1993

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: its Founding, 1930-1936

Elizabeth Geesey Holmes

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons, Museum Studies Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation


https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-xr1t-4536

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
ITS FOUNDING, 1930-1936

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Elizabeth Geesey Holmes
1993
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Elizabeth Geesey Holmes

Approved, August 1993

Richard B. Sherman

Philip J. Funigielo

Douglas Smith

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Jim, my sister, Kate, and my parents, Ron and Jean Geesey. Without their love, support and encouragement I could not have completed this project and degree.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. ORIGINS OF THE ART MUSEUM</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. A STATE ART MUSEUM</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. RAISING FUNDS</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. BUILDING THE MUSEUM</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. GROWING PAINS</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI. OPENING DAY</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VII. THE MUSEUM REALIZES ITS GOALS</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to the staff of the manuscript department of Swem Library at the College of William and Mary for their support of and enthusiasm for this research project, especially Susan Riggs who brought this interesting topic to her attention. The author is also indebted to Professor Richard Sherman for his careful reading and criticism of the manuscript.
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. First floor plan, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Second floor plan, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Original organization chart of the museum</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the 1935 building as it looks today</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis examines the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in the context of the public museum movement of the time, from its conception, through its opening season as a fully operational, public art institution. Officially founded by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1934, it was the first state art museum in the United States. Established before the beginning of the federal government’s involvement with art through its New Deal WPA art centers, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts pioneered the idea of the state art museum.

In tracing the founding of this museum, the author examines the relationship between private and state funding of the museum and discusses the museum’s status as the first public institution of its kind. There were many challenges facing this project during the depression years which the founders successfully overcame through the leadership of John Garland Pollard, the dedication of the museum’s board members and the financial help of the WPA.

When the museum opened in January of 1936, it began a successful first season and continues today as a center for art appreciation and education in Virginia. The original organization of the museum has assured it of state government support without state control.
THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
ITS FOUNDING, 1930-1936
ORIGINS OF THE ART MUSEUM

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts stands completed, a noble and fitting monument, planned for the cultural pleasure and inspiration of countless generations of future Virginians. Designed by the Virginia Art Commission in the style of Georgian architecture characteristic of the Old Dominion, it nevertheless incorporates in its planning and facilities the latest and finest elements of museum design. Inspected by experts, it has been pronounced a model of its kind.¹

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia was a pioneering venture when it opened on January 18, 1936 as the first state art museum. Today the Virginia Museum continues to set the standard for other state museums, offering an unparalleled variety of cultural opportunities, including not only a valuable collection of paintings, sculpture and jewels; but also frequent concerts, plays and dance performances in its theater. The museum’s artmobiles, chapters and affiliates throughout Virginia ensure it widespread support throughout the state.

Although the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts did in fact

pioneer the idea of the state museum, it is a logical extension of the process of museum development that began in the ancient world and continued in Europe and the United States. There were no museums as we know them today in ancient Greece, although cities such as Delphi, Olympia and Athens held vast collections of statues and paintings. These national exhibition pavilions resembled permanent art galleries, but their intent was primarily religious. The first true museum arose when King Attalus of Pergamon stole statues in a raid. Since his new statues lacked a natural setting in Pergamon, the King created an artificial one which aimed at a renaissance of Greek ideals. The museum of Pergamon was the first in a long line of museums created to preserve "the remnants of an admired milieu in a treasury of ideals and medals: a direct expression of the spiritual ties to a dead past."²

Museums in the United States today are a direct outgrowth of European museums established along the lines of Pergamon. According to the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, a museum is "a building or apartment dedicated to the pursuit of learning or the arts; a 'home of the muses'; a scholar's study." More specifically, it is a building or a portion of a building used as a repository for the preservation and exhibition

of objects illustrative of antiquities, natural history, fine and industrial art, or some particular branch of any of these subjects either generally or with reference to a definite region or period.\(^3\)

E. H. Gombach writes that the principal aim of the art museum is to enable those who enjoy art to view it; this is only one goal, however, for without activities such as conservation, acquisition, research and cataloging, there might be no works of art for visitors to view.\(^4\)

These activities were the groundwork for public museums. Before the public could enjoy them, it was necessary to acquire, preserve and catalog art collections. Collectors, therefore, were the force that made the art museum possible.\(^5\) They began as connoisseurs, adding and discarding pieces as they sought the highest quality. During the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, literally hundreds of collectors gathered and preserved the objects that are found today in the great art museums of the western world. These private collections slowly developed into


museums in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Collections opened at Düsseldorf, Munich, Kassel and Dresden around 1750, closely followed by the British Museum in 1759. Influenced by the Enlightenment, princes in Vienna, Stockholm, Florence and Rome opened their collections to the public.

University art collections evolved concurrently with the great private collections. The first of these originated in 1661 when the city of Basel bought the Amerbach Cabinet, a collection containing some excellent works by Holbein. The city exhibited the paintings a decade later in the University Library, inspiring Nathaniel Burt to call this museum the prototype of today's average American big city institution. The Basel museum achieved international status through the private collections of local burghers and a public subsidy by the town council, thus becoming a monument to civic pride.

The first great national art museum opened somewhat later, in 1793. This was the Palace of the Louvre in Paris, dedicated to "the love and study of the arts." Three

---

6 Anna Maria Ludovico, daughter of Cosimo III, willed the collection of the Medici family to the Uffizi Gallery.


8 Burt, p. 18.

quarters of the treasures housed there came from royal palaces, the remainder from churches, religious orders and emigres. Open to the public a third of the time and to art students half of the time, the Louvre was very popular. It was the crowning jewel of a system of museums intended to serve the common man and woman of the new Republic. This system included museums in Brussels, Mainz and Geneva. Eventually twenty-two cities benefitted from the distribution of over a thousand paintings. Napoleon, like his forerunner in Pergamon, gathered art treasures from conquered nations.10

After his defeat at the hands of the British, Napoleon returned many paintings to their original locations; however, by then Europe had become "museum conscious" -- the nineteenth century could easily be called the golden age of museums. Sovereigns, nations and cities poured their treasures into such great exhibition places as the Prado in Madrid (1819), the National Gallery in London (1828) and the Munich Pinakothek (1836).11 Nearly every country in western Europe built a comprehensive collection of masterpieces that extended from ancient times to the present.12

Museums developed not only in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also in the United

10Alexander, p.26
12Alexander, p.27.
States. Indeed, the American museum is an institution as old as the European. This seems paradoxical, but the modern museum is an idea as much as a fact, and the idea of the public museum was also sprouting in America. Today's American museum, as opposed to the "collection" of Europe after the Renaissance, is a thoroughly popular democratic phenomenon. The appeal of the museum in America is that it is not a place like home; instead, it is a palace in a land where palaces are, for the most part, nonexistent. Art museums provide the public with a type of ownership of luxury.\textsuperscript{13} Daniel Fox, historian of art museums, writes that the founders of most public museums in the United States conceived them as institutions for the masses and citadels for the classes. The need to justify tax exemptions, coupled with the appeal of museums as philanthropic organizations, rather than objects of luxury expenditure, helped to democratize and popularize American public museums.\textsuperscript{14} Their founders created the American museum from an ideal; it began with a deliberate appeal to the people, whereas the European museum grew out of collections which mostly remained semi-exclusive and available only to a few.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13}Burt, p.13.


\textsuperscript{15}Burt, p.14-15.
In America, though, it was private donors rather than collectors and collections who were crucial to the development of museums. Donors did much to shape museums along traditional lines, and the rich collections they established were well worth the management problems which often accompanied demanding donors.\textsuperscript{16} The earliest American art galleries, in the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, were either business enterprises or the property of learned societies, but after the Civil War, changing sources and patterns of financial support modified museum goals and policies. Museums established between 1870 and 1960 have their origin, instead, in philanthropy. The increasingly public character of the institutions they founded and supported influenced the actions and ideas of these donors. In 1845, for instance, there was no indication of any effort to create public art galleries; yet twenty-five years later public museums were being founded across the nation. These differed from earlier American galleries in that they had specific programs for public service, administered by independent corporations.\textsuperscript{17}

The founders of American public museums, primarily philanthropists and collectors, were influential members of corporations and their boards of trustees. They were, first


\textsuperscript{17}Fox, p.2.
and foremost, "concerned about the quality of culture in America and the role of taste in civilized life;" the institutions created, therefore, were conceived as instruments of direct and indirect cultural education.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, the role of the private citizen in creating and sustaining these institutions is the most important distinction between European and American art museums.

Two forces influenced the American museum: the need for approval, concessions, funds and services from municipal and state governments, and the changing goals and methods of private philanthropists. In the nineteenth century, these altruists were usually able to forge their own policies, catering to representatives of local governments only if they so desired. In the twentieth century, however, changes in society and politics, combined with changes in the means and ends of philanthropy, forced benefactors to be more sensitive to the needs and desires of the public.

The art museum in America developed slowly at first because of the lack of ready collections and willing philanthropists. In Europe painting was a fine art patronized by kings, its practitioners glorified as geniuses; American painting, on the other hand, was a lowly craft. There were no art schools, no academies, few collections and few models. But Charles Wilson Peale's efforts changed this situation. Peale was a "serious"

\textsuperscript{18}Fox, p.3.
artist, a collector and the progenitor of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, begun in 1805. In addition to running an art school and holding annual exhibitions, the Academy also acquired an outstanding collection of American paintings and sculpture. Earlier attempts by a group of artists, including Peale, to form such an academy failed due to lack of organization and funding. The group launching the later academy included Peale, another artist and many businessmen who were able to secure funding. Peale's motive in both attempts was to further national glory, not just to cultivate taste and sensibility. The Pennsylvania Academy survives today as America's oldest art institution, although it is not exactly a typical American museum of the fine arts.\(^{19}\)

The Yale University Museum of Art and the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford are closer to the mainstream of art museums. Both institutions owe their existence to Colonel John Trumbull (1756-1843), a contemporary of Peale and a fellow pioneer in art. Trumbull's American Academy in New York, primarily an art school, preceded the Pennsylvania Academy, but collapsed because of conflicts in its philosophy.

The pioneer American college gallery, opened at Yale University in 1832 to house the historical paintings of Colonel Trumbull, was more successful. Nonetheless, the

\(^{19}\text{Burt, p.26-34.}\)
first true and continuing art museum in the United States was the Wadsworth Athenaeum (1842) in Hartford, Connecticut. By 1804 one could find Athenaeums throughout the United States. They were usually private libraries, but the Athenaeum at Hartford also contained an art gallery which displayed about eighty works by Trumbull, Thomas Cole and other Americans.\textsuperscript{20} Despite this early progress, once the Trumbull-inspired galleries at Yale and Hartford had been created, no more art museums were founded until the Civil War years. While other cultural institutions flourished, art museums, considered stodgy repositories for works of old masters, floundered in spite of lively activity in the contemporary arts.\textsuperscript{21}

Nevertheless, real progress was made toward the creation of post-Civil War museums in these early years. Private citizens began to build real collections. Few survived as bases of museums, but they served to set a pattern and to raise an important issue: collections ultimately needed museums in order to remain together.\textsuperscript{22}

Consequently, by 1870, founders had established the first two great institutions in a new administrative pattern: one at Boston, the other at New York. The impetus behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and

\textsuperscript{20} Alexander, p.30.

\textsuperscript{21} Burt, p.47.

\textsuperscript{22} Burt, p.49-55.
the Boston Museum of Fine Arts illustrates the general trends, articulated by Joseph C. Choates in his dedication speech at the Metropolitan: (1) to gather together a complete collection of objects illustrative of the history of art in all its branches from the earliest to the present; (2) to use the collection to educate and entertain the public; and (3) to show students and artisans of every branch of industry, in standards of form and color, what past generations have accomplished, thus inspiring the young to excel and imitate their predecessors.23 Earlier, in 1869, William Cullen Bryant had given the following arguments for the foundation of the Metropolitan. In doing so he had summarized "what everyone had been saying for years" -- the people of the United States of America needed art museums for four reasons: national prestige, encouragement of native artists, refuges for former private collections, and education and uplift. George Comfort of Princeton expounded on the educational purpose, adding that museums could loan exhibitions, hold lecture series for the public, work with schoolchildren and enrich the lives of the poor. Indeed, he mentioned almost every activity undertaken by art museums today.24

The original impulse behind the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was similar: it was educational. Founders such as C. C.

23Alexander, p.31.

24Burt, p.91.
Perkins were interested more in uplifting the masses than merely pandering to the delight of the senses. This art museum was the final jewel in Boston's crown of cultivation and improvement that included Harvard, a public library and assorted music societies.  

These two landmark institutions served as the model of the American museum for the next century. From the beginning, the founders wanted the museum to be universal, not elitist: not a gallery in the English sense, but a museum. The American museum was to think of itself as an educational institution rather than merely as a depository of the beautiful. Therefore, the founding of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1870 was a breakthrough for the American art museum. These were followed within a decade by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Metropolitan Museum and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts were, for the most part, privately funded. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, for example, came into being with several inherent advantages: its founders were all

---

25 Burt, P.113.

26 Burt, p.92.

27 The Pennsylvania Museum of Art is now the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

28 The Boston Museum was entirely privately funded until the twentieth century.
descendants of prominent families. Thus, it inherited a
collection, prestige and the backing of Boston's best and
wealthiest. The Metropolitan, on the other hand, inherited
nothing: its founders were emphatically self-made men and
authors of their own fortunes. The museum received a
bequest of five million dollars and won funding from the
city of New York. The Metropolitan received half of its
income from the city, and with the Natural History Museum,
was responsible for a partnership arrangement between the
city government and a private board of trustees that has
been emulated by nearly a hundred American museums.29 The
Metropolitan arranged to have the city build, maintain and
take title to the building while the trustees owned and
controlled the collections, thus establishing an "important
pattern of museum organization."30

Although city government began to contribute to the
support of museums, donors continued to be of prime
importance. William Wilson Corcoran is an example of the
type of man who was to support museums in America well into
the twentieth century. He was a rich, retired businessman
who gave money to all sorts of charities and had strong ties
to other like-minded philanthropists: "Corcoran is thus a
link in a golden chain of early American millionaires; a
tradition of great public benefactions to which the American

29 Burt, p.105
30 Alexander, p.34.
museum is almost totally indebted.\textsuperscript{31}

Donors and philanthropists along the lines of Corcoran were also instrumental in one of the most significant developments in the history of art museums after 1870: the sudden emergence of museums west of the Alleghenies.\textsuperscript{32} The idea of the museum became more important after the Civil War; suddenly it was imperative that a "proper city" have an art museum as a sign of its cultural maturity. Though many of the midwestern art museums were founded after 1900, those in Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati and St. Louis, were in operation well before the turn of the century. These museums began on the usual hopeless, but successful American basis of no art, no artists, no collections, and no building. They had nothing but gradually improving taste and a lot of money. Despite the availability of money, the Chicago museum's founders were not robber barons trying to show off; they were merely civic leaders attempting to enliven culture in Chicago.\textsuperscript{33}

Culture was alive and well in Chicago by 1900. Though few of them could be called excellent, there were dozens of museums in this city, in a country that thirty years earlier

\textsuperscript{31}Burt, p.59.

\textsuperscript{32}Many nineteenth century midwestern museums had roots in art associations. These associations were usually ladies' clubs. Whereas the origin of art academies and museums in the east was almost exclusively male, in the midwest women were active in the beginnings of many art museums.

