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FROM ARTISAN TO ARTIST: JOHN FRAZEE AND THE
POLITICS OF CULTURE IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA.
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, PH.D., 1978

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1978

FROM ARTISAN TO ARTIST:
JOHN FRAZEE AND THE
POLITICS OF CULTURE IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

by

LINDA HYMAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in History in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
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1978

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I The Artisan I	14
II The Artisan II	51
III The Artist I	81
IV The Artist II	117
V The Architect I	159
VI The Architect II	194
CONCLUSION	228
ILLUSTRATIONS	240
BIBLIOGRAPHY	280

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1.	Asher B. Durand: Portrait of John Frazee, Collection Stephen C. Millett.	240
2.	Henry Shumway: Miniatures of John and Lydia Frazee (mid-1830's).	241
3.	John Frazee: Self Portrait Bust (20th-century bronze cast after 1827 plaster), Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.	242
4.	W and J Frazee: Mantelpiece (1818), Telfair Museum, Savannah	243
5.	W and J Frazee: Relief panel (detail of 4).	244
6.	W and J Frazee: Mantelpiece (1818), Telfair Museum, Savannah	245
7.	W and J Frazee: Relief panel (detail of 6).	246
8.	W and J Frazee: Monument to Sarah Haynes (1821), Trinity Church, New York	247
9.	John Frazee: Monument to Peter Schermerhorn (1826), St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, New York	248
10.	John Frazee: Monument to John Wells (1825), St. Paul's Chapel, New York.	249
11.	John Frazee: Grave of Jane Probasco Frazee (1832), South River, New Jersey.	250
12.	John Frazee: John Jay (1832), United States Congress	251
13.	John Frazee: John Jay, City Hall, New York	252
14.	John Frazee: Bishop John Henry Hobart, New-York Historical Society.	253

15.	John Frazee: Nathaniel Bowditch (1834), Boston Athenaeum	254
16.	John Frazee: Daniel Webster (1834), Boston Athenaeum	255
17.	John Frazee: Thomas H. Perkins (1834), Boston Athenaeum	256
18.	John Frazee: John Lowell (1835), Boston Athenaeum	257
19.	John Frazee: Joseph Story (1835), Boston Athenaeum	258
20.	John Frazee: William Prescott (1835), Boston Athenaeum	259
21.	John Frazee: John Marshall (1834), Boston Athenaeum	260
22.	John Frazee: John Marshall (plaster) The Newark Museum	261
23.	John Frazee: Andrew Jackson (1834), Princeton University Art Museum.	262
24.	John Frazee: George Griswold (about 1843), Old Lyme Historical Society.	263
25.	John Frazee: Architectural drawings for New York Custom House (1837), New York Public Library.	264
26.	John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument: Elevation (1848), Library of Congress.	265
27.	John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument: Perspective View (1848), Library of Congress.	266
28.	John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument: Plan of the Rotunda and Terrace (1848), Library of Congress.	267
29.	John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument: Section (1848), Library of Congress.	268

30.	John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing relief panels to right of entrance depicting episodes from the life of Washington	269
31.	John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing relief panels to left of entrance depicting episodes from the life of Washington	270
32.	John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing Statue of History atop the dome	271
33.	John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing Statue of George Washington seated between two youths .	272
34.	John Frazee: Detail of 27 showing one of "four recumbent horses on the pedestals at extreme angles of the terrace".	273
35.	John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing part of exterior of dome "characterized by its thirteen ribs...and thirteen star lights of glass".	274
36.	Attributed to John Frazee: Luman Reed (1830-35), New-York Historical Society	275
37.	Giuseppe Ceracchi: John Jay, United States Department of State	276
38.	Giuseppe Ceracchi: George Clinton, New-York Historical Society.	277
39.	Thomas Crawford: Mary Hone Schermerhorn (Rome, 1837), New-York Historical Society. . . .	278
40.	Horatio Greenough: Marquis de Lafayette (Paris, 1831), New-York Historical Society . . .	279

INTRODUCTION

In recent years much has been written about eighteenth and nineteenth century American art by art historians or antiquarians. In the last decade, for example, several excellent critical biographies examine and evaluate individual artists. Among them are Jules Prown: John Singleton Copley; David Huntington: Frederick Edwin Church; and Theodore Stebbins, Jr.: Martin Johnson Heade. Other work, particularly that of Barbara Novak, attempts to identify and analyse certain stylistic aspects of an overall nature, such as the so-called "luminist" tradition. And, beginning with Oliver Larkin's Art and Life in America over twenty-five years ago, we have seen a large number of general surveys, which include two excellent books on the history of American sculpture: William Gerdt's: American Neoclassic Sculpture; and Wayne Craven: Sculpture in America.

Traditional historians have also interested themselves in cultural and social history--the family, the city, religion, education. A significant addition has been the study of social history of American artists by two scholars trained as cultural historians: Neil Harris's The Artist in American Society and Lillian Miller's

Patrons and Patriotism, both published in 1966. Harris sees American artists as a social class and traces the evolution of this class from 1790 to 1860, the period he identifies as "the formative years." The book is especially valuable in relating American art to such specific phenomena as European travel, professional communities, and Transcendentalism. Miller's work, also covering the antebellum period, is primarily a study of patronage. There are excellent sections on art and the federal government and also on art communities in various key cities. The book is also an attempt to locate the "taste" of various patrons and politicians.

Both Harris and Miller deal with their topics in essentially a survey manner. No attempts are made to treat specific cultural problems within the social nexus, although it is clear that tensions and ambiguities arise between the artists and their public(s) and also among artists themselves. Tantalizing questions emerge from these books which have yet to be answered. Are there identifiable patterns of thought and behavior that characterize American artists as a separate class? How did artists relate to the rest of the community--did they engage in business, political, self-promotional, educational, or familial activities? Thus far American artists have been studied in relation to their own

professional communities--the academies and art unions. Little attention has been paid to other institutions which better define the artist in relation to the cultural matrix.

One of the most important questions derives from the simple fact that America had no place for professional artists in the early years. Because of the teachings of a luxury-denying Calvinism, and the problems involved in providing the necessities of daily life, fine art was seen as superfluous, and often even harmful. There was, however, from the earliest days, an ample market for hand-made products. The crafts that flourished on this side of the Atlantic included those of the weaver, the cooper, the dyer, the potter, the silversmith, the printer, the painter, the mason, and the stonecutter. Painters used their brushes and pigments to decorate houses, signs, furniture, coaches, and other objects. Occasionally they painted portraits. Wood carvers made ships' figureheads and furniture; stonecutters made gravestones. Few artisans trained as painter or carvers ever departed from useful, practical, community-approved work as makers of necessary items.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the category of "art" as separate from "craft" slowly began to emerge. The possibility arose, for the

first time in American history, for people to become professional artists--to serve a function and role and assume an identity fundamentally different from that of artisan. Many of these early professional artists had never experienced artisanal activity. They came--like Washington Allston, John Trumbull or Samuel F. B. Morse--from educated, wealthy, often sophisticated backgrounds. Being an artist was for such men an extension of being an aristocrat. But what of those born and raised within the artisan tradition who, at the point when it became possible, decided to become artists? Was this transition possible within the social structure? If so, how was it effectuated? And how did the artisan-artists fare in relation to the higher-born gentlemen-artists?

The transition from artisan to artist took place during the same years that America experienced the profound changes accompanying the shift from pre-industrial to industrial, from rural to urban society. This is not mere coincidence. It is exactly the pre-industrial rural artisan who was often transplanted into a commercialized, industrializing urban setting. How did this affect the life, thought, and especially the work of the artisan-artist? How did he interact with and possibly create his own changes in his environment? E. P. Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class

discusses the radicalization of British artisans after the Industrian Revolution. Are there parallel examples of American artisans, and in particular artisan-artists, engaged in radical political activity?

As the category and actual profession of artists developed during the nineteenth century, so too did various literary images of artists. Such imagery outlines for us certain stereotypes pertaining to artists, and these stereotypes can be seen as representing the idea of art and artists in the popular consciousness. Exactly how accurate were the images and roles ascribed to American artists? Emerson and the Transcendentalists emphasized the intrinsic moral value of art. They cherished their view of the ideal artist, viewing him as a gifted messenger or priest able to transmit and translate the beauty of nature for all mankind. The American artist, emphasized Emerson, must exist away from the petty associations of daily life, becoming not only a priest but also a hermit. Emerson wrote: "The artist who is to produce a work which is to be admired not by his friends or his townspeople, or his contemporaries, but by all men; and which is to be more beautiful to the eye in proportion to its culture, must disindividualize himself, and be a man of no party, and no manner, and no age, but one through whom the soul of

all men circulates, as the common air through his lungs."¹ One wonders if this Emersonian ideal, this highly moral yet disindividualized artist, revealing all nature to all men, ever existed on the banks of the Charles or in the streets of New York. And further, if "Nature paints the best part of the picture, carves the best part of the statue, builds the best part of the house....," what were all those serious people doing with their brushes and chisels?

Another set of images, more popular than the Emersonian, was also involved with the definition of the artist as super-human, though now allied with the forces of evil rather than good. This is the figure developed by Hawthorne, Melville, and many lesser-known but widely read writers, and appearing in Hawthorne's "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837), "Edward Randolph's Portrait" (1844), Melville's Pierre (1852), and elsewhere. Portraitists are cast as magicians or seers, with powers of prophecy emerging in the act and manner in which they seem compelled to characterize their sitters. The finished products then become symbols of an evil or at least dangerous future situation, which only the artist has been able to see by studying the faces before him. His hand is not necessarily in his own control; one senses that a greater power, a mystical

force, possesses the artist and compels him to presage the evil that only he can see. In this literary genre we also see artists stereotyped as brooding, sensitive, isolated, delicate creatures who often exhibit distinct female characteristics. This artist-type appears in Emerson Bennett's The Artist's Bride (1856), Theodore Winthrop's Cecil Dreeme (1861), and especially Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1844). Owen Warland, the hero of this Hawthorne story, becomes something of a prototype. He is a frail and quiet young man, with a "diminutive frame," a "delicate ingenuity," and a "creative eccentricity." With a "low and slender voice," he announces, "Strength is an earthly monster. I make no pretensions to it. My force, whatever there may be of it, is altogether spiritual."²

Hawthorne often contrasts the passive, fragile, spiritual artists with craftsmen or artisans. Danforth, the blacksmith in "The Artist of the Beautiful," is seen as the "earthly giant." Owen, the young artist, complains that "his hard, brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me." And in the figure of the wood carver Drowne in Hawthorne's "Drowne's Wooden Image" (1846)³ we have an artisan whose very name (pronounced "drone") is symbolic of his rank as "worker." Drowne, the true self-taught artisan, exhibited from an

early age a typical Yankee ingenuity, an ability to imitate the human figure in whatever material he could find. Hawthorne calls this gift a "knack," saying "it would be too proud a word to call it genius." But, at the same time, Hawthorne sees Drowne as "the first American who is known to have attempted--in a very humble line, it is true--that art in which we can reckon so many names already distinguished, or rising to distinction." In this way we are told that the nineteenth century art of sculpture grew directly in America out of the eighteenth century art of carving, that it was the class of artisan that evolved directly into the class of artist.

Hawthorne attempted to explain what it was that kept Drowne, despite his skill of hand, from the ranks of true artists. His work lacked a certain "deep quality, be it of soul or intellect, which bestows life upon the lifeless and warmth upon the cold, and which, had it been present, would have made Drowne's wooden image instinct with spirit." But was it simply the lack of an "approximation to something beautiful" that prevented Drowne, and by association other artisans, from being accepted as true artists? What were the actual social circumstances?

Hawthorne's choice of a carver was most apt, for sculpture exhibits the clearest historical delineation

of the transition from artisan to artist. A good many of America's earliest professional sculptors were trained as masons, bricklayers, stonecutters, furniture makers, or in other useful work, and thus were early introduced to certain tools, materials and processes, as well as to physical labor itself, all forming the basis of their more artistic endeavor. It therefore seems a more fruitful exercise to investigate the problem of the artisan-artist transition through sculpture rather than painting. And it is also, it seems, prudent to begin such a study by investigating the life of one man. Such a monograph then becomes a "test case" against which the larger social and cultural issues can be measured. There have been few in-depth modern monographs on antebellum American sculptors, and certainly none from a social-historical perspective. This study is an attempt to begin such work.

— — —

Throughout the eighteenth century, particularly in shipbuilding centers along the East coast, the carving of wooden figureheads became a major occupation. Much more imaginative than stonecutting for graveyards, woodcarving developed into a serious expression of the American vernacular. It was only with the work of William Rush in Philadelphia, however, that this practice began

to parallel high art. Rush was an early participant in the classical revival. Many of his figures, such as "Schuykill Freed" or "Water Nymph and Bittern" (both c. 1828) combine certain classical forms with more American concepts. But William Rush, carving wooden figures in Philadelphia, was at the same time unique and part of an older custom. In any case, he died in 1833, and with his death ended the long tradition in America of carved monumental figures in wood.

Hezekiah Augur began his career as a sculptor in New Haven in the early 1820's. His marble bust of Professor Alexander Metcalf Fisher, exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1828, reveals his early interest in neoclassicism. Augur's most ambitious work, the two half-life size figures of "Jepthah and His Daughter" (1828-30), remains something of a phenomenon for these early years. Augur's last work was a marble bust of Chief Justice Ellsworth, commissioned by the Congressional Committee on the Library in 1834. He lived for nearly a quarter century thereafter.

For the most part, however, sculpture was practiced in these early years by foreigners imported for exactly that purpose. Between 1790 and 1805 numerous ornamental stone carvers and some mediocre sculptors, such as the Italian Giuseppi Iardella, were called to

these shores. Robert Morris had brought Tardella to Philadelphia to carve the architectural decorations for the house he was building. Others, many virtually unknown, arrived in other cities and advertised their abilities to carve almost anything for public or private use. Many of the better-known Italians came to America for the building of the U.S. Capitol. In 1805 Giuseppi Franzoni and Giovanni Andrei came to work with Benjamin Latrobe, the architect, on many of the sculptural decorations. When the British burned the Capitol in 1814, much of this work was destroyed. Another group of Italians arrived and soon found a good deal of employment restoring the Capitol. Among these were Giuseppi Valaperta, Enrico Causici and Luigi Persico. Others such as the Frenchman Nicholas Gevelot, the Saxon Ferdinand Pettich, and the Englishmen William Coffee and Robert Ball Hughes, emigrated to America where they worked as sculptors in the 1820's and '30's.

John Frazee (1790-1852) has often been called America's first native sculptor in marble. After apprenticeship as a bricklayer and stonecutter in rural New Jersey, he began designing and making gravestones primarily from marble. Entirely self-taught, Frazee moved to New York in 1818, where he operated as a self-employed marble carver, making and marketing gravestones, memorial

tablets, mantelpieces, and furniture. Within ten years he began garnering commissions to execute portrait busts in marble, and a decade later Frazee also assumed the role of architect. Frazee's mature life spanned the War of 1812, the New York Workingman's Movement, the Jackson administration, the Panic of 1837, and other significant events of the antebellum period. Most important to this study, the transition from artisan to artist was nothing less than the experienced reality of John Frazee's own life.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

- ¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Art," The Dial, vol. 1, no. 3 (January 1841).
- ²Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's Short Stories, ed. Newton Arvin (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), pp. 264-290.
- ³Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Complete Novels and Selected Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Modern Library, 1937), pp. 1116-1124.

CHAPTER I

THE ARTISAN, I

In 1834 William Dunlap, the "American Vasari," published his two-volume History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States. This series of critical biographies, composed over a two or three year period, was based largely on notes supplied by various artists about themselves, their colleagues, and their memories of deceased artists. Occasionally Dunlap added his own observations, and sometimes he interviewed an artist to uncover further information. This large and impressive book, then, was compiled through a combination of various methods, some of them more reliable factually than others.¹

One of the subjects treated by Dunlap, the sculptor John Frazee (1790-1852), composed his own autobiography and supplied these notes in a piecemeal fashion to Dunlap. There are several references to Frazee writing these notes in Dunlap's Diary, beginning on September 9, 1833, when Dunlap recorded a "call on John Frazee, who promises me notes of himself and his progress in Sculpture..." There are three additional entries in 1834, where Dunlap mentions Frazee's having submitted various portions of his autobiography.² Although Dunlap received

a 30,000-word manuscript from Frazee, he edited it down to a few terse pages, concentrating on the sculptor's later years and discussing several portrait busts commissioned by wealthy or influential citizens.³

Frazee's nephew by marriage, the publisher Sumner Lincoln Fairfield, printed Frazee's entire autobiographical manuscript in his North American Magazine the year after Dunlap's history appeared, possibly indicating that the family felt somewhat slighted by Dunlap's much shortened and edited version. The same piece also appeared in the New York and Richmond County Times in 1835, a shorter version in the New Brunswick Sunday Times in 1929, and a still shorter version (in fact, more akin to Dunlap) in The American Collector in 1946.⁴

Despite the fact that the complete unedited manuscript had been published twice in 1835, art historians after Dunlap attempted no further research and relied instead solely on Dunlap's rendition of Frazee's life and work. Thus Henry T. Tuckerman in 1867 and Lorado Taft in 1903 quote directly from Dunlap, and both condense even further what was written in the original. Taft, however, added a few typical turn-of-the-century aesthetic considerations, concluding that "Frazee's efforts were a connecting link between the early sporadic manifestations of sculptural art and the modern profession."⁵

Although, as we will see, Dunlap's omissions and choices of emphasis can be understood in nineteenth century terms, it is less easy to comprehend the subsequent twentieth-century handling of the original Frazee manuscript. The editor of The American Collector who republished a condensed version in 1946, wrote that it was based on a hand-written copy of 30,000 words "copied by hand from the now lost New York and Richmond County Free Press c. 1835" which had just been "rediscovered among the papers of Edwin Marsh in the New Jersey Historical Society." This hand-written copy in the Marsh Papers had been made two years earlier (1944) by Harold Alexander Frazee, at "Stepping Stones," the old Lawrence house in Rahway where John Frazee lived and worked until age twenty-one. Apparently Lawrence, who had always been proud of his young apprentice-protege, had kept the 1835 clipping from the New York and Richmond County Free Press which told the story, in the sculptor's own words, of his early life and success. Harold Frazee made four copies of this clipping, one going with the Marsh Papers to the New Jersey Historical Society, and the others being donated to the Metropolitan Museum, the Frick Collection and the New York Public Library. Although Frazee has been treated and discussed by several recent art historians, all have relied solely on Dunlap and the edited installments that appeared in 1946 in The American

Collector.⁶

The reasons for Dunlap's editing and selecting require an understanding of Dunlap himself, the idea of "history" in the nineteenth century and specifically in New York in the 1830's and an understanding of the complex and rapidly changing social structure in America at the time Dunlap was writing his History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States. In addition, information about Frazee's political activities in New York in 1829 and 1830, previously unknown to art historians, may well have been known to Dunlap, and may partially answer some of the questions about what he chose to emphasize about Frazee's life in his history. The facts of Frazee's involvement in the radical New York Workingmen's Party will be discussed later and are certainly central to this argument. First it will be necessary to examine closely the early sections of Frazee's unedited Autobiography, to see what was originally in it, what Dunlap left out, and finally what Frazee himself left out.⁷

Dunlap begins his account of Frazee's life with a short moralizing paragraph praising any individual who, against all kinds of poverty and social adversity, "ultimately places himself in the rank of those honored for genius and for moral conduct." He follows with a statement about Frazee's Scotch grandparents who settled in

Rahway, New Jersey and changed their name from Fraser to Frazee. John's mother's name was Brookfield and he was her tenth and last child. "Shortly after his birth she was deserted by an unworthy husband, and left to struggle with the ills of poverty." A deserted mother, ten hungry children, extremely religious despite trials and tribulations--we see here all the ingredients of romantic pathos. At the age of five, writes Dunlap, John was taken into the care of his maternal grandmother, and "from these worthy women [the mother and grandmother] the child derived the basis of his moral and religious education." This is all the information we get from Dunlap about Frazee's parents and grandparents--but it is historically appropriate, for this is all he or his contemporary audience required to understand the supposed basis of Frazee's high moral worth, which quality was essential to anyone estimable enough to be included in such a book as Dunlap's. Genius, during the Romantic Era in America, was necessarily equated with moral goodness, and moral goodness was often seen as derived from women.

