



Count de Custine, Photo of Original at Versailles.

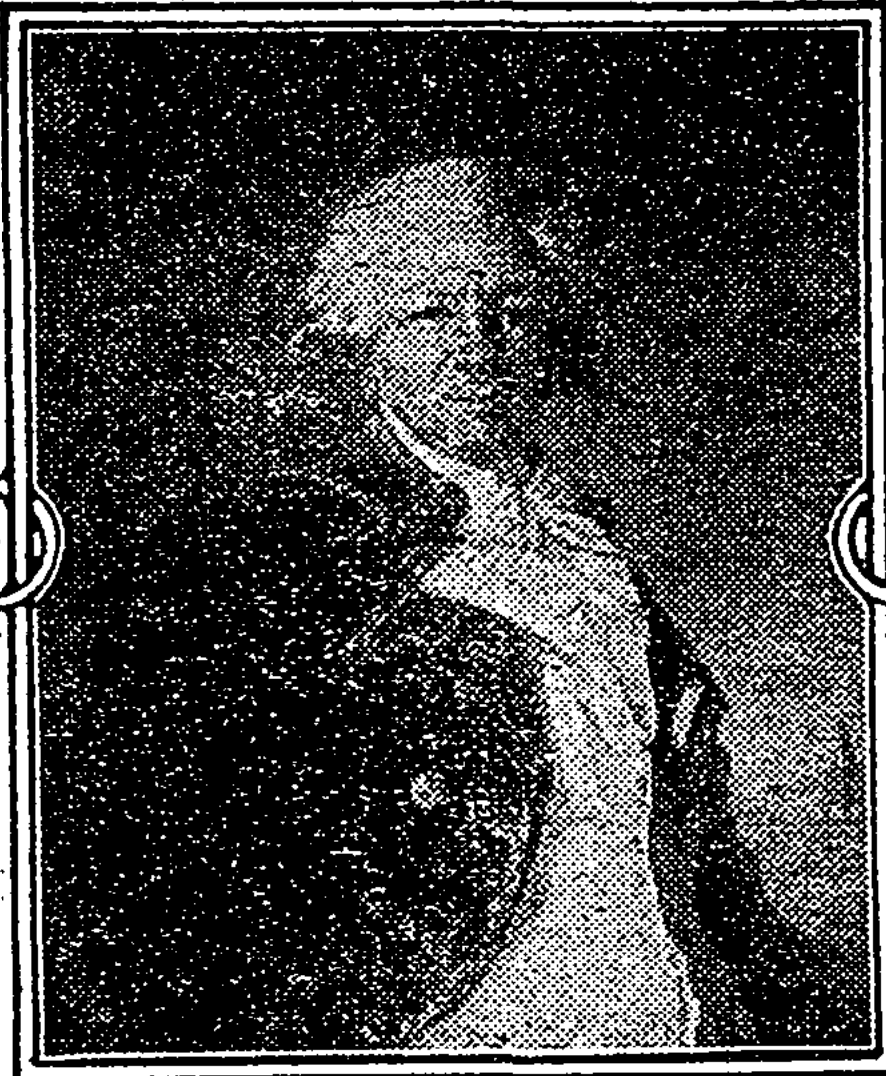
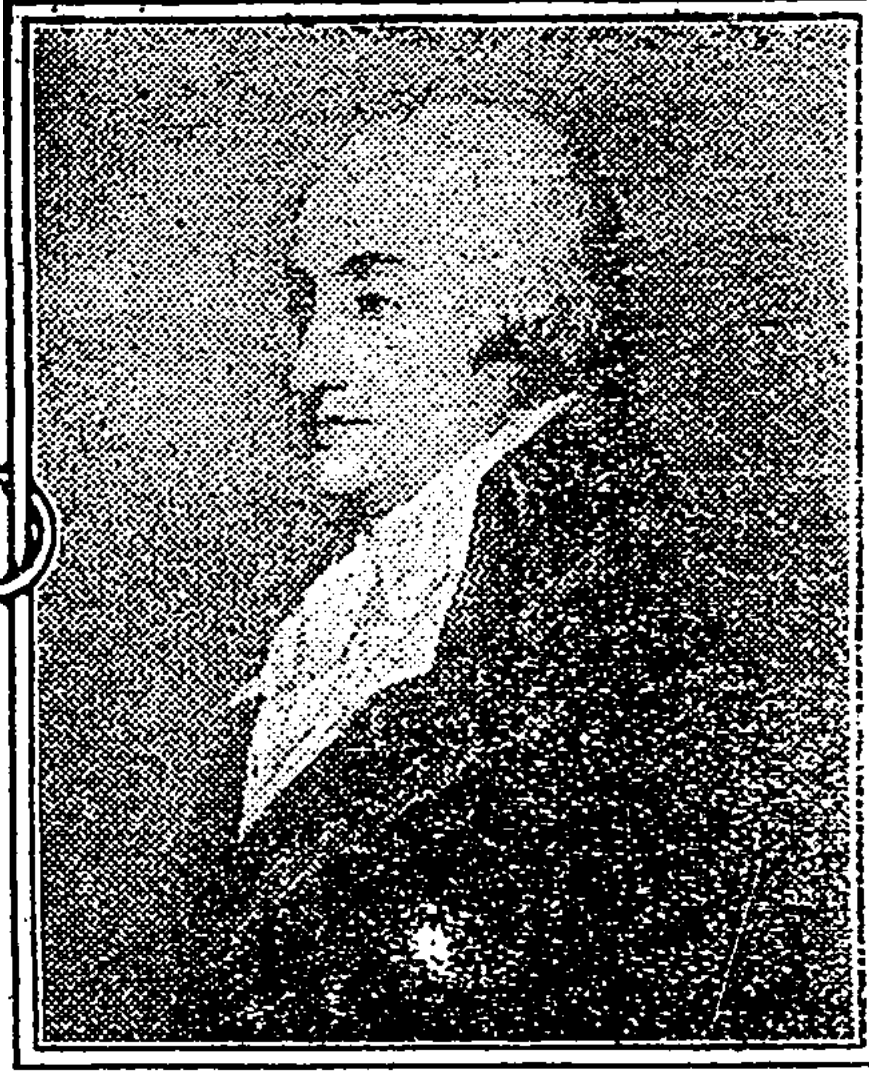


