstract principles for which he stands... They are large in scale and austere monumental in conception, with the result that they are admirably adapted to purposes of public display."⁵²⁷ Based on this definition, Earl's "National Portrait" of Jackson functions much in the same manner of a European state portrait, a monumental work, that revealed Jackson's character and principles.

The painting was heralded by the *Nashville Union* as Earl's "*chef d'oeuvre*." According to the *Boston Statesman*, "As a whole – both in design and execution – it will be considered a masterpiece. It combines the qualities of a portrait, a landscape, and a historical painting and will secure to the distinguished artist, the first rank in his

⁵²⁶ Cunningham, 152. Earl copied the bust of the National picture several times for what turned out to be some of the most successful Jackson images of his career – discuss these, see CAP images and notes.

⁵²⁷ Marianna Jenkins, *The State Portrait: Its Origins and Evolution* (New York: College Art Association, 1947), 1.

profession. It will immortalize Earle, as Washington's portrait has Steward [Gilbert Stuart, *sic.*], and David's Napoleon."⁵²⁸

A letter published in the *Boston Statesman* also outlines the interesting circumstances of the portrait's commission. These details reveal strong party unity at the end of Jackson's presidency, as well as a general sense of democracy in the city of Washington that Jackson had worked to develop. The rise of Jackson's Democratic party is a complex phenomenon, but Jackson was responsible for giving it a voice for the first time. The party originated as "the Democracy" and was composed of Jackson's most ardent supporters. Financial details are rarely documented for Earl's portraits, but in this case, as with the civic commission of the New Orleans portrait of 1821 the painting was paid for by the national capital's citizens. As the Boston notice states, "The manner in which it has been ordered is alike creditable to the citizens of Washington and to Gen. Jackson. It is by voluntary subscription of the citizens of Washington without distinction of party. They pay one thousand dollars for it and no citizen was permitted to pay more than one dollar. It is to be presented to the City Council and hung in City Hall. It is a mark of respect that has been shown no other President, not even to Washington." As the letter continues,

It is on the official sunset of Gen. Jackson – when the citizens have nothing more to hope or to fear from him. It is a tribute, a spontaneous, a voluntary tribute of respect for what he has done – by the citizens who have lived by his side and noticed his conduct during the eight years of his eventful administration. This circumstance must go far to convince the opponents of General Jackson in other parts of the country, that he has been strangely misrepresented by heated partisans. In future, every patriot, every man of taste, on visiting the Capitol of his country, will find his way to the City Hall, to view the inimitable portrait of the greatest man of the age – Earle's Jackson.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ *Nashville Union*, April 11, 1837, reprinted from *Boston Statesman*, February 25, 1837

Earl's *National Picture* served as the capstone to a career-long venture of depicting Andrew Jackson. The painting summarizes both Earl's career as an artist and his life-long Jacksonian devotion. By emulating Stuart's Lansdowne portrait, Earl placed Jackson beside Washington in the succession of great Presidents. And by quoting an American masterpiece, Earl placed his own work in a similar distinguished lineage.

⁵²⁹ *Nashville Union*, April 11, 1837, reprinted from *Boston Statesman*, February 25, 1837.



Figure 4.1. Ralph E.W. Earl, *General Andrew Jackson*, 1818. Oil on canvas, 94 ½ in x 57 ¾ in. Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. Reproduced from *Tennessee Portrait Project*, www.tnportraits.org (accessed January 5, 2010).



Figure 4.2. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *General John Burgoyne*, probably 1766. Oil on canvas, 50 in x 39 7/8 in. The Frick Collection, New York. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed January 5, 2010).



Figure 4.3. Jean François de Vallée, *Andrew Jackson*, 1815. Watercolor on ivory, 3 in x 2 ½ in. Historic Hudson Valley, Tarrytown, New York.



Figure 4.4. Nathan W. Wheeler, *General Jackson*, 1815. Oil on canvas, 30 in x 25 ¾ in. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

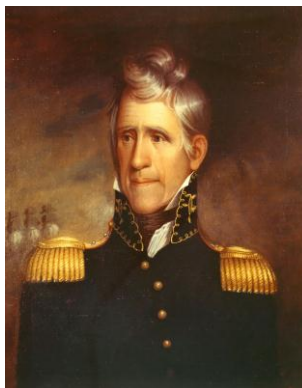


Figure 4.5. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 29 in x 25 in. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee.



Figure 4.6. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 30 in x 25 ½ in. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.



Figure 4.7. Jackson's Coat from the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812.
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

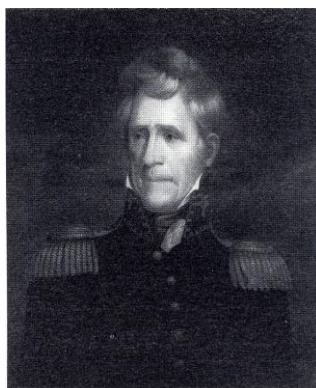


Figure 4.8. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 30 in x 25 in.
Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.



Figure 4.9. Charles Willson Peale, *George Washington at Princeton, 1779*. Oil on canvas, 93 in x 58 ½, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.



Figure 4.10. Charles Willson Peale, *Andrew Jackson, 1819*. Oil on canvas, 28 x 22 ¾ in. The Masonic Library and Museum of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

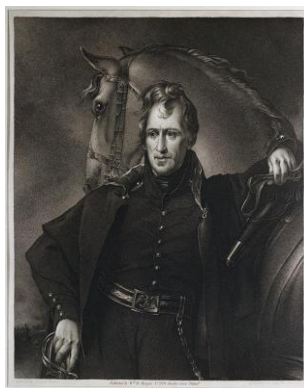


Figure 4.11. James Barton Longacre, after Thomas Sully, *Andrew Jackson*, 1819-1820. Stipple engraving, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{3}{4}$, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Reproduced from *ArtStor*, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed April 2, 2010).



Figure 4.12. Ralph E.W. Earl, "Farmer Jackson," 1830. Oil on canvas, 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ in x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Private Collection.

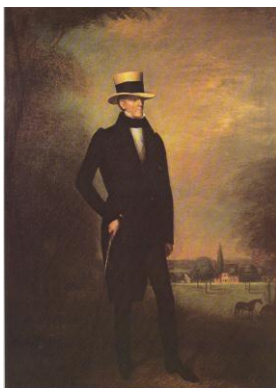


Figure 4.13. Ralph E.W. Earl, *The Tennessee Gentleman*, 1830. Oil on canvas, 28 in x 21 in. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee.

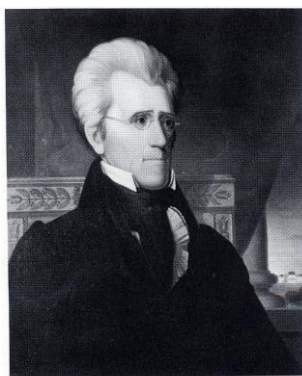


Figure 4.14. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, "The Jockey Club Portrait," ca. 1830. Oil on canvas, 30 1/16 in x 25 1/16 in. The Daughters of the American Revolution Museum, Washington, D.C.

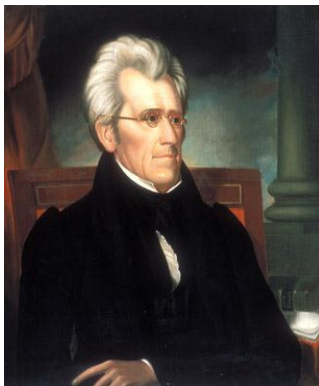


Figure 4.15. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, ca. 1830. Oil on panel, 30 in x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh.



Figure 4.16. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1830. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.



Figure 4.17. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1833. Oil on canvas, 36 x 29. Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee.



Figure 4.18. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson astride Same Patch*, ca. 1833. Oil on canvas, 30 ½ in x 21 in. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee.



Figure 4.19. Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Charles I*, ca. 1635. Museo del Prado.

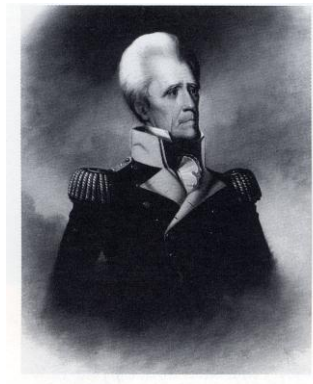


Figure 4.20. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1836. Oil on canvas, 22 5/8 in x 17 3/4 in. Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina.

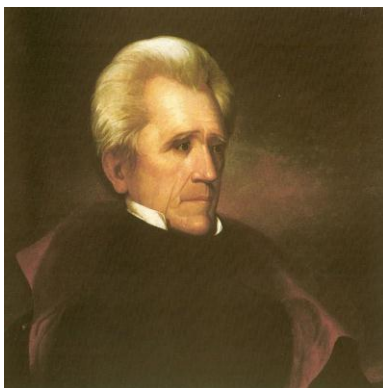


Figure 4.21. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson* (detail), ca. 1834. Oil on canvas, 30 in x 25 in. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee.



Figure 4.22. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, ca. 1834. Oil on canvas, 29 in. x 24 ½ in. Tennessee Historical Collection, Tennessee State Museum, Nashville.

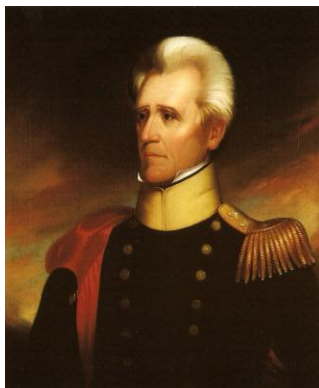


Figure 4.23. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, ca. 1835. Oil on canvas, 29 ½ in x 24 ½ in. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee.

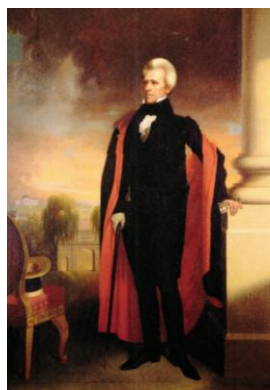


Figure 4.24. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, “The National Picture,” 1836-37. Oil on canvas, 126 in x 93 in. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Figure 4.25. Gilbert Stuart, *George Washington (Lansdowne Portrait)*, 1796. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

**CHAPTER FIVE:
EARL'S PRINTS AND THE JACKSON CARICATURE: MASS-PRODUCED
POLITICAL PROPAGANDA**

As Earl moved into the position of being Jackson's personal artist, he created not only portraits in oil, but also commissioned prints that functioned as mechanisms of political support for Jackson's three presidential campaigns, the last two of which were successful. These hard-fought races were some of the first to involve full-scale personal attacks on the candidates by adversaries (of which Jackson had many), and criticisms came frequently in the form of widely circulated caricatures. No president before Jackson had been as frequently or bitterly attacked by cartoonists. Jackson's friend, John Eaton wrote that, "I am aware, that no man in this country, living or dead, has been abused to the extent you have."⁵³⁰ In fact, it was with the hard-fought Presidential race of 1824 between John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and Jackson that the tradition of political cartooning began in earnest in the United States. Jackson was the first President to be elected from outside an original American colony, and to have risen to high office from a lowly background. He would also become the first President not directly associated with the Founding Fathers. His ascension to the top was especially trying and he faced great political opposition which was exacerbated by his differences from his predecessors. Earl's visual record of Jackson, which was made available to a large audience through the prints he commissioned after his paintings, served as a rebuttal to the vicious attacks on Jackson's character, and was especially designed to refute critiques that often addressed issues of class conflict regarding Jackson's background and his controversial politics and strong personality.

⁵³⁰ *Nashville Republican*, April 9, 1825, cited in Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee* (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, 1941, 2001), 117.