In the original manuscript, however, we find that Frazee himself devoted a good deal of space to his earliest years, describing his father as "a poor man, a carpenter by trade," who "by his trade was enabled to feed the young progeny that gathered fast upon him." But, as

the family grew, the father became "intemperate," until the mother left him after the birth of her tenth child, none other than John. Frazee continues with more details about his parents and grandparents, which, probably for reasons of space, Dunlap excluded. Frazee reports that his father "left his native state and travelled into the Western country, where he remained upwards of nine years." During this time the boy stayed with his grandparents, doing housework for the grandmother (Dunlap mentions that Frazee at this time was a "household drudge," though Frazee does not complain about any "drudgery"), and helping the grandfather work the 21-acre New Jersey farm. When there was little work to be done on the farm, John went to the village school, where he says he learned to read and write and was given additional help at home by his grandmother. And further, we read in the original:

In the garden over which my grandmother presided I soon became master spirit. I mention this because it was in gardening that I trace the first budding of genius. As experienced in the artificial contrivance and arrangement of the flowers, now as landscape gardening is classed as a branch of the fine arts--this case may be listed as one of the reminiscences which show that genius, though it may not strike upon the highest forms at the start, is not to be cheated of her pleasures or be beguiled altogether from the purpose which is by nature destined to be filled.

Here we see Frazee identifying the budding of his genius, appropriately enough, in a garden. It is by no means the last time he finds it necessary to emphasize

or accentuate his own character as that of "genius." Dunlap does not deny Frazee genius-status, but does omit this and other myth-like stories that constantly re-emphasize it.

Young Frazee's principal amusement as a child, wrote Dunlap, "was to cut the forms of familiar objects out of boards or shingles, and to chalk figures upon the door." In the original manuscript we see more detail about this, for Frazee tells us that with his penknife he carved a boat, a windmill and a weathervane. "His reward for these efforts," continues Dunlap, "was to have his ears boxed, and the prediction that he would be a limner." Frazee, interestingly enough, mentions nothing about having his ears boxed, but adds: "For these exposes, however, I was frequently awarded the title of 'limner'-- a name given in that part of the country to strolling portrait painters, though strictly considered it was a misapplication of the term." Again, Frazee carefully insists upon the more highly respected image of Fine Artist or Genius. An itinerant portrait painter, a limner, "strolling" around the countryside looking for work, would have been a denigrating image, and so of course Frazee would take pains to point out its "misapplication." Dunlap was perhaps not so sure about the subtle differences between travelling limner and rural carver, and in any case would not have been so concerned.

What, then, were Dunlap's concerns when he actually sat down to edit the Frazee manuscript? Before we return to the main part of Frazee's pages that were omitted by Dunlap, it would be wise to consider this question. Clearly, Dunlap was not interested in the personal, familial or social developments leading up to the emergence of the mature artist. Typical of the Romantic Era, he saw artistic genius as something latent since birth, suddenly "discovered" by someone in a position to recognize it, and then something which flourished under the "right" conditions. The "right" conditions, especially in America, would have been considered proper religious instruction, a good education, and above all moral fortitude. None of the mysterious Hawthornesque stereotypes concerning artists which were part of the established literary or imaginative traditions were acceptable to Dunlap. This is not to say, however, that the artists themselves did not try to shape their own images somewhat in the literary molds; but Dunlap would most certainly edit out these conventions as he did with Frazee, especially when they involved vernacular-type stories about supposedly "major" moments of youthful artistic or intellectual development.

Dunlap, although not especially interested in the course of individual human development, was nonetheless

ultimately interested in the abstract idea of large-scale historical development. He saw history in the typical nineteenth-century intellectual fashion, as something which unrolls itself progressively from savage or primitive states until it gradually approaches higher and better states of "civilization." This concept, popularized by such writers as Volney and Gibbon, and narrated visually by the American painter Thomas Cole, more or less permeated the thinking of such self-styled urban dillitantes as Dunlap. Part of Dunlap's theory of the development of civilization was the idea that high civilization was made by men of genius, and that many men of genius were involved in the "arts of design." His volumes, then, on the rise and progress of the arts of design, were primarily intended to demonstrate the praiseworthy progress America had made (up to 1834) toward a high state of civilization. Within this theory, of course, there would be no room for an interest in personal development, but interestingly enough this is exactly what Frazee, a genuine product of rural artisan culture, wanted the world to know about him.

Returning now to the Frazee text, we see that at age thirteen John agreed to have his grandfather bind him out to a local bricklayer and plasterer, a man named William Lawrence, to whom an elder brother had also been apprenticed. Dunlap also mentions this, but does not

include the following additional thoughts of Frazee's:

Thus vanished all my hopes and aspirations in regards to the Fine Arts (a word, bye the bye, I knew not the meaning of) and the 'limner' was doomed to almost seven years of pilgrimage to acquire the 'great art and mystery' of the dirty helter skelter occupation of a country bricklayer and plasterer. Here again I might grieve were I disposed to give vent to my feelings that my early life was so unappropriately spent and that the rude path through which I wandered led so perversely to the object of my present pursuit.

It is interesting that Frazee, though obviously in hindsight, nevertheless has fixed notions of the high rank of the "Fine Arts" as opposed to the "dirty helter skelter occupation of a country bricklayer," that, in other words, by 1834 he has completely internalized the notion of artist as better than artisan. One wonders at first where the young sculptor got these ideas, until one reads further and learns from Frazee the exact rudiments of his early education. It was Mr. Lawrence, he wrote,

who first inspired me with notions of thinking philosophically. When he had all his boys at home and seated around his winter evening's fire, we constituted a sort of debating club, and could Newton and Archimedes have heard our wild and heterogeneous disquisitions and arguments upon science and laws, I am sure they would have been highly and laughingly amused. None of us, not even our Boss, had ever read or seen a book on the Arts and Sciences, yet our heads or our mouths at least were always brimful of such topics. But vaguely as we thought upon these questions, I still believe that the time we devoted to them was not altogether misspent. I should give some idea of the extent of Lawrence's Library, and my grandfather's too. I remember every volume and the contents of almost every page in both. The only books in the house of my grandfather, while I lived there, were the Bible, Whitefield's sermons, Walls' psalms and hymns and Lyric Poems, Noah Webster's Spelling Book, the New England Primer.

My Boss had the Bible, Wall's Psalms and Hymns, Shumway's Sacred Harmony, Jenks' ditto, Charlotte Temple and Robinson Crusoe. There are I admit some good books in the above list, which comprised all my studies in the book list until after I was 21! One thing about it is that I perused them all over and over again. The Bible made me religious, Whitefield taught me eloquence, Walls inspired me with the muse, Charlotte Temple caused the tears to roll down my cheeks, while Crusoe made me laugh. But Shumay and Jenks were my great favorites. In them I learned the elements of music, in which I had early evinced a happy and natural talent...

Frazee writes with charm, enthusiasm, and especially a good deal of pride about his youthful intellectual endeavors. He seems to be emphatic in his attempt to dispell the myth, popular then as now, that a poor farm boy, a "country bumpkin," was of necessity ignorant and illiterate. The image of country people versus city people was no doubt something Frazee felt compelled to deal with in his new role as an urban and urbane artist, especially vis-à-vis his Knickerbocker and Beacon Hill patrons and clients.⁸ One cannot, for instance, conceive of other early American artists, born of "gentlemen" and with college educations, making such a point of remembering and then outlining the contents of the various "libraries" they had read as young boys.⁹ It is clear in this passage, as elsewhere in Frazee's writing and activity, that he valued education as much as he did hard work, and in fact attributed his social and professional success to his early efforts in these areas.

Meanwhile, it is important to emphasize here that the life of a rural artisan in the early nineteenth century was by no means sterile intellectually. It is certainly true that the limited volumes available to a boy like Frazee were hardly of the highest quality, especially sentimental novels such as Mrs. Rowson's Charlotte Temple. But it is a fact that Charlotte Temple was enormously popular during these years, and that a boy's education (in both country and city) would by 1800 have included such works as this and Robinson Crusoe, as well as the Bible, the Psalms and Hymns and other strictly religious items.¹⁰ In other words, with the decline of strict Puritan upbringing in the home, and also the immense increase in printed material available to an ever-growing reading public, young people in the rural areas (as well as in the cities) grew up with a wider view of life and thus the wider range of possibilities available to seemingly any American.

In the third year of Frazee's apprenticeship his boss, Mr. Lawrence, decided to open a tavern, but also to continue his trade as usual "leaving to his wife the affairs of the tavern." Frazee goes into some detail about the unsavory types who frequented the tavern, and how he managed nonetheless to be "good" and resist the temptations of corruption. The chief means available to

the boy when tempted by drinking and gambling involved his apparent dedication to self development. Thus we read:

During my apprenticeship I was at liberty on Sundays to go where and do what best pleased myself. My boss usually went to church. Sometimes we went to church, but more frequently we preferred the pleasures of rambling through the fields, the woods, and along the brooks and banks of the rivers. I spent much of my time, however, on Sundays in my bedroom, teaching myself penmanship...Indeed, such was my progress and success with the pen, that I outstripped my boss...Besides working, I amused myself on Sundays and leisure evenings in drawing with pen and ink all kinds of birds, trees and flowers, rude enough, yet there was something of imitation and a degree of merit. With a lead pencil or crayon I might no doubt have done better, but chalk was all we used.

We must not fail to note that Frazee seems to feel none of the earlier Puritan guilt that would have been associated with not going to church on Sunday. Instead (and this speaks clearly to the "new" religion of nature that was replacing the older Calvinism in the 1830's) Frazee values his outdoor walks "through the fields and woods" in much the same way--essentially a moral way. Nature, in effect, can be seen as a substitute for church as a moralizing institution during the Jacksonian period, especially in the eyes of someone who is thought of as an Artist.

Frazee then continues his manuscript with a most interesting and valuable anecdote:

I have just thought of an amazing adventure which occurred shortly after Lawrence opened a public

house. About this time there came to this place a strolling genius by the name of Dawson. He was a jolly old Bacchanalian, and made loud boastings of his skill in sign painting and in imitation of mahogany, marble, etc. But he knew how to mix grog better than he did the mixing of colors, and his ability for taking a glass with his pinch of snuff far exceeded his skill in taking the likeness of anything in creation. Yet, he had the talent and the art, or in other words the impudence to obtrude himself, and elicited from the uninformed a belief that he was a prodigious fine fellow in his profession.

Now Lawrence wanted a tavern sign and Dawson, having smelt it out, laid out his wits for a glorious reign over the bottle and good living. So he called upon my boss one day and solicited the job. Lawrence asked him if he could paint the 'Rising Sun.' "Oh yes," said Dawson, "Better than any other man" and he talked of things terrestrial and things celestial so that my boss began to see the beauties of the picture with the glorious 'orb of the day' already bursting in its radiance over the eastern firmament. The bargain was struck and Dawson was to have 25 dollars for the painting and bed, board and grog while engaged upon the work. The woodwork of his sign was soon completed when Dawson commenced painting in the public garret. Winter had just set in and we were all at home. We had a fine opportunity to watch the progress of Dawson's picture, and watch I did, for, like my boss I expected to see a great and wonderful thing unfolded, and stole upstairs daily to pilfer lessons and watch the forthcoming of the 'Golden Moon.' Days and even weeks passed over and no 'Sun' appeared. Not a single ray had yet dared to glimmer over the horizon. I began to get weary at his small pace and progress with the work; indeed, I was vexed to see him painting for so long without producing a sign or anything else. I began to challenge him as to the progress he was pursuing. 'Few men can represent the morning sky.' 'There is a secret in preparing the colors that everyone has not discovered.' The old master had been nearly a month spreading paint over the sign, and all I could see was blue, blue, it was all over blue, blue as an indigo bay or a learned lady. Thinks I to myself, if that is your morning sky, it is too long before the summer. And so it was, for the old rogue did not permit his sun to shine upon it for some weeks yet. And when it

did come it portended 'a day of woe and dark darkness.'

To give an idea of his process, after having blue brushed the whole sign ten or twelve hours over, to obtain what he called the morning sky, he painted a dark lead colored stripe of about six inches across the sign at the bottom. This he called the sea--His sun was to be represented as rising out of the sea. From the top of his sea, exactly the middle of the sign he struck with a compass a semi-circle, having its radii about 6 inches. The space within the circle was now sized and overlaid with gold leaf and on this he painted the most wonderful outline of a human face. This was his Sun! The circular edge of it was indented with panels nearly as obtuse as the teeth of a handsaw--Fearing his Sun would fail in lighting of the world, Dawson must needs call in the assistance of the MOON and MORNING STAR. So, opposite to each other toward the upper part of the sign he painted DIANA - LUNA and PHOSPHOR, and gilded them over as he did the Sun. A cluster of clouds was all that was now needed to finish the scene. Those were carefully painted just over his MOON and STAR--and when completed they resembled more a dozen skeins of mixed blue yarn hung diagonally across the sign than anything else I can imagine.

The truth was we were all disgusted with the painter and his works. None perhaps as much as myself, for when I beheld his sky with neither warmth, distance or perspective, his Indianfaced SUN with its crest of saw teeth, his gold leaf star, ...and his SEA resembling the ocean as much as a cedar shingle after it had been dipped in a solution of black lead, I could not when I was there (though little did I know of the art of painting) help putting a contempt for the man whose boasted skill had proved to be mere pretension, and whose moral character the stamp of imposture. But I was bent on pursuing him some way, and during the remainder of his residence there I teased him on his 'Rising Sun.' Sometimes in the morning when all hands were gathering around the breakfast just at Sun Rise, I would look through the window and say--Now Dawson, the sun is just rising, come and show us the Indian face and the saw teeth rays. This would cause the laugh of all the house upon him. Then again I would insist upon it the sign was a masterpiece because Dawson had got his sun up and shining long before daylight. At length the old

snuffer got through and departed, and his sign was hung out to be laughed at.

After Dawson had gone I found he had left behind a number of kinds of mixed paints, which were scattered around the garret in clam shells. These I gathered together and decided I would try my hand at painting. I prepared a board twenty inches square, planed it smooth on one side, and commenced painting a horse. I arrived at making a fine and stately looking animal represented as standing in a field close to a fence in a gay and elevated position and as if his eye was attracted by some particular object at a distance. This being the first attempt I made with paint and brush, I found myself terribly bothered, and totally incapable of exacting the thing in any way that might be termed a reasonable approach to my original conception of it, and fortunately as I was favored with sufficient penetration to discover my own deficiency, I let no one know what I was at, lest my horse like Dawson's Sun might bring shame and confusion upon its author. So it was therefore only on Sundays that I would venture to work on it, and I concealed it at other times between the chimney and the weatherboards of the house. It was not my intention to let it to be seen, still I continued to work on for a long time, for experiment's sake, and when the spring came and we were called upon to work with the bricks and mortar again, my picture was hid for the last time behind the chimney and almost forgotten. But my horse was brought to light at an hour when I least thought of him. In the early part of the summer, Mrs. Lawrence was ransacking the chamber in search of something that had been mislaid or lost, and her keen eye fell upon my wooden canvas. She pulled it out and having removed from it the nest of cobwebs and dust, she soon discovered what she had found--not the thing she had been looking for--but the only painting there was in the house!

For a time at least my picture was now rescued from oblivion, and my mistress I have no doubt felt as proud as did Pharoah's daughter over little MOSES after she had delivered him from the bullrushes, nor was the old lady less wise than the Egyptian miss in the determining of the foundling's parentage. She set it over the mantelpiece in the bar room for the gaze and admiration of the world, and when we all came on Saturday night from our week's labor, the first thing that attracted my eye on entering the

house was my bay horse. I at first doubted my own vision, but on a nearer approach, I soon saw that it was all reality. Meanwhile my fellow apprentices gathered around the picture, some of them making their remarks upon its merits, while others asked questions concerning its authorship, where it came from, etc. etc. And I to 'keep dark' pretended to be as inquisitive as the rest about it. Directly the boss came in and began to gaze at the horse, and when he had viewed it a few seconds he called out to his wife "Where did you get this, Old Woman," "Oh," said she with a smile upon her face, "I came across it, eh! eh! I don't like to tell you where, but ask John, I guess he can tell you more about it than anyone else." In an instant every eye in the place was fastened upon me. Finding little or no chance of escape, and feeling also as if my looks were betraying me, I began to make confessions! "Now, Mrs. Lawrence, how could you wish to expose me so, by bringing that thing down here for everybody to stare at and laugh at. Blame the thing. I am sorry I didn't paint it out or burn it up instead of hiding it behind the chimney half finished." Before I got through with this preamble, they all commenced to laugh at me, but more at my misfortune at having been discovered than for any want of skill, so far as they could judge in the execution of it. Indeed, they all soon (?) with praises over my work. This vexed me the more as I could not count on their judgement in such things. Besides, I deemed their praise in this case to be mere flattery. I therefore told them as the picture was my own property, I must take it into safe keeping until I would find opportunity to finish it. So I took the horse from the mantelpiece and carried him into my bedroom and there locked him up from the world's gaze in my chest. But he only slept in my chest at night. So dissatisfied was I with his appearance and finding myself utterly incapable of making a decent creature of him, I determined upon blotting him out of existence; and accordingly the next day I detrunked the board, and went into the garret where I mixed some paint of red ochre, with which I spread a thick coating all over the picture and from mortal eyes concealed my horse forever.

I made no more paintings during my apprenticeship but I continued designing with the pen in which I succeeded much better, and I made some atonement to my mistress for the loss of the horse by drawing for her in my crude way many pictures of birds, beasts,

flowers, etc. all with the pen on white paper. Not however in the Gad Fly style but in the free style of sketching in outline. I had no correct idea of light and shade, and no means offered whereby I might attain these principles, nor was I aware at that period of their importance, although in Dawson's sign and also in the picture of my horse I could sensibly feel the want of their force and influence without knowing why it was so.

NYPL ms. pp. 14-22

"I have just thought of an amazing adventure..." begins Frazee, and indeed we must agree with him, for this detailed anecdotal description of a significant aspect of artisan culture is certainly related to us as an "adventure." In terms of regional Yankee jargon and also regarding the actual practice of sign-making, this particular anecdote takes on a special sense of historicity. But, in terms of the universal, almost mythic adventure, and the high degree of enthusiasm that attaches to it, this bit of American vernacular also imparts a sense of timelessness that goes beyond history. Both of these qualities--the historical and the universal--deserve to be further analyzed, especially regarding the roots of American popular culture.¹¹

This excerpt, as well as some of the sections quoted here earlier, tell us a good deal about the culture of leisure activity--that is to say, what people in Northern rural areas ca. 1800 actually did and thought during the hours they were not at work.¹² We see in this passage indications of a camaraderie, even fraternity, among Frazee and his fellow apprentices. There appears to be

a significant lack of competitiveness or cliqueishness among the workers, at least during their leisure hours, and although there is an obvious sense of respect for the "boss," there is at the same time no segregation of the apprentices from their boss during their free time. What we see, essentially, is a high degree of community feeling, as well as an easy group interaction, often based on practical joking and warm laughter. Much of what binds these people together, in fact, is a common appreciation for and participation in a particularly American form of vernacular humor.¹³

Much of this humor is directed at Dawson, the itinerant sign-painter, or in Frazee's charmingly caustic words, the "strolling genius." Dawson can be seen as a version of the famous Yankee peddler figure, the man who travels from place to place in rural outlying areas constantly amazing and amusing the local folk with his slick trickery. Like P. T. Barnum a half century later, this trickster has no trouble keeping the people constantly amused, even fascinated, with his apparently deceptive behavior.¹⁴ One might also be able to draw parallels between the "strolling genius" described by Frazee and the nineteenth century American "strollers" found in the early theatrical forms.¹⁵ This vernacular humor is quite rich, for not only is it directed against the travelling limner (or peddler or stroller), but it also has a wide

range of appealing internal elements. These fall mainly into the areas of puns, hyperboles, innuendos, and other word plays, and might be a practice more or less universal or timeless in relation to popular humor. (Shakespeare's puns, often termed "low humor," let us remember, were supposedly directed at the "common people," the folk elements, in his audience.)