\textsuperscript{33}Burt, p.173, 181.
was almost devoid of art museums. These museums laid firm foundations for excellence, and by 1900, art museums were an accepted part of American urban life which were to be a natural part of any proper big city or major college or university. Furthermore, nothing that has happened since has really altered the basic pattern developed between 1870 and 1900, and indeed, "the major change since 1900 has been the increment of museums in the South and in the Plains, but all this is a filling in of flesh and muscle and not alteration." Museums were growing in depth: becoming repositories of beautiful things, as well as educational institutions.\(^{34}\)

One of the most important museums of the post-1900 period is the Cleveland Museum. Its founding followed the usual path, and it is a forerunner of the Virginia Museum in terms of goals and planning, if not funding. Civic-minded citizens supported the museum, and the profits of business and industry made it possible. One founder regarded the administration of wealth as a public trust and donated money; another, J. H. Wade, donated land for the building. Its founders wanted the Cleveland Museum to be a place where everyone was welcome and no one looked to see how one was dressed. It was to be a teaching institution and a storehouse for the preservation of man's artistic heritage. Museums were "community schools for the soul" and

\(^{34}\text{Burt, p.228.}\)
laboratories for the development of art appreciation, not simply mausoleums in which to store dusty old treasures, as was Pergamon's museum in ancient times. The founders of the Cleveland museum employed consultants from established museums to plan their building and organizational system. The future of the museum also depended largely on the plans and competence of the director, and by 1930 Fred A. Whiting, the director, had made of the Museum a "human" institution rendering "neighborly service" to all people in the community. Whiting mentioned several goals in his presentation to the Board of Trustees in January of 1914, two years before the museum opened to the public. He recommended a juried exhibition of local artists' work; he stressed quality and not quantity; he proposed India as an area of specialty; and he suggested the organization of a "Friends of Art" group to provide funds for art purchases. Above all, Whiting was interested in the educational work of the museum. He founded a monthly museum Bulletin before the museum was built, promoted a membership campaign, advocated the inclusion of music in the museum's program and corresponded with other directors to get their advice and suggestions.  

A fourteen-member, self-perpetuating Board of Trustees runs the Cleveland Museum of Art. The Trustees approve

---

annual budgets, appointments to the staff, the acquisition of art objects, and loans to other institutions; they allocate funds, provide insurance, and determine employee compensation packages. Basically the Board functions through committees which rely on the director and staff for expert recommendations. Wittke attributes the rapid growth of the Cleveland Museum to a good relationship between the Board of Trustees and the staff. There is also an Advisory Board of Trustees that consists of prominent citizens who make suggestions but have no voting power.36

The Cleveland Museum is just one of many museums established in the first third of the twentieth century which Burt calls "The Golden Age, that great burst of museum patronage and building that took place in America between 1900 and 1945."37 In Baltimore and Boston, private collectors donated their collections to form two museums: The Gardner Museum in Boston and the Baltimore Museum of Art. Isabella Gardner's museum, built to house her collection, opened to the public in 1925, while the Cone sisters left their collection to the city of Baltimore which eventually built a museum. The very rich, including Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan and Andrew Mellon, were interested in art for investment and in donating for public relations reasons. Some of them were

36Wittke, p.95-96.
37Burt, p.169.
very knowledgeable about art. They collected the very best; and, in giving it to the public -- instead of keeping it for themselves and their families, as did the nobility of Europe -- they "transformed American museums from minor to major, from provincial catchalls to institutions comparable to those of Europe." 38

The South and West also developed museums in this period, although the West did not boom until after the Second World War. Burt asserts that the South would have been among the earliest sections to develop art museums had it not been for the Civil War: intentions were good but conditions were not. Nevertheless, the South is packed with art museums today. The Delgado in New Orleans opened in 1911 with little inside it. Memphis opened an art museum in 1916. Other museums in Savannah and Charleston existed in this period. 39 The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts began towards the end of this period in 1934. Coleman, in response, called the South the "land of little and of much" in 1939. He considered New Orleans, Charleston, Memphis and Richmond to be museum centers. 40

By the thirties, museums recognized three aims: aesthetic, scientific and practical. Although many museum boards remained socialite in spirit, the narrow conception

---

38 Burt, p.236.
40 Coleman, p.20,26.
of the art museum's place was passing. Thousands of influential and interested people now recognized that the art museum could be an establishment for all, bound to carry out its aesthetic and scientific aims through educational methods. The public played a significant role in this change, disdaining the old religious conception of art as "sinful" and the pioneer attitude toward it as "contemptible". Everyone could now share in what society had formerly reserved for the wealthy few.

As art museums matured, the art world which had been suspect to many Americans in the late nineteenth century, became both respectable and big business. Fox notes that these two developments were related: museum growth stimulated the art market, and the opportunity to convert whim into charity provided the moral justification for private collecting on any scale. By the 1930s, America had art museums to rival the best of Europe. These museums were moving in two directions: toward acquisition of increasingly valuable collections and toward community service, mainly as educational institutions. Coleman concluded in 1939 that "it is not a pious dream that art can take an intimate place among us as it has among other peoples." Coleman wrote his survey of American museums after the impact of New Deal government art projects had been felt.

\[^{41}\text{Fox, p. 7-8.}\]

\[^{42}\text{Coleman, p. 82-90.}\]
There is no doubt that the Depression affected the museum field, but perhaps not as much as one would expect. Attendance was excellent; Coleman estimated that fifty million people visited museums in the United States each year during the thirties. This shows that something potentially important was happening. The Depression hit opening hours hardest; museums cut working hours but not programs. During the shorter time available museums began scrutinizing their methods and doing more than they had ever done before.\(^43\) Although municipal appropriations were cut back sharply between 1931 and 1935, Fox notes that the larger museums increased their wealth from 1930 to 1939, while resources of smaller institutions remained stable. Furthermore, no museums went bankrupt in the 1930s, although their numbers increased more slowly than in the 1920s. The decline in museum's income, even in the worst years of the Depression, never equalled the percentage of national decline in business activity.\(^44\)

The federal government was involved in art during the 1930s, with a view toward creating a system that would be self-perpetuating and would reach every member of American society, thus founding a vast system of public participation.

\(^{43}\)Coleman, p.297,305.

\(^{44}\)Fox, p.60.
and education.\textsuperscript{45} These New Deal programs, however, primarily provided work relief for unemployed artists, and helped museums indirectly by providing funds for building projects and by funding community centers for art education. In reality, private citizens contributed a heavy share of the cost of WPA Art Centers, and even then, there was scant success in efforts to secure local support for these art institutes after federal funds were withdrawn. The number of these centers that survived seems pitifully small. There was a lack of local leadership and of a "comfort" class in most of these cases. Most people never fully accepted the arts as a public right or a personal necessity.\textsuperscript{46} Despite this fact, however "the belief that everybody can appreciate and enjoy the arts if sufficient access and encouragement is provided became (with occasional reservations) the accepted philosophy of public museums."\textsuperscript{47}

Although the initiative for founding art museums was not taken by government agencies, local governments have been involved in museum development since the 1870s. Municipal and state governments contributed forty percent of

\textsuperscript{45} Gerald E. Markowitz and Marlene Park, \textit{New Deal For Art: The Government Art Projects of the 1930s with examples from New York City and State} (Hamilton, N.Y.: Gallery Association of New York State, Inc., 1977), p.60


\textsuperscript{47} Fox, p.59.
museum buildings between 1870 and 1910. By 1930, in fact, the income museums received from government sources was slightly more than fifty percent of their income from private citizens and foundations combined. It is impossible to determine accurately how much governments have provided in building subsidies and gifts of land. However, the federal government gave museums little more than vague and sporadic encouragement until the 1930s. Their contributions to museum construction and projects then persuaded most municipal governments to restore or increase contributions cut in the period between 1930 and 1934. Indeed, "a decade of economic crisis and readjustment forced museum philanthropists to accept that they must regard 'public' support as the enduring financial bulwark of museums."48

Although most museums receive government funds, few of them are the property of the government. There was no real federal art institution until the National Gallery of Art was created in 1941. This, like most of the cultural institutions now operating as a public trust, was a gift.49

The federal government has commissioned art works for federal buildings throughout its history, but there has never been a national plan for the promotion of art and its

48Fox, 44.

appreciation.

"Despite the egotism and shortsightedness of some of the leading benefactors, art museums have moved with a changing America from 1870 to the present day" to become the largest and most significant voluntarily supported institutions in modern history.\textsuperscript{50} The history of the art museum in the hundred years after 1870 has been one of incredible achievement. In this time a country with minimal artistic traditions and no central government art organization has emerged as a country of museums. If there had been a central government plan for the creation and promotion of art museums perhaps there would be fewer such institutions in the United States today. The museum tradition in America was well established at the time of the founding of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Institutions had found the ability "to further public welfare while serving private desires."\textsuperscript{51}  

\textsuperscript{50}Fox, p.1.  

\textsuperscript{51}Fox, p.83.
CHAPTER II

A STATE ART MUSEUM

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is an unusual museum with unique origins. Officially founded by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1934, it was the first state art museum; indeed, the museum was established before the beginning of the federal government's involvement with art through its New Deal WPA Art Project. Although it was helped by this program, the idea for the museum evolved from a long tradition of interest in art and art institutions in Virginia.

This interest, in fact, was so strong that the Virginia museum was launched during a financial depression.1 John Garland Pollard took office as Governor in 1930 at the beginning of the Depression; nevertheless, he was able to devote time to the founding of the museum. In times of financial hardship, one could easily view an art museum as frivolous; Pollard stated repeatedly that it must be done without state funds.

Pollard played an important role both as Governor and

1"Virginia's New Home for Art," Richmond Times Dispatch, 29 September 1935.

25
as a private citizen. Combining these two roles to become the driving force behind the museum. He acted as motivator, diplomat and supporter. Journalist Robert Merritt calls Pollard the "Doctor at the museum's birth", but the author believes his role was more that of a mother.\(^2\) During economic difficulties, he nurtured the idea to fruition; and without his support, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts would have come into existence much later, if at all.

In some ways the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the culmination of a dream which originated in the eighteenth century. Virginia was the first state to organize an art institution when the French soldier and scholar Chevalier Quesnay de Beaurepaire founded his Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1786. Chevalier de Beaurepaire had lofty goals, one of which was to establish a building to be used as an art gallery; others included a museum of arts and sciences, a school, an auditorium and a meeting place. Although his project did not reach maturity because the French Revolution prevented Quesnay from returning to the United States, the seeds of creative promise were sown.\(^3\)

Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, supporters of the Chevalier's Academy, hoped for an alliance between

\(^2\)"Pollard was 'doctor' at Museum's Birth," Richmond Times Dispatch, 18 March 1984, p.1.

statecraft and art. Such an alliance was gaining momentum in Virginia and elsewhere during this period, as States employed artists to paint scenes of events in the Revolutionary War and portraits of its leaders. The Virginia General Assembly, for its part, commissioned artist Jean Antoine Houdon to execute statues of Washington and Lafayette that now rank among the great art treasures of this country.

State interest in art lay dormant during the nineteenth century and was not revived again until 1916 when the Virginia Assembly passed an act creating a State Art Commission. Other states followed suit, founding Art Commissions in the wake of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, which awakened people's interest in art. These commissions were created to protect and promote the aesthetic factor in community development. Virginia's Art Commission served much the same purpose: it raised the standards of art in Virginia.

Private interest in art was also growing. In the spring of 1917 a Richmond art group formed a committee to raise funds for the restoration of the Academy. Some funds were

---

4 Ibid.
5 Information Pamphlet for Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.
6 Purcell, p.39.
raised, but the committee went out of existence after World War I. A second attempt was made by The Virginia League of Fine Arts and Handicrafts, organized in 1919 with the object of restoring the Academy of Sciences and Fine Arts through a federation of organizations. This initiative failed as well. Meanwhile, Judge John Barton Payne, a Virginia native, gave his valuable collection of art to the state in memory of his second wife, Jennie Byrd Bryan, and his mother Elizabeth Barton Payne. His collection had to be displayed in the Battle Abbey building, which the Art Commission did not consider fireproof, since there was no suitable place to house it. This stone building is in the neoclassical style and now houses the Virginia Historical Society. Payne had an ambitious vision. He hoped to raise the culture of the American South, which had stagnated in the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction.8 Like previous art donors, Payne saw art as a civilizing force that could and should be available for the education and enjoyment of all.9

Lack of funds and organized interest defeated all effort until 1927. That year Alexander Weddell, a diplomat and Richmond native, led another movement to revive the

---


academy."  

Weddell led a group of citizens dedicated to preserving Richmond's cultural traditions. This group, incorporated in 1930 as the Richmond Academy of Fine Arts, had as its goal nothing less than making Richmond the center of art in the South. Although both Payne and the Richmond Academy group hoped to further art in the South, the latter had a more local and elite focus. Conflict later arose between these differing visions.

Other organizations such as the Valentine Museum, the Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences, and several historical museums also played a definite role in Virginia's art renaissance; however, these were all local endeavors.

By contrast, Governor George C. Peery hailed the Virginia Museum's founding in 1932 as "the birth of a monumental Virginia institution, the existence of which has been the desire and effort of many Virginians for over one-hundred-fifty years." It was an unlikely time to establish a museum. Still, Virginia was less hard-hit by the Depression than most states. Per capita wealth was higher in Virginia than in any other former Confederate state, and she

---


11The Academy of Sciences and Fine Arts in the United States of America, (Richmond, Va.: Richmond Academy of Arts, 1931).

12Parker, p.19.

had a well-balanced economy. The Depression, though, had an exceedingly severe effect on Virginia. The summer of 1930 brought a catastrophic drought which ruined crops and caused cattle to starve. By late summer 1931 the Depression was in full force: farm income plummeted and fifty thousand people were unemployed.  

It was during this time that John Garland Pollard took over the governorship of Virginia. Pollard’s life before he was elected was varied and successful. He was an accomplished lawyer and respected citizen of Virginia, a former professor and dean of the Marshall-Wythe School of Government and Citizenship at the College of William and Mary. He enjoyed teaching and felt that the development of responsible and involved citizens was essential. Indeed, it was his lifetime ambition to improve the school system, and he was active in the organization of the State Board of Education and the Library Board. In addition he was a constant worker in developing consciousness among the people of Virginia’s inferiority in education.  

As Governor, consequently, Pollard used his influence to improve Virginia’s educational programs and to develop a cadre of involved citizens. Education and libraries thus

---


15Faculty/Alumni Files: John Garland Pollard, Archives, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.
figured prominently in Pollard’s Inaugural Address on January 15, 1930. First on the agenda was education. The new governor felt that education was the main business of the state, and he demanded larger appropriations from the state treasury in order to equalize educational opportunities throughout the Commonwealth. He also envisioned a new building that would house Virginia’s State Library and its art collection.\textsuperscript{16}

In a message to the General Assembly in 1932, though Pollard summed up the gloomy economic conditions as

\begin{quote}

an unprecedented depression. Yet our condition is comparatively good. While many of our sister states are struggling with huge deficits, debts enlarged, credit impaired and their taxes increased, Virginia stands on a sound financial basis with her accounts balanced, her small debt growing less, her credit unexcelled and her taxes comparatively low.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Accordingly, he recommended that the General Assembly curtail expenses and not increase taxes. Further, Pollard called a special session of the General Assembly in 1933 to vote on the repeal of Prohibition, and to consider a thirty percent cut in the 1933-34 budget.\textsuperscript{18} The Governor lowered his own salary as well. As his cousin George P. Bagby noted,

\begin{quote}

\textsuperscript{16}John Garland Pollard, \textit{Inaugural Address}, (Richmond, Va.: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1930).

\textsuperscript{17}Virginia General Assembly, \textit{Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia}, (Richmond, Va.: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1932), p.4.

\textsuperscript{18}"Pollard was ‘Doctor’ at Museums Birth," p.1.
\end{quote}
Pollard, "had to face unusually difficult and complicated problems." 19 His inability to initiate educational reforms and other projects was frustrating.20 In response, the governor poured his efforts into establishing the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. It was a smaller, in a sense, more tangible goal that made few demands on the Commonwealth's tight budget. As journalist Robert Merritt wrote, Governor Pollard was determined to have the Museum as his own. The Depression had defeated many of his initiatives, and he wanted the Museum as a memorial to his governorship.21

The timing was right, despite a Depression because the Richmond Academy of Arts,

without a permanent home, endowment, or notable collection, working on uncertain income from membership dues and contributions (had) developed a broad adult education program with an intensified program in the public and private schools, which [had] created the demand for the existence of the

19George P. Bagby to John Garland Pollard, 22 January 1934, John Garland Pollard Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va. Hereafter referred to as JGPP.