It is unclear exactly how many different prints Earl commissioned from his own paintings, and countless others were made without his knowledge. However, three of the most critical prints were produced just before Jackson's presidential campaigns of 1824, 1828, and 1832, and were intended by Earl to bolster public support for Jackson. Several of Earl's publishing projects, beginning as early as 1818, have been documented in his letters and notebooks. Two of the most well-documented reproductions, an 1828 engraving of one of Earl's bust-length portraits of Jackson in civilian attire by James Longacre, and an 1832 lithograph of Earl's full-length "Farmer Jackson" by John Bufford were actually issued strategically in election years.⁵³¹ After his failed bid for the presidency in 1824, Jackson returned to the Senate. However, just a year later he resigned his seat in Washington, returned to Nashville, and unofficially began his campaign for the presidential race of 1828, deliberately utilizing Earl's prints to encourage a positive, heroic, public image of himself as an up-and-coming and legitimate American political leader.

Earl had become aware of the active printmaking tradition in England and France while he was there, although he was most likely first exposed to such images in New England in the early nineteenth century. It is probable that his initial experience with European art actually came in the form of engravings made after European masterpieces that were available in the United States. Furthermore, during his childhood nearly every American home would have been adorned with a print of the nation's greatest hero, George Washington. In addition, his father had teamed with printmaker Amos Doolittle in 1775 to publish hand-colored engravings of the

⁵³¹ The making of these prints is described in some detail in Georgia Brady Bumgardner, "Political Portraiture: Two Prints of Andrew Jackson," *American Art Journal* 18:4 (Autumn 1986): 84-95.

battles of Lexington and Concord, the first historical prints made in the United States.⁵³² Although the specific details of this project are mostly unrecorded, the strong tradition, even in the early United States, of printed visual imagery would have been impressed upon Earl at a young age. By the time he embarked on his mature career, the diversity of printed media and their purposes was growing substantially, and Earl would draw upon his exposure in his printed Jacksonian imagery.

Cartoons and caricatures

Printmaking had been transformed in 1796 with Bavarian Alois Senefelder's discovery of the new technique of lithography. Much quicker and less expensive than engraving and capable of reproducing continuous tone rather than just line art, lithography contributed to the rise of caricature in the United States.⁵³³ The process was introduced in America in the early nineteenth-century and began to flourish during the Jackson era, just in time for the election season of 1824. Jackson soon became vilified in widely circulated lithographs, and according to one historian "it marked the first major flowering of American political caricature."⁵³⁴ Jackson was certainly not the first American politician to be lampooned in prints; no President, even Washington, was without visual critique. However, before the introduction of lithography, cartooning was a much more laborious process and print production was not as common as it later became in Jackson's time.

⁵³² For more information see Ian M.G. Gimby, "The Doolittle Engravings of the Battle of Lexington and Concord," *Winterthur Portfolio* 4 (1968): 83-108.

⁵³³ For more information on the history of lithography see Domenico Porzio, et al, *Lithography: 200 Years of Art, History, and Technique* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1983).

⁵³⁴ Nancy R. Davison, "Andrew Jackson in Cartoon and Caricature," in *American Printmaking before 1876: Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1975), 20.

Before Jackson, Jefferson was the most frequently caricatured President, although the number of Jefferson prints is vastly smaller than those representing Jackson.⁵³⁵ One engraving by James Akin belittles Thomas Jefferson's relationship with his slave, Sally Hemmings. Akin's print, entitled *A Philosophic Cock*, depicts Jefferson's head on the body of a rooster (fig. 5.1). Behind him, Hemming's head is superimposed on the body of a hen with the accompanying inscription, "tis not a set of features or complexion or tincture of skin that I admire." This type of biting, and even personal critique became much more commonplace once Jackson entered the political stage.

In one example, *Office Hunters for the Year 1834*, Jackson was cast as a demon that holds strings connected to symbols and objects representing political offices and other presidential favors, and he is using these to tantalize would-be office holders (fig. 5.2). This cartoon is critical of the "spoils" system of rewarding the politically faithful with offices, for which Jackson received great criticism in his first term in office. Even though he had scorned the "corrupt bargain" that had previously gotten John Quincy Adams the presidency and rewarded Henry Clay for his support of that, Jackson was the first President to use the spoils system to a great extent, rewarding those who were loyal to him with political positions.

In critiquing Jackson, nothing seemed to be off-limits to printmakers and it seemed that nearly every aspect of his personal and political life received negative attention from them. One of the most effective early Presidential lithographic cartoons relates to the so-called 'Eaton affair', a major episode from Jackson's first

⁵³⁵ Noble E. Cunningham, *Popular Images of the Presidency: From Washington to Lincoln* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 182.

term in office that threatened to destroy his Presidency. The work, entitled *The Rats Leaving a Falling House*, was created in 1831 by Edward Williams Clay, one of the foremost political cartoonists of the Jackson era (fig. 5.3). Clay satirized the dissolution of President Jackson's cabinet, which occurred as a result of the notorious 'Eaton affair.' The events of the 'Eaton Malaria,' as it was also known, became frequent fodder for a great deal of political cartooning.

After a year of social and political turmoil in Washington (perhaps to protect his own political ambition) Martin Van Buren decided to resign as Secretary of State, thereby encouraging the President's entire cabinet to do the same. Upon Van Buren's advice Jackson had come to see the resignation of his cabinet as the only way to close the seemingly endless scandal. Clay's print, *The Rats Leaving a Falling House* was a vivid response to the fiasco and it was widely distributed. The cartoon depicts four of the cabinet members, from left to right, Secretary of War John Eaton, Secretary of the Navy John Branch, Secretary of State Van Buren, and Secretary of the Treasury Samuel D. Ingham as rats scurrying away from a seemingly perilous "altar of reform" on which Jackson is slumping. A column labeled "Public confidence in the stability and harmony of this administration" is seen toppling over in the left background. Letters of resignation wallpaper the space behind Jackson, while he retains Van Buren by placing his foot on his tail. After his resignation, Van Buren had stayed in the Jackson administration, serving as envoy to England. He remained in Jackson's favor throughout the affair and eventually replaced John Calhoun as Jackson's Vice President in 1832.

The cartoon was one of Clay's most effective satires and elicited much public comment, as did all of the events of the Eaton affair. It was even referenced by Van Buren's son. When asked about when his father would return home to New York from Washington, he replied, "When the President takes off his foot."⁵³⁶ Avid diarist John Quincy Adams also commented on the print in his daily entry from April 25, 1831: "Two thousand copies of this print have been sold in Philadelphia this day. Ten thousand copies were struck off, and will all be disposed of within a fortnight. This is an indication of the [low] estimation in which Jackson and his Administration are held."⁵³⁷

David Claypoole Johnston, a social satirist in Boston, who was one of the first in the United States to master lithography, also turned his attention to Jackson. One of his most interesting satiric political commentaries appeared in a large and complex broadside etching entitled *Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures*, published in 1831 (fig. 5.4).⁵³⁸ The elaborate work criticizes many of Jackson's first-term decisions, including his opposition to the Bank of the United States, nullification, broken Indian treaties and more, but the central theme is the problems in Jackson's cabinet brought about by the Eaton scandal. In the work, Johnston depicts a room of "cabinet pictures" hung in the traditional nineteenth-century manner of exhibiting works of art,

⁵³⁶ Danny Einstein, "The Rats Leaving a Falling House" in Thomas Blaisdell and Peter Howard Selz, *The American Presidency in Political Cartoons: 1776-1976* (Salt Lake, Utah: Peregrine Smith, 1976), 60.

⁵³⁷ Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of John Quincy Adams* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 419.

⁵³⁸ This image is discussed at length in both David Tatham "D.C. Johnston's Satiric Views of Art in Boston, 1825-1850," in *Art and Commerce: American Prints of the Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 19-21 and Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., *Popular Images of the Presidency From Washington to Lincoln* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 189 and my summary relies heavily on information from these two sources.

framed and covering the entirety of the walls, floor to ceiling (a clever visual pun on the word cabinet). However, rather than showing fine art paintings, Johnston has depicted a series of framed cartoons all relating to Jackson and to the Eaton scandal. A full bookshelf, the “cabinet library” appears on the left side of the work which provides added meaning to the cartoon. All of the titles of the books on the shelves can clearly be read, and three of them, *Political Economy*, *Johnson’s Dictionary*, and *Murray’s Grammar* are covered with cobwebs, alluding to Jackson’s never having read them. This is an obvious critique of his lack of classical education and reputation as a backwoodsman, as well as his opposition to the bank of the United States which many regarded as overly authoritarian. The other books, which are clearly not covered by dust or cobwebs, and thereby presumably familiar to Jackson, are all in reference to the Eaton scandal, namely *Slave of Passion*, *Eaton College*, *Innkeeper’s Daughter*, and *Secrets of the Tavern*.

The cartoon images on the walls are numbered and offer an extremely biting visual criticism of the Eaton affair as well. Johnston’s iconography included some of the most clever and complex critiques of Jackson that ever appeared in print. For example, in the upper right, a petticoated figure sets the mythic city of Troy on fire, an obvious allusion to Peggy Eaton and her alleged power to destroy Jackson and the cabinet members. Other images mock in a similar manner. The central image, number fourteen, shows a new design for the United States Coat of Arms, made of corsets and petticoats, a reference to the turmoil and control the women of Washington were wielding over the political system. In number thirteen, entitled “Washerman” Jackson tries to scrub a petticoat clean, a reference to Jackson’s repeated insistence on Peggy

Eaton's morality. Despite Jackson's attempts in the image, the washerwoman informs him that he will never get the dirt out and he should dry and whitewash it.

Interestingly, on the wall behind Jackson and the washerwoman in image thirteen is a cartoon version of the full-length portrait of "Farmer Jackson" by Earl that Pendleton's shop had been commissioned to lithograph at about this time. Johnston, who was working right across town from Pendleton's shop, and had probably seen the painting on exhibition in Boston, beat Earl to the punch by including a parodied version of the painting in his satire before Pendleton had the chance to publish the regal lithograph, which was intended to bolster Jackson's image.

In image twenty, a physical fight has broken out among the members of Jackson's cabinet, and Peggy Eaton has joined the fray while Martin Van Buren looks on approvingly. Below this, in image twenty-two, an ice-skating race between Jackson and Henry Clay is in full swing. This alludes to the upcoming presidential election, and in the image Jackson is behind and being tripped up by a petticoat. In this example, Johnston again uses prominent fine arts in a satirical manner. Above Clay in the footrace is a self-portrait of Johnston (the cartoon's creator) as a painter standing before a representation of Gilbert Stuart's *Atheneum Portrait* of George Washington. Below Stuart's famous image Johnston holds a portrait of Andrew Jackson with the title "The Second Washington" and remarks sarcastically that he sees no difference between the two paintings. To the left of the race picture, in image nineteen, a caricature entitled "Scene from the comic farce of TURN OUT as played by the Administration Company" depicts Jackson pushing a line of his cabinet members out the door.

Johnston signed the cartoon, an original production, in the lower left “Snooks,” a humorous pseudonym he was using at the time.⁵³⁹ Because of his outsider status, Jackson was an easy target, and this harsh political commentary was produced to reinforce perceptions that he did not deserve re-election (the cartoon was produced in 1831 in anticipation of the 1832 election.) The print also offers a multi-faceted view of Jackson through the eyes of a significant caricaturist, and the print attracted major attention. Displayed in bookstore windows, according to the *Boston Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser* of August 17, 1831, the print drew “crowds of the curious of all classes.”⁵⁴⁰ The print also underscores the idea that Earl intended his own presidential print to bolster Jackson’s approval rating, but he was undercut momentarily by Johnston’s work.

Countless other cartoons were published that mocked Jackson and exploited his potential weaknesses. One notable lithographic cartoon, created by an unknown artist in 1832 or 1833 in response to Jackson’s opposition to the Bank of the United States, is entitled *King Andrew the First* (fig. 5.5). It is considered “one of the most direct and finest examples of political caricature ever produced in the United States.”⁵⁴¹ Dressed in the costume of a hated and despotic European Royal, Jackson is seen trampling on several documents that are essential to American democracy, including the Constitution, a ledger of federal courts’ decisions, and the phrase “Virtue, Liberty, and Independence.” His full length, frontal pose before a throne with pulled-back curtains serves to remind the viewer of European monarchical imagery.