Photo of Rosenthal's Painting of Bougainville, Copied from an Original Owned by Countess St. Sauver-Bougainville



Viscount de Viomenil, Photo of Original at Versailles.



Duke de Lauzun, (Biron,) Photo of Original at Versailles.

## Portraits in Independence Hall Under Suspicion

### About Thirty Already Have Been Thrown Out as Spurious by the Philadelphia Art Jury Which Is Investigating Them

**I**F it is true that a statesman is a politician who has died, it would seem to be equally true in Philadelphia that after he has been dead long enough he will come back into politics by means of his effigy if it happens to hang in Independence Hall's collection of 342 portraits of the nation's founders and early defenders. The old slogan to keep the tariff and the Police Department and the Fire Department and the school teachers out of politics may have to be stretched to include the signers of the Declaration of Independence. For the present controversy over the authenticity of some of those portraits surely has some of the earmarks of a political row. The political feature has just been emphasized by the enactment of an ordinance by the City Council creating a new political body to take over the jurisdiction of all the pictures and relics in Independence Hall, thereby ousting the official Art Jury which is now examining the portraits to see what ones should be thrown out as spurious or otherwise unfit. Something over thirty have been marked for elimination so far, and the work is hardly under way. In the meantime the ordinance, which would block this work and put Independence Hall and its contents more under the control of the city politicians than at present, awaits the approval of the Mayor. Philadelphians, in various organizations and as individuals who have any regard for the sacredness of the country's chief shrine of patriotism, will make a vigorous fight against the measure.

Aside from politics, the principal instigator of the attack on the doubtful portraits themselves seems to be Charles Henry Hart of New York. And, on the other hand, the person who takes the attack as a personal matter is Albert Rosenthal, a Philadelphia artist, who has painted 149 of the 342 pictures, including about thirty portraits of French army and navy officers who came over to America and fought for Washington in the Revolution.

The fact that the investigation seems to have taken the form of a personal drive against an individual artist is regretted by the Art Jury, for nothing of the sort was intended. Some of the portraits have been under suspicion for years, and now is a good time to get at the facts, if possible, for the interior of the building is being renovated and repainted and all the pictures, good, bad, and indifferent, true and false, are stacked up on the floor, where it is easy to get at them. How many of them will be returned to the walls is more or less of a burning question. It is significant that the catalogue of the collection has just been withdrawn from public sale. The vacancies in the collection after the work of elimination is completed will be filled by framed tablets in memory of the men whose supposed pictures have been removed, uniform in size with the portraits that are left.