20In a September 1932 letter to his cousin, Pollard wrote that he was, "unusually busy now trying to relieve the unemployment situation in Virginia." A year earlier he wrote much the same thing, "I have never been so busy in my life as I am right now with the budget. It is a source of great disappointment to me that I have struck lean years and cannot do anything for education in which I am so interested." John Garland Pollard to Charles Bagby, 26 September 1932, JGPP, and John Garland Pollard to Mr. A. G. Gresham, 21 September 1932. JGPP.

Museum of Fine Arts. 22

Thomas Parker, director of the Academy, felt that his institution played a role in the Museum's foundation. Pollard acknowledged their help, stating that, "if it had not been for the work of the Richmond Academy of Arts in the last few years in stimulating interest in the city of Richmond," it would not have been possible to raise the funds necessary for the museum. 23 The original concept of a statewide art museum seems to have arisen from Pollard's interest in a State Library and Museum and his association with Payne.

Since his Inauguration, Governor Pollard had sought to stimulate interest in art in Virginia. 24 He had seen the need not only for an enlarged State Library, but also for a more adequate space in which to preserve and exhibit Virginia's growing art collection. 25 Pollard may have been inspired by a 1930 visit of Judge John Barton Payne, a Virginia native and Director of the Red Cross in Washington, D.C., to Richmond. Payne had returned to formally deed to

22Parker, p.13.


24John Garland Pollard to Mr. Frank W. Crowninshield, 21 March 1933, Pollard Executive Papers, 1930-1934, Box 106, Archives Division, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va. Hereafter referred to as PEP.

25Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors, meeting of June 1934. (Typewritten.)
the state the collection of paintings he had given in 1919. Throughout the following summer Pollard and Payne kept up a steady flow of letters. This correspondence often noted that Battle Abbey was not an appropriate fireproof building for such an important collection, to which Payne had just added a new work by his friend, Virginia artist Gari Melchers.

First Pollard pursued his idea of a combined state library and art museum, which ideally would be situated near the Capitol. This idea was not unusual, as several art museums, most notably the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, began in libraries and libraries often housed works of art. Pollard had some property in mind which had formerly been owned by the commonwealth, but it had now been deeded to the city of Richmond and could not be reacquired without great opposition and expense.

His next idea was to enlarge the state library by using land adjacent to it. Pollard thought of Judge Payne and his interest in promoting art in Virginia, and of the interest of a mutual friend, the Honorable R. Walton Moore in the state library. The three met and toured the existing state library, noting the crowded conditions. Payne then offered to give $100,000 towards a new building for the proper

---


27 Ibid.
Pollard was overjoyed to have the $100,000 from Payne, but at the time the state could not afford such a building. However, he kept Payne's offer in mind.

Just before the General Assembly convened in 1932, Pollard visited Judge Payne at his home in Washington, D.C. He told Payne that a combined state library and art museum was not financially possible because a downtown site would be too expensive and there would be strenuous opposition to moving the state library elsewhere. Therefore, if they were to provide adequate housing for Virginia's works of art, they would have to build a separate building for that purpose. Payne consented to using the $100,000 towards such a building and he met with Eppa Hunton Jr., President of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad Company; Gari Melchers; and Alexander Weddell, President of the Richmond Academy, to agree on the conditions of his gift.

As a result of this meeting with Payne, Pollard introduced a bill into the General Assembly, to accept a conditional gift of $100,000 to the Commonwealth of Virginia from the Honorable John Barton Payne for the erection of an Art Museum, and to authorize the Governor and the Art Commission to proceed with the erection of a state Museum without

---

28 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors.

29 Ibid.

30 "Museum Born During an Unlikely Time," p.3.
cost to the Commonwealth of Virginia on the Soldiers Home property or elsewhere in the city of Richmond, if and when they shall receive the necessary additional donations.\textsuperscript{31}

The bill, Chapter 70 of the Acts of 1932, passed both houses unanimously and was signed by the Governor on February 27, 1932.\textsuperscript{32} In a letter to George Cole Scott, Pollard wrote that he and the Art Commission proposed that the museum building be begun and completed during the next calendar year, 1933.\textsuperscript{33} Pollard and the Art Commission appointed John M. Purcell custodian of the Virginia Art Museum Fund, and authorized him to receive from the Honorable John Barton Payne certain shares of stock representing the gift. Purcell had the authority to sell and transfer the shares to receive the proceeds from them.\textsuperscript{34} The idea of an art museum for Virginia and a building to house and exhibit the Commonwealth’s works of art were thus merged into one and given state sanction by Governor Pollard and the General Assembly.

Up to that point the Commonwealth’s involvement in art

\textsuperscript{31}Virginia General Assembly, \textit{Acts of the General Assembly}, (Richmond, Va.: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1932). Payne’s gift of $100,000 was conditional upon the state matching his gift by raising an additional $100,000.


\textsuperscript{33}John Garland Pollard to George Cole Scott, 12 October 1932, PEP, Box 106.

\textsuperscript{34}PEP, Box 106.
was limited to the Art Commission. This body consisted of members appointed for four years by Governor Pollard and met once a month to discuss matters concerning state art and architecture. The Commission's approval was required before any piece of art work could become the property of the state, be contracted for, or placed in or upon or allowed to extend over any property belonging to the state. It also supervised the repair of art works in public places. The Art Commission, by its very nature, was intimately involved in the planning and construction of the art museum building.

Apparently no goals for the museum were stated publicly before the fund raising campaign began. Clearly, the museum was to be a statewide institution, an educational and aesthetic center. In a 1935 statement welcoming the Museum, Pollard's successor, Governor Peery, noted the goals of the museum:

As a State Building, it will house the accumulating art treasures that have been continuously accruing to Virginia. As an institution, it will study, represent and preserve the artistic culture of the Commonwealth, and will foster the love, practice and understanding of art and beauty for the people of the State.

The museum was also designed to facilitate the coordination of the various art groups across the state.

Thus, in 1932 the Virginia Museum was officially

---

35PEP, Box 6.

36Peery, p.1.
established as a state institution by the Virginia General Assembly. In spite of the Depression, Virginia had experienced a revival in art appreciation. The state had a collection without a home, a patron offering $100,000 and a Governor willing to raise the remaining funds necessary to provide this collection with a home and the state with its own art institution.
CHAPTER III

RAISING FUNDS

Having accepted Payne's gift, it was up to Governor Pollard to raise an additional $100,000. With the help of other "friends of art", he began to raise these funds. The Richmond Academy of Art, which was dedicated to the "progressive work of art education in the state" and had stimulated interest in art in the city, played a significant role in the fundraising and construction of the museum.¹ Thomas C. Parker, Director of the Academy declared that the museum would "ultimately become the depository for the work of Virginia artists and the center of our art life in Virginia."² He also exhorted artists to support the Governor in his efforts to build the museum.³ Pollard himself wrote that the Academy was very helpful in raising money to build the museum.⁴ Indeed, he believed it would have been impossible to raise the funds for the museum so

¹ Thomas C. Parker to John Garland Pollard, PEP, Box 104.
² Roanoke World News, 5 April 1933.
³ Ibid.
⁴ PEP, Box 106.
quickly without the efforts of the Richmond Academy of Arts. The Governor relied on the help and advice of Academy members including Alexander W. Weddell, whom he expected to take a parental interest in the museum. At a conference of Virginia's art leaders in November 1933, the Academy reiterated its support of a statewide art institution. Moreover, the group expressed its eagerness to become an institution that would unify state art interests so that the museum might be of far-reaching scope and importance.

Although he had the support of the Richmond Academy, Governor Pollard's original idea was to find one person to donate the entire $100,000. He believed, furthermore, that he needed preliminary drawings of the museum in order to attract this major donor. In March 1932, therefore, the Art Commission met to consider an open competition to select an architect for the museum. Unfortunately, there were no funds available to ensure the participation of the best talent, so the Art Commission advised the Governor that its selection of an architect would ensure results with speed and economy. On April 21, 1932, Governor Pollard and the Art Commission appointed Finlay F. Ferguson, partner in the Norfolk firm of

---

5Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors.

6John Garland Pollard to Mr. and Mrs. Alexander W. Weddell, 29 May 1933, PEP, Box 106.

7PEP, Box 104.
Peebles and Ferguson, as architect. In August the drawings were sent to Pollard, including a perspective in color, a detail of the main entrance, a pencil drawing of the main court, and plans of the main and ground floors. The governor planned to display them in the hall of the Capitol on the occasion of the unveiling of the Mason Bust in September, ostensibly to attract a donor from those in attendance. In October, Pollard wrote confidently to George Cole Scott, an art museum expert and Richmond native, that they could "begin and complete the erection of the museum during the next calendar year." He wanted Scott to raise "at once" the remaining $100,000 in order to promote art appreciation in the Commonwealth. That same month Ferguson wrote to Pollard requesting reassurance that the museum work would be forthcoming, as he wished to retain two men for the purpose and wanted to know whether they would be needed. Pollard replied that "at present the whole matter is in a state of uncertainty, as it is exceedingly hard to raise money at this time." Pollard instructed the architects to do no

---

8PEP, Box 106 and 6.
9John Garland Pollard to Philip Stern, 13 September 1932, PEP, Box 106.
10"Pollard was the 'Doctor' at Museum's Birth,">
11John Garland Pollard to George Cole Scott, 12 October 1932, PEP, Box 106.
12John Garland Pollard to Finlay F. Ferguson, 13 October 1932, PEP, Box 106.
further work until he had raised the entire sum. Unfortunately, the campaign to raise funds faced another setback in December: no donor had yet been found and Scott suffered a heart attack. This left Pollard once again with the whole task of raising the remaining $100,000.\(^ {13}\)

As early as November 1932, an acquaintance recommended that Pollard solicit additional funds outside the Commonwealth; otherwise, the process might take too long to be completed in his term as Governor.\(^ {14}\) Pollard followed this advice but found little success, due to the economic conditions. Pollard had written to E. C. Mayo, president of Gorham Manufacturing in Providence, R.I., requesting the names of wealthy people who might be interested in Virginia and art. Mayo informed him, however, that he knew of no one willing to make such a substantial donation. In fact, Mayo wrote, "it is very difficult to day to know who is wealthy, except of course some very outstanding individuals, as persons who were very well to do in 1929 are having difficulty in meeting their obligations. Had this opportunity come in 1929 I would have been very glad to have made a substantial donation, but with the dark outlook before us...I do not feel justified at the present time in

\(^ {13}\)"Pollard was the 'Doctor' at Museum’s Birth."

\(^ {14}\)John Garland Pollard to Gerard B. Lamberd, 29 November 1932, PEP, Box 106.
making any commitments."\textsuperscript{15}

In February 1933 Pollard still had not raised the needed amount from a major donor so he adopted a new strategy of soliciting smaller pledges ranging from $5,000 to $25,000. For a pledge in excess of $5,000 a donor would, for instance, earn the right to name a memorial gallery.\textsuperscript{16}

In March, he organized a Founders Committee to raise the money since he was busy with a special session of the General Assembly. The committee members were hand-picked by the governor and were influential in art, education, business or society. The governor himself acted as chairman of the committee which included the following members: John Stewart Bryan, Alexander W. Weddell, W. S. Rhoads, General William H. Cooke, Jay W. Johns, Mrs. Gari Melchers, Mrs. Charles S. Whitman, Pleasants L. Reed, Eppa Hunton IV, and Mrs. Alfred I. DuPont. Armed with copies of a form letter from Pollard, a full set of museum plans and a catalog of the Payne art collection, the members of the committee were to call on people for contributions. They were to keep Pollard informed of their progress so that there would be no duplication of effort.\textsuperscript{17}

Governor Pollard also played an active role. On May 5,

\begin{itemize}
\item E. C. Mayo to John Garland Pollard, 17 January 1933, PEP, Box 106.
\item John Garland Pollard to Peebles and Ferguson, 9 February 1933, PEP, Box 106.
\item PEP, Box 106.
\end{itemize}
1933 he invited potential donors, many of whom were members of the Founders Committee, to a dinner which raised $40,000 from three donors. At this point the fundraising stalled again.18 Pollard again wrote to interested parties for help. He asked Mrs. Gari Melchers if she knew of any Virginians interested in art and able to make contributions, and requested that she solicit funds for a gallery in memory of her husband.19 He pleaded with a member of the Founders Committee in New York City to exercise her charming personality to influence prospects, because unless one or two of the galleries were sponsored by New York friends the day was lost. He mentioned that progress had been slow since reaching the $55,000 mark on May 23, when two more donors pledged.20

Throughout this process, Pollard had kept donors and members of his Committee informed of the museum's progress. He also sent out form letters, complete with plans and a description of the project, to those who might be interested in art. In addition, he contacted people who might be interested in sponsoring a gallery in memory of friends or relatives. Friends and committee members suggested people to contact and sought donors by word of mouth. The Governor

18"Pollard was 'Doctor' at Museum's Birth."

19John Garland Pollard to Mrs. Gari Melchers, 20 May 1933, PEP, Box 106.

20John Garland Pollard to Mrs. C. S. Whitman, 23 May 1933, PEP, Box 106.
made these requests in a pleasant manner, often including personal news when the prospective donor was an acquaintance.21

Not surprisingly, the Depression hindered the fundraising process. Many of those contacted responded in the negative, in spite of their interest. Some preferred to give their extra money to relief organizations, but others simply noted that financial obligations forced them to decline the privilege of donating a memorial gallery.22

At the end of May, Pollard still needed $45,000, and he turned to his "cousin Jessie", Mrs. Alfred I. DuPont. In April she had accepted a position on the Founders Committee but had written that she was unable to contribute anything because of her other outstanding pledges. Nevertheless, she expressed confidence that the full amount could be raised.23

She had conferred with her husband regarding Pollard's request that they sponsor the $25,000 Hall of Sculpture. He had replied that they would be able to make the contribution in July, contingent upon the rest of the $100,000 being raised. Mrs DuPont asked her cousin to raise an additional $10,000 so that she and her husband would only have to

21Corinne Melchers to John Garland Pollard, 14 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.

22Murray Boocock to John Garland Pollard, 16 January 1933, PEP, Box 106.

23Mrs. Alfred I. DuPont to John Garland Pollard, 15 April 1933, PEP, Box 106.
contribute $15,000. She emphasized that Mr. DuPont did a large amount of charity work, for which there was a great demand at that time. Her cousin could not comply, so the Duponts gave $25,000 anyway.24

The rest of the money came in quickly. On June 2, Mrs. George Cole Scott and Blythe Branch, two wealthy Richmond natives, donated $10,000 each which, when added to the existing pledges, totaled the required $100,000. Philip Stern of the Art Commission congratulated Governor Pollard on his "marvelous success [which was] nothing short of a wonder."25 Edmund Campbell wrote that Pollard had assured the permanent advancement of art in Virginia by his success.26 The Richmond Academy added their congratulations and informed him that their charter authorized the Academy to take over and manage an institution like the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Moreover, they felt it would be to the advantage of all concerned if the Commonwealth took advantage of their services and experience.27 But Pollard did not take advantage of their offer and this may have caused some resentment. He, and the Art Commission, were in

24 Mrs. Alfred I. DuPont to John Garland Pollard, 24 May 1933, PEP, Box 106.

25 Philip Stern to John Garland Pollard, 5 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.

26 Edmund Campbell to John Garland Pollard, 3 June 1933, PEP, Box 6.

27 Alexander W. Weddell to John Garland Pollard, 19 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.
control of the museum and they wished to guide its progress. He was not ready to surrender the museum in this incomplete state. Pollard himself credited his cousin, Mrs. DuPont with the success. He felt that without her subscription of $25,000 the museum would have been impossible.\textsuperscript{28} Pollard could now move forward with the building plans.

Pollard wrote to Peebles and Ferguson in late May that the necessary subscriptions should be available by July 1, 1933. He could not authorize any expenditure until the $100,000 from Payne and the $100,000 from the other donors were collected, but he directed them to proceed with the working drawings and specifications for the central portion of the museum. It was to be designed to allow for future additions. The project's price ceiling was $200,000, including the architect's fees and all other expenses, such as the preparation of the lot.\textsuperscript{29} Ten days later, Pollard again emphasized the importance of keeping within this budget, as there would be "absolutely no money to pay for extras of any kind" and this must also include bronze plaques for each of the memorial galleries.\textsuperscript{30} By August 9 the architects, Peebles and Ferguson, were ready to submit

\textsuperscript{28}John Garland Pollard to Mrs. Alfred I. DuPont, 2 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.