⁵³⁹ Tatham, 19-21.

⁵⁴⁰ Cited in Cunningham, 189.

⁵⁴¹ Danny Einstein, “King Andrew the First,” in Blaisdell and Selz, 62.

During his presidency, Jackson was repeatedly criticized for wielding the power of the Presidential veto too often and for unduly increasing the federal branch of the government. The King Andrew cartoon satirizes these actions; in his left hand he holds a vetoed bill and in his right a scepter. Although the exact publication date is unknown, this print was issued in the wake of the 1832 Bank of the United States controversy. The Bank of the United States was located in Philadelphia and in the print the arms of the state of Pennsylvania lie in tatters at his feet. Jackson had vetoed Congress's 1832 bill to recharter the Bank and then in 1833 he ordered federal deposits removed from it. This brought a storm of criticism for acting without Congressional consent. Jackson faced many detractors regarding his actions toward the Bank of the United States, and this is only one of many critical cartoons relating to the issue.

Aided by the relative ease of lithographic production, the unprecedented attention from political cartoonists and caricaturists that Jackson received eventually developed into a culture of American political cartooning. After the problematic election of 1824, in which Jackson felt he had deserved the Presidential nomination because of winning a majority of the popular vote, he returned in 1828 for what became the most contentious presidential campaign to date. In a letter from Jackson to his friend in Florida, Governor Richard Keith Call, Jackson discussed his frustrations at all of the negative attention directed toward him and his family in the press. He said "the whole object of the coalition is to calumniate me, cart loads of coffin hand-bills, forgeries, & pamphlets of the most base calumnies are circulated by the franking privilege of Members of Congress, & Mr. Clay. Even Mrs. J[ackson] is

not spared & my pious Mother, nearly fifty years in the tomb, & who, from her cradle to her death, had not a speck upon her character [is also attacked].”⁵⁴²

The “coffin handbills” to which Jackson referred in the letter were one of the earliest and most often reproduced broadsides that slandered him (fig. 5.6). The most widely circulated of these depicted six coffins along the top of the image, representing the six volunteer soldiers who were shot for desertion in Florida Seminole Campaigns in the Creek War of 1813 when they attempted to return home, believing their terms of service were over. However, with the War of 1812 not officially ended, the soldiers were not yet released from duty. When the case was brought to Jackson’s attention (as the governor of the Florida territory at the time), he showed little leniency and refused to pardon the soldiers from the death penalty. This episode prompted Jackson’s detractors to cast him as a heartless tyrant. The handbills were published by John Binns, a pro-Adams editor during the 1828 election campaign in which John Quincy Adams was seeking re-election. Other coffins present in the image represent still more soldiers and Indians allegedly executed by Jackson. The text of the broadside offers a catalog of information about many atrocities supposedly committed by Jackson which were frequently cited by his opponents. Here Binns, the Adams supporter, was casting Jackson as a “military chieftain,” unfit for the Presidency, who had performed vile and violent deeds in his short political career in Florida and who had acted out in fits of rage at other moments in his life. Jackson’s quick temper was a regular subject of criticism.

Although Jackson’s opponents were unyielding in their critiques, Jackson did receive support by some cartoonists. One unknown artist responded directly to the

⁵⁴² As transcribed in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 29 (April 1921): 191-92.

coffin handbills in an 1828 etching entitled *The Pedlar and his Pack, or the Desperate Effort, an Over Balance* (fig. 5.7). The print depicts Binns staggering under the weight of several coffins. Peering out from coffins on the left is Henry Clay, Adams' campaign manager, who urges Adams to hold on "for I find that the people are too much for us, and I'm sinking with Jack and his Coffins!" Adams is seen emerging from another of the coffins on the right and holding tight to a presidential chair, claiming that he will continue to do so "in spite of the coffin handbills...or the wishes of the people." Meanwhile Binns states that he "must have an extra dose of the Treasury or down go the coffins." This print supports the popular claim that Binns was paid by President Adams using Treasury funds, thereby depicting Adams as desperate and corrupt. Jackson, the people's candidate, ran partly on a platform of seeking to eliminate Washington corruption, and this print actually helped the coffin handbills boomerang in Jackson's favor.

Another supportive example, *General Jackson Slaying the Many Headed Monster* (fig. 5.8), from 1836, created by an artist identified simply as A.H., sides with Jackson in the bank controversy. In the print, Jackson is shown with his trademark cane raised over his head and marked with the word VETO. He is striking out at the United States bank, personified as a hydra-headed Monster. Each of the twenty-four heads are marked with the name of a different state, and Jackson is being assisted by his loyal friend Martin Van Buren.⁵⁴³ Jackson had long opposed the holding of public funds in a private bank and believed the bank to be politically corrupt. Jackson was ultimately responsible for the dissolution of the Bank of the United States, and this cartoon supports his actions.

⁵⁴³ For more information see Blaisdell and Selz, 64-65.

Another graphic humorist, Philadelphian James Akin (who had a long career of presidential cartooning, and had earlier critiqued Thomas Jefferson) also utilized caricature to enhance the public image of Old Hickory. Akin became an acquaintance of Earl and sought to counteract the abuse Jackson was enduring from some congressional members by placing “their preposterous proceeding in as ridiculous point of view as can be,” as he put it.⁵⁴⁴ In 1819 he asked Earl to lend him a personal sketch of Jackson, saying “I merely want the strong outlines of feature and figure, required in caricature.”⁵⁴⁵ He also promised not to intrude on plans Earl might have had for publishing images of Jackson, which alludes to Earl’s well-known interest in Jacksonian printmaking projects even prior to 1820. Akin and Earl had frequent, and friendly correspondence, and the two had a mutual friend in James Earle in Philadelphia who provided Earl with his frames. According to one letter it seems that Earle was set to provide frames for Earl’s planned Jackson print. This correspondence from Earl to Akin also attests to their acquaintance, and references a visit that Akin had made to Earl in Nashville saying:

Your polite and friendly communications, would have been attended to previously to this period, had leisure, and the finishing of the picture I was engaged in at the time you were with us, permitted; but, I trust, if there were no other apology for the delay, your intimate acquaintance, with the characteristic indolence of persons of my profession would furnish an ample excuse (*sic*).

I have just written to your friend Mr. James Earle, on the subject which has reference to his wishes, alluded to in your letter of the 15th March last. As he will unquestionably advise you of my sentiments, touching the proposition I

⁵⁴⁴ James Akin to Ralph E.W. Earl Feb.17, 1819. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA, cited in James G. Barber, *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study* (Washington and Nashville: National Portrait Gallery and Tennessee State Museum, 1991), 52.

⁵⁴⁵ Akin to Earl, Feb 17, 1819. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

have been able to make him, with respect to publishing a print of general Jackson &, I think it superfluous here to repeat them.⁵⁴⁶

Importantly, this letter again reveals Earl's very early intentions of publishing a print of Jackson. No further information regarding Akin's project has surfaced until November 1824, when Akin wrote to Earl in gratitude, "My Dear Sir, I enclose you a caricature in favour of Gen. Jackson, in opposition to the miserable herd of wretches who publish their pitiful resentments against the Man who saved them from the Grasp of British Tyranny."⁵⁴⁷ The print Akin enclosed is presumably the 1824 aquatint entitled *Caucus Curs in full Yell, or a War-Whoop to saddle on the People, a Pappoose President* (fig. 5.9). The print offers a critical commentary on what Jackson's supporters saw as the press's harsh treatment of him in the 1824 election, and on the political practice of nominating candidates by caucus in that race. In the print, General Jackson is juxtaposed with the congressional caucus that had endorsed William H. Crawford of Georgia for president, and it offers biting commentary against Crawford and his powerful supporter Martin Van Buren, who would later become one of Jackson's strongest allies. Jackson stands in the midst of a pack of snarling dogs labeled with names of various newspapers that were critical of him. Akin has labeled Crawford, then Secretary of the Treasury, as the "Pappoose President" and criticizes him for alleged corruption in his department. "Pappoose" refers cruelly to a paralyzing stroke Crawford had suffered in August 1823 which virtually brought his political career to an end. The "Caucus Curs" in the print refers

⁵⁴⁶ R.E.W. Earl to James Akin, Nov. 15, 1819. John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁴⁷ Transcribed in William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor*, vol 1 (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1933), 135.

to the partisan newspapers that still supported Crawford against Jackson despite his paralysis.⁵⁴⁸

Although his hat is different, as Barber has pointed out, Jackson's costume and posture in Akin's cartoon are not unlike that of Earl's full-length 1818 image, which Akin had probably seen on his visit to Nashville in early 1819 and which Earl alluded to in his letter to Akin.⁵⁴⁹ As in the painting, Jackson stands upright wearing his general's hat and uniform and holds a telescope in his outstretched right hand. It is likely that Akin directly copied the image from a sketch by Earl provided by the artist in response to Akin's 1819 request. Since Earl had recently finished his original full-length Jackson painting, it seems logical that Akin's cartoon replica of Jackson bears a direct resemblance to the Earl work.

Seeing the lucrative potential of printed attacks on Jackson, however, Akin too had begun his own smear campaign by the end of Jackson's first term in office.

During the reelection campaign, he published a pamphlet, *The House That Jonathan*

⁵⁴⁸ Detailed descriptive information about the print is provided by the Library of Congress website Digital Collections at www.loc.gov. As it describes: He rests his right hand upon a sword inscribed "Veni Vidi Vici." One dog, named "Richmond Whig," is whipped by a nude black boy who says, "Mas Andra I earry say dis eah jew dog blongst to Tunis, bark loud, somebody tief way ee paper & show um one ghose, wite like Clay; dat mak um feard. Name o' God! nobody gwine feard now for Crawford ghose! look pon dat sleepy dog; jumbee da ride um, can't bark no mo for Crawford." In the lower left corner a dog named "Democratic Press" is ridden by a skeletal Death figure holding aloft a tract with the words "Immortal memory Revd. James Quigley basely sacrificed conscience Avaunt!" On the dog's side appear the words, "Good sprite, In mercy lash me with a dry corn stalk; I'm so jaded by stable swooning smoke house steams & Hog Cellar sweats!" A five-headed dog named "Hartford Convention" also appears at lower left. In the left background, before a building marked "Uncle Sam's Treasury Pap House / Amalgamation-Tool Department," Treasury Secretary William Crawford offers a bowl of dollars to a feathered woman, saying "Here's a bowl full of solid pappose [sic] meat. that's a good Girl better marry our wild, Indians than Foreigners good or bad." She says, "O! stuff your mouth you brat! Treasury pap is better than rum." An Indian beside her says, "Rum for de baby." Below the image is a text from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*: "What would you have, you Curs, that like not peace, nor war? / Who deserves Greatness, deserves your hate; and your affections are a sick man's appetite. / With every minute you do change a mind: and call him noble that was now your hate. / Him vile that was your Garland!"

⁵⁴⁹ Barber, 1991, 152.

Built, or Political Primer for 1832. Parodying an old English nursery rhyme, the pamphlet included sixteen pages, twelve of which ridiculed the Jackson administration. Akin is also responsible for the most notorious Jackson caricature, depicting him in profile that when inverted appear to be a jackass (fig. 5.10). Of the many ways of personifying the President, the favorite became the jackass, perhaps a version of his name. Out of this the symbol of the Democratic party was developed, which also traces its origins back to Jackson.

As political cartooning began in earnest in America, negative Jackson images abounded, many playing on his detractors' biggest fears in electing the outsider. It is in this context of witnessing his friend and political ally's negative print characterizations that Earl began converting his "presidential" paintings into a printmaking enterprise, something he had probably been intending to do all along.

