In celebration of the museum’s rich collection of portraits, “Silhouettes to Selfies: Capturing Portraits over Time,” focuses on the art and technology of image making in America. The fine art collection includes approximately 2,200 works, over 100 of which are likenesses of the men, women and children who lived, visited or worked at Tudor Place in its long history. They range tremendously in material, quality and expense, from affordable, early 19th-century cut paper silhouettes of Martha and Thomas Peter’s daughters America (Meck) and Columbia (Lum) to formal oil on canvas self-portraits by Armistead Peter 3rd from the first half of the 20th century. Some faces are readily identified while others have fallen into obscurity.

The portraitist’s choice of medium illuminates much about both subject and artist. In the beginning of the 19th century, immortalizing yourself or a loved one on a large canvas or even a private miniature was an expensive endeavor. Portraiture required the talents of an artist, ideally with academic training and access to specific and costly materials. The invention of photography, beginning with the daguerreotype in the mid-19th century, democratized image making, allowing poor and middle class families the opportunity to preserve family history. Among the collection’s 4,000 photographs, 334 are portraits of the Peters, their servants, friends, extended family, and even pets. These images range from a very rare 1850s daguerreotype of Martha Custis Peter holding her granddaughter Martha to later ambrotypes and tintypes. Platinum prints, gelatin silver prints and cellulose nitrate prints, many taken by Armistead Peter, Jr., and his son, illustrate the social impact and rapid growth of American companies like Kodak.

No matter the medium, every portrait tells a story about the sitter, the artist, and the audience both past and present. The person’s clothing and accessories, posture and gaze, and surroundings reveal the individual’s material world and wider socio-political sphere. The collection’s diversity encourages visitors to reflect on their own access to and creation of portraits, from formal wedding portraits to instantaneous selfies swapped over smart phones and through social media.

One of the most important and significant portraits in the collection depicts the builder of Tudor Place, Thomas Peter (1769 – 1834) (Fig. 1). This oil on canvas has long occupied a place of prominence in his home and been cared for by generations of family descendants. The husband, father, landowner, slave-holder, vestryman, Justice of the Peace and respected gentleman of Georgetown, appears seated and at ease; a large ornamental red drapery pulled to the side situates the subject within established, academic traditions in American and British portraiture, and suggests that the artist employed this common trope to convey Peter’s gentility and prominence. Although unsigned, the painting is attributed to the sitter’s son-in-law, Lieutenant William G. Williams, who married America Peter at Tudor Place in 1824. Peter’s three-quarter-length torso faces the viewer, while his gaze is diverted to his right, leading the viewer’s eye down his sleeve towards the background. In middle-age, he appears in good health and wears a dark overcoat above his yellow waistcoat. His ungloved right hand holds a riding crop, symbolizing Peter’s reputation for breeding champion race horses that competed at the Washington Jockey Club race tracks between 14th and 16th Streets (present-day Meridian Hill).1

Figure 1: Portrait of Thomas Peter
Attributed to Lt. William G. Williams (American, 1801-1846), oil on canvas, early 1830s.
Bequest of Armistead Peter 3rd, 6149.
In December 1985, two years after the death of Armistead Peter 3rd, the Tudor Place Foundation hired one of Washington’s most accomplished paintings conservators to examine and treat the portrait. Charles H. Olin documented and removed eight layers of prior restorations, from yellowed and cracked varnishes to thickly applied overpaint intended to enhance the sitter’s face, hands, clothing and background. The painting’s condition revealed a predictable history; portraits are often cleaned or retouched every 50-100 years, as each generation attempts to refresh and renew the surface with cleaning agents or artistic retouches.