\textsuperscript{29}John Garland Pollard to Peebles and Ferguson, 26 May 1933, PEP, Box 106.

\textsuperscript{30}John Garland Pollard to Peebles and Ferguson, 8 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.
their plans to the Art Commission. After this meeting the architects submitted blueprints of the first and second floors, revised according to the wishes of the Art Commission. The museum was to be an adaptation of Georgian architecture, the dominant museum style of the period.

The roles of Pollard, the Art Commission and the Richmond Academy of Art continued into this phase of the museum’s founding. Governor Pollard had a good working relationship with all parties concerned with the museum. The Academy continued to promote art and arranged for the prospective site of the museum to be surveyed.

The Art Commission had reserved the right to make the final approval of the building plans and the exact location of the museum. Pollard wrote that the Art Commission proceeded with great deliberation as it considered the final plans and specifications for the museum building. The Commission hired Erling H. Pederson, a well known architect and expert in Museum architecture, as a consultant.

---

31 Philip Stern to John Garland Pollard, 2 August 1933, PEP, Box 106.
32 Peebles and Ferguson to John Garland Pollard, 14 August 1933, PEP, Box 106.
33 "Virginia’s New Home for Art."
34 Thomas C. Parker to John Garland Pollard, 20 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.
35 Peebles and Ferguson to John Garland Pollard, 19 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.
C. Powell Minnigerode, director of the Corcoran Gallery, lent advice on plans and specifications. Before approving the final plans, the architect members of the Art Commission, Philip N. Stern, Edmund S. Campbell and Wickham C. Taylor, informed themselves about current museum plans by visiting and studying the construction and arrangements of a large number of galleries in the United States. Governor Pollard wrote influential letters of recommendation for the members of the Art Commission to the museums which would be studied.

The economic conditions of the Depression put a damper on these visits. There was much concern about their cost. In response, Edmund S. Campbell wrote of his intention to pay for all the personal parts of his trip and he distinguished them from the official visits, which were financed from the museum fund. Campbell also hinted that he would charge less than he needed for gasoline. The Art Commission visited these other museums between July 11 and 21 and made recommendations for the Virginia Museum upon their return. Pollard and the Art Commission wanted the best building

---

36 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors.

37 PEP, Box 106.

38 Edmund S. Campbell to John Garland Pollard, 8 July 1933, PEP, Box 106.

39 Report on trip for the state art commission, 11-21 July 1933, PEP, Box 106.
within their means.

Meanwhile, two disputes were brewing: The major one concerned the site for the museum, the other the building’s design.\(^4^0\) Rhoads of the Art Commission favored placing the museum on the same block downtown where the city library now stands. Judge Payne, on the other hand, wanted the building to be near the Capitol. Additional suggestions ranged from downtown to the west end. The University of Richmond offered a site on its campus which was turned down because the Act of the General Assembly accepting Judge Payne’s gift required that the museum be placed on city land.\(^4^1\) Pollard requested that the Richmond Academy make a recommendation regarding the location. Accordingly, they sent out a questionnaire to a selected list of city planning commissions and directors of art museums. By May 9, 1932, they had received nine replies. After careful consideration of the recommendations, the trustees of the Academy unanimously recommended that the new art museum be placed on the Old Soldiers’ Home property. The Act of the General Assembly required that the building be placed on this property unless some other satisfactory site could be donated, as there were no funds to purchase a plot of land. The Governor and the Art Commission approved this site in

\(^{4^0}\)Neil November noted that the location of the museum caused disagreement. "I remember when...," p.D-13.

\(^{4^1}\)John Garland Pollard to Dr. F. W. Boatwright, 9 July 1932, PEP, Box 106.
keeping with the Assembly's wishes. Pollard was opposed, however, to having the building placed in such a way that it might interfere with the use of the property by the surviving Confederate Veterans who were living there.\footnote{PEP, Box 6 and Box 106.}

After the decision was finally made to place the museum on this property the "battle" began. Peter J. White, commander of the R. E. Lee Camp of United Confederate Veterans wanted the property turned into a Lee Camp Memorial Park and he would not budge. Pollard could not place the museum on this piece of state property without the Veterans' consent because, in 1926, the General Assembly had extended the R. E. Lee Camp's possession, use and control of the property until June 1936.\footnote{"Pollard was the 'Doctor' at Museum's Birth."} His first few meetings with the veterans were a disaster and led the veterans to pass a resolution stating that the Lee Camp was irrevocably opposed to the placing of any building whatsoever on the property. Pollard did make some headway with A. C. Peay, camp adjutant, by saying "it is good to know an old Confederate soldier is standing by the state in time of peace as he did in time of war."\footnote{Ibid.} At least one editorial and letter was written about this subject. A Richmond News Leader editorial of December 5, 1933, mentioned that many Richmonders who cherished the Confederate tradition were acutely distressed...
that the location of the museum on the Old Soldiers' Home property should threaten a legal conflict between the Commonwealth and a veterans' group. The News Leader emphasized that the question could be settled amicably if "we seek to honor the good old cause." 45

Soon only a small strip of ground was at issue. Most of the veterans had signed their approval and all decisions had reverted to the Art Commission. Pollard's astute handling of the situation was shown in his reply to Lottie Ely Morton of Richmond, who was emphatically opposed to building the museum on the site of the Confederate Soldiers' Home. She felt that the museum was a good idea, but that the site was an offense against the Confederate memory. Pollard replied that the museum was in keeping with the honorable memory of R. E. Lee and the "gallant men who followed him." Moreover, he said, the museum building would enhance the grounds' beauty. 46 He was successful: on December 8 the resolution for an agreeable site was approved. The Museum would be built at the corner of Boulevard and Grove on the Old Soldiers' Home property.

One more minor dispute was brewing over material for the facade of the building. Many people felt that the museum building should be faced with stone instead of the proposed

45 "Where Contest is Barred," Richmond News Leader, 5 December 1933, p.8.

46 John Garland Pollard to Miss Lottie Ely Morton, 6 December 1933, PEP, Box 106.
brick. A *News Leader* editorial of November 2, 1933 urged that the building should be faced with stone, as this would be in harmony with existing buildings on the property.\textsuperscript{47} In January 1934, as he was about to leave office, Pollard wrote to Mrs. Gari Melchers of the Art Commission that he saw a storm gathering over the question of brick versus stone.\textsuperscript{48} He requested that the Art Commission consult with those who donated $5,000 or more when the bids for stone and brick came in, because a $20,000 donor was very much opposed to a brick facade. Pollard was inclined to agree with him, but he thought that stone would be too expensive and therefore hoped that the cost would make the decision an easy one.\textsuperscript{49}

The special wishes of those who had pledged money towards a particular memorial gallery created the potential for other disputes. While designating a memorial gallery did not allow the donors to exercise legal control over that space, some donors made specific and sometimes very firm requests. For example, Mrs. George Cole Scott delayed sending in her donation until she had heard from Pollard which room in the museum had been assigned to her, as she wanted her room to be next to that of a friend and fellow donor. She also did not want her room to house any


\textsuperscript{48}John Garland Pollard to Mrs. Gari Melchers, 16 January 1933, PEP, Box 106

\textsuperscript{49}PEP, Box 106.
sculpture, because neither she nor her husband liked sculpture.⁵⁰ Another $10,000 pledge rested on the condition that three small galleries on the main floor be turned into one.⁵¹ In all these cases Pollard handled the prospective museum's patrons with tact and skill. He tried to meet their demands if possible; if he could not, he offered persuasive reasons why.

Towards the end of his term, Pollard had settled most of these disputes. He was then able to take advantage of the new Roosevelt administration's interest in art. Aid to the states through public works had begun early in 1933. Enough money had been raised, but Pollard saw an opportunity to attain additional funds. On January 5, 1934, Pollard received a telegram from Harry Byrd telling him that the Federal Public Works Administration had approved a grant for thirty percent of the construction cost, or approximately $67,000.⁵² Pollard had mentioned the idea of applying for such a grant in September 1933. He needed the help of the architects who were required to submit the general plans and estimated costs of the building with the application. Pollard was anxious to obtain the grant and facilitated the

---

⁵⁰George Cole Scott to John Garland Pollard, 5 July 1933, PEP, Box 106.

⁵¹John Garland Pollard to Peebles and Ferguson, 2 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.

⁵²Harry F. Byrd to John Garland Pollard, 5 January 1934, PEP, Box 106.
application process wherever he could. He had signed a contract with the builder in November and requested that he begin work as soon as possible. Pollard had also written to Colonel J. A. Anderson, engineer for the state advisory committee on public works in Richmond, requesting that he take every step possible to approve the grant application, filed on 22 November 1933 by Peebles and Ferguson, for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Col. Anderson wrote in turn to Col. H. M. Waite, Deputy administrator of the Public Works Administration in Washington, D.C. He stressed the Virginia Museum's similarity to another case they had already approved. In December, however, Pollard wrote that he had abandoned all hope of getting money for the art museum, and was wondering if he should call an early meeting of the Art Commission to discuss getting reduced bids for the museum building. Pollard must have been pleasantly surprised when Byrd telegraphed him the good news: they now had some extra money for furnishings and other equipment.

Pollard completed his term as Governor of Virginia, having largely accomplished most of his goal to found a state art museum. After the final site had been agreed upon in December, a contract for the foundation was signed and


54J. A. Anderson to Col. H. M. Waite, 26 November 1933, PEP, Box 106.

55PEP, Box 106.
construction began. The museum's future seemed to be secure. As he prepared to leave office, Pollard made arrangements to hand over official control of the museum project to the Arts Commission and to his successor George C. Peery. Pollard wanted all the pledges to be paid in full before his term expired on January 17, 1934, so that his job as fund raiser would be complete. Before leaving office he also prepared a bill concerning the management of the Virginia Museum: the Art Commission would give control of the museum to a Board of Directors. This bill would be introduced at the next session of the General Assembly.\(^\text{56}\) Governor Pollard left office secure in his belief that "the building is going to be a thing of beauty and a joy forever."\(^\text{57}\)

It is obvious that Governor Pollard played a large and instrumental role in the museum's founding. Indeed, he was essential. Robert Merritt writes that there was never any question about who would make the major decisions as the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts came into existence. Pollard orchestrated it from the beginning. Although he was diplomatic and flexible on small points, he seems to have had a clear vision of what he wanted the museum to be. Unfortunately, Pollard did not record precisely what this

---

\(^{56}\)John Garland Pollard to E. S. Campbell, 15 January 1934, PEP, Box 106.

\(^{57}\)John Garland Pollard to Pleasants L. Reed, 19 January 1934, PEP, Box 106.
vision entailed. He intended that all state-owned art would be housed at the museum, however, it is hard to know how much of a "Virginia focus" Pollard wished the museum to have. He did mention that he wished the Sculpture Hall to be dedicated to Mary Ball, George Washington's mother. He even proposed asking the Parent-Teacher Association and the Cooperative Education Association to unite with the school children of the state in building a statue to her. He believed that this project would increase their interest in art. Pollard had a lifelong interest in education. He believed that colleges should educate adults as well as youth and was very supportive of his sister Maud's work in extended education programs. Although there is no evidence of Pollard's direct involvement in the fine arts before his gubernatorial term, his apparent enthusiasm for art resulted not only in the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, but also in the state's acquisition of ten valuable works of historic moment, busts of six Virginia born United States presidents and four distinguished Virginia citizens. He had a vision and sought to stimulate art and education in Virginia

---


59 John Garland Pollard to Mrs. Alfred DuPont, 2 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.

60 John Garland Pollard to Maud Turman, 1 July 1927, JGPP, Folder 55.

61 PEP, Box 104.
through the Virginia Museum.

Pollard had staying power. He coordinated all the different elements, weathered the setbacks and pushed the project forward. He handled the demands of donors and disputes over the site and the facade diplomatically. He inspired others, such as Colonel Anderson and his cousin Jessie DuPont to support him. Anderson wrote that he supported the museum fully because he knew that it was under Pollard’s excellent management, and Jessie DuPont pledged time and a large sum of money despite her other financial commitments.\(^6\)\(^2\) The Arts Commission did play a large role, but mostly as an arm of the state and the executive office. Judge Payne was indispensable, for without his monetary incentive and desire for an appropriate location for his donated art Pollard would probably not have embarked on such a project. The Richmond Academy and its members played a supporting role as donors of funds and helping hands. Pollard united these forces and nurtured the museum idea well on its way to completion during his term as Governor.

Pollard’s role did not go unnoticed. Governor Peery acknowledged the great service of his predecessor in the origin and development of the plans for the establishment of the Virginia Museum.\(^6\)\(^3\) Thomas C. Parker wrote to Pollard

\(^6\)\(^2\)Col. Anderson to John Garland Pollard, 25 May 1933, PEP, Box 106.

\(^6\)\(^3\)JGPP, Folder 436.
that, "knowing how extremely busy you have been for the past six months, it appears more than remarkable how wholeheartedly you have seen that the plans and details have been given every consideration." Others called the art museum a "splendid undertaking" for which the Virginians of the present and future would owe Pollard thanks. Eppa Hunton wrote a congratulatory letter to Pollard stating, "I know that the result is entirely due to your own efforts and that of no one else, and the completed museum should be a joint memorial to you and Judge Payne because your part has been no less than his." Such praise was justified. Pollard was indeed the "mother" who nurtured the idea of a state art museum to full growth while serving as Governor of Virginia. Under his stewardship the concept of a state art museum flourished.

---

64 Thomas C. Parker to John Garland Pollard, 6 November 1933, PEP, Box 106.

65 Eppa Hunton IV to John Garland Pollard, 15 June 1933, PEP, Box 106.
CHAPTER IV

BUILDING THE MUSEUM

Before leaving office, Pollard drafted a Bill "to define and to provide for the management and operation of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts."Introduced on January 16, 1934, it provided for a Board of Directors and set forth the powers and duties thereof. It also dealt with the disposition of any revenue derived from the museum and defined the museum's relationship to the Art Commission. The General Assembly approved this on March 27, 1934, thus officially creating the museum as a legal entity as well as a physical plant. Through this bill the Assembly appropriated ten thousand dollars per annum for maintaining and operating the museum's building and grounds. For its part the newly-created Board of Directors would be responsible for covering the museum's other expenses and raising an endowment. The Board was to be composed of the originators of and donors to the museum, with the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, the Speaker of the House of delegates and the Mayor of the City of Richmond as

---

ex-officio members. Finally the bill specified the land to be used for the Virginia Museum.²

The General Assembly passed this bill unanimously; nevertheless, a few old disputes continued to brew. Pleasant L. Reed, Vice President of the Larus & Brothers Company, manufacturers of tobacco, wrote to Pollard on February 16, 1934 to express his concern regarding the exact amount of Soldiers' Home property to be used for the museum. After much diplomacy, the veterans residing on this property had agreed to allow the museum to be built on part of the land given to them by the city. Reed believed the Art Commission had changed the provisions in the bill and asked Pollard to discuss this with them immediately. Former Governor Pollard replied the next day that the bill, as he had written it, followed the guidelines agreed upon by the Veterans and the Art Commission. Apparently the General Assembly committee discussing the bill had, without consulting anyone, changed the provisions to give almost twice as much land to the museum, including the grove which was the original bone of contention. Mr. Dovell, the committee's chairman, apparently felt that the museum would be hemmed in and needed more land. Pollard, Reed and the Art Commission all backed the original bill and did not want to resurrect the old dispute

²John W. Williams to John Garland Pollard, 14 March 1934, JGPP, Folder 438.
with the Soldiers' Home. The bill, as written by Pollard, was finally passed with the approval of all, but this incident illustrates the difficulty state-sponsored museums faced and continue to face.

Meanwhile, some of those interested in the museum debated whether brick or stucco should be used in the facade. If the majority of the donors were to insist upon the use of stone entirely, Pollard recommended submitting the question to them, and stressed again the importance of showing consideration to the founders, as the progress of the museum was indebted to their generosity. Most of the donors were neutral and followed the recommendations of the Art Commission, but several were strongly in favor of stone. In March the Art Commission stated that they wished to please the Board of Directors; however, they were against stucco for maintenance reasons. Public sentiment in Richmond favored a stone facade, one that would complement the color of the museum's neighbor, the "Battle Abbey". Ultimately the Art Commission and Judge Payne approved a brick facade, allowing the possibility of covering the brick panels with stucco in the future. The case was then closed.