Earl's Early Printmaking Efforts

Recognizing early on the demand for Jackson's image, Earl showed an interest in reproducing his paintings in print form shortly after arriving in Nashville in 1817, and he maintained a commitment to this task for the remainder of his career, going on to supervise several Jacksonian print projects and leaving one unfinished at his death. Although he probably initially sought to develop a Jackson print in order to celebrate a national hero and make a profit, his efforts quickly began serving as a countermeasure to all of the negative visual critiques of Jackson, and the later ones were directed at aiding the election.

The earliest documented evidence of Earl's desire to reproduce his Jackson portraits in print form occurs in an 1818 letter to Joseph Delaplaine, the Philadelphia

publisher and museum entrepreneur, although Earl probably first thought of the idea in Paris before travelling to Nashville. After agreeing to paint portraits of Generals Jackson and Coffee for Delaplaine's gallery, saying that he would "be highly honored to have them hung in your National Gallery," Earl requested sole copyright on Jackson's portrait saying "I must lay conditional one restriction relative to that of General Jackson. My great object to this Country was to obtain a full length of the General with the intention to have it Engraved for my own benefit, which I must beg you not to suffer to be Engraved at present or copied."⁵⁵⁰ This letter sheds particularly interesting light on Earl's early ambition. His 1821 letter to his mother that reveals so much about his early career also makes clear his intention to create a history painting of the Battle of New Orleans and portraits of the battle's leaders, but the 1818 correspondence to Delaplaine clarifies this, revealing that having his full-length portrait of Jackson engraved was just as important.⁵⁵¹ This information has not been part of previous Earl scholarship or that relating to Jackson's evolving image in American culture. Earl obviously realized that a printed portrait could have a much wider reaching impact than a single oil painting. In response to Earl's request, Delaplaine replied, "I pledge to you my honour, that your portrait of General Jackson shall not be copied, neither shall an engraving be executed, without your permission."⁵⁵² Interestingly, Gilbert Stuart had similarly tried to prevent his images of Washington from being copied. Selling a Washington portrait to John E. Sword of

⁵⁵⁰ Ralph E.W. Earl to Joseph Delaplaine from Nashville, December 8, 1818. John Spencer Bassett papers, 31:3, Library of Congress manuscripts room, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁵¹ Ralph E.W. Earl to his mother, Ann Earl, September 18, 1821, John Spencer Bassett papers, Library of Congress manuscripts room, Washington, D.C..

⁵⁵² Joseph Delaplaine to Ralph E.W. Earl, from Philadelphia, December 13, 1818. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

Philadelphia in 1801, he asked that Sword “promise and assure...that no copies thereof should be taken.”⁵⁵³ Ultimately, however, Stuart’s effort to prevent copies from being produced failed.

It is likely that Earl did succeed in commissioning his initial Jackson engraving in 1819 or 1820 (although it is unlocated). En route to Natchez, Mississippi in January 1821 Earl received a letter from a friend and business associate in Nashville, Ira Ingram, regarding loose ends that Ingram was helping to tie up in Earl’s absence. Ingram states, “Agreeably to your request, I waited on Mssrs. West and Bradford [the Nashville booksellers that Earl used to help distribute his prints], and being informed that they had not disposed of any of the engravings since you left us, requested them to sell all on hand at the first good opportunity.”⁵⁵⁴ It is probable that the engraving that Ingram spoke of was Earl’s first Jackson print. And because he had spoken of his intention of engraving a “full length of the General” to Delaplaine in 1818, it is likely that the print was based Earl’s life sized 1818 image of Jackson on the battlefield. Perhaps it was this print upon which James Akin had based the Jackson image in his cartoon, *Caucus Curs*. Although it is not extant, this very early printmaking effort by Earl reveals his ambition and entrepreneurial instincts in capitalizing on an important early American art form, the presidential portrait-print.

Placing Jackson in the guise of an enshrined national leader in the same way previous Presidents had been was essential to his national reputation. The public had become accustomed to seeing presidential portraits in print form. Though printmaking materials were not as readily available in the eighteenth century as they

⁵⁵³ Transcribed in Cunningham, 19.

⁵⁵⁴ Ira Ingram to Ralph E.W. Earl, January 30, 1821. Earl Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

were later, prints of Washington began being published during the nation's first presidency and they were enormously popular. Several Washington portraits were contemporaneously engraved. For example, hundreds of engravings were made after Gilbert Stuart's "Athenaeum" portrait of Washington. Rembrandt Peale's 1800 portrait from life of Thomas Jefferson also served as the basis for dozens of engravings. One example, produced in 1801 by Cornelius Tiebout sold 800 copies in the three months following Jefferson's inauguration.⁵⁵⁵

Earl's awareness of these images inspired him to work with Jackson's image in a similar manner. His first well-documented project resulted from collaboration with Charles Cutler Torrey (fig. 5.11). In December 1823, Earl received a letter of introduction to Torrey who had recently moved to Nashville from Salem, Massachusetts, and he requested a portrait of Jackson from Earl to engrave.⁵⁵⁶ Torrey had studied engraving in Philadelphia from 1815 and established himself as an engraver in Salem in 1820.⁵⁵⁷ In Massachusetts he was known to have engraved a few portraits and book illustrations, and his most notable work of the period is a large plate depicting a "North East View of the Several Halls of Harvard College." It is possible that Torrey learned of the Nashville portraitist's work with Jackson through Earl's friends and family in New England and had traveled to Tennessee expressly for the purpose helping Earl create a Jacksonian print.

⁵⁵⁵ Cunningham, 26-27.

⁵⁵⁶ Earl and Torrey had a mutual friend who wrote to Earl on Torrey's behalf on December 22, 1823: "Mr. Torrey, an engraver now resident in [Nashville] proposes engraving a portrait of Genl. Jackson provided he can get your permission to copy your portrait of the General. He has requested me to make application to you to that effect." Illegible to Earl, Dec. 22, 1823, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁵⁵⁷ David McNeely Stauffer, *American Engravers upon Copper and Steel* (New York: Grolier Club, 1907), 1:274.

Earl granted Torrey access to one of his earliest portraits of Jackson, a work in which he is depicted frontally with his head turned to the right against a dark background, wearing the military coat he had worn in the Battle of New Orleans (figure 4.7). The painting had been commissioned by Major Henry M. Rutledge of Nashville, a close friend of Jackson's, and notes in one of Earl's memorandum books record the 1818 commission: "Major Rutledge to a Portrait of Genl. Jackson - \$50 – Paid. – not finished."⁵⁵⁸ Rutledge went on to serve as an aide to Jackson in the Florida campaigns in 1821. The portrait was one of three versions Earl produced of the same basic composition in his first year in Tennessee and is one of his first Jackson works.⁵⁵⁹

It seems likely that Earl and Torrey hoped to have the print available to support Jackson's presidential bid of 1824. Unfortunately, it was not completed in time for the Presidential race and only after two and a half years of work did Torrey finally publish his finished engraving.⁵⁶⁰ The inscription reads "Andrew Jackson: Engraved by Charles Torrey from an original picture by R. E. W. Earl in the possession of H.M. Rutledge, Nashville, Tennessee published June 1, 1826."⁵⁶¹

Perhaps not so coincidentally Jackson lost the election. Although the number of print copies that were produced is unknown, it certainly helped fill the demand for images

⁵⁵⁸ Earl's memorandum books are in the Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁵⁵⁹ The portrait is now owned by the state of Alabama and hangs in the state capitol in Montgomery. Of the other two versions of the portrait, one is owned by the Ladies' Hermitage association and depicts four mounted soldiers in the background. The other is in the National Portrait Gallery and was painted for John Decker who operated the confectionary store on Court House Square in Nashville below Earl's rented gallery space. Decker held a key to the museum and regularly oversaw it while Earl was away.

⁵⁶⁰ *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, Oct 25 and Nov 8, 1826.

⁵⁶¹ In late 1826 a newspaper ad announced that the print was ready for delivery and that it could be inspected at a local bookstore.

of Jackson, although it was one of Torrey's last efforts. He died of a fever in 1827. It is also unknown what financial gain Earl saw from the project, but it was beneficial enough that he continued to spearhead other reproductions. Printmaking was an excellent way of satisfying the demand for Jacksonian portraiture, which was steadily increasing. Prints were also an affordable means of owning an image of Jackson, and while many of the general's friends could afford an original portrait, his democratic electorate enjoyed the affordability of a print. The widespread availability of prints helped advertise the polished image of Jackson and by extension, Earl's talents.

It seems that Earl had staked his claim on Jacksonian prints by 1820. In addition to repeatedly discussing it in his correspondence, he began attracting printmakers desiring to reproduce his portraits. Torrey had come calling in 1823 and in September 1826 another printmaker, Archibald Woodruff, Earl's old friend from France, wrote him offering to produce Earl's next Jackson print. According to Woodruff, he had "been informed [by a mutual friend] of your intention to publish a print of the Hero of Orleans, and ever anxious to obtain patronage in the line of my profession inducing me to offer you my services as an engraver in the work you propose publishing." Apparently, John Vanderlyn and Earl had discussed the prospect of a Jackson print with Woodruff in Paris, and Woodruff mentioned the plans he had initially drawn up upon their return to the United States. According to Woodruff, "I would here observe that some time ago I issued proposals for publishing a full length print of the General, and had obtained nearly one hundred subscribers, but having been so much engaged in other business, that I had not time to pay further attention to it until now." According to Woodruff's letter, if Earl accepted his proposal to become

the publisher of his next print, Woodruff promised to turn over his subscribers to Earl and to assist in obtaining additional interest.⁵⁶² However, Earl had probably already made alternate plans for his prints and ended up choosing noted Philadelphia engraver James Longacre for his most important print project to date, over the relatively unknown Woodruff. He is not known to have ever collaborated with his old friend.

James B. Longacre

In 1826 Earl painted his first portrait of Jackson in civilian attire.⁵⁶³ He had spent the first eight years of his career in Nashville celebrating Jackson the General and in the wake of the 1824 presidential loss this was his first attempt at helping the public visualize another persona of the man, that of an experienced statesman and legitimate presidential contender. By 1824 Jackson had already served in Congress, the U.S. Senate, and as Governor of Florida. Earl hoped a highly publicized image of Jackson as a civilian would further expand his national identity and positive reputation.

To ensure that his portrait received national exposure, Earl decided to have the picture engraved and he chose James B. Longacre of Philadelphia, the nation's leading stipple engraver, for the project (fig. 5.12). Longacre was well-connected and counted John Vanderlyn, George Catlin, Rembrandt Peale, Samuel F.B. Morse, Asher B. Durand, Gilbert Stuart, Washington Allston, and John Trumbull among his friends.⁵⁶⁴ In addition, Longacre already had experience reproducing Jackson's

⁵⁶² Archibald Woodruff in Cincinnati to Ralph E.W. Earl in Nashville, September 27, 1826. Bassett papers, 31:5. See also Barber, 90 and Woodruff to Earl, Sept 20, 1826 and Feb 21, 1827, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society. See also *Cincinnati Advertiser*, March 30, 1825.

⁵⁶³ Original is unlocated but a copy is owned by the Ladies' Hermitage Association.

image. His first effort came in 1819 when the Association of American Artists had commissioned him to engrave Thomas Sully's 1819 oil painting of Jackson. Longacre studied Sully's portrait for months, finished a draft of engraving and sent it to the artist for critique. After Longacre made corrections, the engraving was published in 1821 (fig. 4.11). After the print was completed, Samuel Kennedy, a manager and trustee of the Association of American Artists wrote to Jackson thanking him for the initial sitting with Sully, enclosing one framed and two unframed Longacre prints.⁵⁶⁵ This engraving helped Longacre establish a reputation as an engraver of political prints and he went on to complete several additional Jacksonian engravings. For example, also engraved Jackson's image by Joseph Wood in 1824, and attempted an original portrait-print in the early 1830s. From 1820 to 1827 Longacre had also been engaged in creating a series of portrait engravings for John Sanderson's *Biographies of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence*, therefore he was well-versed in creating portrait prints of figures of political importance.⁵⁶⁶

Longacre's experience and talent as an engraver, made him an obvious choice for Earl's first major print commission, for which Earl had high aspirations. A long correspondence ensued between the men regarding the project and Earl also recorded information about the progress in a memorandum book.⁵⁶⁷ As Georgia Brady

⁵⁶⁴ James B. Longacre, "Extracts from the Diary of James B. Longacre," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 29:2 (1905): 134-142.