A clue from the back of the canvas suggests the painting was probably worked on at the end of the 1800s: four cast iron “keys marked “SHATTUCK” that secure the portrait’s stretcher (Fig. 2). A painter himself, inventor Aaron Draper Shattuck (1832 – 1928) understood the importance of a durable and long-lasting key for the joints of the stretcher. Shattuck, named an academician in the National Academy of Design in New York City in 1861, developed a patent for a new stretcher key which was filed in October 1882 and awarded February 13, 1883. The Malleable Iron Works in New Britain, Connecticut, manufactured the keys, which were shipped directly to F. W. Devoe Company in New York for retail. Shattuck’s later patent of 1885 matches the keys found on Thomas Peter. Manufacturing data kept by Shattuck suggests the keys were most popular from 1884 to 1895, when over 2 million of the four available sizes were manufactured. Competition from other, less expensive models caused sales to dwindle in the late 1890s until iron shortages during World War I finally ended Shattuck’s venture.2

Through his cleaning and examination, Olin discovered several attempts to fill losses from earlier attempts at restoration, including of the sitter’s nose and left ear and below the riding crop. These losses and fills indicate the painting suffered considerable damage in its history. Damage such as this, combined with unstable paints and abrasive cleaning materials, exposed the woven canvas ground in six locations including the areas above Peter’s shoulders, inside the curve of his right forearm, his lap and his right hand.

Olin’s restoration transformed the painting, showing Peter anew and revealing much of the original composition. Before treatment, the landscape behind Peter’s shoulder had been completely obscured; Olin uncovered an eques-
Given the extensive losses to the original design layer documented by Olin and visible today, these and other photographic techniques will reveal much about the artwork. The museum seeks to X-ray the painting, as radiographs could reveal layers of under-paint or perhaps a graphite under drawing, if the artist took such steps when laying out his canvas. Reflected infrared photography could also illustrate potential under drawings. Ultraviolet photographs would document where Olin worked to inpaint losses and the location of multiple layers of varnish on the surface, suggesting the possibility of additional original paint below. Like XRF analysis, Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) could provide additional elemental identification and identify organic varnishes or coatings and paint binders.

Tudor Place is grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues at MCI. The museum looks forward to further investigations and sharing the outcome of our research with the public. In addition to funding the analysis of Thomas Peter, the MARPAT Foundation grant supports the conservation of seven other important oil on canvas portraits: John Parke Custis IV, ca. 1725, Williams’s own Self-Portrait and that of his nursing wife in America Peter Williams and Son Laurence, ca. 1833, and three paintings by Armistead Peter 3rd including a double portrait of his wife and daughter from 1932, his 1949 Self-portrait in Naval Uniform, and a portrait of his wife from 1925 wearing her green cloche, all of which are out for conservation and will return in April and May.

—Erin Kuykendall, Curator

Notes

1. A sleeve fragment, woven in bright blue silk, vividly illustrates the wealth Peter invested in horse racing and the social and political power his successful studs awarded him. A note identifies the fabric as “The sleeve of a jockey coat worn by the jockey that rode my grandfather Peter’s race horse.” Bequest of Armistead Peter 3rd, 8046. The collection also includes a riding crop, or whip, similar to that illustrated in the painting. Bequest of Armistead Peter 3rd, 9981.


Figure 5: The spectrometer, positioned less than a millimeter above the painted surface, takes a reading from the equestrian scene behind Peter’s right shoulder.

From the Executive Director

Dear Member:

Just as spring arrives, we have recently heard about the destruction of northern Iraq’s most prized ancient cities, Nimrud and Hatra. This tragedy robs us all of significant witnesses to human history and reminds us how very vulnerable our physical records can be. On a local level, it reminds us that historic sites uniquely preserve our past and inform us today about the development of our nation and its people. The destruction in Iraq, while far from Washington, should be a clarion call to all—we must care for the world’s treasures, just as the Monuments Men did when they stepped forward to protect great artworks during World War II. It is a call to protect and care for important sites not just around the world, but in our own communities—I count Tudor Place among them.

This spring we explore the evolution of portraiture from a time when it involved substantial set up and time, to today, when the snap of a phone camera is all it takes to preserve a likeness. Special programs will examine historic portraits and silhouettes to illuminate what they tell us of their subjects and times past. In the garden, frames will be installed to inspire “selfies” that draw visitors into a discussion of how we portray self. Come experience this new way of looking at the landscape and your image within it!

In 2016, Tudor Place will celebrate the wonderful and uncommon occasion of a 200th anniversary! We are eagerly planning festive activities and commemorations throughout the year. We will be launching a new web page that will document these events, present stories from the 200 years of rich history revealed at this nationally recognized site, and highlight how it will evolve in the future. Keep your eyes on Tudor Place 1816-2016!