---

³Pleasant L. Reed to John Garland Pollard, 20 February 1934; John Garland Pollard to Pleasant L. Reed, 17 February 1934, JGPP.

⁴John Garland Pollard to Edmund S. Campbell, 9 February 1934, JGPP, Folder 438.

⁵Webster S. Rhoads to Finlay F. Ferguson, 25 April 1934, JGPP, Folder 438.
With this issue resolved the final building plans could be approved. The building’s progress was technically under the control of the Art Commission and the Governor of Virginia until the first meeting of the Board of Directors in June of 1934. Bids for the building contract were to open in February, but did not due to a delay in approval of the plans by the architect. The Art Commission finally opened two sets of bids on March 28: one for a brick facade and the other for stone. Since the Art Commission did not want to go against the wishes of the donors, Pollard suggested the donors be present at these bids. The Art Commission received revised bids on April 18. Nonetheless, the Art Commission and Board of Directors needed to address several issues. All bids were over the amount raised, and it was impossible to get more P.W.A. grant money. The plans needed to be revised, and at the end of April the architects were once again at work. Eventually, on May 2 Judge Payne, the Governor and the Art Commission approved the plans and awarded the contract for the superstructure of the museum building to Doyle and Russell in the sum of $219,486. They stressed that there would probably be extra charges and that the P.W.A. was only obligated to thirty percent of the Doyle and Russell contract and not a specific sum. This thirty percent would not include the money paid to Allen J. Saville
for his work in the preparation of the site.⁶ Financial worries were not yet over.

While these plans were in their final stages, another important issue arose: what was to be the role of the Richmond Academy of Art in the completed Virginia Museum? Academy members supplied more than half of the $100,000 raised by Pollard, and the Academy's intent was clear as early as 1933. President Alexander Weddell wrote Pollard that he hoped a method could be found by which the Richmond Academy of Arts could take over the administration of the museum.⁷ In July 1933, Webster Rhoads stated his desire that his contribution be designated for rooms on the ground floor to be used by the Richmond Academy. In a May 11th letter to Pollard, Rhoads reiterated this desire, stressing the need for an organization located in the museum building that would insure a constant flow of new work to be placed on exhibit for limited periods of time. This organization, furthermore, would furnish inspiration to visitors and artists throughout the state and keep the public informed of progress in the field of art. He added that the Richmond Academy of Arts, which had been carrying out such activities

⁶Finlay F. Ferguson to John Garland Pollard, 15 June 1934, JGPP, Folder 439.

for several years, was such an organization.8

Pollard and Judge Payne did not object to the Academy using space in the museum building, but they were adamantly opposed to Academy control of the museum. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts was to be a state art institution under the control of the Commonwealth of Virginia through a Board of Directors. The museum plans therefore were a source of concern: when they reached Payne they showed two rooms designated as "Richmond Academy Gallery" and "Richmond Academy Assembly." Before approving the plans Payne wished to clarify that these rooms could be used by the Academy, but did not give them control of the museum's eventual operations. The architects may have labelled the plans according to the suggestions of Thomas Parker, Director of the Academy. They had asked him to suggest ways to incorporate space for educational activities in the museum. The Art Commission instructed the architect to remove specific room designations from the final plans.9

Pollard reassured Rhoads and other Academy members that the museum Board would see the benefit of working with the Richmond Academy. In fact, Pollard had just this in mind when he inserted section three in the 1934 Act. This section gave the Board the authority to enter into agreements with

---

8Webster S. Rhoads to John Garland Pollard, 11 May 1934, 11 July 1933, JGPP, Folder 438.

9JGPP, Folder 438.
specialized organizations to further art in the Commonwealth. The Board of Directors, moreover, would have sole authority. Rhoads wrote Pollard to assure him that he laid no legal claim to space in the museum based on his contribution; however, in a letter to John S. Bryan he wrote, "those of us directly interested in the Richmond Academy of Arts should work together tactfully and make every effort to have the original plan, a controlling role for the Academy, carried out."\(^\text{10}\) They would have to convince the Board of Directors that such a role for the Academy would benefit the museum.

During this time Pollard and other founders were still concerned with raising funds. The 1934 Act provided for the physical operation of the plant, but the Board of Directors would have to provide, by endowment or membership fees, money for staff salaries as well as acquisitions. Pollard hoped that the city of Richmond would make an appropriation, as her citizens would benefit the most from the museum.\(^\text{11}\) Nevertheless, Pollard felt that this institution ought to be supported by gifts from well-to-do citizens rather than by government appropriations. The task at hand, then, was to

\(^{10}\)Webster S. Rhoads to John S. Bryan, 31 May 1934, JGPP, Folder 439.

\(^{11}\)Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors.
attract the interest of wealthy people.\textsuperscript{12} Other fundraising ideas included encouraging people to contribute to furnishings for the museum, and asking satisfied customers of artist Gari Melchers to contribute to a gallery in his memory. The immediate goal was to encourage more public interest in the museum. Pollard wanted a booklet containing an architectural rendering of the building and its floor plan, including proposed wings. He planned to use the booklet to solicit loans and gifts of works of art to be exhibited at the museum's opening, as well as funds for the eventual expansion of the museum. Pollard also wanted to enlarge the Board of Directors with additional members who were both interested in art and able to contribute money and works of art to the museum. He emphasized, though, that seats on the Board of Directors were not for sale; rather, a combined financial and personal commitment would be ideal.\textsuperscript{13}

The Board of Directors agreed to hold their first meeting on June 23 to deal with the myriad of pressing issues. Governor and Mrs. Peery hosted this event, an organizational meeting followed by a dinner at the Governor's mansion with the Governor acting as chairman. Peery graciously acknowledged Pollard's great service to the museum and requested that he act as secretary. In April,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{12}John Garland Pollard to John W. Williams, 8 February 1934; John Garland Pollard to Webster S. Rhoads, 26 April 1934, JGPP, Folder 438.

\textsuperscript{13}JGPP, Folder 438.
\end{footnotesize}
Pollard had noted several issues that needed to be addressed, one of which was funding. In addition, the Board needed to elect officers, to secure loans of art works for the museum's opening, discuss the relationship of the museum to the Richmond Academy, establish classes of membership, and discuss whether to admit additional Board members.¹⁴ At this meeting Pollard moved that Judge John Barton Payne be elected president, and the other Board members approved the motion unanimously. Payne then suggested using the booklet mentioned above to create interest for the museum statewide. Moreover, he wished this institution to have intimate personal contact with the people of Virginia. Payne viewed the museum as "a vital and growing educational institution, imparting the inspiration of its work and artistic standards and in return, developing, growing ever more worthy of being the cultural emblem of the Commonwealth."¹⁵

Perhaps the most important decision Board members made was to create an Executive Committee to communicate with the Art Commission during construction. The smaller Committee would be authorized to act on behalf of the larger Board of Directors and would meet more frequently. Board members decided that this committee would consist of six members

¹⁴John Garland Pollard to Webster S. Rhoads, 4 April 1934, JGPP, Folder 438.

¹⁵1935 Brochure for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, JGPP, Folder 441; Folder 439.
appointed by the president, and the president himself.\textsuperscript{16} The first members of the Executive committee were: Governor George C. Peery, John Garland Pollard, John Stewart Bryan, Pleasant L. Reed, Webster S. Rhoads, Jessie Ball DuPont, and John Barton Payne, ex-officio. Payne discussed his selection with Pollard. Both agreed that Mrs. DuPont would be an excellent member because of her sizable contribution. They strove to choose wealthy and dedicated members from different geographical areas. Pollard also suggested including the Mayor to represent the city of Richmond, and the Governor to represent the interests of the Commonwealth. The inclusion of the Mayor and the Governor was important since the museum would represent the art interests of Virginians and be located in the capital city of Richmond.\textsuperscript{17}

Another important decision made by the Board of Directors at their first meeting was to designate Pollard as chairman of a committee to draft the by-laws of the new museum. Payne gave him the authority to chose his own associates. By-laws for the Virginia Museum were not a new topic for Pollard. Earlier, Thomas C. Parker of the Richmond Academy had written to him offering a draft of by-laws for the Museum. Parker felt that his experience and exhaustive study of similar institutions qualified him to write these

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16}Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors; JGPP, Folders 438 & 439.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17}JGPP, Folder 440.
\end{flushleft}
by-laws. Pollard thanked Parker, but declined.18

During October Payne and Pollard drafted by-laws for approval by the committee. Pollard collected and examined constitutions and by-laws from other public museums including the Baltimore Museum of Art, the St. Louis City Art Museum, the Toledo Museum of Art and the Worcester Art Museum. These examples were helpful, and many of their provisions were similar to those chosen by the Virginia Museum. The new by-laws incorporated the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts as an institution of learning, organized and operated exclusively for charitable, scientific, literary and educational purposes and not for the profit of any corporation or individual. The state, acting through the Board of Directors, would maintain the museum building for the exhibition of works of art and any art treasures which the Commonwealth possessed or might acquire. It would maintain the means and facilities for aiding any and all members, or others the trustees may determine, in receiving a thorough and liberal education in any and all branches of fine and applied arts and other intellectual and cultural fields.19 All members of Pollard's committee accepted this version except Webster Rhoads, who felt these by-laws were not comprehensive enough. He preferred the draft written by

18Thomas C. Parker to John Garland Pollard, 12 June 1934, JGPP, Folder 439.

Thomas Parker. Payne's and Pollard's draft reflected their feeling that the original by-laws not descend into detail concerning employees as they had no idea at present what funds would be available for salaries. Pollard's experience, furthermore had taught him that it was better not to be too specific too early. Rhoads deferred to Pollard's experience, and Pollard's version was adopted at the second meeting of the Board of Directors on February 11, 1935.20

The By-laws Committee and the Executive Committee were the first to be organized by the Board of Directors. Pollard felt that the Board should limit the number of committees for the time being, but he noted that others might be useful in the future. He suggested committees to deal with accessions, membership, education, and buildings and grounds, all under the direction of the Executive Committee. For his part, Payne stressed the need for an Accessions Committee. In a letter to Pollard he stated that "the museum [would] be offered all sorts of things and there [would be] a danger of lowering the standard materially unless an Accessions Committee is both capable and strong."21 The Board of Directors agreed. and it eventually created this and other committees.

Payne, Pollard and the Board of Directors faced other,

---

20Webster S. Rhoads to John Garland Pollard, 1 October 1934, JGPP, Folder 440.

more pressing concerns during the fall of 1934: the cost of the building and the need to save enough money to furnish the museum for its opening, avoiding delays in construction so as not to jeopardize the Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) grant, and the placement and design of a bust in tribute to Judge Payne. In November the architect wrote Pollard with the date of completion for the museum as set forth in the contract, July 9, 1935. However, the Art Commission had, with P.W.A. approval, granted an extension of six weeks, bringing the final date to August 20, 1935. He added that the remaining balance was $9000. Funding preoccupied Pollard’s mind as usual. He stressed to Philip Stern of the Art Commission the need to reserve money for the museum’s furnishings. He wrote:

I do not know where any additional money can be gotten to pay for the Museum, the landscaping or the furnishings. The money subscribed was raised by me after the most arduous and exacting effort and I should feel quite desperate if we do not get the Museum substantially within the contract price.23

The Act of the General Assembly presumed that the Board of Directors would handle this issue.

The P.W.A. had been involved with the building and construction of the museum since it had provided a grant for thirty percent of the total construction cost. The P.W.A.

22Finlay Ferguson to John Garland Pollard, 30 November 1934, JGPP, Folder 440.

23John Garland Pollard to Philip N. Stern, 16 November 1934, JGPP, Folder 440.
also solved the problem of furnishings early in 1935 by granting the Museum $11,500 toward furniture. But in the fall P.W.A. wage guidelines threatened to throw the museum project over budget: projects using P.W.A. funds were required to pay laborers according to a set scale based on unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled work. The Board of Labor Review was seeking to convert all laborers classified semi-skilled to skilled, thus raising their wages. Governor Peery requested that Pollard lend his help in retaining the current classifications, so Pollard attended a Board of Labor Review meeting, which did not reach a decision. Pollard was no longer terribly concerned, however, because the classification change would only affect carpenters making concrete forms and not all laborers.  

By October 1934 the Art Commission reported to Pollard that progress on the museum building was going well and that the P.W.A. representative on site was pleased with the work.

As 1934 drew to a close, Pollard continued to work hard for the new museum. He was still concerned about recruiting new Board members who would contribute financially to the museum. In fact, the committee on by-laws tentatively decided that the Governor should nominate for the Board only those who had contributed $500 or more -- their interest having been proven by their financial contribution. But

---

Pollard’s priorities were not only financial. He wrote to Colonel A. A. Anderson in December that he hoped the institution would be an agency for coordinating all art activities in the state of Virginia.\textsuperscript{25} This goal was not new to Pollard; in May 1934 he had been elected as honorary president of the newly organized Virginia Art Alliance. This organization hoped to gather together all the regional art interests and activities to support the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. By December the group had accomplished enough to merit a five-page report by the secretary of the Alliance, Thomas C. Colt, Jr., which concluded by delineating the Alliance’s relationship to the new museum:

\begin{quote}
This museum will stand as the living emblem of Virginia culture and art. It will require the cooperation of every high minded citizen of Virginia, and it is confidently believed that it will assist the growing art needs of the state. The final purpose in the By-laws of the Virginia Art Alliance is to ‘cooperate with and render service to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.’ Should the Museum accept this offer, every individual and organization member of the Alliance may confidently anticipate a stirring ‘call to arms’ in behalf of the Virginia Museum.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

1934 had seen much progress toward the construction and organization of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. By the end of the year the museum was well on its way to completion: building had begun, a Board of Directors and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25}John Garland Pollard to Colonel A. A. Anderson, 24 December 1934, JGPP, Folder 440.
\textsuperscript{26}Semi-Annual report of the Secretary of the Virginia Art Alliance, 1 December 1934, JGPP.
\end{flushright}
been appointed, and support from the state’s art community was strong.
Figure 1: First floor plan, The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{27}The Four Arts, April 1935, p.8.
Figure 2: Second floor plan, The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{28}The Four Arts, April 1935, p.9.
CHAPTER V

GROWING PAINS

Progress towards the completion and organization of the museum continued in 1935 despite several setbacks, the first of which was the death of Judge Payne on January 24. Payne had contributed generously to the Virginia Museum during his life, and he continued to do so in his will. He left the museum several works of art and $50,000 as an endowment for the purchase of additional works. Partly due to his efforts, the museum’s permanent collections were worth approximately $750,000 by early 1935. Payne contributed money, inspiration and ideas, but his death left vacant the presidency of the Board of Directors. This position was capably filled by Pollard at the February 11 Board of Directors meeting, and the museum’s progress continued unabated.

The major challenge of 1935 was the selection of a museum curator, which had begun just before Payne’s death. Payne and the Executive Committee of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts had begun their search in December 1934. Pollard had wished to select a curator as early as possible, even though it might not be possible to place him on the payroll,
in order to have his professional opinion in the preparations for the museum's October opening.\textsuperscript{1} Pollard was, as always, willing to defer to Payne's decision. The Executive Committee conducted a thorough search and selection process, consulting Laurence V. Coleman of the American Association of Museums and Dr. Robert B. Harshe of the Chicago Art Institute.