⁵⁶⁵ *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 3:40.

⁵⁶⁶ For detailed information on the creation of some of these images see James B. Longacre, "Extracts from the Diary of James B. Longacre," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 29:2 (1905): 134-142.

⁵⁶⁷ Much of the correspondence in addition to the memorandum book is located in the Ralph E.W. Earl papers at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Bumgartner (now Barnhill) notes, this “documentation helps clarify some of the conditions inherent in the print trade in the United States in the late 1820s and 1830s and brings to our attention a previously unrecognized genre – the political portrait print.”⁵⁶⁸

Earl made his painting available to Longacre and was pleased with his proof of the print, writing to him in May 1828 that, “The engraving I consider to be an exact copy from my original likeness, and am perfectly satisfied with its correctness as well as the elegance of the execution thus far.”⁵⁶⁹ Earl instructed Longacre to run an initial 500 prints, to frame 100 of them, and forward them to Robertson and Elliot booksellers in Nashville who were handling the subscription lists (issued in 1827) and circulation of the prints, or as Earl put it, were acting as “my agents for disposal of the engravings in this section of Country.”⁵⁷⁰ Earl served as the manager for the entire operation and he detailed not only the size of the print runs, but also the quality of paper to be used and the price, which was advertised at “three dollars in the sheet, or six neatly framed. Those who pay for five copies will be furnished with a sixth free of expense.”⁵⁷¹

Earl helped with the advertising of the print, creating a printed subscription list that included testimonials of the engraving from several individuals, including Jackson himself and Sam Houston, the governor of Tennessee. Being extremely well-connected in his region, Earl probably procured testimonial quotations personally.

⁵⁶⁸ Bumgartner, 85.

⁵⁶⁹ Earl to Longacre, May 9, 1828, Earl letters, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, cited in Bumgartner, 85.

⁵⁷¹ Earl to Longacre, May 9, 1828.

Public announcements included: “In the course of the ensuing summer there will be delivered to subscribers an engraved portrait of Gen. Jackson, which is admitted by competent judges to be the most correct likeness ever offered for public sale. It was engraved by Mr. Longacre of Philadelphia, in his best style, from an original and much admired painting by Mr. Earl, of Nashville.”⁵⁷² Subscription lists were circulated in most of America’s major cities and publicized in many national newspapers, including the *Washington Telegraph*. Earl kept a detailed account of the distribution of his prints in a “Memorandum book of my Jackson Prints, 1828.”⁵⁷³ He went to great lengths to ensure that the flattering print was made available to as many people as possible by advertising in a variety of newspapers and enlisting the help of associates in several cities. Allan D. Campbell, a Presbyterian minister from Pittsburg, wrote Earl on August 28, 1828 that he probably could not sell the prints for the full three dollar price but that they would easily sell for two dollars. Alluding to the political ambitions for the prints, Campbell assured Earl that Pennsylvania would vote for Jackson, saying, “You may rest assured, Pena. is safe, she will shew [*sic*] what she is on the Election Day.”⁵⁷⁴ In addition to the prints’ dissemination in Nashville, Washington, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Louisville, Kentucky; Augusta, Georgia; Abbeville, South Carolina; Memphis, and Natchez, Mississippi, Earl encouraged Longacre to “take some impressions of the plate to dispose of in

⁵⁷² Some examples of these lists which are hand-signed by subscribers are owned by the American Antiquarian Society, the Ladies’ Hermitage Association, and the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

⁵⁷³ In the Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society. See also Robinson to Earl, Sept. 9, 1828, also in Earl papers.

⁵⁷⁴ Allan D. Campbell to Ralph E.W. Earl, Earl papers, August 28, 1828, cited in Bumgardner, 86.

your city” of Philadelphia.⁵⁷⁵ William L. Robeson, a New Orleans merchant and the widower of Selima Winchester Robeson, the daughter of Earl’s old patron in Nashville, James Winchester, also wrote to Earl of the safe arrival of twenty-five impressions, and included a notice that had been inserted in the *Louisiana Advertiser* regarding the reproduction. Robeson also reported that he was circulating Earl’s subscription list, and closed his letter with commentary on the upcoming political election, reiterating the connection between the print and Jackson’s bid for the presidency.

Earl’s “Memorandum of My Jackson Prints 1828” sheds more light on the purchasers of the prints as well as their geographical distribution. Several individual purchasers are listed by name, all of whom were linked to Jackson in one way or another, and were just the type of people who were also commissioning portraits of Jackson and themselves from Earl. Earl delivered twelve prints to subscribers via General John Coffee, one of Jackson’s closest friends. The Honorable Jacob Peck of Tennessee received sixteen copies, also for distribution to subscribers. And Charles Biddle, the father of Nicholas Biddle, president of the Bank of the United States, and a longtime friend and correspondent of Earl’s, received one as a gift and purchased another.

The Nashville newspapers lauded the image, and used it as a jumping off point for discussions of Jackson the civilian. They portrayed him just as he hoped to be characterized during the election campaign, typical of hometown media. The *Nashville Republican and Gazette* said that he appeared in the print as he was “known to thousands of the American people, in the costume of a hospitable, benevolent and

⁵⁷⁵ Bumgardner, 89.

philanthropic farmer, surrounded by a happy domestic circle, not to be disturbed by the calumnies of faction or the infamous detraction of political demagogues.”⁵⁷⁶ The Nashville *Whig and Banner* stated that the image “exhibits the General in the costume of a private citizen, enjoying the comforts of domestic life, and will preserve the recollection of him, amongst his neighbors and friends, in the character in which they most value and esteem him – that of a kind, affectionate, and benevolent citizen.”⁵⁷⁷ These reports were not unbiased, to be sure, as the anonymous authors threw their unabashed support behind Jackson in the election year. Jackson is likened to the nation’s heroes of the time – the farmers – despite his status as Nashville’s leading citizen, a prominent politician, lawyer and plantation owner. The newspaper reports also embellished Jackson’s appearance. Certainly he is shown as a “benevolent citizen,” wearing not the clothing of a military hero, but rather that of an eminent citizen. However, the likeness is only a bust-length view of Jackson set against a plain background, rather than something more elaborate as was suggested by the newspaper descriptions. Perhaps plans for the print changed after the publishing of the subscription list, or perhaps the newspaper editors glorified the representation in their partisan enthusiasm.

The Longacre print was successful on several levels. First, it was distributed nationwide just in time for the 1828 presidential campaign, a fact recognized by many. Robeson had written to Earl, for example, that he hoped that the print would “extensively spread among the people of the United States who alone appreciate properly the important services rendered by the General to our Common Country, and

⁵⁷⁶ As noted on the subscription list.

⁵⁷⁷ Cited in Barber, 91, from quotations on the subscription list for the print.

who will award him by an elevation to the first office within their control.”⁵⁷⁸ In addition, a distinguished image of Jackson, as citizen, rather than in his more common guise at the time of military hero, encouraged the public to view him in a new light and to see him as a politician beyond his status as a United States General and military hero. The respectable image of Jackson also deliberately and explicitly counteracted the negative attention he received from print media in the form of cartoon and caricatures.

After Jackson’s election, Earl’s prints continued to sell to people who desired a portrait of the newly elected president. Earl clearly realized a profit on the endeavor and it increased his fame. He wrote to Longacre on May 9, 1828 (before the print was even published) that he had “already got subscribed a sufficient number to defray your charges for the engraving, and that of the printings.”⁵⁷⁹

After his collaboration with Earl, Longacre continued to work with Jackson’s image. In one of Longacre’s few attempts at original portraiture, he produced an engraving of Jackson himself for his fine art book, *The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans*, which was modeled on Delaplaine’s *Repository of the Lives and Portraits of Distinguished American Characters*, for which Longacre had produced some of the stipple engravings.⁵⁸⁰ In the volume, the image states that it was “drawn from life and engraved by J.B. Longacre,” however, the engraving was criticized for its lack of truth to Jackson’s actual likeness, a criticism that Earl’s work

⁵⁷⁸ William L. Robeson to Earl, April 23, 1827, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, cited in Barber, 91.

⁵⁷⁹ Cited in Bumgardner, 89.

⁵⁸⁰ James Barton Longacre and James Herring, *National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1834), 1:180.

never received. Longacre went on to live a long and successful life, dying in Philadelphia in 1869 at the age of seventy-four.⁵⁸¹

Engraving of “Farmer Jackson”

For Jackson’s reelection campaign of 1832, Earl again commissioned a print of one of his earlier paintings. It is possible that Earl had especially painted his “Farmer Jackson” portrait of the president (fig. 4.12, discussed in chapter four) to serve as the model for a printed reproduction. It was the first (and only) finished painting Earl ever did of a full-length Jackson on a small scale. And, again Jackson is shown not as a warrior, but according to one historian “as a citizen of simple but noble dignity, a man close to the land, unmoved by strife, and free of the trappings of urban sophistication.”⁵⁸² In response to prints such as *King Andrew the First* that likened Jackson to powerful European monarchs, Earl represented him in a simple, straight-forward manner. The image of Jackson as an upright, American man of the land was something carefully calculated by Earl, not only to counteract all of the negative publicity, but also to appeal to the all-male electorate. Jackson appears as the ideal American man, refined and intellectual (due to the inclusion of his spectacles) but also bound to and proud of his land.

Upon Jackson’s return to Washington in September 1830, Earl finally traveled to Washington with Jackson, who had been asking him to join him since his inauguration. There, George Bates, a physician and art connoisseur, and his son visited Jackson and Earl in April 1831 at the White House and discussed the

⁵⁸¹ Longacre, 134.

⁵⁸² David Tatham, “John Henry Bufford: American Lithographer,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 86:1 (1976): 69.

possibility of publishing a print from the “Farmer Jackson” portrait (fig. 5.13). Bates was an active Jacksonian in Boston, a city known for its dislike of the Southerner. In 1831 he published a series of pamphlets in Boston to counteract this sentiment. One of them, “A Vindication of the Character and Public Services of Andrew Jackson,” he targeted “expressly for the democratic yeomanry, the revolutionaries and those of the Jefferson school.”⁵⁸³ Based on Bates’ prior involvement in publishing materials supportive of Jackson, it seems logical that the *Farmer Jackson* print was also intended to counteract critiques of the President and aid in his reelection campaign. Jackson had been likened to a farmer in the subscription list for Earl and Longacre’s earlier print and its success encouraged an even more explicit association of Jackson with that characterization. Earl’s painting of Jackson was one of his best known up to that time and it had received great acclaim in Nashville, where it was created, and then in Washington and Boston where it traveled. While it was in Boston, Bates exhibited it and wrote to Earl of an eager prospective buyer, inquiring if it was for sale. Apparently Earl declined the offer.⁵⁸⁴ Aside from the prospect of selling the original painting, Bates suggested making a print version: “Our friends hereabouts are urgent in their demands to have a likeness of our venerated President to adorn their parlours...many frames have already been made in anticipation of its publication.”⁵⁸⁵ Bates also suggested ideas for the prospective image and proposed a large size, sixteen by twenty-five inches.

⁵⁸³ Dr. George Bates to William B. Lewis Aug. 22, 1831, Earl papers, cited in Bumgardner, 95.

⁵⁸⁴ See Bates to Earl, Aug. 8, 1831, and Bates to Earl, Oct. 4, 1831, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁵⁸⁵ Bates to Earl, Mar. 14, 1832, Pendleton to Earl, Mar. 14, 1832, Earl papers, quoted in Cunningham, 149-51.