Frazee's "strolling genius" is important not only as an element of humor, but also in terms of his actual activity as a limner or sign-painter. The reactions of the people to his activities and behavior are also important, and again afford us a meaningful glimpse into rural artisan culture. It is clear that Frazee, his fellow apprentices, and his boss, have never seen an "artist" at work and are, to varying degrees, fascinated. What interests them the most, and in fact appears to be their very definition of "genius," is the degree to which Dawson can imitate reality. They are altogether fascinated with the idea of illusionism, a quality which characterizes the culture of rural artisans as well as the high or elite culture of the more well-to-do and sophisticated. Throughout American history, particularly in the nineteenth century, there is a special cultural need, something which transcends class lines, for illusionism in art (and in other areas, if one chooses to see Barnumesque activities in this way). Dawson, inasmuch as he

cannot fulfill this requirement in his picture, becomes the butt of teasing and practical joking, especially from Frazee who presumably was more interested in the art of painting than the others and therefore had a greater reason to be frustrated or disappointed. There is, in fact, something poignantly pathetic about Dawson and the entire story, for he is essentially the Yankee peddler-manqué (or Barnum-manqué). His attempt at deception, in the end, did not succeed, and therefore he was seen as a failure.

Dawson's failure is related more to his lack of ability as a painter (within the framework of illusionism) than to other elements which might have been emphasized by Frazee. That is, although Dawson was clearly a drunk, a braggart, possibly a cheat and certainly a "freeloader," Frazee and the others would have been willing to overlook all of these moral lapses if only the artist were a real "genius" and could imitate reality. These people, given the opportunity to be fooled and amused, would easily forget their religious instruction and ethical training. This aspect of American vernacular culture may be one of the subtle elements that distinguished rural from urban culture in the nineteenth century. (Remember, too, that Frazee felt no compunctions about skipping church on Sundays when he wanted to walk in the woods.)

Another interesting quality of Frazee's anecdote is the free-flowing mixture of elements of "high" or "classical" culture with the vernacular already discussed. Thus we see references to Greek mythological figures such as Diana and Phosphor, we see Dawson described as "Bacchanalian," and also we notice Biblical references sprinkled throughout. Frazee even goes so far as to identify himself with the infant Moses, whose very existence (in this case identified with talent or creativity) is discovered by Mrs. Lawrence in the guise of Pharoah's daughter, "the Egyptian Miss." Like Vasari in his Lives of the Artists, like Dunlap and also Hawthorne, Frazee easily calls upon this Christian version of the Myth of the Birth of the Hero in order to legitimize and universalize his own heroic stature.¹⁶ Although he does this in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek tone, possibly trying to be both funny and serious at the same time, Dunlap for one did not seem to think this (or any of the rest of the story) worth including in his text on Frazee. Dunlap, instead, tells the more serious, less frivolous story of Frazee being "discovered" as a talented stone cutter by his boss, who needed someone to cut an inscription on a New Jersey bridge they were building and chose Frazee (the only one who offered) to do it.

This same passage also gives us valuable information about the actual practice of sign-painting.

There are several technical and mechanical aspects of the craft that are elaborated for us, such as the cutting and preparing of the wooden plank, the use of a compass and other compositional aids, the chemical contents of various pigments, the use of a gold leaf overlay, the storing of mixed paints in clam shells, etc. These details are particularly valuable for those interested in the practice of artisanal painting as opposed to the more formal and better known studio practices, and also as a means of comparison between traditional European methods and other, perhaps more indigenous, methods. The forms and methods discussed by Frazee might also prove valuable to students interested in the psychology of visual perception, for although some work has been done on the perception of untrained artists (especially children and "primitives"), it is not often that a written document such as this can be studied in relation to "naive" art.¹⁷

And finally, in relation to this passage, it is necessary to remember that Frazee wrote it in 1834, many years after the historical fact, but that he nonetheless retains the charm and directness of his youthful enthusiasm. What we have, then, in Frazee's entire Autobiography is a most significant document which reveals a good deal about what actually happened, both intellectually and socially, to a rural artisan when, a brief two decades later, he had developed into an urban artist.

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Seven years passed between the end of Frazee's apprenticeship and his move to New York, another pilgrimage of sorts. During this time a good deal transpired, but none of it has been printed since 1835, when the Autobiography was published in the North American Magazine. The following excerpts are most revealing about Frazee personally, and also about artisan culture in general at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In 1811, soon before Frazee turned twenty-one, he was sent to Haverstraw-on-Hudson to work on the (now destroyed) house of DeWitt Smith, using stone from the nearby Nyack quarries. Some of this is found in the American Collector manuscript, but not the passage which follows--a poignant account of the termination of Frazee's apprenticeship and the rather touching emotional changes he experienced while undergoing this transition into what he calls "manhood."

Before the walls of the house were all up, my Boss, with all his troops, except myself and another apprentice named Dunham, took their departure for home, leaving him and me to complete the walls, after which nothing could be done to the interior of the house, until the carpenter work was finished. It was now about the 10th of July, 1811, and my time would be out on the 18th and Dunham's on the 21st of the same month, so I told him we must hasten our job or we should be obliged to journey home to Jersey on our own time and at our own expense--a thing which neither of us desired. We therefore made our stone hammers fly with twofold energy, and by the 15th the remainder of the work left for us was completed, when we took passage at Haverstraw in a sloop for New York, where we arrived on the morning of the 17th. Spent that day in gazing at the pomp and

wonderments of our great city, and the next morning jumped into a ferry boat for Elizabethtown Point, arrived there about 10 o'clock, threw our kits on our shoulders and trudged homeward on foot. I was 21, but poor Dunham had 8 days to serve--which time, brief as it was, seemed to weigh upon his mind in prospect as heavily as so many years, simply because I was about to leave home, when he was close upon my heels. During an apprenticeship of almost seven years, I had been closely tied down to the hard labor under the control and direction of another, whose authority was law, and to whose will and command I had ever been uniformly obedient. But to the cares and anxieties of life I was an utter stranger, and now, although I thought I was the sovereign of myself, and committed to my own charge and keeping, and yet a strange and inexpressible sensation pervaded my mind,--I felt lost and vacant, like a solitary being in a desert, on all sides all appeared vast and wild to my mind. But there was no time to be lost and I had not forgotten the text 'Whatsoever thy hand findest to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work nor desire nor knowledge, no wisdom in the grave, where thou goest.' This was the text of the sermon at my grandmother's funeral. This good woman was never known to be idle a moment, and I have always felt since her departure as if the mantle of her life were upon me. The very remembrance of her seems a blessing to me. I said that is my freedom I had not forgotten. The text at her funeral, the recollection of which helped to brace me with a cheerful courage, as I started forth into the world for myself and for my fortune. My feelings now and my contemplations were altogether different from what they were when my father found me shelling my hickory nuts at the parson's. Then all my grievances and anxieties were of a sensual and temporal nature: but now I had become a different being, and received everything in a moral and intellectual light. My mind was not computing the wealth of the world, I sought more the esteem of mankind, the treasure of a good name, and a character worthy of it. I knew that by the 'sweat of my brow' I was to eat, nor did this grieve me much, since I had always been accustomed to hard labor from early youth, and taught myself to make work a pleasure and not a pain.

NYPL ms. pp. 35-38

Frazee obviously looked back upon his seven-year apprenticeship with mixed feelings. He reports, without bitterness, that during those years he had experienced "hard labor under the control and direction of another." His life had been so utterly controlled and directed, and he had been so obedient, that he had known nothing of the "cares and anxieties of life." We see no resentment here of the actual apprenticeship process, nor of the "hard labor" it entailed. There is, if anything, a feeling of having been properly prepared professionally, but not emotionally, for the life that would follow. Frazee's awareness of this tension is underscored by his perception of an even larger problem. He was pleased finally to be "sovereign of myself," but at the same time felt "lost and vacant, like a solitary being in a desert." The highly structured work, the unchallenged authority of the boss, the cohesive sense of community, and the overall goal orientation--all these youthful life-sustaining factors were suddenly swept away. Frazee, a good young republican, had been trained to look forward to the day when he would be "sovereign" of himself, but had not been prepared for the concomitant identity crisis that would leave him feeling desperately alone, "lost and vacant." It was, as he significantly states, his value of hard work that would sustain him.

Frazee had always been interested in music, a not insignificant fact when one remembers the efforts of Romantic artists to bring together the various branches of the arts. The following excerpts not only demonstrate this interest, but also show Frazee's additional talent in being able to bring his various vocational interests in line with his economic needs.

About this time [1808] my profession in vocal music began to attract notice, particularly in psalmody, in which department I had risen above my contemporaries in the village singing schools, not that their voices were different in melody and power, but they wanted the energy and patience to cultivate these properties and improve their taste. They were too careless, too indolent to pursue the elementary studies, without a thorough knowledge of which, no one however great, can sing well, especially before a public audience. At the age of seventeen I could read music with ease and fluency, and had also extended my studies into the nature and philosophy of composition. Before the age of eighteen I was solicited to take the part of Chorister in the Presbyterian Church at Rayway.

NYPL ms. p. 26

In the fall [1812: Frazee was 22] the young folks of Rahway established a singing school, and I was chosen for their instructor for the term of three months at a dollar for each pupil. There was boarding, at this time with my old Boss Lawrence, a young man from Connecticut named Robert Wilson, with whom I had, in the course of the summer, become intimate. Wilson had received a very fine education. He was at this time instructor at the Village School at Rahway; he was also teacher of sacred music, and during the preceding winter conducted a singing school in an adjoining neighborhood. Finding that I was likely to have a large school made up, and as rooms sufficiently large in a public house could not be obtained at a reasonable rate, I proposed to Wilson that if he would make no charge for his schoolroom, and would agree to appropriate it one night a week for the singing school, if he thought well of it make him a partner with me in teaching the school and divide the proceeds with him equally.

Having cheerfully fell in with my propositions, our school opened quite auspiciously.

NYPL ms. pp. 40-42

Frazee's friendship with Robert Wilson, the young school-teacher from Connecticut, was to last for many years. From the beginning it was characterized by Frazee's profound respect for Wilson's "very fine education," but also by the ability of both men to combine money-making ventures with their interests in art, music and education.

Soon after Frazee became involved with Wilson in the singing school, he also began, in partnership with his old boss, Lawrence, a tombstone-cutting business. These activities extended simultaneously throughout 1812, when the effects of the war of that year began to be felt.

The late war with England had just commenced and it began to take a serious shape in the Northern section of our country. There was now very little to do at my trade. Lawrence had discharged all his workmen, soon after the walls of the Smith house were up, he having scarcely enough work to keep himself and three remaining boys in employment. My prospects then with the trowel were rather cloudy. My brother (of whom I have before spoken, and who had been free for more than 4 years) was now engaged in the wool-carding business, and in the manufacture of clothes, which during the war he found more profitable than the laying of bricks. I called upon him at his factory and apprised him of my freedom. He inquired of my prospects and intentions, and on learning that I had no work, employed me at a dollar a day, to assist in tending his carding machine until something more lucrative might offer.

I continued with him for several weeks, when I met Mr. Barron of Woodbridge, for whom I had in 1806-1807 worked as apprentice while my master was build-

ing an elegant house in that place. Since that time I had not seen Mr. Barron, and I being grown up, he did not know me until I made myself known to him. I had been a favorite with the old gentleman at the time his house was in progress, and now when I revealed myself to him at manhood, he appeared much rejoiced at falling in with me, and after warm expressions of congratulation, he stated that he had some chimneys to build, and other work which he should be glad to have done immediately if I was not otherwise engaged. I told him I was ready to enter into his service forthwith.

So on the following Monday I at daybreak shouldered my kit and walked to Woodbridge, with a lighter and higher heart, too, I imagine than I could have borne with musket on my shoulder to the Canada lines to fight the British. I never cherished a thirst, much less a taste, for human butchery or military glory, though I have always possessed a warm and unwavering spirit of patriotism, which I inherited from my parents on both sides, who were all Whigs during the American Revolution, and who fought bravely and suffered much to wrest their beloved country from the iron grasp of misgovernment.

NYPL ms. pp. 38-40

The wartime economy, during the War of 1812 as with later wars, had created a situation where building construction came to a near standstill. The manufacture of textiles and clothes, however, which no doubt related to the requirements of outfitting troops, significantly augmented. Frazee, always one to take every opportunity at hand, took a job helping his brother tend his wool carding machine "until something more lucrative might offer." That opportunity soon arose when a Mr. Barron hired Frazee to build some chimneys in nearby Woodbridge. The aspiring artist jumped at the chance "with a lighter and higher heart" than if he were fighting the British

at the Canadian lines. This, he is careful to point out, is because of his aversion to "human butchery" and not due to a lack of patriotic zeal. Frazee proudly insists on his "unwavering spirit of patriotism," which he attributes to his parents on both sides who were Whigs and fought bravely in the Revolution. A self-conscious and assertive patriotism is a characteristic which will be seen to dominate Frazee's consciousness and behavior throughout his life.

Yet another extraordinary passage follows, in which we discover how much Frazee felt he suffered from the lack of a "liberal" education. His solution, practical as ever, was to consider it too late to deal with this inadequacy, and to spend what little time he had studying the rudiments of accounting. Unable, because of birth and circumstance, to be a gentleman artist, Frazee diligently set out to be a businessman artist.

I have already related the poverty of my education at the commencement of my apprenticeship. As a scholar I could not be but deplorably ignorant, and therefore ill-qualified for my professional enterprise in which learning is a necessary aid to insure success. This I now began to feel. As circumstances brought me into higher circles of society--to move and to act with those who had been liberally educated, I saw my deficiency, and I beheld the mental darkness with sorrow and mortification, and the literary chasm, with its empty yawnings, constantly hounded my wavering existence. My mental powers were hale and vivid, fed and nourished only upon the open fields of nature and common observation and supported always by constant bodily health and cheerfulness, they were neither blunted by study nor paralysed by disease. But it seemed too late not to think of education, when I wanted bread.

Some schooling, however, I very much needed to enable me to keep my book accounts somewhat decently, and so when the tombstone work was not pressing upon me, I devoted part of my time to attending school under the tutorship of my friend and companion Wilson. By this application, I became sufficiently master of figures for every kind of reckoning or computation connected with my profession. So I passed the first winter of my manhood, and a very agreeable one it was.

NYPL ms. pp. 47-48

On July 19, 1813, Frazee married Jane, the daughter of Garret Probasco. They were both twenty-three, "and both almost penniless as we embarked together on the rapid and tossing current of life." In August of that year, the Frazees moved, with John's old friend Dunham, to New Brunswick to take over a stonecutting business, a venture which did not prove easy.

There were few orders on hand, and before these were worked off we began to discover that we had been deceived, not only in the misrepresentation regarding the number of orders on hand, but also in the real value of the stock. The truth was that the war had caused a great depression in the business of building, consequently stone cutting was cast in its wake and struggled for existence. We had 3 apprentices between us, who with our wives and ourselves were all to be fed, but our means were extremely narrow. We were strangers in a strange place. Money we had not always, and credit we dared not ask. Indeed the scanty allowance we were confined to would make frugality blush and poverty itself weep. But still we held on, my skill in tombstone work soon began to awaken general interest, and by degrees I gathered friends to my occasional aid. The first summer and the first winter following were still tougher. In early August 1815, Dunham's wife and one of the apprentices were both taken with the typhus fever (which prevailed to a great extent and with terrible mortality during that season in New Brunswick) and about 2 weeks after another of the boys and myself were violently attacked

with the same disease and a gloomy time we had of it. But we all got well, though most of us were confined to the couch for six weeks. I was myself absent from the shop for 2 months. The effect was a serious derangement in our business.

[Frazee then decided to dissolve his partnership with Dunham, who then moved to a farm "into the Genessee country."] I was now by myself without regrets at being so; but my [?] made me almost quake with fear. My heart sank within me when I began to look seriously into my case, nor did I know how to surmount the difficulty so as to obtain relief. Finally I came to these resolutions, that I would live as frugally as possible with justice to my family, that I would attend strictly to my business to do all the work that came to hand well, quickly, and if possible please everyone who employed me.

I had calculated on my business in New Brunswick in the line of building work, but in this I was mistaken. Nothing was done scarcely in the way of building where cut stone was required during the war. I was compelled, therefore, to pick my living out of the tombstones, and even with these the want of business frequently narrowed me down to the plainest fare. As to the Fine Arts, the field opened extremely slow.

NYPL m.s pp. 55-59

The "field" of Fine Arts did indeed open slowly. For, although Frazee had been actively doing decorative lettering and carving in stone, he knew nothing of the institutions, terminologies or historical references that preoccupied the better-educated gentlemen-artists in both Europe and America. In his determination to rise from artisan to artist, Frazee felt constantly tortured by these lapses in knowledge and behavior. Furthermore, he must have been greatly frustrated by his apparent intuition that much of what he lacked,

since it was intimately connected to social class, could never wholly be acquired. The early American nation, famed for its high degree of social mobility, did have its limitations in this area, and the life of John Frazee certainly represents one case where an effort to change professional and social status was not without problems. The following passage specifies some of the inadequacies and limitations Frazee faced, and also reveals his awareness of the differences between craft and art. His choices of Ben Franklin and Benvenuto Cellini as role-models are not without significance or pathos in view of later developments.

Though the traces of skill and handicraft were discernible in my work, and while I outstripped all my contemporaries in the craft, there was still abundant room for improvement. The want of that knowledge, derivable only from arduous study and research which constitutes the pure element and soul of the Arts, may easily be detected by the connoisseur in most of my works prior to the year 1820. And how could it be otherwise, with one educated as I had been, or rather, not educated at all? While I remained in New Jersey, I never saw a book that treated upon the Arts, either historical or elemental. I knew nothing about the Arts of Antiquity, their rise, progress, uses and philosophy. My genius, therefore, ran wild and wandering and while I toiled for bread, my mind was harrassed day and night, with the thoughts of my trials and responsibilities...

I wanted books and began to think it time for me to get together something in the shape of a family library. The few books I had hinted to me strongly the necessity of having more, one in particular 'The Life of Franklin' increased my thirst for reading and knowledge. This book opened to my mind new worlds, new views of men and things. Solomon

says 'He that getteth a wife getteth a good thing.' I got a wife and 'The Life of Franklin' about the same time, so I had two good things together to help me along life's thorny way. I was always glad that I fell in with the 'Life' of that excellent and exemplary man as early as I did, because I believe that the 'Rules of Duty' that he laid down and the advice he gave to young men were of great service to me. This book greatly increased my love of literature and science and confidence in the opinion that a man if he would might do much to supply the want of early education. [Frazee then describes at length the additional impact 'The Life of Benvenuto Cellini' made on him at this time. This section is included in the American Collector, which, however, significantly omits the preceding paragraphs.]

NYPL ms. pp. 60-65

Frazee, by 1834, looks back on his "wild and wandering" genius as having lacked one all-important element. He knew nothing, while in New Jersey, of the "Arts of Antiquity," and attributes the faults in his early work to this basic lapse in knowledge. Soon after leaving New Jersey and moving to New York, Frazee became a staunch, even doctrinaire, neoclassicist, exhibiting the same unswerving, single-minded zeal in this aspect of his personal make-up as he did with his patriotism. Both his neoclassicism and his patriotism will be seen as two not unrelated elements of Frazee's profound republicanism--that is, of what he felt it meant to be an American.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

¹William Dunlap, A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States, 3 vols. (New York: 1834; reprint ed. New York: Dover Publications, 1969). Dunlap's methods of gathering biographical information are outlined in the Introduction by James Thomas Flexner.

²Dorothy C. Barck, ed., Diary of William Dunlap, 3 vols. (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1930). The entry quoted for 1833 is on p. 740. See also: July 26, 1834, "Frazee brings me his biography in parts;" October 9, 1834, "Receive note from Frazee--promises me remainder of his biogy;" November 2, 1834, "Read Frazee and write on history."

³See Dunlap, History of the Rise and Progress, 2:226-270.

⁴"Autobiography of John Frazee," North American Magazine, 6 (1835); New York and Richmond County Times, c. 1835, all issues now lost; "John Frazee," ed. Alexander S. Graham, New Brunswick Sunday Times, June 9, 16, 23, and 30, 1929; "The Autobiography of John Frazee," The American Collector, vol. 15 (September, October, and November, 1946).