Webster S. Rhoads suggested Thomas C. Colt Jr. for the position of curator on December 18, 1934. Rhoads sent Colt's record to Pollard along with his report as secretary of the Virginia Art Alliance as representative of Colt's ability. Born in Orange, N.J. in February of 1905, Colt graduated from Blair Academy in Blairstown, N.J. and from Dartmouth College. After college he spent the summer of 1926 studying art at Columbia University, then went abroad to spend eight months studying art and European culture. Upon returning to New York City he reviewed books for the \textit{New York Times Book Review} and later joined the Rehn Gallery's staff. He remained with this prominent gallery of American art for several years. Jean Trigg, a supporter of Colt, wrote to Rhoads, "one of the things that impresses me the most. . . [is] the many close friendships that [Colt] formed with the leading artists, art critics, museum

\textsuperscript{1}John Garland Pollard to John Barton Payne, 26 December 1934, JGPP, Folder 458.
directors and art patrons."\(^{2}\) During his time in New York City, Colt became interested in developing the art department at Dartmouth College, and after a lengthy correspondence with President Ernest M. Hopkins he assembled and took to Dartmouth the first of a series of exhibitions. The interest Colt’s exhibition generated led to a magnificent art building for the college.

In 1929, desiring to gain knowledge and experience of life in a different setting, Colt had voluntarily resigned his position and enlisted for aviation duty in the Marines. A year later he was commissioned a Lieutenant and designated a naval aviator and commercial transport pilot. He served until 1931 at Quantico, Virginia, after which he came to Richmond, married a native girl and made the capital his home. Colt was wealthy and could therefore devote himself to his true vocation in art. Despite this family money, though, Colt was not an idle man. With Rhoads’s help he obtained a volunteer position at the Richmond Academy of Art. He worked hard at the academy and was upset by the paid staff’s insinuations that, "he should consider himself indebted to them for the right to work without pay."\(^{3}\) Colt collected books, pictures and old glass, and his collection was noted

\(^{2}\)Jean Trigg to Webster S. Rhoads, 15 December 1934, JGPP, Folder 458.

\(^{3}\)Jean Trigg to Webster S. Rhoads, 15 December 1934, JGPP, Folder 438.
as one of the best in Richmond. Furthermore, he was well liked and respected by many. Indeed, his mother-in-law Mrs. Willingham looked favorably on him, as did Richmond lawyer T. Justin Moore, who was impressed by Colt's background and trusted that Pollard would find it entirely satisfactory.⁴

After receiving Rhoads's recommendation, Payne and Pollard discussed Colt as a candidate. Rhoads had highlighted Colt's column in the December Four Arts magazine, in which Colt had suggested conducting a campaign for the museum. Colt's recommendations were exemplary, and although he did not mention himself in connection with the program, Pollard advised that the Executive Committee ask Colt to take charge of the campaign as a test; an opportunity to become better acquainted with a potential curator.⁵ Colt agreed to head up the campaign and made further proposals to Pollard, but his work was delayed because of the controversy surrounding the selection of a curator.⁶

Meanwhile, numerous endorsements of Thomas Parker for the position of curator had been pouring in to Pollard and Payne. They included virtually all artists in Richmond,

⁴T. Justin Moore to John Garland Pollard, 2 January 1935, JGPP, Folder 459.

⁵John Garland Pollard to John Barton Payne, 28 December 1934, JGPP, Folder 438.

various directors and faculty members of art schools and programs, members of the Richmond Academy of Art, and C. Powell Minnigerode, Director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Henry H. Hibbs, Director of the Art School at the Richmond Division of the College of William and Mary, noted Parker's qualifications: his charming personality, leadership, ability to secure the cooperation of others, success in creating interest in art among the general public, and his unusual energy. Edward B. Rowan, Chief of the Section of Painting and Sculpture Procurement Division Public Works Branch in Washington, D.C., wrote:

Due to his experience and knowledge of the local situation I feel that there is no one better qualified to carry on in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts the work that he and his associates have so nobly encouraged in the Richmond Academy of Art. There aren't many people in the state with the training and experience to carry on a program of art education.7

Mrs. Marrow Stuart Smith, Director of the Norfolk Public Schools Art Department, noted Parker's effectiveness at managing the affairs of the Richmond Academy and concluded that he was entitled to first consideration for the new post.8 On behalf of the Camera Club of Richmond, Wray Selden noted that the "recent awakening of interest in art in Virginia [was] almost entirely the work of Mr. Parker,"

7Edward B. Rowan to John Garland Pollard and John Barton Payne, 20 November 1934, JGPP, Folder 457.

8Mrs. Marrow Stuart Smith to John Garland Pollard, 27 November 1934, JGPP, Folder 437.
since he combined organization and management skills with artistic ones.  

Others highlighted his background too. Although he had not been born in Virginia, Parker considered himself a native because his parents were Virginians, and he had been raised in the Commonwealth. He attended high school in Richmond and then entered the McIntire School of Fine Arts at the University of Virginia where he studied the history of art and architecture and later worked as an architect. Currently serving as its first director, Parker was a driving force in the founding of the Richmond Academy of Art. A few interesting patterns occur in these letters of endorsement. First, most were from Richmonders. Second, many congratulated Payne and Pollard on their success in bringing the Virginia Museum into existence. Third, many supporters felt that Parker, as the director of the Richmond Academy and a friend and supporter of artists, was the only possible candidate for the position of curator. Finally, many were solicited by Mrs. Upshur, an Academy Trustee.

In response to these letters of recommendation, Pollard noted his belief that the Board would follow Payne's judgement in the final selection of a curator. He thanked

---

9 Wray Selden to John Garland Pollard, 29 November 1934, JGPP, Folder 437.

10 Parker to John Barton Payne. 2 January 1935, JGPP; and assorted letters of recommendation also in Folders 458 and 459 of the JGPP.
the writers for their letters and suggestions and requested they continue their active support of the museum. As usual, Pollard was both diplomatic and singlemindedly devoted to the museum's development.11

Finally, Payne wrote to Pollard in December requesting a statement of Parker's education and qualifications, so that they would have a complete record. Parker responded early in January with a three page letter highlighting his work in several art groups in Richmond, culminating in his directorship of the Richmond Academy.12 Parker also met with Pollard to discuss his plans for the museum, and praised Pollard for his contribution to the museum. Parker felt strongly that the Board of Directors should select a curator and work out a definite program before announcing a membership drive. "If it is to be successful", wrote Parker, "the museum must have an auspicious beginning."13 As Parker was listing his qualifications, Payne expressed his criteria for the director of the museum: he should be cultured in the realm of art and must be able to win the cooperation of others, especially in building up a membership from whose

11 John Garland Pollard to Hattie Belle Greshman, 2 January 1935, JGPP.

12 Thomas C. Parker to John Barton Payne, 2 January 1935, JGPP.

fees the running expenses could be paid.\textsuperscript{14}

With the qualifications of these two candidates in hand, the Executive Committee could make a decision. The Board of Trustees reasoned that the ladies and gentlemen composing that committee had given liberally of their time, thought and money towards the founding of the museum, therefore, they were in a better position than others to know of the problems which confronted the new institution and what qualities a curator should possess. On February 15, 1935, the president of the museum, now John Garland Pollard, called a meeting of the Executive Committee to discuss the appointment of a curator. After deliberation, Webster Rhoads nominated Colt. Several Committee members concurred and passed this nomination unanimously. They authorized Pollard to confer with Colt to ascertain whether he would be available for this position.\textsuperscript{15} Pollard was pleased with the agreement with Colt and noted that the curator would have to do the hardest work ever connected with the museum between now and its opening. He would, therefore, be entitled to compensation from the beginning of his service if income became sufficient to justify it.\textsuperscript{16}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{14}John Garland Pollard to Hattie Belle Gresham, 2 January 1935, JGPP, Folder 459.

\textsuperscript{15}Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors.

\textsuperscript{16}Webster S. Rhoads to John Garland Pollard, 16 February 1935, JGPP, Folder 441.
Colt accepted the position on several conditions. First, he would begin the position upon notification of his election and then, under the direction of the president, would prepare for the opening of the museum, securing new members and issuing relevant literature. Second, he would purchase the necessary furniture, secure exhibits, and execute other tasks as deemed necessary by the president. Third, he would incur no expenses on behalf of the museum without the President's prior consent. Finally, his salary and that of other employees approved by the Executive Committee would be collected from the annual memberships of one hundred dollars or less. His salary was contingent on the collection of sufficient funds from these membership fees, but if funds permitted, his salary was to be $200 per month until the museum opened and $300 per month thereafter.17

As Pollard began negotiations with Colt, both Richmond newspapers announced that the Board of Directors of the museum were considering Thomas C. Colt and Thomas Parker among other candidates for the position of curator. This news infuriated a large proportion of the Richmond artist community -- all of whom felt that Parker was the only possible choice for curator. Twenty-one of these artists, led by David Silvette, sent a telegram to Pollard on

17John Garland Pollard to Thomas C. Colt, 15 February 1935, JGPP, Folder 441.
February 17. It was framed almost in a tone of blackmail making four points. First, it said, the Executive Committee should delay action in selecting a curator until the various candidates demonstrated their ability to work harmoniously with the artists; otherwise the museum would not be a complete success. Second, Parker had inspired the artists and directed a leading art organization without reproach. Third, Parker was the only logical candidate and the only candidate acceptable to the artists of the state. Fourth, and finally, the Executive Committee should examine information regarding the other applicants [Colt] in order to avert the selection of an unworthy candidate. Another telegram arrived two days later restating the above and adding that Colt was unworthy because his only experience in art was one year as Parker's subordinate.18

Meanwhile, more supporters of Parker wrote to Pollard on his behalf. Many had written before and wished to re-iterate their endorsements. Artist Charles W. Smith was shocked that Parker might not be selected, and he felt that Parker deserved the position because he had worked hard to bring the Richmond Academy to its present standing; to stop his work now would be a setback to the whole plan. Smith also stressed Parker's contacts with dealers and artists in New York City who liked his frankness and honesty. Parker's supporters expressed their opinion in several newspaper

18JGPP, Folder 460.
articles as well, stressing his work in Virginia's art renaissance and his familiarity with Virginia.\textsuperscript{19}

Pollard replied to these letters, noting the writers' interest in Parker and thanking them for their input. On February 27 he wrote each of the artists who had signed the telegram, requesting that they inform the Executive Committee of Colt's unworthiness. All but five of the artists denied knowledge of any such information and said they had signed a telegram only in support of Parker. These five, led by David Silvette, sent affidavits to Pollard which outlined their charges against Colt. Their first was dubbed the "Dartmouth incident": Dartmouth College allegedly asked Colt never to show his face there again after he attempted to sell paintings to Mrs. Rockefeller for a commission as salesman for the Rehn Gallery. He then requested that Mrs. Rockefeller donate these paintings to Dartmouth College. According to Silvette and the other artists, Mrs. Rockefeller was outraged that Colt and Dartmouth had asked her to give more funds to a college she had already generously supported and threatened to withdraw her support. Colt had apparently acted without the authorization of Dartmouth College, and Silvette suggested that Pollard write to Robert Andrews of the Dartmouth Art

\textsuperscript{19}Charles W. Smith to Webster S. Rhoads, 23 February 1935, JGPP, Folder 441.
The artists' second accusation concerned Colt's alleged deception of Parker. Colt, had previously told Parker that he was not applying for the position of curator, so when Colt's name appeared in the list of candidates, Parker's supporters thought that Colt had knowingly misled Parker about his intentions. To support their allegations, the artists claimed that Colt said he had mailed Pollard an endorsement of Parker, an endorsement which he did in fact write but never mailed. Mrs. Upshur, trustee of the Academy; Margaret Nokely, Parker's secretary and Marjorie Crawford, his stenographer, all wrote affidavits accusing Colt and corroborating the others' stories. Upshur claimed she was told by "someone close to Governor Pollard" that Colt was being considered for the position. She could not believe that this would happen if he had not submitted an application, but he denied having done so. Silvette and his wife added that it was deceptive of Colt to continue to work with Parker at the Academy while concealing his candidacy and denying it as late as February 9. Silvette claimed to be able to give elaborate proof if necessary.21

The artists' other charges were less serious, but no less vehement. They felt that Colt's background as an art

---

20David Silvette to John Garland Pollard, 19 February 1935, JGPP, Folder 460.

21JGPP, Folder 460.
dealer would incline him to make deals for his own profit, rather than for that of the museum. They also charged that Colt as an outsider, a northerner from New Jersey, could never truly represent a Virginian institution, as he would not be conversant with the "spirit of the section." Lastly, the job of curator by right belonged to Parker, "the man whose service to the state of Virginia and the Richmond Academy of Art has kept it alive and through the activity of which institution the ground for the state art museum was prepared." No man (Colt), they concluded, could be suitable for a position if the majority of the art community with whom he must work were in favor of another man (Parker). 2 2

The Executive Committee and Pollard felt that these charges should be investigated, so they postponed their final choice of a curator. Rhoads and Pollard discussed the situation privately and with Minnigerode; they decided they should act together in this matter which was, after all, primarily local. Pollard asked Colt for more recommendations; in addition Colt's friends and employers sent a number of unsolicited endorsements. Colt's former employer, Frank K. M. Rehn, recommended Colt as an excellent man for the position because of his executive ability. Eugene Speicher, a New York artist, noted Colt's fine character, his sensitivity to finances in the arts and his

22David Silvette to John Garland Pollard, 19 February 1935, JGPP, Folder 460.
knowledge of the same. Pollard also wrote to several people regarding the "Dartmouth incident." Robert Andrews, to whom Silvette directed him, claimed to know nothing of any misconduct on Colt's part and referred Pollard to Professor Artemus Packard. Professor Packard expressed the utmost confidence in Colt, calling the charges a "tissue of lies of the most fantastic sort." When questioned about Colt, Ernest M. Hopkins, Dartmouth's President, also denied knowing of anything that might reflect badly upon Colt. Mrs. Rockefeller also gave Colt a positive report. Apparently the artists' charges were unfounded. They were probably the result of a conversation between artist Charles Smith, a friend of Robert Andrews, and Parker, which was enlarged in the hopes of discrediting Colt. Thus the charges were disproved and Silvette was put on the defensive when Andrews demanded an apology from Silvette for blackening his name.

Pollard also disproved the second charge against Colt. The artists seemed intent on denying the possibility that Colt could have been considered for the position without having officially applied for it. Pollard summed up this charge saying, "Colt's offense seems to be that he was willing to accept the position if offered it." Pollard

---


24 John Garland Pollard to Thomas Parker, 22 March 1935, JGPP.
added that he did not receive a single piece of substantiation of the fact that Colt secretly applied for the job. Late in March, Miss Nokely noted that the situation regarding Colt's letter of endorsement of Parker had been cleared up, and Rhoads stated that he had proposed Colt as curator.\(^2\)\(^5\)

The other charges were not addressed directly by Pollard. In early March he and Rhoads decided that negotiations with Colt had proceeded far enough and that Colt's defense of his character was more than satisfactory. Colt addressed the charges against him, stating categorically that, as favorably as he regarded the position of curator, he had not applied for it. He also noted that the "Dartmouth incident" had "to the best of his knowledge no basis in fact."\(^2\)\(^6\) He assured Pollard that he regretted the pettiness and hysteria of a few that unavoidable accompanied an affair of this sort.

Despite the lack of substance to their claims, some of Parker's supporters refused to drop their complaints. Mrs. Upshur of the Academy was especially vehement. Pollard wrote to her in March regarding her complaints. He diplomatically praised Upshur's zeal in all good causes, but added that many of those writing on behalf of Parker overlooked the

\(^{25}\)JGPP, Folder 462.