Notably, Bates directly compared the proposed print to earlier ones of George Washington (a comparison Earl certainly welcomed), suggesting a reproduction of “Gen. Jackson of the size of a beautiful print which I possess of Washington... I think so beautiful a painting is entitled to be well-executed in prints and as Gen. Jackson’s character is so closely identified with the best and most glorious part of the history of the late days of our country’s liberties, I feel desirous to have his print framed side by side with... Washington.”⁵⁸⁶ The elevation of Jackson’s status to garner comparisons with the Father of the Country was sure to have pleased both the subject and the artist. To execute the print Bates recommended William S. Pendleton, the proprietor of Boston’s first successful lithographic firm, and one of the first artists in America to successfully master that process.⁵⁸⁷ Since it was a relatively new art form in the United States, this would be Earl’s first experience with lithography; his previous prints were engravings, the more established, laborious, and traditional medium.

A lengthy correspondence ensued among Bates, Earl, and Pendleton which provides unique insight into the management and marketing of portrait prints in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In June 1831 Earl reported that his painting was on its way to Boston for copying and he stated, “The Lithographic I wish done in Mr. Pendleton’s best stile [*sic*].”⁵⁸⁸ Bates wrote to Earl to report the painting’s arrival on July 11 as well as Pendleton’s pronouncement of it as a “first rate work.”⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁶ Bates to Earl, April 29, 1831, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁵⁸⁷ For further reading on the history of lithography in America see David Tatham “The Lithographic Workshop, 1825-50” in Georgia Brady Barnhill, ed., *The Cultivation of Artists in Nineteenth Century America* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1997).

⁵⁸⁸ Earl to Bates, June 28, 1831, Earl papers, cited in Bumgardner, 90.

⁵⁸⁹ Bates to Earl, July 11, 1831, Earl papers, cited in Bumgardner, 91.

Pendleton assigned John Henry Bufford, his most capable apprentice, the job of drawing the image on the lithographic stone.⁵⁹⁰ In Boston, only David Claypoole Johnston was a more talented graphic artist, however his anti-Jackson cartoons automatically disqualified him from consideration.⁵⁹¹ Bufford had come as an apprentice into Pendleton's shop in 1829, joining Nathaniel Currier, and Bufford later opened his own lithographic firms in New York and Boston, becoming a successful artist, printer, and publisher.⁵⁹² At sixteen by twenty-two inches, the imposing and dignified Jackson print was to be the largest lithograph ever attempted by Pendleton's firm. In addition, the roughly 1,000 impressions that were ordered were a shop record for a broadside print and it was a very significant project for an apprentice.⁵⁹³

Unfortunately, the initial proof which Earl received from Pendleton in late October was unsatisfactory. Earl wrote politely to Bates on October 26, 1831, that he was "sincerely thankful for the interest you have taken in the success of this work, I regret, yes! truly regret that it does not prove to be what I supposed would come from under the eye of Mr. Pendleton – nor is it in any way satisfactory to the President's family or friends."⁵⁹⁴ He went on to say that the print was "altogether too black and wooly, and wants that clearness of touch and brilliancy I expected from a lithography

⁵⁹⁰ Because of the numerous letters that clearly and carefully document the creation of the "Farmer Jackson" print, this episode is perhaps the most well-known of Earl's career. It is recounted in several sources, including Barnhill, Cunningham, Barber, and Bufford.

⁵⁹¹ In addition to his *Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures* (1831, fig. 5.5), and *Richard III* (ca. 1828), Johnston also created *The Cracked Joke: A Late Student* (1827), all anti-Jackson lithographs located in the Print Collection at the American Antiquarian Society.

⁵⁹² For information on Bufford see David Tatham, "John Henry Bufford: American Lithographer" *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 86:1 (1976): 47-73.

⁵⁹³ Tatham, "John Henry Bufford: American Lithographer," 68.

⁵⁹⁴ Earl to George Bates, Oct. 26, 1831. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

of Mr. Pendleton.” Earl was gracious in saying that “the necessity for these remarks is truly painful to me, but when a work like this is to go before a censorious world, anticipated by the public as it has been – it is not only my own reputation that is at stake, but Mr. Pendleton must know that his own is also.” In order to make the print acceptable, “the entire person of the President from head to foot, would have to be altered,” and he recommended to “obliterate the drawing from the stone.”⁵⁹⁵

Pendleton himself replied to Earl, blaming the “blurry heavy appearances” on the stretch of damp weather that Boston had received. He agreed to redo the drawing to “redeem the character of my establishment.”⁵⁹⁶ Earl wrote back authorizing a new version of the print, to which Pendleton replied that the lithograph would be completed “as perfectly and as early as possible.”⁵⁹⁷ After his initial failed attempt, Bufford’s progress on the print was slow and deliberate, but time was getting short. Jackson was seeking reelection in the 1832 Presidential race. Earl wrote to Bates in June 1831 stating that he was “*extremely* anxious to have it out this summer.”⁵⁹⁸ Bates certainly recognized the political implications of the print from the outset and his letters often included remarks indicating this awareness. Bates even sent a note to Earl a few days before the Democratic convention in Baltimore in May suggesting that he rush fifty to sixty prints to the city.⁵⁹⁹ Like Earl, Bates realized the dual advantage of the timing of the publication, writing in August 1832 with the print

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Pendleton to Earl, Oct. 31, 1831, cited in Bumgardner, 92.

⁵⁹⁷ Pendleton to Earl, Nov. 12, 1831, cited in Bumgardner, 92.

⁵⁹⁸ Earl to Bates, June 28, 1831, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society, cited in Bumgardner, 90-91.

⁵⁹⁹ Bates to Earl, May 18, 1832, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

finally in hand that, “The excitement of the election will help the sale and the presence of the picture will help the election.”⁶⁰⁰

The nearly final print had arrived in March 1832, almost a year after Bates’ initial correspondence with Earl. This second proof was sent to the artist, to which he responded favorably, saying “I am pleased and gratified that execution of the work is much to my satisfaction. The President’s family and other friends here who have seen the Print are equally satisfied.”⁶⁰¹ Taking care that the reproduction was as close as possible to the original, Earl recommended a few minor changes: that the lines of the face be more “strikingly marked,” that the line of the brim of the hat be strengthened to distinguished it from the sky, and that the inscription “At the Hermitage, 1830” be added under Jackson’s signature so it would be clear where he was standing.⁶⁰²

Pendleton recommended charging five dollars for first impressions and three dollars for second impressions and according to Bates, “Most of the Subscribers to the Print and probably most of those who will subscribe are persons not abounding in wealth and not amateurs of the fine arts, but men devoted in heart to our excellent President and who are therefore desirous of possessing the best likeness of him at a cheap rate... The first impressions must be sold to the wealthy, the second to easy in circumstances and the third impressions can be sold at still lower prices to our good country friends, who if not so rich as citizens are not less devoted to Liberty and

⁶⁰⁰ Bates to Earl, Aug., 31, 1832, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁶⁰¹ Earl to Pendleton, Mar. 22, 1832, cited in Bumgardner, 92.

⁶⁰² Pendleton to Earl, Nov. 12, 1821, Bates to Earl, Mar. 14, 1832, Pendleton to Earl, Mar. 14, 1832, Earl to Pendleton, Mar. 22, 1832, all in Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

lovers of her great Champion.”⁶⁰³ This quotation suggests widespread loyalty to Jackson as well as the popularity of his image.

Earl requested that 200 copies be sent to him in Washington and that an additional 200 be shipped to Nashville. Of those that arrived at the White House, Earl kept detailed lists of their distribution. One hundred were given over for distribution to booksellers Thompson and Homans. Of the other 100, Earl recorded the recipients of ninety-eight of them in a memorandum book. Several were gifted to close friends, and not surprisingly, many of the purchasers were active Jackson allies. Bates shipped others to New York, Albany, Philadelphia, Norfolk, Charleston, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Louisville, and other cities, and the prints were distributed by dealers in each respective city. Bates also told Earl something that he already knew about advertising: “Whatever may be the merit of a work of art, it will not sell unless the public attention is called to it and purchases solicited.”⁶⁰⁴ He called attention to the print by placing a lengthy ad in the *Boston Daily Advertiser and Patriot*, describing the portrait as “a masterly production of Pendleton’s.”⁶⁰⁵ In the end, Jackson did win the election, possibly aided by the crafting of his image in the print.

As Barnhill has pointed out, Earl modernized his distribution methods for his second Presidential print production. With the earlier Longacre print, Earl had circulated subscription lists in advance of print distribution. This use of the subscription method had been used in the United States for over 100 years by that

⁶⁰³ Bates to Earl, Mar. 28, 1832 and Pendleton to Earl, Mar. 30, 1832, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

⁶⁰⁴ Bates to Earl, May 16, June 2, and June 16, 1832, Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society. See also *Washington Globe*, April 12, 1832.

⁶⁰⁵ *Daily Advertiser and Patriot*, Apr. 4, 1832, cited in Bumgardner, 94.

point. For example, Peter Pelham had used the subscription method in his 1728 mezzotint of Cotton Mather.⁶⁰⁶ For the Pendleton print, however, Earl enlisted dealers, both individuals and firms, to handle distribution in each respective city. The United States had experienced a major mercantile shift in the Jacksonian era and Earl's new and more diverse method of print distribution displays a business acumen that he applied his entire career. As he had done with his painting style, here he learned from past precedents and adapted new methodology as necessary.

The "Farmer Jackson" print led to the 1833 commission of an oil replica of the original painting. In 1833, Joseph Hemphill, a Philadelphia counselor-at-law wrote John Eaton to request a copy of Earl's "Farmer Jackson" after seeing the lithograph of the original.⁶⁰⁷ In the replica, Earl altered some of the details. He removed the glasses Jackson had worn in the original and "his entire countenance has been slightly altered."⁶⁰⁸ The vast majority of Earl's paintings depict Jackson without his spectacles, allowing greater emphasis on the subject's deep-set eyes. Three horses were also added to the foreground and the grapevine spiraling up the tree on the right in the first version was deleted.

Beyond Earl's own commissioned prints after his paintings, his Jackson portraits were in demand for prints produced by others as well. Countless reproductions both naïve and professional in nature have been made after Earl's portraits, partly due to the vast number of Jacksonian portraits that he painted and the

⁶⁰⁶ Barnhill, 94.

⁶⁰⁷ See Longacre Papers, Eaton to Hemphill, May 21, 1833. In addition Earl also painted at least two head and shoulders versions based on his original full-length painting. One is owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum in Washington D.C., the other is illustrated and advertised by Vose Galleries in *Antiques*, November 1955, 420 and is unlocated.

⁶⁰⁸ Barber, 139. The painting is located in a private collection.

enormous market for the president's visage. The Hemphill version of Earl's 'Farmer Jackson' was even recreated as a life-sized marble sculpture around 1860 by William Rumney (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

One especially interesting example of a print after Earl's paintings occurred in 1834. *The New York Mirror, A Weekly Journal Devoted to Literature and the Fine Arts*, edited by George P. Morris, was publishing an engraving depicting the seven U.S. Presidents to that point and desired an image of Jackson for inclusion. The publishers sought to reproduce accurate likenesses of each President, in addition to showcasing the fine abilities of America's leading artists. Printmaker Asher B. Durand managed the project and made printed copies of two original Presidential portraits himself (Stuart's 'Athenaeum' portrait of Washington and Sully's portrait of Jefferson) and made another from life (of James Madison). The print's layout was designed by Robert W. Weir and the engraving executed by John W. Casilear. According to one historian, "Morris went to extraordinary lengths to arrange for engravings of portraits that were highly regarded as superior likenesses of each President."⁶⁰⁹ Morris was especially worried about offering the public a successful likeness of Jackson, the current President, and he told Durand that "No head in the whole cluster will be more closely scrutinized than that of Genl. Jackson."⁶¹⁰ In the end, Morris selected Earl's portrait owned by Martin Van Buren which was then located in the office of New York Governor William L. Marcy. Van Buren himself claimed that it was the only correct likeness of Jackson that existed and Morris urged

⁶⁰⁹ Cunningham, 57.

