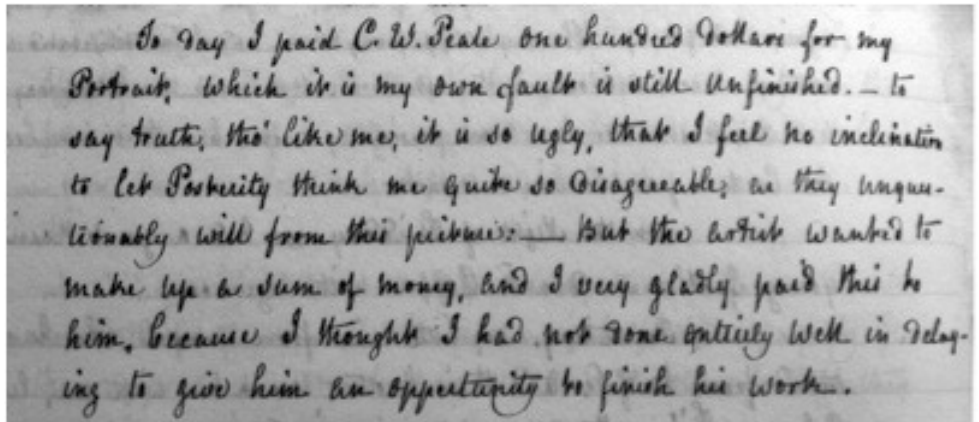


Previsit Activity #2

Deborah Logan's Portrait

You read about Deborah Logan and her diaries when you learned about Stenton.

Deborah was a friend and neighbor of Charles Willson Peale when he lived at Belfield. In 1815, Deborah was visiting Peale and he offered to paint her portrait. We know this



To say I paid C. W. Peale one hundred dollars for my Portrait, which it is my own fault is still unfinished. — to say truth, tho' like me, it is so ugly, that I feel no inclination to let Posterity think me quite so disagreeable, as they unquestionably will from this picture. — But the artist wanted to make up a sum of money, and I very gladly paid this to him, because I thought I had not done entirely well in delaying to give him an opportunity to finish his work.

because she wrote about it in her diary. Deborah was 54 years old. Let's look at a copy of her diary entry on Saturday, July 5, 1822. Below it is written out for you to read more easily.

Today I paid C.W. Peale one hundred dollars for my Portrait, which it is my own fault is still unfinished. To say truth, tho' like me, it is so ugly, that I feel no inclination to let Posterity think me quite so disagreeable as they unquestionably will from this picture. But the artist wanted to make up a sum of money and I very gladly paid this to him because I thought I had not done entirely well in delaying to give him an opportunity to finish his work

When Deborah worries about “Posterity,” she means that she is worried about what people in the future (like us today!) will think about her “ugly” portrait. She feels bad that she has kept the artist waiting and unable to finish his work.

On April 28, 1825, she wrote

I had intended going to town this morning, after so long an interval to sit again for my Portrait, which has remained so many years unfinished in my kind friend Charles Peale's Painting Room (the fault not his but mine). The Picture is paid for, or I would not have done the good and amiable old artist injustice. Well, the rain kept me at home today.

Deborah writes that it is her fault - not the “good and amiable” (friendly) artist's fault – that the portrait is still not finished. It had been 3 years since she paid for it, and 10 years since Peale first offered to paint her portrait! The next day, she went to his studio to sit for the artist one final time.

On June 25, 1825 the painting was finally complete

Cousin brought home my picture, and advised me to burn it. She said she would not consent to go down to Posterity in such a character, or rather caricature. It does not vex me much, but to be sure it is inexpressibly ugly. I think everyone present condemned it.

Deborah compared the portrait to a caricature – or a cartoon. She said it did not “vex” or bother her too much, but it was definitely ugly and everyone in the room agreed. In her final entry about the painting, she wrote

My Portrait (looking at me) stuck over the clock in the Library is a very churlish thing - my kind friend and neighbor has characterized me sadly. I hope Posterity will not suppose I had such a disagreeable expression. I believe I shall be tempted to put it out of the way altogether.

Deborah hung her portrait in the library at Stenton. She writes that she has thought about “putting it out of the way” – to throw it away or get rid of it. But she did not.

In 1934, Deborah Logan’s great-granddaughter, Maria Dickinson Logan, read the diaries and made a decision. She took down the portrait and burned it in the fireplace! She believed her great-grandmother never liked the portrait anyway. So unfortunately, the original painting no longer exists. However, there is a copy of the painting which hangs at Stenton in the Blue Lodging Room today.

Questions:

How much did it cost Deborah Logan to have her portrait painted? _____

How many years did it take? _____

Why do you think Deborah Logan worried about Posterity?

Do you think it was right or wrong for her great-granddaughter to burn Deborah Logan’s portrait? Why? What would you have done?

Vocabulary words:

Posterity: Future generations of people.

Churlish: Harsh or unpleasant.