⁵Henry T. Tuckerman, Book of the Artists (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1869), p. 572. Tuckerman adds to Dunlap that Frazee's "name and memory are pleasantly associated with the art he loved." Lorado Taft, History of American Sculpture (New York: Macmillan Co., 1903), pp. 28-36, quotation from p. 28.

⁶The most detailed study of Frazee to date is Henry B. Caldwell, "John Frazee, American Sculptor" (M.A. thesis, New York University School of Fine Arts, 1951). Caldwell chose to ignore the original manuscript, however, claiming that "it is far from

revealing the artistic side of Frazee," and instead he wrote his thesis "to fill in some of the blanks in Frazee's life [after 1834] that have been allowed to exist for so long." Frazee is also discussed in Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, Yankee Stonecutters (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945); Wayne Craven, Sculpture in America (New York: Crowell Publishers, 1968); and William H. Gerdts, American Neo-Classic Sculpture: the Marble Resurrection (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

⁷I have based my study on the Harold A. Frazee handwritten copy in the New York Public Library, Art Room. Quotations will be indicated by NYPL ms.

⁸For more on this quality, and especially its relation to early industrialization, see Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁹See, for example, the writings of Horatio Greenough or Washington Allston, where there are no self-conscious assertions of intellectual or educational background and ability.

¹⁰According to Leslie Fiedler, Mrs. Rowson's Charlotte Temple, published in England in 1791 and in America in 1794, was the first novel "to move American readers." With more than 200 editions, it has survived to this day among certain readers, despite its appallingly bad quality. See Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, 1960 and 1966); and also James D. Hart, The Popular Book; A History of American Literary Taste (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950 and 1963).

¹¹For a fascinating seminal work in this area see Constance Rourke, The Roots of American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942).

¹²There is not much information regarding the early culture of artisan work for this period, particularly for rural areas; Carl Bridenbaugh's, The Colonial Craftsmen (New York: New York University Press, 1950), is occasionally helpful, but again pertains mainly to life in cities and towns. Far more satisfactory, though of a later period, is Herbert Gutman's collection of essays: Work, Culture and Society

in Industrializing America (New York: Vintage Books, 1976). There is, however, very little beyond Constance Rourke and Neil Harris on leisure popular culture.

¹³For more on this important aspect of early American culture, see another significant work by Constance Rourke: American Humor, a Study of the National Character (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1931).

¹⁴See Neil Harris, Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1973), for a discussion of this popular form of American humor.

¹⁵See both works already cited by Constance Rourke for more on the early theatricals and "strollers."

¹⁶For an early psycho-cultural examination of this myth, see Otto Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings (New York: Vintage Books, 1959).

¹⁷For works by psychologists in the field of visual perception see, of course, Sigmund Freud and later Ernst Kris. More directly interested in art history are Rudolf Arnheim and E. H. Gombrich.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ARTISAN, II

In 1818 Frazee moved to New York with his growing family and joined his elder brother William in setting up a marble-cutting business. Their work included commissions for funereal monuments in churches and mantelpieces for private homes, as well as gravestones. Some of the work from this early New York period is signed "W & J Frazee," whereas others bear the signature of John Frazee alone. There is no record of anything signed by or attributed to William Frazee alone. We read in the Autobiography that John's activity, if not William's, soon attracted the attention and admiration of local artisans, especially because of his style of lettering.

I knew, from what I had seen and examined on my occasional visits, that it would require a mighty struggle to compete with the tombstone cutters of New York, although the chief artists among them vaunted themselves as unrivalled champions from the celebrated workshops of Europe. My style of lettering put them all to shame. The very first epitaph I cut brought them staring from every shop in the city. And I soon learned from rumor that their ranks were in a state of discomfiture, and yet it was a plain gravestone, with but very few letters upon it, that made so great a stir among the craft. But these letters were arranged with taste and well-proportioned and engraved. They had abundant cause for alarm, for it was not many months before my work in this department attracted general

notice and a marked attention among artists, connoisseurs, and gentlemen of taste, while an unexpected supply of orders on file proved that the fears of my competitors were not groundless nor my merits left unappreciated.

NYPL ms. 75-76

Frazee's reputation in New York was soon firmly established. His pride shows through every word in these passages, where he elaborates on the significance of his ability to carve fine lettering.

I had yet never seen the inside of the Academy, therefore knew very little of the higher branch of sculpture, nor did I at this time make the least pretension to the nobler art. I was, however, deeply in love with monumental sculpture and engraving of letters, and no man ever studied more to bring an art to perfection than I did that of lettering. My application was intense beyond comprehension. For several years I worked from 13 to 15 hours the day throughout the whole year, and my Sundays were for the most of the time employed in reading, writing and sketching. I believe I brought the art of forming letters to a higher perfection than has been done by any other man.

NYPL ms. 76-77

Reflecting further on his early New York years, Frazee explained that he taught his apprentices the art of lettering so that, long before 1834 when writing the Autobiography, he was no longer doing much of what he called this "accessory art." Throughout the '20's, however, it was definitely the more practical side of marble-carving (though increasingly more decorative) that accounted for the flourishing business of the Frazee brothers. While still in New Brunswick, especially after business picked up in 1816, Frazee had worked at the

carving of headstones, milestones, curbstones for sidewalks, and some building stone. During the winter there he had often worked for cabinetmakers, carving lions feet and other furniture ornaments from wood, and he also found employment carving wooden ornaments for the pulpits of parish churches. It was after he moved to New York in 1818 that Frazee decided to limit his work to the "monument and mantelpiece business," apparently feeling that this specialization in the decorative arts was a step upward.

From 1818 until the mid-'20's, Frazee (alone and with his brother) carved a great many monuments and mantelpieces, but very few of them are extant. The only known mantelpieces are the two in Savannah,¹ but it is not known who commissioned them or how or when they came to Georgia. It is entirely possible that the mantelpieces were ordered at the time by the architect either by mail (based on advertisements) or in person while visiting New York.² The mantelpieces would have then been shipped, as large specially ordered household items often were, directly to Savannah harbor and then simply installed in the house. These mantels, dated 1818, reveal a somewhat clumsy classical style which features, in low relief, small animals, floral decorations, and other pastoral elements clearly borrowed from Greek and Roman models. Such a design, of course, could have been copied

from the many decorative art or design books then available to artisans in New York. These mantels date from the first year of the New York business, which would certainly account for the lack of sophistication in design and execution. There were, according to all accounts, many more mantelpieces executed in the next several years, but none of them are known today.³

More, however, is known about the many sepulchral and funereal monuments done during this period. The earliest example of Frazee's marble plaque work is the tablet in memory of Sarah Haynes in Trinity Church, New York, which can be dated 1821. In the Vestry Minutes of Trinity Church for April 9, 1821 we read: "Permission was granted to Mr. Haynes to erect a monument to the memory of his late wife in the Interior of Trinity Church or either of its chapels."⁴ Signed at the bottom "Designed and executed by W & J Frazee," this is an example of varied Greek and Roman motifs, such as the acanthus leaves which appear at the bottom. Most notable here is the lettering for which John Frazee was so justly praised. There is great precision in the lettering, and at the same time a notable variety, for it is executed in both sunken and raised and in printed and script forms. The variety is further accentuated by different sizes of letters and the use of two differently colored marbles.

The Haynes memorial must have been greatly admired, for in the next few years several other Frazee tablets were placed in various New York churches. Among these are the Peter Schermerhorn memorial in St. Marks-in-the-Bowery and the memorial to Anthony Van Dam in St. Paul's Chapel.⁵ Frazee's reputation, especially with New York's old, established families, seems to have grown quite rapidly. In 1824, for example, we see John Pintard of New York writing to his cousin Samuel Bayard at Princeton: "Cousin Caty Van Dam has desired that a monument should be erected in St. Paul's to the memory of her brother Anthony, cost L50 sterling which will afford a very neat tablet. I have undertaken to superintend the execution by a Mr. Frazee, an ingenious artist."⁶ Frazee, it appears, was not only an ingenious artist, but also an ingenious businessman--if 50 pounds sterling is an indication of the prices he was receiving in the mid-1820's.

Frazee's flourishing "monument and mantelpiece business" included during this period at least one public commission. The Elbridge Gerry Monument, located in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, was erected by authorization of the U. S. Congress in 1823.⁷ Signed "W. Frazee and John Frazee," this elegant neoclassical marble tombstone is 12 feet high and consists of a truncated pyramid surmounted by an urn and flame. Another

example of Frazee's fine lettering is the inscription on the pyramidal section of the monument. It is not known who in Congress sponsored Frazee for this piece, but the authorization might very well have been due to the influence of Gulian Verplanck, the representative from New York and a friend of Frazee. Just a year later, in fact, Verplanck publicly stated his idea that the federal government should be the proper fountainhead of art patronage. "Sculpture," he said, "is fitted chiefly for public uses and of all the arts it is that for which private patronage can do least, and which most requires the fostering care of the state."⁸

John and William Frazee apparently got on very well with each other personally as well as professionally. Another brother, Noah, received a letter from John in 1819 saying "I rejoice that I have brothers who are near and dear to me." He then went on to state that "William and I continue at the marble business--by industry and frugality we get along comfortably well. Striving to promote the good of each other, we unite in surmounting every impediment that may obstruct our passage to the summit of tranquility."⁹ This is the first of several letters we have to Noah, and like the rest reveal John Frazee's deep family feelings. It is also sprinkled with fascinating bits of local color and

New York news, such as the lengthy paragraph explaining the considerable expenses of providing for his growing family. Fresh pork, he wrote, was up to 6 pence per pound, hickory wood was going at the rate of \$9.00 per cord, while beef, dry goods and potatoes were also going up. He concluded by saying he hoped to visit Noah in Geneva, New York, as soon as "they get the Canal cut through." A few years later, after the Erie Canal was completed, John wrote Noah again, saying that he still wanted to visit, but it is difficult to leave "while a person is in a business with a number of workmen to oversee, and having pressing orders from different parts of the union to constantly attend to."¹⁰

Although Frazee's business was clearly thriving and his reputation as a fine marblecutter rapidly growing, he was not especially pleased, and claimed in his Autobiography that "some of my mural monuments erected in the different churches in New York and elsewhere have been admired for their beauty and workmanship, yet to me they seem hardly of sufficient importance to claim any particular notice." John Frazee therefore took every opportunity to break through into that other realm--just on the other side of the fence--that he called Fine Art. He made several forays into this field during the '20's while at the same time maintaining his marblecutting

business with William. The answers to why he felt this pressing need and how he tried to fulfill it reveal a good deal about American culture and society in the ante-bellum period.

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Throughout his Autobiography and other writings, Frazee shows a marked preoccupation with the American Academy of Fine Arts. This venerable old institution, the precursor of the National Academy of Design, was headed by Colonel John Trumbull, the celebrated history painter. Membership in the Academy no doubt represented to Frazee the epitome of acceptance in the world of Fine Art, and was in fact something of a private club to which established artists were invited to join. Beyond its social significance, the Academy was the only place in New York with a collection of plaster casts of antique statues, and this fact alone impressed Frazee. He had, after all, dedicated himself to Greek and Roman art, though until he first visited the Academy he had only seen engravings. Frazee had heard about the Academy while still in New Brunswick, but recounts in his Autobiography how he missed his first chance to go there.

Sometime after I removed to New Brunswick [probably about 1818] one of my neighbors came into my shop, where I was cutting a very neat ornament at the top of a headstone. After some conversation with me, in which he expressed his admiration for my work, he asked me if ever I went to the Academy

of Fine Arts when I visited New York. I was dumb and could not give an answer until I inquired of him what it was. I thought I understood the word Academy but the term Fine Arts bothered me. I never had heard of it before, and I felt like a fool. Nor was my friend less astonished at my ignorance than I was confounded for an answer, and when he had informed me that this Academy of the Arts was nothing more or less than an exhibition of Pictures and plaster casts, I was still somewhat in the dark. I could not see how or why a simple picture gallery should be called an Academy, a place of active and practical instruction, and on this point my neighbor, too, was altogether remiss. I did not however visit this Academy until I removed to New York.

NYPL ms. 62

About a decade later, Frazee finally had an opportunity to visit the Academy. It was, as he tells it, obviously a thrilling moment.

[In the early '20's] I made a model in clay of my little son, three years old. It was in the early part of the summer when I was unwell and lingering about the house. It was that which opened an introduction for me to the old Academy. My physician mentioned it to Mr. John Murray, who thereupon called to see both the model and its maker. Mr. Murray expressed himself as highly delighted with my model and other works, and begged permission to introduce me and my works to Col. Trumbull, the President of the Academy of Fine Arts, to which I cheerfully consented and went forward with Mr. Murray to the Academy for the first time in my life. The few paintings by West of Shakespeare hung on the wall, but when I entered the Saloon of Antique Statues, what could describe my feelings at that instant! Even at this very moment I feel the sensation thrilling through me. I stood staring like a statue, while Mr. Murray endeavored to hurry me along from one group to another, from this statue to that, giving vivid descriptions of everything. He scarcely gave me time to collect my senses sufficiently for a calm survey of the great works before me, so anxious was he to fill my unacquainted soul with knowledge. Col. Trumbull was not there, as expected, so I was not introduced to him.

NYPL ms. pp. 79-81

A few days later, Colonel Trumbull called at Frazee's shop, apparently at the request of Mr. Murray. Frazee showed him some work "which seemed to please the old gentlemen," but the sculptor himself was not pleased by what the old gentleman wisely, though a bit brusquely, predicted. "He thought it a game of chance for me or any other artist to think of accomplishing anything in sculpture in this country for a century to come, that in his opinion there would be little or nothing in this branch of Art, and no encouragement given to it in this country for yet a hundred years." Every time he saw Trumbull thereafter, wrote Frazee, the venerable old artist of the Revolution would "express himself in terms the most cold and discouraging." Frazee, of course, wrote this in 1834, at the very height of his career as a sculptor of portrait busts. Just a few years later he might have better understood what Trumbull had been trying to say, but in 1834 his optimism and self-confidence kept him from recognizing the possibility of any future problems with his patronage.

Obviously impressed with the Academy the minute he saw it, Frazee no doubt was determined to be elected an Academician. His letter to the Public Building Commissioner of 1823, asking the permission of the President to model a portrait bust based on a painting of Columbus, bears some relevance here. This was no doubt

an attempt to make initial inroads not only with the Academy, but also with the federal government. There is no record of any response to the following request, dated September 3, 1823, and addressed to Joseph Elgar, Public Building Commissioner:

Dear Sir:

The Portrait of Columbus has, by the consent of Mr. Davis, just been placed in our Academy. As the subject of this picture is deeply significant to Americans, and particularly to the native artists, I feel eager to seize upon the present opportunity, and to solicit your kindness in granting permission to make a model from the Portrait and I should wish to have it in private possession about two weeks. You may be assured that it shall not receive a particle of injury while in my care. If you will consult the President, and procure for me this privilege, it will be a favor for which you shall receive my warmest gratitude.

John Frazee¹¹

Since this effort (and perhaps others) was fruitless, Frazee seized the next best opportunity, the triumphant return of General Lafayette to America in 1824. Frazee managed to gain membership in the Academy in June 1824.¹² He then set about the business of solidifying his position there, using Lafayette's presence to do so. The return of this aged, already legendary hero of two revolutions was extremely moving to many Americans, and throughout his triumphant tour there was a tremendous demand for an accurate likeness of his features. The first was probably a widely circulated engraving by Asher B. Durand¹³ which was used to decorate programs,

fans and playbills and in turn was reproduced on pottery. The painters Sully, Jarvis and Vanderlyn, among others, petitioned the corporation of the city of New York to paint Lafayette's official portrait.¹⁴ They were all, however, turned down, the successful applicant being the then relatively unknown painter, Samuel F. B. Morse.¹⁵ And, in Philadelphia, a likeness of Lafayette's head was carved in wood by the aged William Rush.¹⁶

One of the requirements of the Academy was that within one year of election each new member had to present a work of his own art to the Academy's collection.¹⁷ It was probably Frazee's intention to gain permission to model the head of Lafayette and then to present it to the Academy as his official entrance piece. He thus approached several members with his plan.¹⁸ At a special meeting of the directors Frazee's views were seconded, and a delegation of three was appointed "to wait upon the Nation's Guest," and to solicit him to sit for his portrait bust. On September 5, 1824, John R. Murray, Ezra Weeks, and Archibald Robertson, along with the artist, called on Lafayette at the City Hotel, and "obtained his most cheerful assent."

The next morning, in a quiet room of the hotel, Frazee began to model in clay his bust of Lafayette. Finding, however, that the general's head was completely

bald under his wig, "he deemed it a favorable opportunity to take a cast which would preserve, with great precision the bony and fixed parts of the head, and also facilitate his work." He did so, with the general's permission, and with several gentlemen (including the general's son, George Washington Lafayette) looking on.¹⁹ When the bust was completed both Lafayette and his son pronounced it a perfect likeness. A few weeks later it occurred to Frazee that it would be a good idea, probably in terms of garnering future commissions, to have this pronouncement in writing. But Lafayette and his son had already left New York and were travelling to Washington, and so it was to Baltimore that Frazee wrote and received the following answer:

Mr. John Frazee - New York

Sir:

My Father - General Lafayette, has received your letter to the date of New York, the 10th of November, and charges me with the thanking you for it, as well as with the kind trouble you must have taken with the finishing of his bust. My father expressed great approbation of the likeness you have made of him, and which I also feel much pleasure to say it is very faithfully taken and beautifully executed. Will you be so good sir, as to accept of the expression of my best regards.

/s/ G. W. Lafayette

Baltimore

November 26, 1824²⁰

Earlier the same month, an incident occurred which might actually have prompted Frazee to solicit the letter from Lafayette attesting to his bust's accuracy.

A French sculptor living in New York, Nicholas Gevelot,²¹ offered a plaster bust of the general to the City Corporation. It was accepted and voted to be in a conspicuous spot in the Gallery of Paintings in City Hall.²² But copies had been struck off and were evidently being offered for sale by Gevelot. Frazee was not at all pleased. He inserted a notice in the newspaper that read:

Understanding that busts of General Lafayette are vending in this city, and that the public is impressed with the idea that Busts are taken from the original model executed by me, from the mould which I took in plaster, from the face of the General, to which he submitted at the solicitation of the Academy of Fine Arts in this city; I do hereby declare that no busts of Lafayette have yet been published by me. I shall affix a label upon every bust issued by me containing my signature and seal, confirmed by the Secretary of the Academy of Fine Arts. The busts will be out in about ten days, and in the meantime, I invite my fellow-citizens to call at 443 Broadway and examine the original model.²³

Frazee need not have been too worried, however, for with his own bust of Lafayette he had managed to fulfill his first-year requirement for full entrance into the American Academy of Fine Arts.²⁴ This was the kind of prestige he had been looking for--essentially the recognition of his own fellow artists that acknowledged to him his own artistic worth and at the same time welcomed him into their "club." He was not yet thinking of what to do about patronage in his new official role as a fine artist. Would his future clients be the same as they were for gravestones and mantelpieces--private

citizens? Or would his patronage come from the public or government domain? Clearly, he was not yet dealing with such questions. He might have paid closer attention to Nicholas Gevelot, who, after all, had made a gift of his bust of Lafayette to the city of New York, no doubt hoping for a "pay-off" some day in the form of a public commission--something perhaps like the \$3,500 he had garnered from the U. S. Congress for a relief sculpture in the Capitol the year before.