⁶¹⁰ Morris to Durand, Aug. 8, 1833, New York Public Library, cited in Cunningham, 59.

Durand to “please be careful – and let Mr. Casilear exert his utmost skill upon the General.”⁶¹¹

The finished print was intended not only as a celebration of the Presidency but also of the arts in America (fig. 5.14).⁶¹² Morris described the finished image proudly:

The whole picture is intended to represent on end of a room in that capitol of the United States. In the centre is a large mirror, reflecting a statue of the Goddess of Liberty from the opposite side, and surmounted by the American eagle with banners... The portraits, seven in number, are disposed, each in a chaste but elegant frame, around the mirror, three at each side, and that of Washington at the top.⁶¹³

At the bottom of the image, the following words appear, “The Presidents of the United States, from original and accurate portraits.” From the beginning of the two-year project Morris had intended on creating “a splendid National Engraving...executed in the best manner, and by the most imminent artists.”⁶¹⁴ Earl’s inclusion in such a project is significant and reveals his elite status among artists in America. As the United States reached its fiftieth birthday and a turning point toward the status of an internationally established nation, Jackson’s had elevated the Presidency to a powerful role in American culture, and Earl’s work accentuated that achievement.

Durand’s Print of Vanderlyn’s Painting

Earl was not the only artist who created fine prints of Jackson portraits. In addition to Longacre’s aforementioned efforts, Earl’s old friend John Vanderlyn

⁶¹¹ Morris to Durand, Aug. 8, 1833, New York Public Library, cited in Cunningham, 59.

⁶¹² Cunningham, 60.

⁶¹³ *New York Mirror* 12 (1834): 41, cited in Cunningham, 60.

⁶¹⁴ Morris to James Madison, Apr. 13, 1833, Madison Papers, Library of Congress, cited in Cunningham, 60.

followed a very similar production plan to Earl's, perhaps following through on discussions the two had had while together in Paris. In 1819 Vanderlyn had been commissioned by the Common Council of New York for a full-length image of General Jackson to be hung in City Hall. This was the first portrait of Jackson commissioned by a civic body, the one for which he requested Earl's assistance with Jackson's head, and Vanderlyn finished it in September 1820. Bored with portraiture, Vanderlyn struggled with the painting and it received mixed reaction.⁶¹⁵ Nationally renowned artist Asher B. Durand produced a line engraving of this painting, and a limited number of prints (850) were produced to be sold at nine dollars apiece. The Vanderlyn/Durand print was sold by subscription and the engravings were published in June of 1828 by James R. Burton of New York (fig. 5.15).

Despite similarities in timing and advertising between the 1828 prints of Earl and Vanderlyn's Jackson paintings, the images themselves are quite different. Earl's image depicted Jackson as a civilian. As noted, it is a bust-length view of Jackson in gentleman's attire, a black jacket with white shirt and jabot seated against a darkened draped background. Vanderlyn's work however, commissioned in 1819 in celebration of Jackson's war heroics, depicts General Jackson. The three-quarter length image pictures Jackson standing before his horse with sword drawn. The painting is set on the New Orleans battlefield and Jackson's army can be seen in the distant background.

Four months before the Presidential election of 1828, Vanderlyn's prints created, as Earl's had, a timely icon for Jackson supporters. It is quite possible that both Vanderlyn and Earl had come back to the United States hoping to not only create

⁶¹⁵ Barber chronicles the life of the painting in *Andrew Jackson: A Portrait Study*, 64-67.

history paintings of the Battle of New Orleans, which both had discussed while in Paris together, but also to publish prints after their intended portraits of Jackson. Both Vanderlyn and Earl also followed similar business models in production of their respective prints utilizing published subscription lists, and it is probable that the two were in communication regarding their mutual interests. Both Vanderlyn and Earl also employed nationally renowned printmakers. And although both artists' prints coincided with the Presidential election, only Earl's motive was both political and personal in nature. Vanderlyn was disinterested in the project, and in portraiture in general and the work had been commissioned by someone else more interested in Jackson's election.⁶¹⁶ In 1828, Vanderlyn was financially strapped and desperately trying to keep his portrait gallery, The Rotunda, in New York afloat, utilizing whatever artistic means he could for financial assistance. Earl on the other hand naturally sought to promote his friend's image, and serve his own career-oriented goals, but more importantly, he wanted to aid Jackson's presidential ambitions.

Earl was engaged in a final printmaking project in 1838, the year of his death. In January of that year, with Earl and Jackson home at the Hermitage, S.D. Langtree, founder of the new literary magazine, *The Democratic Review*, wrote to commission an engraving. Langtree, who had already sent Earl the magazine's first issue, wrote to say he "rejoiced to find that you liked the Review," continuing with, "you will perceive from the second number [of the *Democratic Review*] which is now sent, that we have promised a fine engraving from your last picture of the General. I am in hopes that you will have found time...amid the shades and quiet of the Hermitage to

⁶¹⁶ According to Charles Henry Hart's *Catalogue of the Engraved Work of Asher B. Durand* (New York: Grolier Club, 1895), 38 no. 54, the work was reproduced by Durand on commission from Mr. S. Converse.

retouch with the last finish of an artist's care, the original sketch of the large painting."⁶¹⁷

The 'large painting' Langtree referenced was the so-called National Picture that Earl had painted on commission from the citizens of Washington City. The 'original sketch' of the painting is a thirty by twenty inch oil study for the finished work (fig. 5.16). Although the study is a bit awkward in the area of Jackson's face, it contains all of the elements of the monumental Washington. This was probably the painting Earl was reworking at the time of his sudden death in September 1838. As a result, Langtree's engraving probably never got off the ground. Earl's many Jackson prints reveal yet another example of his artistic engagement and ultimately helped bolster Jackson's national reputation. Although they were the most influential reproductions from Earl's paintings, there were not his only printed efforts.

Prints of Rachel Jackson

In addition to his numerous prints of Andrew Jackson, Earl sought to create prints of Rachel to diffuse the aspersions cast on her, and by extension Jackson, regarding the circumstances of their marriage, which Jackson's political adversaries had cast as a national scandal. Although no prints have surfaced and may never have been produced, Earl went to considerable trouble in 1828-30 to commission engraved versions of her portrait, at least one of the many he had painted of Mrs. Jackson since his first years in Nashville (see chapter three).

Richard and Mary Call were close friends of the Jacksons' and had married at the Hermitage in 1825, after which they moved to Florida where call became Governor. After their move, Call wrote to Jackson, requesting portraits of both him

⁶¹⁷ Langtree to Earl, Jan. 5, 1838, Earl papers.

and Rachel to which Jackson had responded that, “it will give Mrs. J and myself pleasure to sitt [sic]to Mr. Earl and I will see him shortly on the subject.”⁶¹⁸ The paintings were produced and sent to the Calls in Florida in 1826. During Jackson’s election campaign of 1828 Earl began trying to borrow the Calls’ painting of Rachel for Longacre to engrave. It was Earl’s favorite painting of her and the only one he felt appropriate for a print.⁶¹⁹ Earl complained to Jackson in Washington about the difficulty he had in retrieving the portrait.⁶²⁰ According to Earl, “Upwards of twelve months ago I wrote [General Call]...in which I informed him it was my desire to have an engraving taken from the Portrait of Mrs. Jackson then in his possession, and also to have a miniature taken from it for you...On the receipt of your letter I wrote to Call...and requested him (if he had not already done so) soon as convenient to have it sent to Longacre of Philadelphia, where Major Bradford has my full approbation to have any Engravings taken from it he may think proper.”⁶²¹ Because of the indordinate delay, Longacre wrote to Earl in June 1830 to see if the project was still pending.⁶²² In the letter Longacre lamented, “I was ready to have proceeded with the work a year ago if the picture had been received.” No engraving has surfaced of Rachel Jackson by Longacre; however, a loose engraved reinterpretation (of unknown

⁶¹⁸ Andrew Jackson to Brigadier General Richard K. Call, Mar. 9, 1826. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 6:483.

⁶¹⁹ Earl to Jackson, April 5, 1830 “You exp[r]ess’d a desire of getting a miniature likeness of mrs Jackson from one of my late portrait of her – the only one which I would wish to send forth to the world as a correct representation of that good and pious woman is in the possession of Genl. Call.” *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:132.

⁶²⁰ Earl to Jackson, April 5, 1830 *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:132.

⁶²¹ Ralph E.W. Earl to Andrew Jackson, from Fairfield, TN April 5, 1830. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:132

⁶²² Longacre to Earl June 23, 1830. Earl papers, American Antiquarian Society.

sources) of the “Call portrait” in reverse appears in Heiskell’s 1920 biography of Jackson.⁶²³ Perhaps by 1830 after Rachel’s death, the engraving was no longer needed to defend her honor and the project was abandoned after the shipping delay. Earl’s desire to create a print of Rachel, however not only reveals his loyalty to the Jacksons, but also his own enterprising nature. He was clearly personally and politically motivated to promote and defend his patrons, and this unfinished project adds another intriguing layer to the artist’s fascinating career.

In both his paintings and his printed versions, Ralph E.W. Earl worked to cast Jackson in a manner similar to other presidents. He was certainly aware of the tradition of presidential print-making initiated by Charles Willson Peale, who produced several mass-marketed mezzotint engravings of George Washington in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.⁶²⁴ As mentioned, he also would have been aware of the extremely popular images of Washington by Stuart, and both the Lansdowne and Athenaeum portrait of Washington were printed repeatedly, both by Stuart and by dozens of followers. However, Earl’s application of printmaking in defense of Jackson against his detractors, and his use of prints to aid in the election was unprecedented. His involvement with this emerging political industry shows his awareness of the print tradition both in Europe and the United States, but it also reveals his understanding of the power of imagery. It also offers yet another example of how Earl borrowed from numerous sources and experiences to create a successful career for himself. He exploited the idea of Jackson as a democratic man of the

⁶²³ Heiskell, 2:291

⁶²⁴ Wendy Wick Reaves “His Excellency Genl Washington”: Charles Willson Peale’s Long-Long Mezzotint Discovered” *American Art Journal* 24:1-2 (1992): 44-59.

people by incorporating printmaking, the democratic art form, into his artistic purview. Ultimately, Earl's printmaking efforts offer another example of how he absorbed artistic ideas from a number of sources and translated them into his service of Jackson. In addition, with his prints, Earl not only sealed Jackson's fate, but helped cement his own, as the President's artist. The national scope of the prints gave Earl and Jackson great exposure. With Jackson, a new tradition of negative political cartooning had begun in the United States, and Earl was the first artist in America to use fine art prints in direct response to these negative attacks.



Figure 5.1. James Akin, *A Philosophic Cock*, undated. Hand-colored engraving. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.



Figure 5.2. Unknown artist, attributed to James Akin, *Office Hunters for the Year 1834*, 1834. Lithograph, 15 ¼ in. x 9 7/8 in. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Figure 5.3. Edward Williams Clay, *The Rats Leaving a Falling House*, 1831.
Lithograph, 10 3/8 in. x 7 3/4 in. The Library Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

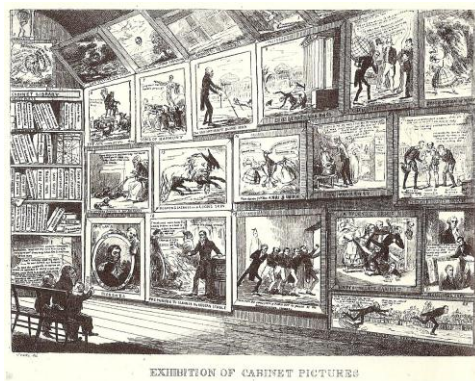


Figure 5.4. David Claypoole Johnston, *Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures*, 1831.
American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.



