

Collector's Day 2021 Scholar's Report:  
Exploring Hammond-Harwood House and the Many Reincarnations of George  
Washington in the American Decorative Arts

By Alexandra McDonald

Walking along Maryland Avenue in downtown Annapolis it is impossible not to stop and marvel at the Hammond-Harwood House Museum. An Anglo-Palladian five-part house, Hammond-Harwood is an architectural gem. Detailed, hand carved laurel leaves frame the entryway into the town house, Flemish bond brickwork with glazed headers catch the late autumn sunlight, and pediments over the windows draw your eye upwards as you walk around the building. I had passed the Hammond-Harwood House on previous visits to Annapolis, but this autumn I finally crossed the threshold. On November 13<sup>th</sup> I had the opportunity to learn more about the House, its collections, and George Washington's legacy in the American decorative arts at the museum's fifth annual Collector's Day.



Margareta Angelica Peale, *Peaches and Pear on a Plate*, 1864

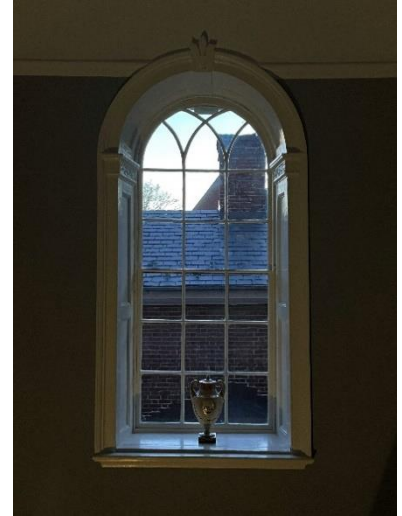
Our afternoon started with a house tour led by curator Rachel Lovett. Walking us through the home, Rachel pointed out furniture made by Annapolis cabinetmaker John Shaw, portraits painted by the Peales, and new acquisitions to the collection. One of the most exciting things for me was the still life painted by Margareta Angelica Peale in 1864, a new addition to the House. Margareta was Charles Willson Peale's niece and, as this painting illustrates, a skilled artist in her own right. Standing in front of the painting, you can see how she has captured the light shining off the rounded edges of the grapes as they teeter on the edge of the table. The peaches and pear are bathed in light, drawing the viewer's eye into the work. Perhaps what is most exciting about this piece is that while Hammond-Harwood House has a strong collection of Peales, this is the first piece from a Peale woman to enter the collection and it thus opens so many new avenues for interpretation at the House.

Following an afternoon tea reception, we were treated to two very different, but equally thought-provoking discussions of George Washington's visual legacy in the decorative arts. Brian Scott Miller took us on a visual odyssey through over two hundred images of Washington, covering everything from his portraits housed in major collections across the country to reproductions of his likeness being sold as Chia Pets. What became abundantly clear from the visual cacophony Brian presented was that images of George Washington are everywhere in American culture. They are in the



Jean-Baptiste Dubuc, *Clock*, c. 1800

National Portrait Gallery and on a nineteenth century French clock made for the American market now displayed at Hammond-Harwood House, but they are also on socks, ties, curtains, spoons, and children's stickers. Catherine E. Kelly further developed this idea of the ubiquitous Washington in her presentation. Focusing on a handful of key moments in the development of George Washington's image in the early nineteenth century, Catherine showed us how Washington himself helped to cultivate his image and then came to feel that his likeness was no longer his own. In the early days of his presidency, Washington sat for any artist who wanted to capture his likeness, but by the end of his life he felt detached from the image. Despite his own detachment, images of George Washington are everywhere. What was clear from both presentations is that either in portrait or sock form, these images speak to a certain type of American identity that is deeply ingrained in national memory.



View from the second floor looking West at sunset.

As the sun began to set, we moved to the back garden where food historian Joyce White had created a George and Martha Washington inspired tasting menu. One of the first chilly nights of the season, it was the perfect end to the day to warm up with mini Christmas pies, cherry bounce, and mini Martha Washington Great Cakes. As someone who grew up eating my grandmother's fruit cake every winter, it was both personally nostalgic to bite into one of the cakes and taste the dried currants, raisins, and cherries soaked in sherry and peach brandy and, as a professional historian, it was an important reminder of the power of historic foodways to transport a museum visitor to a different moment in time.

Attending Collector's Day as a Glenn Harwood Memorial Scholar was a wonderful experience. Spending a quiet moment with Fran Harwood talking about my research and the John Shaw clock in the dining room proved yet again that there really is nothing like standing in front of these objects, being able to look closely at the craftsmanship and the materials, to gain a deeper understanding of early American decorative arts. As with any good event, I left with more questions than answers and I am excited to return to Annapolis.



Mini Martha Washington Great Cakes