Frazee's bust of Lafayette did, however, serve a definite immediate purpose. As he stated in his Autobiography, "It was on the merits of my plaster cast of Lafayette made in 1824 that I obtained a commission to execute in marble the bust of Mr. Wells." John Wells, who had been an eminent New York lawyer, had died in the Yellow Fever epidemic the year before.²⁵ On July 1, 1824, friends of Wells and members of the New York Bar applied to the vestry of Grace Church and received permission to have a monument erected in his memory.²⁶ Less than a year later, on April 2, 1825, Frazee had completed the bust of Wells that was to surmount the memorial plaque. Before installing it in the church, however, it was placed in the Mayor of New York's office so that friends and acquaintances of Wells could inspect it.²⁷

The Wells portrait was at the time acknowledged to be the first bust in stone carved by a native American sculptor, and no evidence since then has come to light to disprove that claim. Frazee himself certainly took the commission most seriously, stating in his Autobiography that:

I was not without some fearful bodings on commencing this work. The difficulties that confronted me were manifold; some of which were totally unsurmountable. This I well knew at the commencement, so did my employers, else I never would have touched the work. I never knew Mr. Wells and the portrait I was to model from had been painted after his death from memory, chiefly by Mr. Waldo. With such material, success in likeness would have been a miracle. Moreover, this was my first attempt to model from a painting, a proceeding in which complete success is scarcely allowable under the most favorable circumstances. My trial therefore was a severe one. It being the work of deep interest on all sides, the family of the deceased, the numerous relatives, and friends, together with my employers, the members of the New York Bar, were all looking on the one side; and on the other stood myself, fearful and trembling, yet firm and resolved. I had declared I could do it, and could not, dared not, shrink from my pledge. Help for the work I had none, and I had passed to an age which with my national pride, could not permit seeking out aid from any foreign artist on these shores. So I determined to put forth all my energies and powers and breast the dangers alone fully confiding in the auspices of kind heaven for a favorable result. My model was successful beyond the highest expectations of all parties... the monument to John Wells the bust of which I have just been describing displays some of my sculpture aside from the bust. The whole cost one thousand dollars.

NYPL ms. pp. 82-84

After inspection by the citizenry in the Mayor's office, the bust was adjoined to the marble plaque and the completed memorial installed in the Old Grace Church,

at Rector and Wall Streets. Here it remained until 1846, when that structure was torn down, and the new Gothic revival church (designed by James Renwick) opened at Broadway and 12th Streets. Several of the wall monuments were at that time moved uptown to the new building, among them Frazee's memorial plaque to Cadwallader Colden, but the Wells memorial was not included.²⁸ Instead, members of the New York Bar petitioned the vestry of St. Paul's Chapel in downtown Manhattan, requesting permission to have the memorial reinstalled in that church, which is where it remains today.²⁹

Throughout the 1810's and '20's, there was a growing dissatisfaction among New Yorkers with the American Academy. Founded in 1808 by wealthy "gentlemen of taste," the Academy was intended primarily as an institution for the cultivation and refinement of native Americans. This the Academicians attempted to accomplish mainly by exhibiting works of art. There was very little emphasis on education, the exhibitions consisted of mediocre to bad pictures, and practically no attention was paid to the growing numbers of American artists. Instead, the Academy catered to the needs of the wealthy "amateurs," as they were called--gentlemen who were not themselves professional artists, but who were patrons of art and stockholders in the Academy, and interested in art

for its increasing social and cultural cachet. This bias, especially offensive to the artists, was clearly spelled out in the Academy's 1816 By-Laws: "All artists of DISTINGUISHED merit...shall be permitted to exhibit their works," while "AMATEURS shall be 'INVITED' to expose in the Gallery of the Academy any of their performances." But perhaps the most irritating aspect of this contempt for the artists, was the dictatorial attitude of Colonel John Trumbull, the Academy's President, who permitted young artists to study and draw from the Academy's collection only from 6:00 until 8:00 in the mornings starting in 1817. "Beggars," he is reported to have said, "cannot be choosers."³⁰

The waning popularity of the Academy's exhibitions only added to the problems. New Yorkers were far from uninterested in art exhibitions and would have gladly supported the Academy if its director had made some attempts to change the offerings from time to time. It was, however, mainly the permanent collection that was on view, with an occasional loan from a local collector. All in all, the repetitiousness and mediocrity simply did not sustain interest. "The pictures at the old Academy," wrote Samuel F. B. Morse, "are for the most part execrable trash, the vile daubings of old picture manufacturers or the rude copies of students, good, bad, and indifferent." The situation was hardly healthy--

not for the artists, who needed and wanted inspiration, and not for the public, that needed and wanted education.³¹

Although Frazee had been earlier impressed with the old Academy, he had at the same time bitterly experienced Trumbull's disdain for young artists and pessimism about the future of American sculpture. He readily joined Morse and a small group of young artists who made a tentative attempt to withdraw from the Academy by forming the "Drawing Association." Then, in 1826, this group decided to form a rival institution and thus founded the National Academy of Design. The new academy, formed entirely of artists and primarily oriented to artists, was made up initially of fifteen members, with Samuel F. B. Morse as President. The fifteen founders elected an additional fifteen members, and this group of thirty formed the nucleus of the new organization. John Frazee was one of the original fifteen and the only sculptor in the group.³²

Beginning in 1826, the National Academy held annual exhibitions of works by its members. These shows were so heavily attended that the revenues paid for the academy's art school in just a few years. Catering to the country's growing sense of nationalism, the new academy hung works of art by native Americans which provided a material basis for pride in one's own national culture. Most of what the public saw consisted of oil

paintings representing landscapes, portraits, genre scenes, or historical scenes. There was, however, a portrait bust in plaster by John Frazee in the first exhibition in 1826. It was listed in the catalogue as a bust of a woman inscribed "Mother" (now lost). In the 1827 exhibition was the bust of Lafayette and a self-portrait.³³ The self-portrait bust was, after the exhibition, presented to the National Academy in fulfillment of one of its by-laws.³⁴ It was apparently never carved into stone, but other copies are known.³⁵ And, like other plasters (such as the one inscribed "Mother"), Frazee does not mention it in the Autobiography, evidently feeling that works in plaster were not yet finished and thus not worthy of mention.

The self-portrait bust is, in many respects, Frazee's finest work. It represents the artist at the age of 39, looking quite youthful, self-assured, and attractive.³⁶ With head cocked slightly to the side, full wavy hair, a dreamy quality in the eyes and half-open lips, we see Frazee's self-conception as rather romantic--even Byronic in character. It has been compared with the famous "Azara" Alexander bust, a plaster of which was in the American Academy's collection of casts and which Frazee no doubt had seen.³⁷

Frazee's self-portrait can be compared with at least two other contemporaneous likenesses. One, an oil

on canvas, was painted by Asher B. Durand about 1825 or '26, the same time as the self-portrait. In Dunlap's chapter on Durand he writes "The first effort he made with these instruments [paints and brushes] was a portrait of his mother. The next, and the first that I saw, was a portrait of John Frazee, since eminent as a sculptor."³⁸ In this portrait, also a three-quarter bust, we see the almost identical facial features, hair, and slight turn of the head that we observed in the self-portrait. Durand, however, has clothed the sculptor in a toga-like garb, visible in the upper area of the torso and resembling perhaps the official robe of the classic academician. Frazee and Durand, of course, knew each other as founders of the National Academy of Design, and the costume in which Frazee is shown might therefore be a specific reference to this relationship. The painting, however, was apparently not given to the National Academy to fulfill any obligations; rather it was later presented to Orion Frazee, the sculptor's son, and has remained since then in the family.³⁹

A miniature portrait of Frazee by the artist Henry C. Shumway⁴⁰ is now in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. It is paired with a miniature portrait of Frazee's second wife, Lydia Place, who he married in the winter of 1832-33. Although undated, these miniatures

can be placed in the early to mid-1830's, for Frazee does not look more than ten years older than in the Durand portrait. It is altogether possible, in fact, that the Shumway miniatures were done as marriage portraits. There is also a daguerreotype of Frazee from the 1830's,⁴¹ which was exhibited much later at the National Academy.

It becomes clear that, as the 1820's progressed, so did John Frazee's associations with the world of "Fine Arts"--his activities with first one and then the second academy, his relations with artist colleagues, and primarily his determination to succeed himself as a "fine artist" rather than a "mere stonecutter." At the same time, his success in the "monument and mantelpiece business" became more and more pronounced, as his fame in that area of activity became more widespread. With a growing family and every year more responsibilities, his lucrative business no doubt answered many personal and familial needs. But the ambiguity (even irony) of the situation apparently became unbearable for Frazee, to whom recognition and prestige as an artist finally became more important than security and remuneration as an artisan.

It must have been, therefore, a difficult decision but at the same time a relief for Frazee when, in

1829, "with so much of my time taken up with the commonplace and miscellaneous work of our shop and quarries," he decided to dissolve the business partnership with his brother. He informed William that he "wanted to enter into the more distinct and separate study of the Fine Arts and apply myself more closely to statuary sculpture." Without going into specific details, Frazee tells us in the Autobiography that he proposed a plan to his brother that was mutually agreed upon, and that their inventory was sold at auction in September 1829 for \$14,500. We do not know how the money was divided. William, according to later correspondence, evidently returned to New Jersey,⁴² whereas John continued to work in the studio on Broadway. Within a few more months his life was to change even more radically.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II

- ¹These are in the collection of the Telfair Museum, Savannah, Georgia. The Telfair House was designed by the architect William Jay about 1818.
- ²Since both the Telfair House and the mantels date from the same year, it is likely that William Jay had included the Frazee mantels in his design from the beginning. This would also explain why the Telfair (now a museum) has no acquisition record or provenance for them.
- ³If it is true that the Telfair mantels were ordered by William Jay, one might further speculate about what other Frazee mantels he, or even other architects, might have commissioned.
- ⁴It is not known where this plaque was placed in the old Church, but when Trinity was rebuilt in 1844 the tablet was put in its present position--to the right of the door to the verger's room on the east wall.
- ⁵The monument to Peter Schermerhorn (d. 1826) is signed by John Frazee. The plaque is to the right of the entrance on the rear wall of St. Marks-in-the-Bowery, 2nd Avenue and 12th Street. The Anthony Van Dam memorial tablet is on the south wall of the chancel in St. Paul's Chapel, Broadway. In his Autobiography Frazee mentions having also done monuments in the Market Street Church and the Church in Murray Street.
- ⁶Letter dated August 12, 1824, in Letters from John Pintard to his Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833, ed. Dorothy C. Barck (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1940-1941), 4 vols., vol. 2, p. 157.
- ⁷See James M. Goode, The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974), p. 91. The inscription on the monument's pyramidal section reads: "The tomb of Elbridge Gerry, Vice President of the United States; who died suddenly in this city on his way to the Capitol as president of the Senate, November 23, 1814, aged 70. Thus fulfilling his own

memorable injunction: 'It is the duty of every citizen, though he may have but one day to live, to devote that day to the good of his country.'

- ⁸An Address by Gulian Verplanck at the opening of the 10th Exhibition of the American Academy of Fine Arts in May, 1824 (original in Verplanck Papers, New-York Historical Society). See also: Robert W. July, The Essential New Yorker: Gulian Crommelin Verplanck (Durham: Duke University Press, 1951).
- ⁹John Frazee to Noah Frazee, 6 November 1819, Frazee Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (Hereinafter referred to as Frazee Papers, AAA).
- ¹⁰John Frazee to Noah Frazee, undated, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ¹¹Public Building Commissioner Correspondence 1823, #2700 vol. 26. Copy in office of the Architect of the Capitol.
- ¹²See letter from Archibald Robertson to John Frazee, 5 June 1824, informing Frazee of his having been elected an Academician, Frazee Papers, AAA. See also letter from Frazee to Robertson, 10 June 1824, expressing thanks, New-York Historical Society.
- ¹³"We have just seen the head of Lafayette in miniature engraved by Durand," New York Evening Post, 4 September 1824. This was during Durand's active career as a fine engraver of portraits, bank notes, certificates, etc., and before he became the well-known landscape painter and "member" of the Hudson River School.
- ¹⁴Minutes of the Common Council (1784-1831), vol. 14, p. 123.
- ¹⁵"Vanderlyn, Sully, Peale, Jarvis, Waldo, Inman, Ingham and some others were my competitors in the application of this picture." Letter from Samuel F. B. Morse to his wife, 6 January 1825, Edward L. Morse, ed. Samuel F. B. Morse, His Letters and Journals (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1914), vol. 1, p. 211.
- ¹⁶"An example of Rush's uncanny memory and ability as a sculptor is demonstrated by his portrait of Lafayette which was executed between September 28 and October 5, 1824. Rush...was present at one of the numerous

official dinners tendered to Lafayette during his visit and was observed to be quiet and to be studying the General's face intensely. Several days later, Lafayette dined with the sculptor and some of his friends. In the center of the table was a tall object covered with a cloth which, after arousing much comment, was unveiled to reveal the portrait of Lafayette. It is said that the General considered the bust an excellent likeness and that a remembrance of the bust sent Rush an engraving of himself from the Ary Scheffer portrait." Henri Merceau, William Rush (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1937); also cited by Caldwell, "John Frazee," p. 33.

- 17 Charter and By-Laws, The American Academy of the Fine Arts (1817), Section III, states "That every person elected an academician shall, within one year after his election, deposit with the Academy a specimen of his talents, whether in painting, statuary, architecture or engraving, to remain the property of the Academy."
- 18 The story of Frazee modelling Lafayette's portrait bust is related in North American Magazine, vol. 5, no. 27 (January 1835), pp. 205-206. See also Caldwell, "John Frazee."
- 19 The anonymous writer of the article in the North American Magazine took great pains to point out that Frazee was a genuine sculptor, not simply a maker of plaster face-masks (perhaps like Browere, then at work in New York), and that it was only the fact of Lafayette's baldness that suggested the appropriateness of making a plaster cast of the cranium alone (and not the facial features). A footnote to the article reads: "It is proper to remark that it is not the practice of Frazee to take a cast of the head and face, in modelling his likenesses. Casting is only safe upon the fixed and bony parts; and when the face is cast, an after-sitting is required to perfect the likeness with the modelling tool. Lafayette's head being bald, he embraced the opportunity to expedite the model and secure great truth to the cranium."
- 20 Letter from George Washington Lafayette to John Frazee, Baltimore, 26 November 1824, Frazee Papers, AAA. The bust of Lafayette has disappeared. As late as 1911 there was a copy in the National Academy of Design, but it cannot now be located. A recent search for the bust, in France as well as in the U.S., by the Lafayette Papers (Cornell University) has also been unsuccessful.

- ²¹Gevelot was the French sculptor who had sculpted the bas-relief of Penn's Treaty with the Indians in 1823 in the Rotunda of the Capitol in Washington. He received what was considered by many the scandalous amount of \$3,500. See Lillian B. Miller, Patrons and Patriotism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), esp. Part II.
- ²²Minutes of the Common Council, New York, (1784-1831), vol. 14, November 16, 1824.
- ²³New York Evening Post, 16 November 1824.
- ²⁴On March 18th, 1824, Alexander Robertson, the secretary of the Academy, had written Frazee a letter which is virtually a statement saying the admission requirements of the Academy had been met. It was reprinted in North American Magazine, vol. 5, no. 27 (January 1835).
- ²⁵"Mr. Wells died at Brooklyn Heights in September 1823 of what was stated at the time to be high bilious fever, and which was, in fact, the yellow fever." "A Memoir of the Late John Wells," American Monthly Magazine, March 1838. Yellow Fever outbreaks were common in New York during the 1810's and '20's. One such episode was recorded by John Frazee in a letter to his brother, Noah, 6 November 1819, Frazee Papers, AAA. "This city has been visited with the yellow fever this season, but through Divine mercy we have escaped it, as we lived out of the infectious vicinity."
- ²⁶William R. Stewart, History of Grace Church and Old New York (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1924), p. 84.
- ²⁷"The bust of the lamented John Wells is placed in the Mayor's office for the inspection and gratification of his numerous friends and acquaintances," New York Mirror, 2 April 1825. Also in 1825 Horatio Greenough departed for Europe.
- ²⁸Henry B. Caldwell speculates that this was due to the large size of the Wells memorial. See Caldwell, "John Frazee."
- ²⁹"An application in behalf of the Gentlemen by whom the monument to the memory of the late John Wells Esquire was erected in the former edifice of Grace Church was

read, requesting permission to erect the same in St. Paul's Chapel. Whereupon it was ordered that permission be granted to erect the same in said Chapel under the direction of the Committee of Supplies and Repairs." Vestry Records, St. Paul's Chapel, 8 December 1845.

- ³⁰ See Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, ed., The American Academy of Fine Arts and the American Art Union, 1816-1852, 2 vols. (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953). The By-Laws are quoted in Thomas Cummings, Historic Annals of the National Academy of Design (Philadelphia: G. W. Childs, 1865), pp. 19-20 (the italics and capitals are Cummings's). See also Miller, Patrons and Patriotism, Ch. 8, for a good summary of the demise of the American Academy.
- ³¹ See Cummings, Historic Annals, pp. 18-19, where he maintains the permanency of the Academy's materials was one of the causes of its "death" and that the institution's failure was directly due to the fact that the "Academy keeps works on exhibition all the year." The Morse quote is from a letter from Morse to Simeon DeWitt Bloodgood, New York, 26 December 1828, Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- ³² Eliot H. Clark, History of the National Academy of Design (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 10. The fifteen founders were: S. F. B. Morse, Henry Inman, Asher B. Durand, Thomas S. Cummings, William G. Wall, William Dunlap, Charles C. Wright, Moseley I. Danforth, Edward C. Potter, Gerlando Marsiglia, Ithiel Town, Charles C. Ingham, Hugh Reinagle, Peter Maverick, and John Frazee. The original fifteen elected members were: Ambrose Andrews, Frederick S. Agate, James Coyle, Robert Norris, Albert Durand, John W. Paradise, Thomas Grinnell, George W. Hatch, John C. Murray, Jr., John Neilson, John F. Morton, Henry J. Morton, Thomas Cole, D. W. Wilson, and A. J. Davis. See also: Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, ed., National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826-1860 (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), 2 vols.; and Cummings, Historic Annals.
- ³³ "Catalogue of Pictures, Busts, Architectural Designs and Engravings in the first Exhibition of the National Academy of Design - 1826," p. 11. See also Cowdrey, Exhibition Record.

- ³⁴Rule XIX, Constitution and By-Laws of the National Academy of Design, adopted December 16, 1826, states that "every Academician should, during the first year after his election present to the Academy a specimen of his own production in the Arts of Design to be preserved in the gallery of the Academy."
- ³⁵A fine plaster self-portrait bust is in the possession of Frazee's great, great-granddaughter, Marguerite C. Heath, North Tarrytown, New York. When it was in the possession of her aunt in the 1920's a bronze copy was taken from the plaster and presented to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
- ³⁶"Although this head represents Frazee in his thirty-ninth year, according to his own statement, it gives the impression of a much younger man." Taft, History of American Sculpture.
- ³⁷See Caldwell, "John Frazee." See also: "Charter and By-Laws of the American Academy of the Fine Arts with an account of the Statues, Busts and Paintings," 1815, where several plaster casts of antique statues are listed, including the "Azara" Alexander. Frazee could also have seen an engraving of the Alexander in James Dalloway, Of Statuary and Sculpture among the Ancients (London, 1816), p. 138, a book which he mentions in the Autobiography.
- ³⁸Dunlap, History of the Rise and Progress, vol. 3, p. 62.
- ³⁹The painting by Durand is now in the collection of Stephen C. Millett, Jr., Bristol, Rhode Island. Mr. Millett is Frazee's great great, great-grandson.
- ⁴⁰Shumway and Frazee no doubt knew each other late in the '20's (as did Durand and Frazee) through their associations with the National Academy of Design. "After two years at the National Academy of Design, Mr. Shumway began painting in 1829 for ten dollars a miniature portrait," Henry Willard French, Art and Artists in Connecticut (New York: Charles Dillingham, 1879), p. 73.
- ⁴¹The location of the daguerreotype is unknown. See Cowdrey, Exhibition Record, where in the exhibition catalogue for 1911 no. 772 is a "Photograph of John Frazee."

⁴²"Brother William lives in Jersey, 3 miles from Elizabethtown." Letter from John Frazee to Noah Frazee, dated New York, 2 February 1835, Frazee Papers, AAA.

CHAPTER III

THE ARTIST, I

On April 23, 1829, six months before Frazee ended his partnership with his brother, a meeting of "mechanics and others" was called in New York City in an effort to protect workers from an alleged plot by employers to lengthen the long-established ten-hour day.¹ It is possible, as we will see, that John Frazee attended this meeting, which was, in fact, the birth of the New York Working Men's Party. If Frazee did attend this meeting, there is no indication of it--or any of his subsequent political involvement--in his Autobiography. It is perhaps not coincidental, however, that his decision to split with his brother involved a desire to spend more time in other activities than simply the Fine Arts.