Figure 5.5. Unknown artist, *King Andrew the First*, 1832 or 1833. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

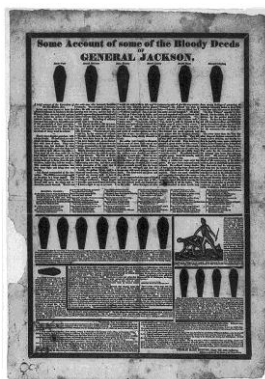


Figure 5.6. *A Brief Account of some of the Bloody Deeds of General Jackson.* Handbill, 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. x 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Private Collection.



Figure 5.7. Unknown artist, *The Pedlar and his Pack or the Desperate Effort, an Over Balance*, 1828. Etching, 16 ½ in. x 11 in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.



Figure 5.8. Alfred M. Hoffy, *General Jackson Slaying the Many Headed Monster*, ca. 1836. Lithography, 14 3/8 in. x 12 in. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Figure 5.9. James Akin, *Caucus Curs in full Yell, or a War Whoop to saddle on the People, a Pappoose President*, 1824. Aquatint, 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. x 17 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Figure 5.10. James Akin, *The Man! The Jack Ass!*, not dated. Lithograph, 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Photograph by author.

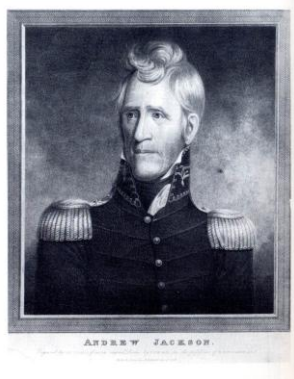


Figure 5.11. Charles Cutler Torrey, engraving after Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1826. 16 3/8 in. x 14 1/4 in. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

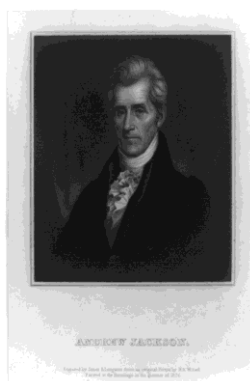


Figure 5.12. James B. Longacre, after Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, 1828. Engraving, New York Public Library, New York.



Figure 5.13. John Henry Bufford after Ralph E. W. Earl's "Farmer Jackson," *Andrew Jackson at the Hermitage*, 1832. Lithograph, 21 in. x 17 in. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

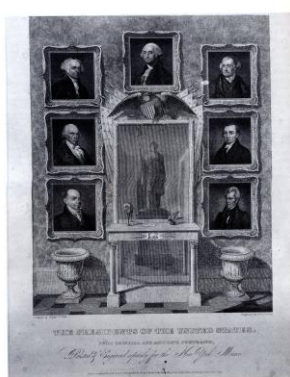


Figure 5.14. Robert W. Weir and John W. Casilear, "The Presidents of the United States. From Original and Accurate Portraits, Printed & Engraved expressly for the *New York Mirror*," 1834. Engraving, 18 in. x 14 ½ in. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 5.15. Asher B. Durand after John Vanderlyn, *General Andrew Jackson, New Orleans, Jany. 8th. 1815*, 1828. Engraving, 20 ½ in. x 14 ¾ in. The New York Historical Society, New York, New York.

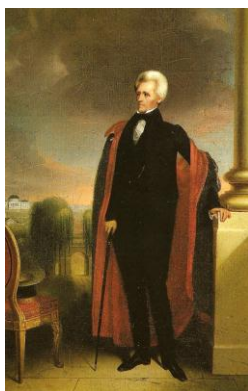


Figure 5.16. Ralph E.W. Earl, *Andrew Jackson*, study, 1836. The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, Hermitage, Tennessee.

CONCLUSION

In short, Earl was the perfect cultural intercessor, not only for Jackson, but for Nashville and the South as well. The wealth of experience he brought to the Western Country not only enabled him to attain great success and fame as Jackson's artist, but it was also just what southern culture needed at the time. He was aware of the American tradition as he learned it through the eyes of his father in Colonial New England. He also had a solid English training and a grounding in British portraiture. His study in France particularly appealed to southerners, who had long preferred continental styles and culture to that of Great Britain. His intellect, solid education, and easy manner, enabled him to become the South's first great cultural entrepreneur. His created style not only dominated trends in Tennessee throughout the nineteenth century, but his achievements surpassed regional interests as he achieved national and even international success with his Jacksonian imagery. Ultimately it is Earl's authentic image of Jackson that nineteenth-century Americans were aware of and that twentieth-century Americans relate to. Earl's unique and intriguing story not only needs to be heard, but it is critical to an understanding of a range of issues including early nineteenth-century art in the South, the life of American artists in the antebellum era, and the refining of Jackson's persona. Earl's role for Jackson personally and in Jacksonian America cannot be overstated. He was a key component in all aspects of Jackson's life especially those involving Jackson's identity. Earl's achievements in Connecticut School portraiture and as an early American entrepreneur, also stand on their own as quite significant in American cultural history

and should not be forgotten. Ultimately, Jackson and Earl offer an intriguing look into the developing history, culture, and artistic traditions of a still developing nation.

Earl's Death

After living eight years in Washington, Earl returned to the Hermitage with Jackson at the end of his presidency in 1837. He moved back into Jackson's home and began reconnecting with old friends and finishing paintings he had begun in Washington. He seemed quite content accompanying the president into his retirement. While supervising the construction of the new driveway to the estate in 1838, however, Earl suffered a heat stroke from which according to Horn he, "passed into a congestive chill from which he never recovered."⁶²⁵ When he died on September 16, 1838, he left an incomplete portrait of Jackson in his General's uniform – a testament to his life's devotion. Earl was fifty years old at the time.

Earl was buried in the family cemetery at the Hermitage, beside his dear friend Mrs. Rachel Jackson. Jackson was with him on his deathbed and wrote of the event to Nicholas P. Trist:

Our faithful friend Col. Earl is no more, he departed this life on the morning of the 16th instant in the short illness of eight days and without the least intimation from the physicians until the morning before he departed that his case was dangerous; he daily assured me he was better without pain, his medicine operating well...His death shocked us all, being so sudden and unsuspected until it was too late to talk to him on the subject of his worldly affairs. His death is a severe bereavement to me, he was my sincere friend and constant companion, and when I was able to travel always accompanied me. He was an invaluable friend, a most upright and honest man, but he is gone to happier climes than these 'where the wicked cease to trouble and the weary are at rest'.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁵ Horn, 127

⁶²⁶ Andrew Jackson. Letter to Nicholas P. Trist, from Hermitage, dated September 19, 1838. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 5: 565-66.

Earl's tombstone is inscribed "In memory of Ralph E.W. Earl/ Artist, Friend, and Companion of General Jackson."⁶²⁷

Commentary by those closest to Earl after his sudden death reveal much about Earl, how deeply instilled he was within the Jackson family, and how beloved he was by his friends. An inventory of Earl's possessions and a testimonial was included in a letter dated August 7, 1839 from Andrew Jackson Jr. to Earl's brother-in-law:

It is now needless for me to express to you the deep grief we all felt at the untimely loss of our friend Col. Earle, as he was in fact a member of our family been living with us for the last fifteen years or more- thus you can well judge of our feeling on this melancholy event- v- we regret extremely to be informed of your late bereavement in the decease of your Lady (and now the Col.)⁶²⁸

Earl's reputation was echoed in his obituary in the *Nashville Union*, September 19, 1838 which seems to have been written by Jackson himself:

Departed this life on the 16th inst., at the residence of Ex-President Jackson, Mr. R. E. W. Earl. The deceased came to this country about twenty-two years ago, and was soon favorably known to the citizens of Nashville as a portrait painter, in the study and practice of which art he has ever since been engaged, and with a success which has secured him a high reputation on the list of American Artists. But it was not alone in his professional career that the deceased won the respect and favor of those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. In all walks of life he was equally fortunate in the exhibition of those qualities of mind and heart which give value to human character. As a companion he was lively, instructive and kind – as a friend no one could be more sincere, confiding and steadfast – as a man he was honest, upright, and faithful to every engagement. He was mild and unobtrusive in his disposition, but yet consistent in his conduct, acting always upon the highest principles of honor. He met death with the calmness and complacency which became such a character – not a word of complaint having been known to escape him during his illness. It will be some consolation to his distant relatives to learn that in his last hours he was attended by the friend whom he was proud to acknowledge, on all occasions, as entitled to the greatest space of his gratitude, veneration and love. Indeed there was in the relation subsisting

⁶²⁷ More info about Earl's funeral and the poem that was written to commemorate it can be found in Horn, 127-8.

⁶²⁸ Original letter is in the Bassett papers, Library of Congress, and is transcribed in the Gage family papers, American Antiquarian Society, 4:2.

between him and Gen. Jackson, something more than usually interesting. He was introduced, soon after his arrival in Tennessee, to Gen. Jackson, whose sagacious eye was not long in discovering his merits. An intimacy soon sprung up, which led to Mr. Earl's admission into the family of the Hermitage, where he was able to pursue without interruption his favorite art, and was placed beyond the necessities which too often discourage the efforts of its most meritorious votaries. This hospitality has been repaid in the many excellent portraits he has produced of this distinguished man, and by the kindness, and affection which he uniformly manifested for him.⁶²⁹

In addition to this heart-felt tribute to Earl, Jackson's feelings about Earl were expressed especially poignantly in the weeks following Earl's sudden death. For example, he wrote to Major Lewis on December 10, 1838 (two months after Earl's passing): "You cannot well imagine how much I miss my real friend Earle. He was my companion and friend."⁶³⁰ Many of Jackson and Earl's friends also lamented his passing. Francis P. Blair, a close associate of both men and editor of the *Washington Globe* expressed his condolences to the ex-President in a letter dated October 19, 1838:

I received few days since your last letter announcing to me the death of Colo. Earl. I sincerely sympathize with your feelings upon his loss. He was an affectionate hearted man and idolized you almost, in his enthusiastic attachment, which grew not more from personal predilection, than from gratitude and admiration for your services to the Country. I felt a sincere friendship for him, indeed a sort of fraternal affection; for during seven years both of us were in the habit of looking to you as a common Patron. Poor Earl, in his facetious way, frequently spoke of our relationship, saying that he, was the *King's Painter* and I the *King's Printer*.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ *Nashville Union*, September 19, 1838.

⁶³⁰ *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 5:574

⁶³¹ Blair to Jackson, October 19, 1838. In Harold D. Moser, Daniel Feller, et al. *Papers of Andrew Jackson* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1980- current).

James K. Polk also expressed his sympathy to Jackson: “I deeply lament the death, of our good friend Col. Earle. I heard nothing of his indisposition until I saw his death announced in the newspapers.”⁶³²

Between the time of Earl’s arrival in Nashville in early 1817 until his death there over twenty years later, a true and lasting bond had formed between Jackson and Earl. Especially after Mrs. Jackson’s death, the two had close daily interaction, and perhaps no one spent more time with the Jackson while he was in office. Based on their “real” friendship, and Earl’s various experiences, no one was better situated to represent Andrew Jackson for posterity.

In a 1982 essay, Robert Darnton stated that “the study of a career, old-fashioned and merely biographical as it seems, may provide a needed correction to the more abstract study of ideas and ideologies.”⁶³³ These ideas and ideologies about art in the American South cannot be substantiated without knowledge of the region’s cultural players. Though Earl has been shown to be more than a southern portraitist alone, his role in the Jacksonian era deserves study. And while Earl’s biography certainly needed to be recorded, it is through a study of his life and work that so much about his periods’ and regions’ cultures may be discerned.

⁶³² Polk to Jackson, September 23, 1838. James K. Polk, *Correspondence of James K. Polk* (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1969) 4:562.

⁶³³ Robert Darnton, “On the Printers, Pamphleteer, and Booksellers of the Enlightenment in France” in *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982) cited in Jaffee (1985), 69-70.

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