\(^{26}\)Thomas C. Colt to John Garland Pollard, 26 February 1935, JGPP, Folder 460.
fact that the Museum Board included three Academy trustees with direct experience of Parker's qualifications. These trustees knew the needs of the museum and were intimately associated with Parker. Upshur retorted that these three members represented individual opinions and not the opinion of the whole Board. When she saw that she was losing, Upshur suddenly maintained that Colt indirectly applied for the position and added that this was just as damaging as applying directly. Again, she could not prove this petty claim, but this agitation occupied the Museum Board until their final vote at the April 13 Executive Committee meeting.27

Most of the artists were satisfied that the Executive Committee had thoroughly investigated and disproved the charges against Colt. On April 1 Pollard sent a letter to all the signers of the artists' protest telegram discussing the charges and stating his findings. He asked the artists to write and tell him whether in light of this evidence, they still wished to press these charges. Theresa Pollak's response was typical:

I wish to say that in view of your very thorough investigations in this matter I am now satisfied that these charges were false and I realize that I was misinformed and sent the telegram under a misapprehension of the facts which... were known to me only in the

27 JGPP, Folders 461 & 462.
form of rumors which I wished investigated.\textsuperscript{28} Others had signed the telegram only in support of Parker and they reiterated their support. Pollard wrote to Rhoads that the artists were in a more satisfied state of mind after receiving his letter.\textsuperscript{29}

Meanwhile Parker had been in touch with Pollard directly. He apologized for the overblown "Dartmouth incident" and claimed that it was not caused by any action on his part. He added that he did not know what he could have done to prevent it, but his letter made clear his opinion that Colt had maneuvered to get the position. After investigating the charges against Colt, Pollard agreed to meet with Parker and they apparently met at the end of March. Just hours before the Executive Committee meeting on April 13 Parker made a last attempt to promote his case. He stressed his ability to manage a limited budget and suggested that the Board consult George C. Osborne, vice-president of the Carolina Chemical Company, as a reference.\textsuperscript{30}

On April 12 Colt wrote to Pollard of his concern regarding the museum's progress. Because of the antagonism

\textsuperscript{28}Theresa Poliak to John Garland Pollard, 2 April 1935, JGPP, Folder 462.

\textsuperscript{29}John Garland Pollard to Webster S. Rhoads, 6 April 1935, JGPP, Folder 443.

\textsuperscript{30}Thomas Parker to John Garland Pollard, 13 April 1935, JGPP, Folder 443.
towards Colt, members of the Board had questioned his suitability for the curator position. In his defense Colt asserted that this gossip and hostility had not penetrated to any great degree beyond the perpetrators; he urged the board to nominate a curator quickly so that plans for the museum's opening would not be delayed.\textsuperscript{31} That same day, Pollard held a conference with both Parker and Colt at which he requested that they settle on an arrangement to work together in the administration and advancement of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. They conferred, but were unable to reach an agreement. Parker felt he could only be interested in the museum if he could devote his entire time and energy thereto. Apparently the Executive Committee did not regard the feeling against Colt to be serious, and on April 13 they voted to elect Colt as curator. The next day the Richmond papers announced the selection.\textsuperscript{32}

The Executive Committee had several reasons for choosing Colt over Parker. First, they did not consider Parker to be "more of a Virginian" than Colt. Both were born out of the Commonwealth and had chosen later to settle in Virginia. Parker had been a resident longer, but both were actively interested in serving Virginia. Pollard noted in

\textsuperscript{31}Thomas C. Colt to John Garland Pollard, 12 April 1935, JGPP.

\textsuperscript{32}Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors, and "Colt is Named Head of State Arts Museum," Richmond Times Dispatch, 14 April 1935.
February that Parker wrote successfully on art, but was not a dynamic speaker. In a letter to an adamant Mrs. Upshur, Pollard noted that Parker would not have been selected even if Colt had never been born. Parker was passed over, not because of any lack of appreciation of his good qualities and service to art in Virginia, but because the committee did not think him qualified to meet the business and management needs of the position. Indeed, this is the issue on which the position rested. Colt was chosen primarily because of his proven talent in art development both in New York and Virginia. He had the contacts, the personality and the talent to recruit both people and funds to the museum. In addition, he was an able art scholar. He was also willing to serve without pay until enough money had been raised.

Nevertheless, Parker’s ardent supporters refused to accept Colt’s selection. They held a meeting to protest Colt’s election and plan a strategy. Mrs. Upshur, Mrs. Maynard and Miss Clark were the only Academy Trustees present, Richmond was the only city represented, and no one of prominence or note was there. The proceedings were highly confused and the majority of the audience was skeptical. After the reading of innumerable letters and statements by David Silvette the meeting broke up with a decision to draft a memo advocating the continuation of the Academy and protesting Colt’s appointment as a slight to the dignity of the artists. Eventually they drew up a set of formal
resolutions which they sent to the Board of Directors of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Board of Trustees of the Richmond Academy and the advisory board of the Virginia Museum. These resolutions stated that the Board of Trustees of the Richmond Academy had been slighted in the selection process, since it was customary to consult the relevant professional group when making appointments. Moreover, they accused the Museum Board of disregarding the public will by raising funds privately, and they pledged to continue the work of the Richmond Academy separate from that of the museum.

Pollard, in a scathing rebuttal, called this protest "an attempt to discredit the management of the institution and thus injure the art movement in Virginia." Finally showing his irritation with the issue, Pollard called the affair

[a] shining example of ingratitude toward those public-spirited liberal and art-loving citizens who are trying to help some of the very people who are now seeking to make the public believe that the directors of the museum cannot be trusted to select wisely the curator of an institution which they founded and gave to the state.

Mrs. Upshur and other supporters of Parker felt the Board

---


had overlooked their opinions. She wrote in a bitter tone that a handful of rich men had made the museum possible and could probably do what they like with it, but without the support of the artists and art groups the building would remain empty.\textsuperscript{35} Pollard replied, "we did not ignore them, we simply differed with them."\textsuperscript{36} In fact, Pollard and others had listened to the supporters for months. Pollard and the museum Board were forced to defend themselves against this attack and gave press releases to the Richmond papers justifying their decision-making process and their selection.

Although the protests were loud and angry, the protesters did not represent the majority of citizens interested in art in Virginia. By April 25, Colt felt that the affair had lost its menace and would not interfere with his work. The supporters could be ignored; indeed Colt, in a humorous aside, stated that the accusations made him appear far cleverer than he felt.\textsuperscript{37}

These hard feelings may have stemmed from the confusion regarding the relationship between the Richmond Academy of Art and the Virginia Museum. Parker showed his confusion in a letter to Rhoads in which he stated that if not chosen as

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36}"Arts Academy Group Drafts Colt Protest," \textit{Richmond Times Dispatch}, 30 April 1935.

\textsuperscript{37}Thomas C. Colt to John Garland Pollard, 25 April 1935, JGPP.
curator he would resign from the directorship of the Academy. He felt his work at the Academy would be in opposition to that of the museum he wished to support.\textsuperscript{38} As early as January of 1935, Pollard and Rhoads foresaw a conflict between these two organizations and a need to clarify their relationship. Pollard recommended an early meeting of the trustees to discuss this matter. Although the majority of Academy trustees voted to support the museum, the two Boards delayed a discussion because of the controversy over the selection of a curator.\textsuperscript{39} Rhoads noted that the two organizations would be competing for members if the Richmond Academy continued exactly as it was.\textsuperscript{40} In January, Pollard proposed that the Academy conduct the educational activities of the museum in Richmond, that the two share members and membership fees, and that the Academy be allowed the use of rooms without charge in the museum building. Rhoads, a trustee of both organizations, felt that Richmond could not support two organizations and proposed that the museum take over all art functions. Later he modified his position and acknowledged the Academy's right to community support for its work with artists. Mrs. Maynard and Mrs. Williams, Academy trustees, recommended that the

\textsuperscript{38}Thomas Parker to Webster S. Rhoads, 2 April 1935, JGPP.

\textsuperscript{39}John Garland Pollard to George C. Peery, 19 January 1935, JGPP.

\textsuperscript{40}Webster S. Rhoads to Alexander Weddell, 17 January 1935. JGPP.
Academy continue under Parker and provide activities for student artists. In the same vein, Colt thought that the Academy could become an organization directed towards the needs of local artists and be controlled in part by them. This would direct businessmen with an interest in art towards the museum. In May, the two Boards formed a joint committee consisting of three members of each board to discuss cooperation between the two institutions. At the same time the Academy trustees voted nine to three to pledge the Academy’s support and cooperation to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

By the Fall of 1935 the Richmond Academy of Arts was operating independently under the direction of Rosewell Page. Page stated openly his desire to cooperate with the Virginia Museum, but there was no plan for joint membership. In its membership letter the Academy outlined its program which included sponsoring local exhibitions, entertaining visiting artists, and exhibiting works of Richmond and Virginia artists.

This controversy could perhaps have been avoided had

41 Thomas C. Colt to John Garland Pollard, 17 May 1935, JGPP.

42 These three dissenting voters were the same trustees who led the fight against Colt. Pollard and Colt were worried that they would try to gain control of the Academy’s Board of Trustees and continue to work actively against the museum. This did not happen. Webster S. Rhoads to JGP, 8 May 1935, JGPP.

43 JGPP, Folders 445 and 446.
these two institutions resolved their relationship before
the selection of a curator. Parker’s supporters thought that
the museum was to be an institution with a purely Virginia
focus: an extension of the Academy. Under this vision of the
museum, Parker was the logical choice for curator. Payne
and Pollard, on the other hand, envisioned the museum as
Virginia’s art museum. It would support and encourage local
artists and bring art to Virginians, but it was also to be a
part of the national art scene: a repository for works of
the great masters as well as Virginian artists. Colt’s
appointment was more appropriate for this version of the
Virginia Museum. He had the means to work without
compensation and was involved in the national as well as the
local art scene. His leadership, business and academic
talents were indispensible to the museum’s development.
CHAPTER VI

OPENING DAY

With Thomas C. Colt as curator, Governor Pollard and the museum's board gained a valuable colleague to work with them in completing the final organization of the museum and plans for its opening. They had much to accomplish and many obstacles to overcome before the museum finally opened its doors on January 16, 1936. Colt was vital to the museum’s ultimate success. He worked full time for the museum and gave advice to Pollard and the Board of Directors.

Colt’s input began even before he was officially named curator. In February 1935 he noted three main tasks: the installation of staff and collections in the building, the opening of the museum combined with a membership drive, and the development of policies and a program for the first season.1 Colt’s duties included development and public relations. And, since Pollard was anxious to have the museum support federal art projects, Colt served on the Fine and Applied Arts Committee of the WPA’s Art Project, a project which Colt felt would significantly benefit Virginia

---

1Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Program for Establishment, 15 February 1935, JGPP.
and the museum.\textsuperscript{2} Colt and Pollard also urged Governor Peery to accept an invitation to speak at a meeting of the Virginia Art Alliance to reassure all art organizations that the Virginia Museum desired to cooperate with them. To publicize the museum Colt arranged for the May 1935 edition of \textit{The Four Arts} magazine to exclusively feature the Virginia Museum. He then mailed this special issue to supporters of the museum and to museums, artists and newspapers nationwide.\textsuperscript{3} As usual, Pollard encouraged a personal touch: he instructed Colt to print letterhead for the museum and enclose personal, hand-signed letters to the recipients of the special magazine edition. On the home front, Pollard especially wanted Colt to become well-acquainted with the members of the museum's Board of Directors. Meanwhile, Colt was tireless in trying to interest different groups in the museum. For example, he attracted the support of wealthy "horse" people by asking their recommendations on where to borrow hunting paintings of real merit for the opening exhibit.\textsuperscript{4}

Colt's duties encompassed more than public relations. During the summer of 1935 he travelled, soliciting loans for the opening exhibit, and he consulted with the Advisory

\textsuperscript{2}JGPP, Folder 444, and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, \textit{Minutes of the Executive Committee}, 21 September 1935, p.10.

\textsuperscript{3}Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, \textit{Minutes of the Executive Committee}, 21 September 1935, p.2.

\textsuperscript{4}JGPP, Folders 443 & 444.
Committee. He also met with New York artists and received considerable encouragement. Colt was responsible for some interviewing and screening of job applicants, which he handled diplomatically, and that summer, Colt was involved with Pollard in plans for the October Board of Directors meeting.5

In the autumn of 1935 Colt was increasingly busy with plans and details for the museum's opening, its organization, funding and membership drive's. He developed a filing system, arranged for collection insurance, completed plans for the opening exhibit, moved the collection into the completed building, catalogued the collection, supervised janitorial staff and developed a maintenance plan. Judge Payne had left a fully paneled library room known as the Portuguese Room to the museum in his will and Colt negotiated its restoration through a small PWA grant and oversaw its installation in the museum building.6

Before Colt's selection, Pollard and the Board of Directors drew up a plan of organization which was included with the by-laws and passed at the February Board meeting. The first page depicted a flow chart showing the various committees, staff members and government bodies and their

---

5John Garland Pollard to Mrs. Alfred I. DuPont, 7 July 1935, JGPP; JGPP, Folder 444; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 21 September 1935, p,4.

6JGPP, Folder 446.
Figure 3: Original organization chart of the museum. ¹

role in the museum's management. It clearly illustrated that the Board of Directors would have the final say in museum affairs.

The plan also described the duties of staff and their salaries. The Director-Curator would be the chief staff member with a salary of $3,600 per annum. He would be assisted by an Executive-Secretary, hostess, guards and a stenographer, among others. The museum would be open on weekdays from ten to four-thirty, and Sundays from one to four-thirty. Working hours for various staff differed, but all were full time employees. The museum would be open free to the public one day per week, and closed on Mondays for alterations and repairs. The charge to non-members on other days would be twenty-five cents. School classes might tour the museum free by prior arrangement.

This charter also delineated the relationship between the museum and the Virginia Art Alliance. As a state institution, the museum desired the interest and support of the entire Commonwealth. As a federation of all art groups in the state the Alliance would provide a channel for the museum to reach every part of the state, form the nucleus of state membership drives and exercise considerable weight in recommending state appropriations for the museum.

These by-laws also contained provisions for hiring the

---

8 See Figure 3.

9 This was a low salary even for 1936.
museum staff. By October 26, Colt and the Board of Directors had selected several other staff members: Edward M. Davis, assistant to the curator; Mrs. Joseph Gayle, assistant in charge of extension and statistical work; Mrs. A. B. Montgomery, secretary; T. D. Eaton, publicity director; T. E. Grigg, Engineer; and Otto Moeller, expert restorer. Davis’s, Colt’s and Eaton’s salaries were to be paid by membership fees; Gayle’s services would be voluntary unless the Carnegie Foundation or the Art Project of the WPA approved her employment. The Commonwealth would provide salaries for Montgomery and Grigg, and Moeller’s temporary services were paid for through a small WPA grant. The Board left positions funded by private money up to Colt’s discretion.\(^\text{10}\) Funding for salaries was a mix of federal grants, privately raised money and state appropriations.

Although the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts was a state institution, its annual funding would come from a variety of sources as mentioned above. The original bill called for the state to provide sufficient money to pay the operating costs of the museum, with the other costs defrayed by membership fees. Payne had felt strongly that the educational value of the museum depended on creating public interest through the solicitation of memberships.\(^\text{11}\) It would be necessary to

\(^{10}\) Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 21 September 1935, p.5.

\(^{11}\) 1935 Brochure for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, JGPP.
have a large income from these fees, at least in the beginning until the Board of Directors could raise a general endowment fund. The directors recognized that their greatest problem was raising this money. All funds, with the exception of special endowments, would go first to the museum treasurer and then to the state treasurer, but would be marked for the museum. In this way museum funds could be separated from general state funds and avoid political control over how they were spent. This plan was reaffirmed at the October meeting of the Board of Directors at which they elected First & Merchants Bank of Richmond as museum treasurer. The matter of a specific budget was turned over to the Executive Committee at this same meeting.12

At its September meeting, the Executive Committee noted that the maintenance of the building would be provided by the state superintendent of grounds and buildings. There was one problem, however, that Pollard volunteered to discuss personally with Governor Peery. Apparently the $10,000 appropriated by the General Assembly for the museum had been spent on other things by the superintendent.13 This problem was taken care of when Governor Peery agreed to an emergency appropriation providing for the physical upkeep of the

12Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors, 26 October 1935.

museum, including watchmen and attendants. The museum eventually received $11,000 during its first year of operation, from April 13, 1935 until June 15, 1936. This included insurance on and transportation of the collections; the upkeep of the collections was included under state maintenance.

Meanwhile the Board had a few more funding problems to handle. As of July 1935 three donors still owed some $5,725 on their pledges. This was a serious problem, since the PWA grant for the museum building was to be based on the amount actually paid—not the amount pledged. Philip Stern of the Art Commission suggested that Governor Peery address letters to those donors stressing the importance of their prompt payment. The Governor complied, and by the end of September all pledge money was in hand.

The Board, however, still needed more money to cover specific funding problems. The WPA provided the services of an expert frame maker and restorer free of charge during the 1935-1936 museum year. Webster S. Rhoads, Pleasant L. Reed, Katherine Rhoads and Judith Rhoads West donated $5,100 to establish a fund to defray the expenses of preparing the museum for its opening. The money was used for publicity.