Joseph E. Widener is the President of the Art Jury. John F. Lewis, President of the Academy of Fine Arts; Eli Price, and Hugh H. Breckenridge, an artist, who has a group of pictures in the present academy exhibit, are the members of the jury appointed as a special committee to rule upon the genuineness of the portraits in Independence Hall. The trouble they have found so far is that Philadelphia, through the various committees and commissions which have had their turns at looking after Independence Hall, and in the course of various patriotic revivals, such as that of the Centennial of 1876, has shown more zeal than judgment in the forming of its historic portrait gallery. Somebody said it would be a fine thing to have all the signers. Great idea! And the portraits of signers poured in and were welcomed, regardless of credentials, and so on through various other groups of American worthies. Sometimes a silhouette, supposed to be that of somebody's distinguished great-grandfather, would be the basis of a manufactured portrait labeled with that great-grandfather's name and sent down to the hall. It would be taken in and given a place on the wall.

Not even the most staunch defender

of the collection will claim that every picture in it lives up to what Thomas Carlyle said a historical portrait ought to be. Carlyle's opinion on the matter was incorporated in a paper by the same Charles H. Hart, who is active in the present controversy, on "Frauds in Historical Portraiture," which was printed in a recent report of the American Historical Association to the Smithsonian Institution. Carlyle said:

"Often I have found a portrait superior in real instruction to half a dozen written biographies, as biographies are written. In all my poor historical investigations it has been, and always is, one of the most primary wants to procure a bodily likeness of the personage inquired after, a good portrait, if such exists; failing this, even an indifferent, if sincere, one. In short, any representation made by a faithful human creature of that face and figure, which he saw with his eyes and which I can never see with mine, is more valuable to me and much better than none at all. It is not the untrue imaginary picture of a man and his work that I want, but the actual, natural likeness, true as the face itself; nay, truer in a sense, which the artist, if there is one, might help to give and the botcher never can."

"Many of the best known portraits purporting to be authentic likenesses of our great men and women are nothing more nor less than apocryphal," declared Hart. "Not only are many of these portraits not authentic, as likenesses of the individuals whose names are given to them, but in innumerable cases portraits of other well-known persons have been substituted for them, so that the number of so-called portraits that have been proved false is well calculated to astonish one unacquainted with the facts.

"There are three distinct classes of spurious portraits, which may be classed under the equity headings of fraud, accident and mistake. First, those that are frauds per se, consisting in the publishing of the genuine portrait of one man with the name of another with the intention to deceive; second, those that have been produced by inadequate means or by unskilled hands; and, third, those which are erroneously named by mistake or from insufficient investigation and proof of authenticity. The first and second classes consist largely of engravings and other reproductions, while the last consists, for the most part, of paintings and sculptures, which, fortunately, do not offend so frequently."

Referring specifically to pictures in Independence Hall, Hart said: "A wholesale deception of a serious character was perpetrated something over a generation ago, for the gratification of a very honorable gentleman residing in New York, who had no intention to impose upon anyone, but who wanted effigies of all the signers of the Declaration of Independence, although of a number of them there were no authentic portraits known. But this apparently insurmountable obstacle was overcome and in due time there appeared etched portraits by H. B. Hall of Francis Lightfoot Lee, William Whipple, George Taylor, James Smith, Lyman Hall, John Hart, Caesar Rodney, Button Gwinnett, John Penn, Benjamin Harrison and Carter Braxton, which today are looked upon by the uninitiated as genuine portraits. What is most deplorable in this connection is that fake portraits of at least four of the signers of the Declaration of Independence have gained admission within the sacred portals of the room where the document was adopted. On the walls hang effigies, recently admitted, inscribed with the names of John Hart and of George Taylor, neither of which has the slightest warrant of authenticity, while others of William Whipple and Benjamin Harrison have been there a longer time without any better warrant."

The point on which Rosenthal, the artist, comes into the fight with the most vigor is that of the thirty French paintings which he sold to the City of Philadelphia upon his return from Paris several years ago for \$7,500. For his previous paintings of something over one hundred Americans he had received from the city \$26,000.