Although "societies" of artisans in various crafts had existed in American cities and towns in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the first amalgamation of these societies for political purposes occurred in Philadelphia, with the birth of the first Working Men's party in 1828. The New York Party was the second labor party to organize, and after 1830 such parties rapidly sprang up throughout New England and the

central states. Although some of these can be seen as Jacksonian-type extensions of guild organizations, there is no question but that the New York City Working Men formed a potent, radical and forward-looking reform organization. It was, from its inception, serious and taken seriously.²

At the April meeting, a Committee of Fifty had been formed, and their long-awaited report was delivered at a large meeting of "mechanics and other working men" on October 18, 1829.³ The Committee was headed from the start by Thomas Skidmore, a machinist, who had just written a book entitled The Rights of Man to Property!, and the report of the Committee obviously bears the stamp of this tract. "The hereditary transmission of wealth" was called the "prime cause of all calamities," and Skidmore proposed an elaborate scheme providing for its "equal transmission to every individual of each succeeding generation on arriving at the age of maturity." In addition, Skidmore proposed a version of the universal free public education reforms that Robert Dale Owen had been lecturing about during these months in New York. And finally the meeting voted to run Working Men's candidates on a separate ticket in the next month's election, resolving "that past experience teaches that we have nothing to hope from the aristocratic orders of society,

and that our only course to pursue is to send men of our own description, if we can, to the Legislature at Albany..."

The Working Men chose a full legislative ticket, including eleven State Assembly candidates and two for State Senate. Careful to show the extent of true "laboring elements," Skidmore listed the occupations along with the names of the Working Men's ticket. They included: two carpenters, two machinists, a painter, a whitesmith, a brassfounder, a printer, a cooper, a grocer and a physician. After a vigorous two-week campaign, the November elections took place, and the Working Men's Party scored a remarkable political success. One candidate, a carpenter named Ebenezer Ford, was elected to the Assembly, and every other candidate made a respectable showing, the Working Men receiving at least 6,000 of the 21,000 votes cast.⁴

Not only Skidmore, but also Robert Dale Owen in his speeches and George Henry Evans in his newspaper, regularly voiced their opposition to both the Democrats and the National Republicans. They constantly warned that Andrew Jackson in particular had no interest in serious reform. According to Jabez Hammond, the men who "flocked to the standard of the Workingmen" in New York were "opposed to the Albany Regency and the Jackson party."⁵ Although they were united in their opposition

to the major parties and in their desire for significant reform, the Working Men themselves represented a wide variety of social and economic types.⁶ The preponderance, however, came from the artisan class of workers.⁷

But Thomas Skidmore's radical "agrarian" policy, especially with its proposal for an equal distribution of wealth, soon proved too extreme for even the Working Men. As many historians have pointed out, these men were more interested in obtaining equality of opportunity in a growing capitalist economy, and in achieving a higher social status, than in actually dividing up the pie into equal slices.

Soon after the 1829 election, Skidmore was forced out, and in 1830 the party split into at least three factions. The most influential, headed by George Henry Evans who spoke through his newspaper, The Working Man's Advocate, retained many of Skidmore's proposed reforms, such as abolition of imprisonment for debt, free trade, anticlericalism, antimonopolism, compensation for jurors and witnesses, and various civil service reforms. But the most important plank of the new platform was a unique educational system known as "State Guardianship," whereby working class children were to be educated in free boarding schools under a tax-supported program.

This new platform was read at the "Great Meeting of Working Men" held on September 15, 1830. It was

proposed that the workers "erect a National Edifice that shall have EQUAL RIGHTS for its foundation, REPUBLICAN EDUCATION for its pillars of support, and 'OPEN TO ALL HONEST MEN' as a motto over its gates." Deciding now to make a political effort above and beyond the state legislature, nominations were taken for the U. S. Congress as well. Among the eight names proposed was John Frazee, Marble Cutter.⁸ A month later, a balloting was taken from the names formerly proposed for Congress, and the following ticket resulted: Thomas Hertell, printer (192 votes); Isaac Pierce, grocer (165 votes); John Frazee, Sculptor (163 votes). In one month John Frazee the marble cutter became John Frazee, sculptor and Congressional candidate of the New York Working Men's Party.⁹

A day before the November election, the following advertisement appeared on the back page of the Working Man's Advocate:

J. FRAZEE'S Marble Works, 442 Broadway (adjoining the N. Y. Tattersals). This is the only establishment in the city where the whole attention is particularly devoted to SCULPTURE, AND MONUMENTS FOR THE DEAD. Strangers from the country, and from different parts of the United States, will find it to their advantage to call at this establishment for Monuments, Statues, Busts, Fountains, Vases, Pier and Center Tables--and any other description of ORNAMENTAL SCULPTURE. All of which can be furnished at the shortest notice, and on the most reasonable terms, in either American or Foreign Marble, in a superior style of workmanship.¹⁰

The 1830 election proved a dismal failure for all the Working Men's candidates, including Frazee. But the party again ran candidates for state office in 1831, with Frazee on the ticket this time for State Assembly.¹¹ This election, as well as the next few, were again unsuccessful, and by 1834 the Working Men's party was out of existence, many of its members having gone over to join the Jackson or Tammany men.

Many of the workers who left the fold resented the scornful denunciations that had constantly been cast upon them by "respectable" politicians and journalists. Such phrases as "Dirty Shirt party," "Mob," "levelers," and "ring-streaked and speckled rabble" implied a permanent lower class position that few of the New York workingmen were willing to accept. Much of the nation's press, in fact, continually looked askance at a party whose own press constantly reminded its readers that America was a class society. Said the Boston Courier: "The very pretension to the necessity of such a party is a libel on the community."¹²

The decline and downfall of the Working Men have been attributed not only to bad press, but also to internal bickering, political ineptness, infiltration by opportunists, and the shrewdness of the Democrats. But, according to a most recent scholar, the party that presumed to speak out for labor fatally ruined its own image,

especially in the eyes of working men themselves. "Speak out the Working Men did, in a message that was idealistic and radical. As the message became clearer, an American public seeking the main chance and increasingly optimistic about its possibilities lost interest in the nay-saying of the radical dissenters...¹³

Why did John Frazee decide to become a radical politician? Was he not aware of the possible difficulties that might result for him personally and professionally? The answer, I believe, can be found in part in the high measure of importance Frazee placed on a good "liberal" education. Throughout his Autobiography, we remember, he constantly stressed the problems he had to overcome due to the very lack of such learning. Knowing that this was perhaps the most difficult obstacle for him to overcome (though failing to recognize any others), Frazee might have been generous enough to want to try to establish a more readily available free public education for young craftsmen of the future. The reforms proposed by Owen and Evans would certainly have appealed to Frazee as just such a remedy. But, being essentially naive socially (as well as politically), Frazee failed to see in such radical educational reforms the inherent threat to the established members of society. That is to say, Frazee did not recognize these reforms as radical.

More likely is the fact that Frazee saw reform in general as a positive good, and further that he saw a "taste for the Fine Arts" as part of the general movement for reforming or bettering American society. And, since certain elements of what has since been called the antebellum movement for "romantic reform" were taken up and espoused by various "genteel" citizens, Frazee possibly felt that his behavior would have been judged favorably--especially by certain members of Knickerbocker society who showed some interest in promoting the arts as well as other kinds of "reform." He supposed, then, that "established" reformers would look kindly upon social reform when it appeared in the form of an organized political party. But this was no ordinary political party; it was composed of and meant to represent the rights of "laborers, mechanics and other working men." As the 1830's and '40's progressed, a good deal of agitation for reform in such areas as anti-slavery, temperance, women's rights and even education did indeed occur, but never successfully when in the form of a politically organized third-party. Individual agitation, group meetings and conventions, the formation of societies, the printing and distribution of tracts--such were the often benign activities that met with favor and were championed by the wealthy.

Frazee's brief period of political activity appears to have had no marked effect on his patrons. Gulian Verplanck continued, as we will see, in his attempts to influence Congress on Frazee's behalf, as did other friends of the artist's in Washington. There is no indication of how Verplanck or the others reacted to Frazee's venture, if in fact they reacted at all. Most likely they simply saw it as a logical, even reasonable, extension of Frazee's complex web of associations with his fellow workers. Frazee, in his capacity as a master artisan with journeymen and other workers beneath him, would have seen himself and have been seen by others as a natural leader. One of course is tempted from today's point of view to search for clues to support a hypothesis that Frazee's radical activities alienated his patrons, especially because a few years after his years of political involvement, his activity in sculpture nearly came to a standstill. But the evidence is simply not there. In fact, immediately after the political foray, there was a veritable burst of activity.

Throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, Congress gave commissions for the sculptured decoration of the Capitol. All these commissions, as discussed earlier, were given to foreign sculptors visiting America, particularly the prolific Causici, Persico, and Gevelot. This tendency began to change,

in however modest a way, in 1831, when John Frazee was awarded the commission to do a bust in marble of the recently deceased statesman, John Jay. Put through Congress by Gulian C. Verplanck, Frazee's friend and representative from New York state in the House, the bill appropriating \$400 for the bust was passed by Congress on March 12, 1831. (If one considers the \$100 for the pedestal, then the commission can be seen as \$500.) A few weeks later, Frazee wrote to Joseph Elgar, Commissioner of Public Buildings:

Your letter appraising me of the act of Congress relative to the Marble Bust of John Jay, to be executed by me, was duly received. This is, I believe, the first instance where our government has voluntarily bestowed its patronage on an American genius, in this department of Arts; and you cannot imagine with what emotion of pleasure I received the intelligence. Not, however, in a pecuniary view, although the price is very fair, but my joy was kindled through considerations of a more elevated nature--considerations which, I have no doubt, your mind will readily apprehend.¹⁴

Frazee, it seemed, now had two small triumphs, for not only had he been the first native-born American to have done a marble portrait bust (John Wells), but now with the Jay commission he also had the honor of being the first American sculptor commissioned by Congress. His letter to Elgar clearly revealed his own pride in this accomplishment. Others apparently felt Frazee had been treated badly in terms of remuneration--especially when compared with the much larger sums which

had been consistently awarded foreign sculptors. As one New York newspaper put it:

The appropriation of Congress for the Bust of Jay was five hundred dollars. Can rational man believe this is just remuneration for such a work? We shall say nothing of reward, for that is an unfashionable word in our vernacular. We shall say nothing of the beauty, the felicity of the execution, in this view. Will five hundred dollars repay it? No--those in the least acquainted with it will answer, No. Is this patronage? Is this the incentive to patient study, watching thought, solitary toil, and desire of fame? Had our politicians no better reward, a sudden flight among the seekers of office would darken the land of liberty.¹⁵

As in the case with the Wells Memorial, Frazee had never seen the subject of the bust. But in the case of Jay, he could use a fine painting of him by Trumbull in City Hall for a model. More important, there was a bust of John Jay done 40 years earlier by Giuseppe Cerrachi, owned by Peter Augustus Jay, the son, which Frazee referred to many times.¹⁶ Almost exactly a year after the commission, Frazee finished the bust and placed it on view in the New York Merchants' Exchange.¹⁷ Two days later more than four thousand people had visited the Merchants' Exchange to witness this work of art done by an American sculptor.¹⁸ The work was so highly praised that in 1834, we read in the Autobiography, Jay's daughter Ann donated a replica to the Corporation of New York City.

The Jay bust apparently had a profound, even sensational, effect on the New York public--a public, it

must be remembered, which was always excited by the slightest oddity or rare item placed before it. In this case, the feature that most aroused the public's interest was not so much the aesthetic aspect but rather the fact that the bust had been carved by an American. According to one newspaper: "That so delicate and beautiful a piece of workmanship should have been executed by one of our own countrymen in New York, created universal astonishment."¹⁹ John Pintard, who had known Jay personally, also visited the Merchants' Exchange, and later reported his amazement in a letter to his daughter, saying "A Mr. Frazee, sculptor, executed for Congress a bust in marble of John Jay. It is equal in workmanship to the best Italian performances." Even Pintard, an educated and fairly sophisticated aristocrat, was taken with Frazee's ability when compared with Europeans. The fact is, however, that until Frazee there were no professional American marble sculptors. Pintard continued his typically Romantic explanation of this phenomenon: "The bust is in the antique Roman style, and is an admirable likeness and elegantly executed. Frazee is an American born in New Jersey, and worked in early life as a brickmaker in Rahway, but genius breaks through and surmounts every obstacle. He is competent, in my opinion, to execute a pedestrian statue of Washington in marble."²⁰

Pintard was not given to abstract musings; his reference to a "pedestrian statue of Washington in marble" was to something quite specific. On July 14, 1832, Congress authorized "the President of the United States to contract with a skillful artist to execute, in marble, a pedestrian statue of George Washington to be placed in the center of the Rotunda of the Capitol, the sum of \$5,000."²¹ This important commission had been the talk of Capitol Hill for months before the bill was passed. And the talk, of course, had spread to New York, where John Frazee was most anxious to win the commission. He hoped that his Bust of John Jay, on view at the Merchants' Exchange, would excite the kind of positive public response he needed, and in this respect he was not disappointed. In March 1832, a week after the Jay bust had been placed on public exhibition, Frazee wrote to his patron in Congress, Gulian C. Verplanck, to inform him that "a glorious feast it has been, I assure you, to the citizens of N. Y....If Congress estimates its merits as highly as the people of N. York, then--! I shall not say..."²² This letter, in fact, was only one in a series of importunings from Frazee to Verplanck, and is unquestionably the most restrained. A month earlier, for instance, he had written more stridently:

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I perceive, by the reports of Congress, that the Committee on Public Buildings have reported a Resolution to have a pedestrian statue of Washington in the Rotunda of the Capitol. Should this Resolution be acted upon, nor any particular artist be selected before this letter reaches you, I will deem it a great favor if you will use your influence to have that part of the Resolution which relates to the selecting of the artist suspended until my bust of Jay arrives in Washington... I have spent \$600 to execute a work for which I received \$500,-- and this I do to establish my claim to something of higher importance than the making of a Bust;-- and yet, even this Bust will be more admired I know, than any piece of Fine Art that has ever appeared at the Capitol. You will perhaps smile at this assertion. But rely on what I say. I cannot be mistaken in my judgement.²³

Frazee's aggressive, even arrogant, tone in that letter perhaps resulted from something more than personal pride or self-confidence. Throughout the 1820's and into the first years of the '30's, Frazee had enjoyed his acknowledged position as the only active native American sculptor. But, by early 1832, when he wrote that letter to Verplanck, he no doubt was beginning to feel somewhat threatened. Horatio Greenough had been but a young man when, in 1825, he had left Boston (with the blessing of the famous painter, Washington Allston) to begin his long years of residence and study in Italy. After some time, he came to the attention of James Fenimore Cooper, who befriended him in Rome and soon commissioned the "Chanting Cherubs," based on a painted group by Raphael. In an effort to secure future patronage for his protege, Cooper placed it in New York early in 1832 on public exhibition. Frazee clearly felt threatened. In a "P.S."

to the same February letter to Verplanck quoted above, we read:

Have you seen the "Chanting Cherubs?" If not, when you see them, take a lateral view of the smallest boy, and you will find a point where one leg completely obscures the other, a circumstance that never occurs in the antique statues. This defect is of itself sufficient to damn the group.

And, having delegitimated Greenough's work on the basis of its inaccurate pose with reference to classical antiquity, Frazee then moved into the ideology of his own time in an effort to convince Verplanck of a severe moral defect. The figure representing Inspiration, claimed Frazee, should have her eyes cast upward, not down. "But what think you of Celestial Beings poring tamely over a lesson,--guided, like our school boys, by a prompter?--While chanting the praises of the Most High, would not Inspiration lift her eye to Heaven?"

Frazee's remarks to Verplanck notwithstanding, Horatio Greenough (with recommendations from both Allston and Cooper) became the talk of Washington throughout the winter and spring of 1832. During the latter part of this period, Frazee's Jay bust was drawing immense crowds in New York, and by mid-April was on its way to Washington. "The Bust is now on its way to the Capitol, by the land transportation line," Frazee wrote Verplanck, "and will probably reach you before this letter. You will please have the annexed certificates²⁴ placed by the

Bust while it is under examination. I hope you will be able to get me an order for a Statue.--Why not have one of the illustrious Jefferson? Such a work would inspire me with tenfold energies. Something of this kind and I will make Greenough and his Italian aids stand back and stare."²⁵

Frazee, of course, resented the age-old method by which Greenough (and all sculptors trained in Italy) turned out monumental marble sculptures. The artist was responsible for the design and usually executed the clay model, while local Italian assistants, each skilled at a different branch of marble-cutting, cast it into plaster and then translated the plaster cast into marble. Frazee felt this to be somewhat dishonest, and took pride in the fact that he alone was responsible for every step in the production of his own sculptures.

Frazee's suggestion concerning a statue of Jefferson implies that the sculptor indeed felt threatened by the rumors about Greenough. Greenough's name, in fact, had already been raised several times on the floor of Congress as a possible recipient of the Washington full-figure sculpture for the Rotunda. In light of all this, perhaps Frazee thought there might be room for both Greenough and himself in terms of government patronage, and that if this were true a statue of Jefferson would certainly not be out of line. But Frazee could not get

the Washington commission out of his mind, obviously because it was much closer to being a reality. His next letter to Verplanck takes on an almost plaintive tone, as he pleads:

I this moment see by the Washington papers which have just arrived that the question of the Statue of Washington is yet undecided, the Senate taking some exceptions to the House of Representatives. There is yet open a chance for me. Do, my Esteemed Friend, embrace it, if it lies in your power.--If Greenough, Gevelot, or any of them has anything in existence, or can produce anything equal to my Bust of Jay, then I give it up. But, for Heaven's Sake, let me have an equal chance with them.²⁶

There is no record of Verplanck's responses to these letters, nor of any backroom politicking he may have done on the sculptor's behalf. Verplanck's influence at this point went instead in the direction of Greenough, on whose behalf he had received a letter from Allston in Cambridge,²⁷ and who had already been endorsed by several members of Congress. Greenough's friends in Washington advised him months in advance of the actual passage of this bill that the commission for the full-length rotunda statue was his. On July 8, 1832, six days before the official passage of the bill, Greenough modestly wrote President Jackson's Secretary of State, Edward Livingston, "I accept this great opportunity with surprise at finding myself so early known, and with joy that I am thought worthy of the task."²⁸ A few months later Greenough's letter of acceptance was published in the New York Mirror, but in that short time the original sum of \$5,000 had

been increased to \$20,000 as the estimated cost by the sculptor. Horatio Greenough, born in Boston and educated in Cambridge and Rome, was now the first of many successful American sculptor-entrepreneurs to live in Italy and work for the American public. He was twenty-seven.

John Frazee, the self-made artist, had a large and ever-growing family, fierce patriotic pride, and the obstinate desire to stay at home and become a "Fine Artist" without "Italian aids." He was forty-two.

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Throughout most of 1830's, Frazee continued to operate his marble shop in lower Manhattan. Despite his attempts to devote himself more thoroughly to the "fine arts," and despite the dissolution of his partnership with his brother, it is clear that he was not able to abandon his artisanal activities completely. Such activities seem to have included the making of marble chimney pieces, pier tables, and other decorative interior items, though again nothing is extant from this period. We do know from the Autobiography, however, that Robert Launitz, a Russian emigre who had spent some time in Rome at Thorwaldsen's studio, was taken on as an apprentice by Frazee in 1831. And Thomas Crawford, who later became a well-known sculptor in Rome, spent his early years in Frazee's employ. Frazee took it upon

himself to speak for them, as well as his other New York "marble friends" when in early 1833 he wrote the following letter to Verplanck in Washington, regarding the new tariff bill:

I write this through the urgency of my marble friends here, who are greatly alarmed at your Tariff Bill. I have been so much occupied in my workshop recently that I have paid no attention to the particulars in the Bill; one clause they tell me reads this--"all articles not mentioned in this Bill (or list) shall be reduced to the rate of duties fixed on them in 1816;"--and they say marble is not included in the list of articles made out in the Bill. Now I hardly think such is the fact. If it is, and the Bill passes in that shape, we marble workers are done over,--we shall be nullified with a vengeance. It appears to me that the South cannot be injured by the rates upon marble as affixed by your last session, nor can I yet believe that you have so soon altered them. In 1816 the duties on marble, wrought and unwrought, were 15 per ct. ad valorem, I think,--and if you place them at those low rates now, I am sure, very sure, that more than three-fourths of all our interiors work, such as chimney pieces, pier tables, and other articles of furniture, will be manufactured in Italy, and our business in this department will not be worth one straw. But we hope otherwise.²⁹

Verplanck, who had been elected to the House of Representatives in 1824 largely because of his opposition to high tariffs, had recently introduced a tariff bill in Congress. It was this bill that was under consideration in late 1832-early 1833 when Henry Clay introduced his famous tariff compromise in an effort to protect the South. Frazee was right in saying that high tariffs on marble would not particularly concern the South, since most American marble being used at that time was from

the Eastchester quarries just north of New York City. And his concern about competition from Italian marble was entirely justified, especially if the renowned Carrarra marble quarries were in question.