---

14 Jessie Ball DuPont to John Garland Pollard, 22 November 1935, JGPP.


16 Philip Stern to George Peery, 10 July 1935, JGPP.
postage, telephone charges, the salaries of the secretary and stenographer, stationery and traveling expenses. Rhoads also gave $1000, which, supplemented by PWA money, paid for a stone balustrade to enhance the front terrace.¹⁷ Colt and the Board also actively sought various grants. During June of 1935, for instance, Colt submitted a request for a grant with the Carnegie Corporation for $42,000 to assemble an art reference library and $24,000 to develop a three-year program of exhibition and extension work. Pollard wrote to Kenneth Chorley of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to inquire whether funds might be available from the several Rockefeller foundations. He also wrote to the Honorable A. J. Montague, whom he thought was on the Carnegie Board, for assistance in gaining the grant for which the museum had applied.¹⁸

Another concern for Pollard, Colt and the Board was money for furnishings. In June the Executive Committee postponed the purchase of furnishings, as the amount available would remain in question until the building's construction costs had been audited by the federal authorities and the final PWA grant amount calculated. By


¹⁸ JGPP; and Minutes of the Executive Committee, 21 September 1935.
July Pollard and Colt had the assurance of the state Art Commission that Colonel Anderson of the PWA would approve the purchase of furniture out of the building fund balance. They delayed anyway, since the museum was not set to open until January 1936. Eventually, enough funds for furniture, equipment and landscaping were provided by a $9,000 PWA grant. This grant was especially important because raising funds in the depressed economy of 1935 was difficult.19

Planning for the museum’s membership campaign began shortly after Colt took office. In June the museum encountered a problem with the Richmond Academy. The joint committee of Academy and museum board members had failed to develop a plan of cooperation. The Academy board was almost hostile towards the museum; they grumbled that the museum should not undertake a membership campaign in territory in which there existed a local art organization without its prior consent.20 In effect the Academy wanted the power to see and approve the museum’s membership plans if memberships were solicited in Richmond. Pollard replied to Adele Clark of the Academy that the museum had not yet adopted a membership plan, but the staff wished to cooperate with other local art groups. The official position of the Executive Committee regarding this Resolution of the Academy

19 Thomas C. Colt to John Garland Pollard, 4 October 1935, JGPP.

20 Adele Clark to John Garland Pollard, 11 June 1935, JGPP.
was that the advancement of art in Virginia would best be
served by establishing a plan of cooperation through the
Virginia Art Alliance. They planned to hold a joint
meeting to hammer out such a plan. The General Assembly,
however, had given the museum the power to solicit
memberships and the board of the museum would control their
own membership drive.21

The board nominated and approved Colonel LeRoy Hodges,
a man of state-wide influence, as the chairman of the
Membership Committee. His work began in September, as did
the membership year. Seven membership classes had been
defined in the museum's by-laws: Founders, $5,000 for
lifetime membership; Patrons, $1,000 for lifetime
membership; Life Members, $500 for lifetime membership;
Sustaining, $100 annually; Artist, $5 annually; Richmond
area, $10 annually; outside of the Richmond area, $5
annually; and student $2 annually.22 Although this fee
entitled members to free museum entrance it was not easily
affordable for the general public.23

Hodges and his committee had an uphill battle ahead of
them. They wrote letters to recruit supporters for a state-

21 John Garland Pollard to Adele Clark, 12 June 1935, JGPP.
22 JGPP
23 I used the Consumer Price Index to determine that the
$10 annual fee in 1935 is approximately equal to $95 in 1990.
The current annual membership fee for Richmond residents is
$35. Almost one-third the cost in real terms of a 1935
membership.
wide sponsoring committee to recruit members in all areas of the state. By October, sixty people had replied positively, and he estimated that they could raise $10,000 in membership fees in a drive that would begin with the opening of the museum in January 1936. With the help of the state publicity director, Carter Wormeley, the Membership Committee initiated an aggressive publicity plan to increase public awareness of the museum and its programs. In addition, Hodges sent letters to prospective members, asking for support. His committee had submitted lists of possible members, including Virginians in New York City. Hodges' committee held one membership event before the drive was to officially begin, a tea and reception for new members and their invited guests on October 26th, and at which membership cards were available. Colt also suggested inviting government staff, heads of the state departments, heads of all state art organizations and colleges, and owners of old Virginia homes and estates. According to Colt, this event combined with increased visibility would fix the museum in the minds of the people of the state and should assure a successful campaign to raise membership funds.

By contrast, no additional funds were needed for the


25Thomas C. Colt to John Garland Pollard, 16 October 1935, JGPP.
museum building. The original date for the museum's opening was October 1935, but this had to be postponed until January 16, 1936, due to delays in construction. When the building opened to the public it contained galleries and a sales area on its main floor and more galleries, storage, work space, toilets, a boiler room, vault and receiving area on its ground floor. In June 1936 Colt reported that approximately $275,000 was expended on the building, furnishings, equipment and landscaping. The difference between that and the original $200,000 was furnished by the PWA. Colt expected a full report in the fall, but did not anticipate a further deficit. The generosity of the PWA enabled the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to open as soon as it did with a complete and well-equipped building.

On October 26th, 1935 the Art Commission formally transferred control of the newly completed building to the museum's Board of Directors. The Board had been organizing the museum since its formation and was now officially in charge of all the museum's components. At this reception, Governor Peery credited Pollard with starting the movement for a state museum and commended the public service of Philip Stern and the Art Commission. Stern, speaking for the Art Commission and pledging their continued support,

26 JGPP

concluded that their work was finished, while the board's had only begun.\textsuperscript{28}

That was an understatement. During 1935 the Accessions Committee began to receive offers of art works for sale, donation and loan. The museum already possessed a special endowment of $50,000 from the estate of Judge Payne, to be used for the acquisition of paintings by American artists. At the October Board of Directors meeting they discussed and passed on the suitability of some of the works offered as gifts. During the summer the directors investigated the possibility of obtaining the collection of Richmond native and London resident Henry P. Strause as a permanent loan, eventually securing this collection in 1936.\textsuperscript{29}

An art education plan and an additional wing were also under consideration by the museum board in 1935. The Executive Committee liked the plan for a cooperative art education program, but felt that it should be postponed until time permitted more thorough preparation.\textsuperscript{30} The additional wing could not be built even though the Board went so far as to apply for a PWA grant to cover fifty-five percent of the cost of the proposed wing, because they could

\textsuperscript{28}Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors, 26 October 1935.

\textsuperscript{29}JGPP, Folder 441 & 442.

\textsuperscript{30}Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 11 June 1935, 21 September 1935.
Indeed, until extra money was subscribed by Rhoads and Reed, Colt and Pollard had thought the Inaugural Exhibition would have to be limited to local works of art. This could have been detrimental to the museum’s success, as this opening needed to be "sufficiently impressive to deserve the spotlight" and attract museum patrons. Other museums came to the rescue. Early in 1935 Fiske Kimball, Director of the Pennsylvania Museum of Art; Juliana Force, Director of the Whitney Museum of Art and Duncan Phillips, of the Phillips Memorial Gallery agreed to act as advisors to Colt in planning the Inaugural Exhibit. Colt began planning during the summer, selecting paintings and arranging for their loan. His September report to the Executive Committee reported splendid cooperation and support from other museums and collections.

This cooperation enabled Colt to put together a comprehensive, artistic and educational exhibit for the opening of the Virginia Museum. This special exhibit entitled "Main Currents in the Development of American Painting," was hung in the Main galleries on the second floor and included rooms devoted to: the English Influence, the Decline of English Influence, the Beginning of Landscape

\footnote{JGPP, Folder 445.}

\footnote{Thomas C. Colt to John Garland Pollard, 29 November 1935, JGPP.}
Painting, the Barbizon or Romantic School, the Düsseldorf Storytelling School, the Munich School, the Cosmopolitan Influence and the Impressionists.33

The opening of this exhibit and of the new museum was a grand event. The Board of Directors invited the Advisory Committee and paid their travel expenses. Many Advisory Committee members accepted the board's generosity and probably reported their experiences to the art communities of their respective areas. Pollard and the Board also invited members of the General Assembly, Richmond government officials and their families in an attempt to impress them and win their support for the museum. Pollard also instructed Colt to include personal letters in the invitations of the artists. The final invitation read:

The governor of Virginia and the Board of Directors of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts request the Honor of your company at an official reception and preview of the Inaugural Exhibition, "The Main Currents in the Development of American Painting." January 16, 1936 at 4:30PM. Tea will be served.34

On January 16, 1936 the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts opened its doors for the first time to an invited group of artists, patrons and dignitaries. Over the following weekend members of the general public were able to visit the new museum, its special exhibit and permanent collections free

33JGPP, Folder 442.

34JGPP, Folders 446, 447, 448.
of charge. Virginia finally had its state art museum.
Figure 4: The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, The 1935 building as it looks today.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: A SUCCESS

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is by its very nature a state institution. This fact requires a statewide vision of service to all the art interests of Virginia. The museum and its curator, appreciate its essential obligation to the culture and traditions, the artists and art lovers, and the people of the state as a whole, and pledges itself to do its utmost to fulfill that great obligation. While necessity requires that the physical plant and collections of the museum be in the capital city, thereby lending added beauty and service to that one center, the major efforts of the museum will be statewide, in an attempt to extend its benefits and services to all localities. The museum trusts that it will be regarded as the state art center.¹

This was the purpose of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts as stated by its first curator, Thomas C. Colt, Jr. Fifty-eight years later, the museum has achieved this goal. As the current curator, Paul Perrot, writes, "consistent government support has provided the framework which has attracted collections, a professional staff, and state-wide programs which remain rare models of educational outreach."² The Virginia Museum, now the thirteenth largest art museum in

¹"Colt's Appointment Confirmed by Fine Arts Museum Trustees," Richmond Times Dispatch, 13 April 1935.


120
the United States, grew from the first state art museum to one of three state art museums. She was both part of the flow of museum growth and an original creation.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is significant precisely because it the first state art museum, created for the education and aesthetic enjoyment of all Virginia’s citizens. Unlike other museums, the Virginia Museum’s original goals included an emphasis on education and outreach. Although most museums were and are funded through a combination of private and government funds, the Virginia Museum was approved and legally created by the state through the General Assembly. The Virginia Museum developed a comprehensive plan for the promotion of art appreciation in Virginia and provided a place to store and display art works belonging to the state. In the early thirties this idea was relatively new; the Federal Government experimented with a national art policy during the New Deal, but had no national museum until 1941.

Despite these differences, the Virginia Museum had and still has many similarities with other American art museums. It succeeded in part because it was led by businessmen rather than artists. Throughout America’s history many art endeavors organized by artists have failed while those run by businessmen interested in art have flourished. The circumstances of the Virginia Museum’s founding also resemble those of other institutions, since
the basis of success of nearly all early American museums seems to have consisted of an alliance between two or three dominant men: an active President good at stirring up interest and money in the community, a sensitive collector of sound taste and large pocketbook willing to make really significant donations and finally a director, usually something of a showman, competent and devoted and with long tenure and close association with his president.3

The Virginia Museum possessed all three of these factors: Pollard was the active President, Payne the generous patron/collector and Colt, the showman director/curator. Like other museums, it grew out of a desire for a secure building in which to house a collection and the goal of creating something of educational and artistic merit. Many museums were connected to libraries as was the Virginia Museum, which was originally to have been part of a new state library complex. The Virginia Museum, like most other museums was and is funded through a combination of state and private money. Much of the private funding came from prominent Virginians who may have given out of a sense of noblesse oblige. In the nineteenth century, wealthy men and women often gave money to educational institutions and museums through this sense of duty to their community. Although much less prevalent in large cities in the thirties, this sense of duty still operated in the Commonwealth and led Virginians to support an institution.

that would benefit their state.\textsuperscript{4}

By the end of the museum's first season in June of 1936, Virginia had already benefitted from the new museum. Members of the museum and the general public had had the opportunity to view five exhibitions and the regular collections of the museum. They were able to attend lectures on art history and poetry readings, and artists, for their part, were able to display their work at a special exhibition of Virginia Artists. Three developments especially pleased Colt. First, the response of the public, which had been surprisingly large and enthusiastic: during the first six months, 40,000 people from many parts of Virginia and elsewhere, visited the museum. Second, the many gifts of art, money and effort given by individuals: the museum's collections grew by four hundred percent during its first six months. Third, the museum entered the new year without a deficit, and despite a rather disappointing initial membership campaign, the Membership Committee raised enough funds to pay salaries and other expenses.\textsuperscript{5} In


\textsuperscript{5}Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors, 27 June 1936, p.5.

The initial membership campaign produced 533 members and $11,734. By December 1936 the membership roster listed 420 members as Richmond residents out of population of approximately 183,000. This represents only about 1/4% of the population. Roster of Members, Christmas 1936, JGPP, Folder 453.
addition, animosity between some artists and art groups and the museum had also subsided. Many artists who had backed Parker for curator exhibited work in the museum’s Virginia Artist exhibition, and the Richmond Camera Club, another Parker supporter, sponsored a photography exhibition in the museum. Finally, the museum building itself was a success. After eighteen months of use, the director noted no depreciation of consequence and stated that great care was exercised by the state in its maintenance.

Pollard’s and Payne’s vision, which began with this building, had been fulfilled. Without the combination of the right time and the right people, this institution would not have come into existence. The Richmond Academy had raised Virginia’s and Richmond’s art consciousness, and Payne had spurred on the Commonwealth and Pollard as Governor with his generous gift of paintings and money. Pollard then took up the project and saw it through to completion with the invaluable assistance of Colt’s business savvy, art experience and enthusiasm. Finally, the creation of the Federal Government’s Public Works Administrations grants for art projects and public buildings made the museum building

---

6Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Exhibition Files 1936-1937, Box 1, Folder A, Archives Division, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.

7Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Second Annual Report of the Director, 1 July 1936 - 15 June 1937, Director’s Files, Box 1, Archives Division, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.
and thus the museum itself financially workable even during the Depression. Virginia now had its own state art museum, funded jointly by a state appropriation for the maintenance of the building and grounds, membership fees to fund staff salaries, and endowment funds for future acquisitions. It was available to the public as a state institution, but would be able to maintain its artistic integrity under the control of an independent Board of Directors. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the first state art museum, was on its way to being the state art center Colt and others had envisioned.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Manuscript Collections


Pollard, John Garland, Faculty/Alumni Files, Archives, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

Pollard, John Garland, Papers, Manuscripts Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Directors’ Files, Virginia State Archives.


Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Minutes of the Board of Directors, 1932-1942, Virginia State Archives, (Typewritten.)

Government Documents


__________________________, House, A bill to accept a conditional gift of $100,000 to the Commonwealth of Virginia from the Honorable John Barton Payne. S.B. 323, 1932.

127


Articles


Antiques, August 1990.

"Artist Group Will Demand New Meeting of Trustees." Richmond News Leader, 25 April 1935.

"Artist Meeting Called to Protest on Curator." Richmond News Leader, 18 April 1935.

"Arts Academy Group Drafts Colt Protest." Richmond Times Dispatch, 30 April 1935.

"Arts Academy Votes to Back State Museum." Richmond Times Dispatch, 8 May 1935.


"Colt is Named Head of State Art Museum." Richmond Times Dispatch, 14 April 1935.

"Extensive Art Collection sent to Museum by H. P. Strause." Richmond Times Dispatch, 11 February 1936, p.5.


"First Free Sunday Concert at Museum Scheduled Today."


"Pollard was 'doctor' at museum’s birth." *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 18 March 1984.

"Rare Clocks Still Running, To Be Shown at Museum Here." *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 16 February 1936.


*The Four Arts*, April 1935.

"Virginia’s Art Renascence (sic) and Governor Pollard." *The Four Arts*, February 1935, p.11.


Secondary Sources


VITA

Elizabeth Geesey Holmes


From July 1989 until June 1990, the author attended the College of William and Mary, completing course requirements for a M.A. in History, and an apprenticeship in archives and manuscript collections.