"I was born in a studio, my father's



Albert Rosenthal, Who Painted 149 of the Portraits in Independence Hall.



studio, in this city," said Rosenthal the other day. "My father was an artist and engraver, and my earliest boyhood recollections are of historic portraits of early American statesmen and soldiers. It was my father's work and hobby to hunt down the originals and to reproduce from authentic material wherever he could find it. It became my work, too, and I have been at it from boyhood. I am 54 now. The greater part of my historical portrait work has been for the City of Philadelphia, and I consider it has been constructive. When I was a young man I went abroad and studied for three years under Gérôme in Paris to better equip myself for the historical work I intended to do.

"Since then I have been steadily at work for Independence Hall and other institutions. My portrait of William R. Day is in the State Department at Washington. Chief Justice Fuller, by me, is in the robing room of the United States Supreme Court. Attorney General Moody's portrait, also by me, is in the Department of Justice at Washington. Chief Justice White and all the present members of the Supreme Court have sat to me, and I have their portraits in readiness for the National Government when the proper time comes. The portraits of the Chief Justices of Pennsylvania at Harrisburg are all mine, and so are most of the Mayors in the City Hall.

"In 1906 I suggested to Chief Justice James G. Mitchell of this State, who

was also head of the Independence Hall Commission at that time, that we should have the portraits of the Frenchmen who had helped us in the Revolution. He approved and I went to France and got them. Some I copied from originals at Versailles, others I got from original portraits and miniatures in the possession of descendants. This undertaking was so heartily approved by Ambassador Jusserand of France that he gave me letters to the Foreign Office and to M. Nolhac, the curator of the museum at Versailles, and the latter afforded me every facility for the work.

"Now, for reasons I cannot fathom, the authenticity of some of these French pictures is being questioned. This is partly due to the ignorance of Wilfrid Jordan, the present curator of Independence Hall. He wrote to Versailles asking for information. He asked about some pictures which I had not painted at all, which had been done in this country by Peale, and had never been in France, but always in the Independence Hall collection, which Jordan is supposed to know something about. When he learned from France that such pictures were not at Versailles he jumped at the conclusion that I had offered something which was not genuine.

"By way of answer to these charges and criticisms I have sent to Hampton L. Carson, the present Chairman of the Independence Hall Commission, the following itemized statement covering each

of the French pictures:

Chevalier du Chambray, I did not paint. It is an original by C. W. Peale.

Custine I painted in the Versailles Gallery from a painting by Court.

D'Aboville, from a portrait owned by Count D'Aboville, Lieutenant in the French Army, Château Touane, France, who was kind enough to send the original to me in Paris.

Armand I copied from the C. W. Peale portrait owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Bougainville I painted from an original painting owned by Countess St. Sauver-Bougainville in her apartments in Paris.

Chastelleux I did not paint. This, I believe, is by C. W. Peale.

Dillon I copied from a portrait in the Versailles Gallery, by Belloz.

Dumas was from a portrait in the Versailles Gallery by Mme. Desnos.

Duportail I did not paint. This may be a C. W. Peale.

D'Estaing is from the Versailles Gallery portrait, by Lebrun.

Fersen is from a photograph from an original owned in Sweden, for which I was indebted to the well-known dealer and collector of Americana, M. Meyer, Rue Blanche.

Gouvion; the original of this portrait was brought to my studio in Paris by a descendant, one M. Cordier of Toul, France.

Guichen I copied from a portrait in the Versailles Gallery, by Guerin.

Of William Henry I know nothing, as I did not paint the portrait.

Lauzun I copied from a portrait in the Versailles Gallery.

Louis XVI. was one of the several portraits in the Versailles Gallery.

Luzerne I did not paint.

De Noailles I painted from a contemporary print given me at the Château Maintenon, France, by the present Duke de Noailles.

Du Plessis I purchased directly from the Marquise du Plessis, in the Hôpital de Picpus, Rue Vaugirard, Paris. While loath to part with it, when she learned where it was to be placed she was pleased to permit me to purchase it.

Rochambeau, the elder, I painted from the original miniature owned by the Countess Rochambeau, who was visiting the Marquise, her mother-in-law, when I was at Château Rochambeau; she had it from her husband, Count Rochambeau. Rochambeau, the younger is from the original in the Château Rochambeau, near Vendome, France.

Treville I copied from the painting by Rouget in the Versailles Gallery.

Vergennes I copied from a portrait in the Versailles Gallery.

Viomenil is from a painting by de Laval in the Versailles Gallery.

Volney I did not paint.