Sincerely,

Leslie C. Brinkley
Executive Director
Visitors strolling through the grounds inevitably admire Tudor Place’s stately oaks, breath-taking tulip poplars and, if touring the garden in spring, the many species of lovely magnolias. There is one tree that many walk past but few actually “see.” Those that do find the tree, usually as part of a guided tree tour, stand beneath it gazing up, puzzled as to what it is. Depending on the season, one can see a few branches with large fragrant white flowers while other branches are just finishing their long bloom of purple flowers similar in appearance to foxglove. Winter sees the tree covered in oval brown seed pods and on a few limbs, long brown seed pods measuring more than 6 inches in length. The tree resembles a Paulownia tomentosa (a native of China) but also a Catalpa bignoniodes (a tree native to the southeastern United States). In actuality, the tree is both—a Paulownia has taken up residence inside a Catalpa.

Many garden visitors are familiar with the story of the white oak located southeast of the main house which started as a seedling in a dead root of a black locust tree. Few, however, are familiar with this other pair of trees sharing a single space. While the locust tree disappeared as young Peter’s white oak grew, the Catalpa continued to survive despite the Paulownia’s best efforts to take over. Today, the Paulownia continues to grow and its expansion is cracking the main trunk of the Catalpa. Only a few seams of growth support the Catalpa limbs. It appears that the two trees have fused together, which makes saving the Catalpa a difficult task.

This pairing of trees, which when leafed out look very similar, is located along the service drive just across from a hedge of tree box south of the historic garage. While the Peter family was modernizing the site in 1914, the Catalpa stood southwest of the main house, a longstanding resident of the landscape. Photos from the late 19th and early 20th centuries show the tree in its maturity along with a very open landscape. On October 28th, 1930, Armistead Peter, Jr., described work in the garden done by Charles and Henry who were moving two clumps of wisteria, one of which was going down “by old catalpa tree, at S.W. clump of trees.” His son would describe the same tree thirty five years later using the same language “the old catalpa” in his book, Tudor Place, while describing a scene from his boyhood where a large pile of wood could be found along with a sleeping cat.

Following the Peter family’s diligent tradition of protecting the lives of the garden’s mature trees, the decision was made to preserve what is left of the Catalpa. After conversations with several arborists, the least intrusive method was chosen. The work, completed in February, required a tree crew to add a tension cable to the largest limb, long dead but a significant identifier in old photos, which was then attached to the Paulownia’s main trunk. The Paulownia was meanwhile pruned to allow more light to reach the Catalpa’s limbs. The work was completed by “Davey men” (as Armistead Peter, Jr., referred to Davey Trees when they worked on the site in the 1910s) who reused a portion of a black locust trunk to support the Catalpa limb after it was bolted. The root zone shared by the trees was fertilized, giving both needed nutrients to continue to support each other.

No one knows when the Paulownia began growing or why it was left there. Inevitably, the Catalpa’s trunk will fully break apart, and it will no longer support itself. This tree that once shaded a sleeping cat and later a pigeon fly pen has stood at Tudor Place for more than 150 years. It faces a short future but will long be remembered fondly as “the old catalpa”.

—Suzanne Bouchard, Director of Gardens and Grounds

Below, left to right:
Before the Paulownia, December 1984.
Cabling the Catalpa limb, February 2015.
The Old Catalpa ca. 1890, Courtesy of Miss Martha Custis Peter.
Plaster in the Parlor

Following a period of heat loss during an extreme cold snap in 2014, a large bubble, approximately 3-feet in diameter, and several smaller bubbles appeared in the northeast corner of the 15-foot high plaster Parlor ceiling. The critical question with any sudden change in the appearance of a plaster ceiling is whether it is at risk of falling; staff immediately conducted an inspection of the damage and began to monitor the ceiling for visible changes in the size or shape of the damaged area so that objects, the public, and staff would be safe.