The interesting point here is not so much the final outcome, which maintained the duties at their earlier rate, but the fact that Frazee felt himself in a position to intervene in a congressional matter, and that he apparently spoke on behalf of others in the marble business in New York.³⁰ The implication, of course, is that even though Frazee's direct involvement in politics had ended, he was still considered a respected spokesman by his peers in the marble trade. We do not know specifically who these "marble friends" were, but we can assume that Frazee's loyalties to them did not diminish during the years that he was at the same time trying to succeed in that other world, that of the "Fine Arts." He attempted to intervene, however, with Verplanck, a politician whom he knew through his art connections, so what we see here once again is Frazee's retention of his old artisan-status with at the same time his attempt to maintain his new artist-status. This confusion of roles, statuses, and identities was no doubt just as confusing to others as it occasionally was to Frazee himself.³¹ One significant indication of

Frazee's ambivalence is his failure to mention any of his political activities in his Autobiography.

Interventions with members of Congress did continue, however, as we see Frazee writing to Aaron Ward, who had shown some interest in promoting American painters in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings of the House of Representatives:

From the sides you have taken upon the question of employing native artists in the future paintings for the Rotunda of the Capitol, I am encouraged to solicit your attention to the future sculptures.

With the exception of the Busts of John Jay, all the sculptures at the Capitol have been executed by foreign artists, [Greenough's Washington had not yet arrived] --artists too of secondary merit, and I am now informed that Persico is endeavoring to obtain further commissions from Congress.--Now, dear Sir, is this right, is it justice, to extend everlasting patronage to these foreigners, who have no common interest or sympathy with us, while the like favors are withheld from native sculptors who, it will not be denied, have far higher claims upon the nation, both as artists and as men? Where is our national pride and spirit, and where our national honor, that we do not declare our independence in science, literature, and the Fine Arts as nobly as we have proclaimed ourselves free in government? The time had long ago arrived, and it only needed enquiry to have been known and acknowledged throughout the union, that we had native artists in painting, architecture and sculpture, everyway competent to execute the works of the highest order in their respective professions. Why then do we stoop to Gauls, Brittons, Romans and Tuscans for the accomplishment of our public works of Art? Yet we have so done, to the neglect and shameful injury of our own genius, and to our national dishonor. But I must cool down this fire.

I am not destitute off. I have a good many busts of distinguished individuals to execute, besides a number of monuments. But I am not content with this. Mind!--it is not money I seek, neither;--

No Sir, I have a higher object in view. My spirit thirsts for fame; and it is my wish--a laudable one, I trust--to be employed upon more important works--something which shall enlist all my powers and energies to their noblest end.--When Mr. Verplanck was in Congress, upon the Library Committee, he drew up a Resolution to have a statue of Jefferson executed in marble by me; but the session was closed before its being brought before the House. I saw Mr. V. a day or two since, and told me he would write immediately to the Hon. Mr. Jarvis of the Lib. Comm urging the revival of that Resolution, and requesting it to be laid before the House as originally intended. Now, dear Sir, may I beg your aid and friendship in this thing. I should be exceedingly glad to execute a fine statue of the great author of the Declaration of Independence. I am prepared at any moment to take a right hold of the work and I will pledge my all to produce a finer and nobler specimen of statuary than has yet been seen at the Capitol.³²

A day after Frazee wrote to Ward regarding the Jefferson statue, Verplanck reportedly wrote to Leonard Jarvis, Ward's replacement as Chairman of the Library Committee in the House of Representatives. Asking Jarvis to use his influence in favor of Frazee, Verplanck seems to have been promoting Frazee at this point not so much on the basis of the sculptor's merits but more in opposition to those of Luigi Persico. Jarvis agreed with Verplanck's views, and added an interesting bit of news about the recent arrival and success in Washington of another young American sculptor:

I have delayed my answer to your letter of February 3 until I had something to say in relation to the subject of it. I agree entirely with you in your estimate of Persico and was adverse to giving him a new work to execute--but he has contrived to ingratiate himself with my colleagues of the committee and they have determined to recommend him

for employment in a work of twice the magnitude of this which he has recently completed. I am happy however to inform you that they have agreed with me in recommending the employment of Mr. Frazee to execute the statue of Jefferson. I hope the house may be brought to consent to this and that it will reject the other project.

We have here in Washington a very promising artist from Cincinnati. He has modelled a bust of the President Jackson which is decidedly the best likeness that has been taken. It is truly admirable. The name of the artist is Hiram Powers and he is now engaged upon R. M. Johnson, Calhoun, and Van Buren. If he should succeed as well with their heads as he has with the head of the President, his reputation will be established in our branch of the art.³³

Hiram Powers did indeed succeed during his short stay in Washington. The next year, with financial backing from his Cincinnati patron Nicholas Longworth and the support of others, he departed for the expected sojourn in Italy. Powers stayed in Florence for the rest of his life, periodically sending back to his native America his highly popular, over-sized, fleshy, marble maidens--The Greek Slave, California, and many others. Frazee, a generation older and less "liberated" from his artisan roots, could not find it within himself to admit a need or desire for European associations. And unlike Powers, Greenough or Persico, he seems to have been unable to ingratiate himself personally or effectively with long-term private or public patrons.

As for the Jefferson statue, nothing seems to have happened in Congress for at least two years. Finally,

in 1837, Aaron Ward, of the Committee on Public Buildings, reported a bill appropriating \$2,000 "to enable the President of the U. S. to contract with John Frazee for a statue of Jefferson to be placed in the Library of Congress." The same bill appropriated \$2,000 to Hiram Powers for a full-length statue of John Marshall, and \$8,000 to Luigi Persico for a statuary group to adorn one of the blockings on the east front of the Capitol.³⁴ The contract with Frazee for the Jefferson statue still did not materialize, for a year later, on motion of Mr. Hoffman of New York, it was resolved "That the Committee on Public Buildings be directed to inquire into the expediency of authorizing the Pres. of the U. S. to contract with John Frazee for a statue of Thomas Jefferson to be placed in the Library of Congress."³⁵ And this is the last we hear of it for several years.

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Meanwhile, throughout the 1820's and early '30's, just as Frazee's marble business was flourishing, so was his family. By 1832 he had been married to his wife Jane for nearly twenty years, had lost at least one infant to a childhood disease, and had five young children. His family responsibilities, as we have seen, were at least as strong as his business concerns and contributed greatly to his decision to try to succeed

as a "fine artist" without going to Europe. According to all accounts, Jane was a good, patient, kind and supportive wife. They had been childhood sweethearts in New Jersey, had married young, and had embarked on the pursuit of happiness through a pursuit of the arts very much as a team. All went well for them, in fact, until the now-famous summer of 1832, the year of the cholera in New York. Frazee sent his brother Noah the following letter at the end of the summer:

I have just returned home from the country, where I have sojourned 7 weeks a fugitive from the Cholera. But I returned not as I went out,--I came back shrouded in sorrow and affliction. No language to convey to you the weight of grief and sorrow which afflicts my frail and bleeding heart. My dear Jane is no more! My beloved wife, my chief comfort in this frail life, now lies in the cold and cheerless tomb. Oh, my dear brother, how changed in a moment has become all earthly things to me. My heart was light and cheerful the other day when I wrote you, but now, Oh my God! how I am cast down into the lowest depths of affliction and grief. Never in all my life did I feel so sensibly the need of sympathizing help from my kindred and friends as at the present moment.

Jane died of the Cholera, in its most malignant form, at the Village of South River, 5 miles from New Brunswick, where we had gone among her relatives, to tarry awhile with all our family. We went there because we thought our minds would be more composed in the country than in the city, where so much death and desolation were constantly before our eyes. And it was so. From the 9th of July up to the 15th of August we all enjoyed health and happiness. No case of Cholera had occurred in or near this little village, nor had Jane, after leaving the city, visited at any place where the disease prevailed. It was a singular, isolated, and perfectly spontaneous case. On the 14th of August a number of the citizens of South River embarked on board a sloop for an excursion to bathe in the sea-waters at Sandy Hook, as

was their custom at this village every summer. Our friends and kindred were among the number and invited us to go along. Jane seemed pleased and willing to go, but I objected on the grounds that I thought the salt-water and fatigue of the voyage might have a bad effect on the stomach at such a time, and induce the Cholera. But the more I remonstrated, the more she and the rest urged our going, until I yielded assent, and we embarked with them, about 60 souls in all, men, women, and children.

We had a good run down, and a cheerful time in the surf upon the sea shore, and all seemed joyful and glad. The next day at 12 o'clock we set sail to return, all in good spirits and health, and I thought Jane never looked more cheerful and happy,--but alas! Dear woman! little did she think the Destroying Angel had come on board when we started from the Hook, and now stood beside her on the deck, when the sun shone so bright and clear, and the sea and its shores looked beautiful, as we parted from them in the brisk breeze.

I ought to mention here what I think was the cause of her death, or rather, what brought on the disease. She had been too free in the eating of fruit and vegetables. The evening previous she had eaten heartily of whortleberries, and this same morning had very imprudently eaten some blackberry pye. Thousands, I believe, have died with the Cholera, who would have now been living had they not indulged in eating these things which produce acidity and fermentation in the stomach and bowels. I had cautioned my dear Jane not to eat them, still she continued to do so. Oh, my God, my God, thy will be done!

About two o'clock she was taken with purging and vomiting, though lightly at first. Yet none dreamed of the Cholera at this time and place. Nor was she anyway alarmed, and attributed her sickness to the motion of the vessel, saying she would soon get over it when once ashore. We sailed on till about sunset, when the Cholera showed itself in its most terrific form. Her face fell in till her skin lay close to her bones, and cold as ice itself. The most violent cramps seized her all over in a moment. Her awful look I never shall forget.

Her cries and screams, Oh God! I hear them yet. We were several miles above Amboy. A boat was put out and a doctor sent for, who arrived just as the sloop reached the wharf at South River. But alas! there was no help! The spasms had left her and she lay in a stupor. Her last words were "Don't give those little children any of that blackberry pye!" She soon after became senseless, in which state she lay until about sunrise, when she breathed no more.

Thus have I given you all the particulars of her death. She was buried at South River beside the remains of two of her sisters that lie there. Jane was a kind and faithful wife, and a more tender and affectionate mother never lived. Nearly twenty years had she been the dear companion of my joys and of my woes, and in the latter she always bore her part with me without a murmur. Think then how hard it was to part from her in a moment, and under such afflictive, such calamitous, circumstances. Think how it was but yesterday, as it were, I went with her and our five children, all cheerful and happy to the country, and today I must return to my house without her, yet bringing home by my side the little ones all in tears and sackcloth! Oh my Brother and my Sister! this affliction is terrible. It seems as if my heart and bowels would wither within me. Such is the oppression of my body and my soul. Do write me and let me have one tear of your kind sympathy. Do, for it will soothe some portion at least of this gloom and this sorrow.³⁶

Cholera, a dread epidemic disease, had been confined before the nineteenth century to Asia.³⁷ By 1830, however, it had spread inexorably to European Russia and Poland, and to England in 1831. Throughout the winter of 1832 New Yorkers waited with trepidation for the arrival of the cholera, which finally appeared in June, and during the hot summer that followed over three thousand of the City's quarter-million population died. Those who could afford the luxury, like Frazee and his family,

fled the city to supposedly safer, less populated areas. The disease, nevertheless, did continue to spread up and down the East Coast, often striking in a seemingly random fashion, such as with Jane Frazee.

Badly misunderstood and severely mistreated, cholera had for years created large-scale panics that gave way to popular myths and folkways. Such folk patterns, not surprisingly, were often influenced by the prevalent ideologies of particular times and places. In nineteenth century America we thus see continual attributions of the disease to sexual license, drunkenness, and gluttony. In particular, many believed that over-indulgence in highly acidic foods such as fruits and vegetables left one "predisposed" to the disease. In attributing Jane's demise to eating too much "blackberry pye," the Frazees might very well have remembered reading one of the many newspaper announcements such as: "Dr. Stevens the president of the [Canadian] Medical Council advises total abstinence from all fruit, fresh or prepared, and all garden vegetables."³⁸

It has often been difficult for modern scholars to comprehend the reactions to such epidemics. Individual responses to the fear, agony, and pathos have tended to be lost in a series of statistics, charts, graphs, and medical reports. John Frazee, however, experienced

such a crisis in the midst of his own mature life, and his beautifully articulate description of his wife's death remains a moving subjective account of the trauma. It can, moreover, be seen in the larger context of Romantic or Early Victorian attitudes to death.³⁹ What may be unfairly judged by some today as an over-reaction, or overly sentimental, unrestrained, or even self-pitying response, must be viewed in conjunction with other such contemporaneous responses to death. It will then be seen that such rhetoric was, to a large degree, so common that it often became stylized, and that phrases such as "Destroying Angel," "cold and cheerless tomb," "frail and bleeding heart," "shrouded in sorrow and affliction" continually appeared throughout the so-called "consolation literature" of the ante-bellum period.⁴⁰ The fact that such phrases also appeared regularly in hymns and on gravestones would, of course, be especially pertinent to Frazee.

Detailed discussion of death, today a taboo subject, was hardly so in the nineteenth century. Friends, relatives, and often mere acquaintances, joined together in the expected ritual and rhetoric attending to the act of dying and death itself. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in America, grief over death was a matter of stoic discipline. But John Frazee, despite

his adherence to Neoclassicism in matters of art, was primarily a person of the Romantic era. His overt expressions of grief were thus entirely appropriate. Given the pathetic lack of understanding that often accompanied the causes of death, as well as the mystification related to many of the so-called remedies, such expressions of grief must be seen as largely therapeutic--on both community and individual levels. Indeed, within weeks of the crisp autumn weather, John Frazee and his fellow New Yorkers were all comfortably back to normal.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III

¹For reports of this meeting, and the origins of the party, see the New York Morning Courier, the New York Commercial Advertiser, and the New York Free Enquirer, all for April 25, 1829.

²There has been a good deal of scholarly work done on the New York Working Men's Party, beginning with the history by George Henry Evans, one of the most active members and publisher of the party's organ The Working Man's Advocate. See: George Henry Evans, "History of the Origin and Progress of the Working Men's Party in New York," Radical, 1842-43. Also written by an active observer is Jabez D. Hammond's History of Political Parties in the State of New York, 2 vols., rev. ed. (Syracuse: Hall, Mills and Co., 1850). The pioneering twentieth-century work is: John R. Commons and Associates, History of Labor in the United States, 4 vols. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1918-1935). More recent work includes: Walter Hugins, Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Douglas T. Miller, Jacksonian Aristocracy: Class and Democracy in New York, 1830-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); and especially Edward Pessen, Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement (Albany: SUNY Press, 1967). For the Working Men's parties in general, see: Alden Whitman, Labor Parties, 1827-1834 (New York: International Publishers, 1943); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1945), Ch. 9; and Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind in American Civilization, 5 vols. (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), vol 2, Ch. 2.

³Reports of this meeting are in the Working Man's Advocate, 31 October 1829 and the New York Evening Journal, 30 October 1829.

⁴See Working Man's Advocate, 7 November 1829.

⁵Hammond, History of Political Parties, p. 331.

- ⁶The occupational distribution was discussed first by Hammond in 1846 and later by Hugins in 1960.
- ⁷For a discussion of the transformation of artisans into radical politicians, see E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). A parallel development can be seen in America in the late 1820's and 1830's, though more short-lived and less profound.
- ⁸Working Man's Advocate, 18 September 1830.
- ⁹Ibid., 23 October 1830.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 6 November 1830.
- ¹¹Ibid., 5 November 1831.
- ¹²Quoted in Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 292.
- ¹³Edward Pessen, Most Uncommon Jacksonians, p. 32.
- ¹⁴Letter dated 30 March 1831, National Archives, Roll 121 from 820 Comm. Letters.
- ¹⁵"Frazee's Bust of John Jay," The New York, vol. 5 (March 1831). The article is a reprint from The Commercial Advertiser.
- ¹⁶The Ceracchi Jay bust remained in the family until 1976, when it was acquired by the U. S. Capitol. It is now in the State Department's Diplomatic Reception Rooms. For more information on Ceracchi and his Jay bust, see J. Desportes, "Giuseppe Ceracchi in America," Art Quarterly, 26, 1963, pp. 140-79.
- ¹⁷On March 21, 1832, the New York Evening Post announced that "Frazee's bust of John Jay is on exhibition at the Merchant's Exchange."

- ¹⁸New York Evening Post, 23 March 1832: "The exhibition of Frazee's bust of John Jay continues to hold the attention of our citizens. We understand that the number of visitors yesterday amounted to upwards of four thousand."
- ¹⁹New York Mirror, 31 March 1832.
- ²⁰Letters from John Pintard, p. 38.
- ²¹Quote in Charles E. Fairman, Art and Artists of the Capitol of the United States of America (Washington: U. S. Gov't Printing Office, 1927), p. 65.
- ²²Letter dated New York, 26 March 1832, the New-York Historical Society.
- ²³Letter dated New York, 18 February 1832, the New-York Historical Society.
- ²⁴The reference is to three certificates verifying the exactness of the likeness. The first is signed by John Trumbull, John Pintard, E. W. Laight, and Silvanus Miller, and is in the Frazee Papers, AAA. The second is signed by Peter Augustus Jay and the third by Morgan Lewis; they are in the possession of W. E. Belknap, a descendant of Frazee.
- ²⁵Letter dated New York, 14 April 1832, the New-York Historical Society.
- ²⁶Letter dated New York, 27 April 1832, the New-York Historical Society.
- ²⁷See July, Gulian Crommelin Verplanck.
- ²⁸Greenough's letter was published in the New York Mirror, 10 October 1832, p. 2.
- ²⁹Letter dated New York, 24 January 1833, the New-York Historical Society.
- ³⁰Frazee himself owned a quarry in Nyack, part of the large Eastchester Quarry.

- 31 Recent studies by British social anthropologists Victor Turner and Mary Douglas shed light on the problems attached to people or groups in the process of transition. That is, they show how people in the process of moving up the social ladder from a well-defined status to a less well-defined status, go through a period of transition often characterized by anxiety and confusion on their own parts and feelings of suspicion or threat on the parts of people in better defined statuses. See Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969), and other works by this author; and March Douglas, Purity and Danger (London: Penguin Books, 1966).
- 32 Letter dated 2 February 1835, manuscript collection, Boston Public Library.
- 33 Letter from Leonard Jarvis to Gulian C. Verplanck, dated Washington, 17 February 1835, the New-York Historical Society.
- 34 National Archives, House Records, 24th Congress, 2nd session, 14 February 1837.
- 35 National Archives, House Records, 25th Congress, 2nd session, 28 May 1838.
- 36 Letter from John Frazee to Noah Frazee, dated New York, 8 September 1832, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- 37 An excellent recent social history is: Charles E. Rosenberg, The Cholera Years (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Excellent first-hand accounts of the 1832 New York epidemic are to be found in the The Cholera Bulletin, Conducted by an Association of Physicians, vol. 1, nos. 1-24, 1832, reprinted by Arno Press and The New York Times (New York, 1972), with an Introduction by Charles E. Rosenberg.
- 38 Announcement from the Albion Newspaper, Upper Canada, 6 August 1832. Reprinted in The Cholera Bulletin, vol. 1, no. 23, New York, August 27, 1832.
- 39 See David E. Stannard, ed., Death in America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

- ⁴⁰See Ann Douglas, "Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880," in Stannard, Death in America.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARTIST, II

Robert Launitz, whom Frazee had taken on as an apprentice in the late '20's, had by 1831 become a partner in the marble-cutting business. Correspondence between the two men shows that they regarded each other affectionately yet respectfully. Frazee, not untypically, evinced an almost paternal concern for his young, foreign-born protege. This can be seen in the first letter we have from Frazee to Launitz, written from New Jersey during the fateful summer of the cholera. Frazee was concerned about Launitz, and had taken the trouble to get him and his family out of New York as soon as possible.