The problem stems from an early 20th-century repair. The Parlor ceiling, along with other ceilings and the walls in the Dining Room, Library (now the Visitor Center) and several others spaces, were covered with a thin canvas during the 1914 renovations undertaken by Armistead Peter, Jr. Canvas, a typical treatment for old plaster walls at the time, was used to cover an uneven, cracked, or otherwise visually unappealing plaster surface, and was then painted. Unfortunately, years of paint accumulation results in an impermeable canvas coating which can trap moisture, causing the canvas to delaminate and curl. In the Parlor no source for water infiltration could be identified, but adhesive failure, exacerbated by the tension placed on the outer face of the canvas by layers of dried paint, was suspect. What caused the delamination to occur suddenly was unclear, but a severe drop in temperature in the space in the weeks preceding the damage appears to be the likely culprit. A week of extreme freezing temperatures resulted in a frozen gas meter cutting off heat to the building for the better part of two days, and this may have been enough to exacerbate the failure of an already weakened adhesive system.

While the damage appeared to be related to canvas delamination, the area was still monitored carefully and treated cautiously in case the plaster itself should be at risk of collapse. Traditional plaster is installed in three layers on wood or metal lath that serves as the structural backbone of the system. A rough coat of plaster is pressed onto the lath and oozes between gaps in the material, forming keys that hold the plaster in place. Key breakage is a frequent mode of plaster failure, and when it happens in a ceiling the plaster becomes a victim of its own weight and can fail dramatically.

Since it was necessary to empty the Parlor of furnishings and objects to complete the ceiling repair, a plan was put in place to complete the repairs in January 2015 when the museum was closed for its annual cleaning. The ceiling was continually monitored so that any changes in condition could immediately be addressed. Once the room was empty and plastic covered the doors and light fixtures, Stephen Ortado of Historic Structures began the repair by cutting away the delaminated areas of canvas. He confirmed that the plaster itself was sound, with only minimal loss of some areas of finish coat that had pulled away with the canvas. Because only delaminated areas of canvas were removed, in an effort to conserve as much original material as possible, the areas of loss were filled and leveled so that they blend with the remainder of the ceiling. Stephen accomplished this...
by applying a plaster skim coat and embedding fabric mesh in the repair areas to both strengthen and fill them. Staff examined the original canvas to determine what type of paint had been applied to it. Both calcimine and oil paints were used on the ceilings, and both required consideration when repainting, as modern latex paints do not adhere properly to either without proper preparation. Because the existing paint was found to be oil-based, Stephen and his crew applied a new oil-based coating to the entire flat portion of the ceiling to hide and blend the repairs. The result is an invisible repair that preserves the majority of original ceiling fabric and restores the beauty of this spectacular room.

—Jessica Zullinger, Director of Preservation

Spring into the Museum Shop!

Welcome the springtime and warmer weather after a snowy winter by visiting the Museum Shop! New merchandise inspired by the garden includes teapots, tea cups, and honey and jams to enjoy on the terrace during a warm spring day. For your garden, you’ll find many varieties of heirloom seeds from Tudor Place ($3 each). Garden enthusiasts will also enjoy stunning photographs and illustrations in The Bartlett Book of Garden Elements and City of Trees.

Visit the shop Tuesday – Saturday 10-4 or Sunday 12-4, order online at tudorplace.org, or call the shop at 202.965.0400. www.tudorplace.org.

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Special Member And Landmark Society Programs

18th-Century Style and Taste—English and French Ideas in America
James F. Caughman

Wednesday, April 22, 2015 | 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. (Lunch follows lecture)
Join well known lecturer James F. Caughman in an exploration of the 18th-century Age of Refinement and its influence on American design. From the grandeur of Baroque and fantasies of Rococo to the nobility of Neoclassicism, Mr. Caughman explores the impulses from France and England that American artists and makers absorbed, and how they molded them to reflect the ideals of the new republic.

Formerly an international marketing executive for Kohler Interiors and Executive Director of the Washington Design Center, Mr. Caughman developed historic product licensing programs with Historic Charleston, Colonial Williamsburg and the Stately Homes of England, Scotland and Ireland.

This event is generously sponsored by Geppetto's Catering.
• Landmark Society Members $15
• Member, $25 Non-Member, $35
• Registration is required and must be received by Monday, April 20.

SPECIAL EVENT: “The Q&A Café with Patrick O’Connell”

Thursday, May 21, 2015 | 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
This May, prominent Washingtonian and Georgetown resident Carol Joynt will take her renowned interview program “on the road” to Tudor Place. Carol will conduct an extended interview with Patrick O’Connell, Executive Chef and Proprietor at the Inn at Little Washington. Mr. O’Connell’s new book, “The Inn at Little Washington: A Magnificent Obsession,” tells the story of the Inn’s remarkable 36-year transformation from a rural garage to the sumptuous country house hotel it is today. Join us for lunch provided by Susan Gage, a specialty cocktail created by Patrick himself, and a lively interview on the South Lawn.
• Individual: $60
• Individual with Book: $110

Silhouettes to Selfies

Thursday, June 4, 2015 | 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Snap a few photos of the garden in full-bloom, sip a specialty cocktail, and explore portraiture over time. In conjunction with our spring installation, “Silhouettes to Selfies,” Tudor Nights will highlight how the art of capturing one’s likeness has changed over the past two centuries. Although the museum is a “no-picture zone,” cameras are welcome in the gardens and Dower House!
• Age 21 +
• Members: Free
• Nonmembers: $20

Join the Legacy Society and Become a Lasting Guardian of Tudor Place!
The Legacy Society recognizes individuals who make a commitment to the preservation of America’s history by including Tudor Place in their estate plans. Members of The Legacy Society ensure this National Historic Landmark will educate visitors for generations to come!

Individuals can make a meaningful gift to Tudor Place through a wide range of planned giving options. Your gift can be customized to fit your philanthropic needs.

Please contact Mary-Michael Wachur at 202.965.0400, x. 104 or mwachur@tudorplace.org if you...
• Already included Tudor Place as a beneficiary in your will,
• Are interested in learning how to name Tudor Place as a beneficiary in your will, or
• Would like more information on a Charitable Remainder Trust, gift of insurance, or an IRA.

No matter where you are in your estate and financial planning, Tudor Place can help you create a special historic legacy.
Tudor Place Foundation, Inc.
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Education Programs this Spring!
A full list of Spring 2015 programs for adults and children is available online at www.tudorplace.org

Slow Art Day Special Tour & Group Picnic
Saturday, April 11
10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. or 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.
Enjoy. Art. Slowly. This is the goal of Slow Art Day, a worldwide event you can be a part of at Tudor Place. Your tour entails examining four works of art for 15 minutes each, followed by a friendly picnic lunch and discussion with fellow participants. No expertise needed! Bring your own brown bag lunch, or enjoy a delicious boxed lunch we will provide from a popular local eatery, pre-payable when you register.

Tree Fest: Majestic, Green & Growing
Saturday, April 25 | 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Celebrate 19 new trees and some very old ones with your family at Tudor Place, one of D.C.’s greenest spots! Enjoy guided, kid-friendly garden tours, crafts, planting, games, and two sing-along performances by the acclaimed group, Nature Jams. Shop for Mother's Day or spring planting at our plant sale, featuring seeds, heirloom specimens from the estate, and other finds connected to spring growth.

Mother's Day “Silhouette” Tea for Young Families
Sunday, May 10, 2015 | 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Celebrate Mother’s Day together with tea, and take home a traditional keepsake portrait to remember your special day. Adults and children ages 5 to 12 will enjoy period teas, finger sandwiches and kid-friendly sandwiches for the little ones, and delicious desserts. During tea, have your silhouettes cut by a skilled local artisan. After tea, your guided, family-friendly tour of the 1816 Landmark mansion’s entertaining spaces includes a look at 200-year-old silhouettes of the first children to grow up at Tudor Place.
Organized in conjunction with the site-wide spring installation Silhouettes to Selfies, your tea includes a silhouette of each participant to take home, matted and ready for an 8×10 frame. For ages 5 and older.

Mother's Day “Silhouette” Tea
Sunday, May 10, 2015 | 2:30 - 4:30 p.m.
Celebrate Mother’s Day together with tea, and take home a traditional keepsake portrait to remember your special day. Adults and children ages 12 and older will enjoy period teas, finger sandwiches, and delicious desserts, and have your silhouettes cut by a skilled local artisan. After tea, your guided tour of the 1816 Landmark mansion’s entertaining spaces includes reflections on portraiture over time, including 200-year-old silhouettes of the first children to grow up at Tudor Place.
Organized in conjunction with the site-wide spring installation Silhouettes to Selfies, your tea includes a silhouette of each participant to take home, matted and ready for an 8×10 frame. For ages 12 and older.