This is a thinly populated place, and there are no boarders here from New York excepting our relatives; I think therefore that you would not probably find a country place that would be more free from the cholera or more agreeable to your family than this. I have found a private family, the gentleman of whom I am acquainted with...He has a spare room furnished with two beds which he has agreed you shall have and for which, including your board, he shall charge you per week \$2 apiece. I think this reasonable, and think you had better bring your family immediately.¹

In the same letter to Launitz, we also see indications of the increased size of the business. Not too many years earlier, when working on the Wells bust, Frazee had

complained that he had to do everything singlehandedly. Now, in 1832, there are five in the workshop, including an Italian, and Frazee suggests to Launitz that if the workmen are getting uneasy about the cholera, perhaps the shop should be closed for a week or two.

Should you determine to do so, could you bring out the pieces of marble for the caryatids and frieze blocks to this place? It will cost us nothing for shop room here 3 or 4 weeks. Bring the Italian along, if he will come, and Van Dyke and Gill-- then there will be 5 of us still engaged upon Mr. Ward's work.²

The mention of Ward's work here is intriguing. It has been surmised that this probably referred to the bust of Nathaniel Prime, commissioned by Prime's banking partner Samuel Ward.³ In the Autobiography, however, Frazee definitely dates the Prime bust as 1833. There is no reason, of course, why Frazee could not have been working on this bust as early as 1832 (Prime had retired earlier in 1832), though it is highly unlikely that a portrait bust of any kind would have employed "two pieces of marble for the caryatids and frieze blocks." More likely is the fact that these elements--caryatids and a frieze--were being made to be incorporated into either an elaborate chimneypiece or an ornate marble pier table. Furniture designed along strict neoclassical lines often employed such sculptural elements, the caryatids "holding up" either the table top or the mantel and both of these elements in turn decorated with a horizontal frieze

in bas relief.⁴ There are no examples extant of such work by Frazee, though we do know from advertisements and the artist's letters that he was doing much of just this kind of work, especially in these years.

Samuel Ward, one of New York's earliest art collectors, would have been a likely admirer of Frazee's work, and might very well have commissioned the marble decorations for his famous picture gallery. Samuel Ward, we are told,

was a splendid specimen of the old school New Yorker. He stood over six feet, and large in proportion. Fine arts was his forte. He lived on the corner of Fourth Street and Broadway; the house is still standing [this in 1870]; in its rear is a marble building, without windows on Broadway. Thousands in the past thirty years have made enquiries relative to that curious but windowless building. It was the Painting Gallery of Old Sam Ward, of the firm of Prime, Ward, and King.⁵

The fact remains, however, that Frazee continued to disparage this kind of decorative sculpture even while continuing to do it. "My compositions in sculpture have been of such commonplace interest that I feel no inclination to speak of them. They consist chiefly of little things in basso relieve upon mantelpieces and monuments."⁶ Frazee was much happier with the portrait busts he continued to do, such as the 1833 bust of Nathaniel Prime ordered by the investment banking firm of "Messrs. Prime, Ward and King."⁷ This commission was no doubt instigated by Sam Ward, who very likely knew Frazee first as an

artisan. Clients such as Sam Ward, who had first employed Frazee to do decorative marble cutting, were seemingly able to cross the bridge from "craft" to "art" as easily as their needs required. This was not true for John Frazee, whose mind was always troubled by the significance of such distinctions.

But Frazee was certainly aware of the social significance of the Prime, Ward and King commission. "This," he said, "opened my way to Boston, it having been seen by Mr. Thomas W. Ward of that city while on a visit here."⁸ Thomas Wren Ward, a cousin of Sam Ward, was a well-known Boston merchant who throughout the 1830's acted as American agent for Baring Brothers, the London-based banking house. His visit to New York in 1833 was no doubt a business trip, which may have included some actual dealings with Prime, Ward and King. It was not, however, for reasons of business that Sam Ward showed his cousin Frazee's bust of Nathaniel Prime; Sam was obviously proud of the work, for he took Thomas Ward to see it "while in execution." Thomas Ward was properly impressed with Frazee's ability, and on his return persuaded members of the Boston Athenaeum to commission Frazee to model a bust of Nathaniel Bowditch, the well-known astronomer and mathematician.

Frazee did not leave for Boston until October 1833. There was, therefore, almost a year in New York

to work with Launitz on several other commissions. From the end of 1831 and throughout 1832, in fact, they must have been working on the Hobart Memorial. John Henry Hobart, the Episcopal bishop of the New York Diocese, had died on September 12, 1830, in the home of his friend, the Rev. Dr. John C. Rudd, rector of St. Peter's Parish in Auburn, New York.⁹ Three months later, Bishop Onderdonk (Hobart's successor) wrote from New York to the same Rev. Rudd in Auburn, stating that Robert Van Dyke was coming to Auburn "in the employ of Mr. Frazee for the purpose of erecting the monument to the memory of our late beloved friend and Bishop."¹⁰ Van Dyke, one of the workers in Frazee's shop, was apparently sent upstate to take measurements and to make other preliminary arrangements. Frazee's design was for a "sarcophagus of white marble in the antique form, with appropriate bas-reliefs and surmounted by a bust of the bishop." The editors of the New York Mirror continued: "We have seen with much pleasure a monument just finished by Frazee which is to be erected in the new Episcopal Church at Auburn."¹¹ Soon after this viewing, in July 1833, the monument was on its way up to Auburn, in the care of Robert Launitz, who would then supervise its installation.¹² On August 8, 1833, the New Church of St. Peter's at Auburn parsonage was consecrated by Bishop Onderdonk

and it is likely that the Hobart Memorial was unveiled at that time. It was certainly still there in 1840, for we know it was the direct inspiration for a poem written then by William Croswell entitled "Lines Written in the Chamber where Bishop Hobart died on the 12th of September 1830." This poem, written in Auburn at St. Peter's Parsonage, includes the following stanza:

Pass through the Gothic Porch, and view
 the Chancel's choicest trust
 Where all but speaks, in lifelike grace,
 His monumental bust.¹³

In March of 1868 the Church in Auburn was taken down; some of its materials were then reincorporated into a new building, but not, apparently, Frazee's Hobart Memorial. A fine plaster bust of Bishop Hobart, however, was donated to the New York Historical Society a few years later, but with no artist's name attached. This bust has recently been attributed to Frazee on stylistic grounds alone.¹⁴ It is now possible to support this attribution with documentation, for it is clear that Frazee did indeed model the bust of Hobart and that the plaster is probably the original version of the marble that ended up on the sarcophagus in Auburn. This bust, according to the New York Mirror, was the "best likeness of him [Bishop Hobart] that has been preserved either by painting or engraving or sculpture."¹⁵

At least one other sculpted likeness of Hobart is known to us, as it certainly was also to John Frazee. According to Morgan Dix, in his four-volume History of the Parish of Trinity Church in the City of New York (1896-1906), a memorial to Hobart was proposed for Trinity soon after the Bishop's death. Two designs were offered, and the one by Ball Hughes, a sculpted relief, was selected. Robert Ball Hughes was an English sculptor who had studied at the Royal Academy in London. In 1823 he had exhibited a neoclassic bas-relief of "Pandora Brought by Mercury to Epimetheus" for which he was awarded an Academy Gold Medal.

Hughes moved to New York in 1829 and immediately began receiving commissions to execute portrait busts in marble. During the early 1830's, he modelled portraits of John Watts, Thomas H. Perkins, Hon. D. B. Ogden, John Trumbull, and William Gaston. Hughes's bas-relief of Bishop Hobart for Trinity Church was finished in plaster by November of 1831.¹⁶ Hobart was pictured at the moment of his death, slumping down into an antique chair, with "limbs loosely wrapped in a sort of drapery so disposed around them as to give a fine classical air to his person."¹⁷ Standing beside him is an allegorical female figure representing Religion; with one hand she holds up the Bishop's falling head, while with the other

she points to the sign of the Cross.

Frazee was clearly not pleased with Ball Hughes. A recent arrival in New York with credentials from the Royal Academy and with patronage coming his way almost immediately, Hughes no doubt appeared in Frazee's eyes from the very beginning as a possible threat. That threat became a serious reality, it seems, when Hughes was awarded the commission from Trinity Church for the Hobart Memorial. The award, it will be remembered, was given to one of the two submitted drawings. The identity of the rejected artist is unknown, but it could very well have been John Frazee. Frazee, at this point, was already at work on the Hobart Monument for Auburn, and might have supposed that an additional Hobart likeness would have been an almost natural outcome. Furthermore, Trinity Church in New York and St. Peter's Parish in Auburn were both of the Episcopal Diocese of New York State, so Frazee may have expected a certain degree of loyalty from the Episcopal Bishop Onderdonk who already knew and admired his work. But the commission, for whatever reason, went to Hughes, and the monument was finally installed in Trinity in 1835. That year a bitterly scathing attack on it appeared in the North American Magazine, the journal published in New Jersey by Sumner Lincoln Fairfield, the husband of Frazee's niece.

Although unsigned, the article clearly expressed Frazee's ideas, is written in his unmistakable language, and was no doubt authored by him.

The group is copied from the monument to Mrs. Howard in the Church at Corby, England, a design by Nollekins, an English sculptor who, like all his British contemporaries, never knew how to appreciate, much less to imitate the style and beauty of Greek composition...Upon the features of the dying prelate there is not a single trace of expression that wears the impress of a devout heart. The folds (of the allegorical figure of Religion) are sluggish and heavy and the garment is wrapt about the figure and tucked up with as little regard to strict propriety, or to style and beauty, as though it were a modern landlady habited for a jaunt in the post coach. In truth the whole group is stamped with the insignia of old English sculpture.¹⁸

Frazee objected to the absence of strict classicism in Hughes's work and especially to the total lack of nobility in the anecdotal handling of the subject. To portray the allegorical figure of Religion so that she appeared as a "modern landlady" was nothing less than an artistic travesty. It was, however, probably the actual presence of Hughes in the professional New York art world that irritated Frazee more than the Englishman's work. Throughout the 1820's, Frazee had been the only native American sculptor working in New York. Despite the presence of European artists, he had managed to retain a corner on the market of English-speaking, academy-oriented sculptors. Even the presence of Greenough in Rome starting in 1825, or of Powers in Washington in the early '30's, did not appear as quite the same kind of

immediate threat as that of Hughes in New York. Frazee had been the New York sculptor; now he was one of two. The article in the North American Magazine, then, says a good deal more about how Frazee felt regarding his new competition than it may at first appear. Frazee's annoyance with Hughes did not relent, nor did his heavy-handed attempts at art criticism. In 1835, the same year that Hughes's Hobart Memorial was unveiled at Trinity Church, his full-length marble statue of Alexander Hamilton was installed in the New York Merchants' Exchange. The directors of the Merchants' Exchange had awarded this commission to Hughes in 1833, who then carved it from a single block of Carrarra marble. Hughes had earlier modeled several small statuettes of Hamilton, and apparently derived the design of the large statue from these small efforts.¹⁹ The statue, when completed, was installed in the Exchange in April 1835 and immediately became one of the famous monuments of the city.²⁰ But, only eight months later, on December 17, 1835, the Merchants' Exchange burned down, and the celebrated statue of Hamilton was destroyed. This was the horrible night of the Great Conflagration, which, according to Philip Hone, was "the most awful calamity which has ever visited these United States...Nearly one half of the first ward is in ashes; 500 to 700 stores, which with

their contents are valued at \$20,000,000 to \$40,000,000, are now lying in an indistinguishable mass of ruins... The splendid edifice erected as the Merchants' Exchange, and one of the ornaments of the city, took fire in the rear and is now a heap of ruins...When the dome of this edifice fell in the light was awfully grand. In its fall it demolished the statue of Hamilton executed by Ball Hughes, which was erected in the rotunda only eight months ago by the public spirit of its merchants."²¹

Ball Hughes's statue of Hamilton, to be sure, had been admired and praised by thousands of New Yorkers during its short life. John Frazee, however, was not one of them. Despite the fact that it was the first full-length marble portrait statue executed in America (or perhaps because of it), Frazee was only able to ridicule Hughes's effort. Objecting first to the statue's contemporary clothing, then to the pomposity of the New York merchants who commissioned it, and finally to Hughes himself, Frazee composed a long satirical poem entitled "The Statue in Breeches." Although this was evidently never published, the original manuscript has recently been located.²² Possibly written for Fairfield's North American Magazine, or possibly just to amuse himself and his family, this long, rather inept versification nonetheless reveals a good deal of Frazee's feelings about

himself, his rival, his fellow New Yorkers, and his profession. A footnote to the title of the poem reads:

"It is proper to observe that the statue recently placed in the Exchange is altogether too mean and contemptible for serious criticism. The head is the only part that is even tolerable, and that was copied from a bust of Gen. Hamilton by Ceracchi, an Italian artist." Frazee then continued in verse:

Last week was a season of frolic and noise,
The Jockies and all the pedestrian boys
Were out on the Course, and the great race was run,
While in Town we had wonders and much other fun.

The White Bear had broke from his cage it was said,
But many declared 'twas a ghost from the dead!
Yet it turned out to be a rude image in stone,
And to see it the people by thousands did run.
Our Corps Editorial led on the van,
And Wall Street was crowded to see a Stone-Man;
Like herds, wild and scampering o'er hedges and ditches,
Did they run to get sight of a Statue in Breeches!

Now word went about that the Change would be lighted
And kindly as cream were the Ladies invited.
Then Fashion and Beauty arrayed themselves neat,
While each Toilet contended for looks the most sweet,
For mothers, and daughters, aunts, sisters and nieces,
Must show their spring-dresses if the world went to pieces;
So the Great Room was filled to its corners and niches,
And our fair ones were charmed with the Statue in Breeches!

Our girls caught 'the panic,' and vowed, one and all,
They would see the Stone-Man tho' the heavens should fall;
So Amelia, and Polly, and my dear cousin Nancy
Attir'd themselves out in the 'tip o' the fancy';
Then Aunt Kate grew jealous, and nothing would do,
But she must get ready and go along too,
And even old Granny, when she saw all the lasses
Fitting out she began to rub up her glasses,
Protrude her long chin and gather her lip
Then she sparkled her eyes and she riggled her hips;
'I declare' - said she smiling - 'my curiosity itches,
For a peep at the wonderful Statue in Breeches!'

But the girls were off quickly, and took me along,
 Little dreaming I e'er should parade them in song;
 We were soon upon 'Change - in the Merchants' Big Hall,
 And there was the image! coat, breeches, and all;
 There stood the Statue upon an old Dutch Churn,
 And 'round it a halo of gas-light did burn! -
 O' Effigy matchless! O Figure divine
 Bring wreaths for the Sculptor - his brow to entwine!
 'How chaste,' I exclaimed, 'how truly sublime!
 Ho, ho, all ye genii of the Eastern Clime!
 Ye have nought in the Vatican, St. Luke, or the Louvre,
 To compare with this charming, this noble Chef d'oeuvre!
 Bring wreaths for the breeches, the stockings and shoes,-
 The ne plus ultra of Robert Ball Hughes!
 See how this magnificent Hall it enriches!
 Behold it! Ye People! The statue in breeches!'

Aunt Kate wished to know if I was serious or joking?
 This made the girls laugh, which was still more provoking,
 For Aunt Kate she thought that she knew all about it,
 'And she didn't come there to be hooted, nor scouted;'
 She was sure that the breeches sat tidy and neat,
 And shoes could not closer be fitted to feet.
 Now look at those stockings, how inimitably fine;
 But why couldn't they make 'em flesh-colored, like mine.
 You have hit it, Aunt Kate, - black, yellow and red, -
 Is all that's now working for a fine Figure-head! -
 Our country is redeemed from its sinister witches
 We have a Picture of Shins, and, a Statue in Breeches!

From the dazzling assemblage we now turned away
 And suppose they are gazing e'en unto this day
 At the botton'd up image - most mighty concern,
 The world's last wonder - a ghost on a churn!
 With his neck in a napkin, girt round many fold
 To keep his throat warm that he should not take cold;
 And gaze on they will, at the tailor-made clothes,
 At the toga down-falling like leathern fire-hose,
 At the square-toed shoes, bright buckles, and stiches,
 and all that adorns the great Statue in Breeches!

O' ye people on 'Change, hail! hail to your glory;
 Be your work long remembered in song and in story,
 May high praise salute you wherever you turn,
 For your speckled coat statue that stands on the churn!
 And when John Bull (who deems you a soft Yankee-doodle)
 Comes round you again with his wheedle and coodle,
 Let your kind souls drink in the sweet words he preeches,
 But, - remember the song of the Statue in Breeches!

Americans! Yes Americans - (if there's seven on Earth!)
 Tell one what your boasted independence is worth?
 Ye are perfect automats to the will of John Bull,
 Ye all move to his wires, and he knows how to pull.
 There is all adulation, with words such as honey
 When he waits at your door with his schemes for your money.
 Yet how oft has he tauntingly call'd you all fools,
 Without genius, or science, or learning or schools?
 Then he puts on his haughty Brittanical look
 And asks you - Who reads an American book?
 Who sees an American statue, or Picture? -
 Fools truly ye are! - for you swallow his mixture,
 Then he purges you off with his 'Hygean pill'
 Till your stomachs are nicely prepared to refill
 With all sorts of nick-naks - stageplayers and penmen,
 'The best under Heaven' - so says Lady Wenman.

Then ye gather together with feelings so grateful
 Towards the Old Scamp - in whose eyes ye are hateful.
 Above all on earth ye did know it! But still
 A \$3,000 benefit proclaims your good will!
 And when all his playwrights, Miss Fannies and bores,
 Get their pockets well-laden and depart from our shores,
 The old rascal will laugh, and lap out his tongue
 Saying 'Jonathan! Brother Jonathan! You are young, you are young!'
 Thus as you bear drawing, So sends he his leeches,
 And among them a maker of a Statue in Breeches!

Non-Bamboozler

Buried in this doggerel are Frazee's serious feelings about what American culture was meant to be, and his reservations about what it was becoming. Instead of identifying and promoting their own native talent, and instead of developing a proud cultural heritage of their own, Americans were busy importing British artists, playwrights, actors, and authors. Frazee sees America's "boasted independence" as essentially worthless as long as the people continue to value British culture more than their own. Condemning his fellow Americans as

"perfect automatons to the will of John Bull," he further implies that John Bull's "haughty Brittanical look" is fundamentally condescending regarding Americans. Frazee points out how often the British "tauntingly call'd you all fools,/Without genius, or science, or learning or schools," and yet at the same time falsely flattered Americans "with words such as honey" when they were actually scheming for American money. Gravely disappointed in their need for flattery, in their essential naivete, and in their lack of sophistication, Frazee also criticizes the Americans for their actual approach to high culture. Culture seems to him to have become largely a matter for Aunt Kate, Cousin Nancy, and old Granny, who dress up and visit an exhibit as if on a social outing. Frazee recognizes the early feminization of American culture, and condemns it for not being serious enough about the real meanings of art. He sees art as becoming increasingly separated from the true beliefs and values of the community at large, and hopes that this alienation will soon end.

Frazee's aversion to the "Statue in Breeches" was thus a good deal more profound than a simple objection to contemporary garb in portrait sculpture, though his objections to this practice were deepseated enough. From the very start of his career, he maintained the stance of a pure classicist, and could never condone

such concessions to modern comprehension as, for instance, changes in costume or "props." Such alterations had been made earlier by the great history painter Benjamin West and had met with some scorn, but also a great deal of praise, at the Royal Academy. They had also been tried, with a degree of success, in the monumental wood-carvings of Philadelphia's William Rush. Frazee may have been able to understand such adjustments of classicism to contemporary needs in painting or in wood-carving but with marble (or bronze) he was adamant. The very nobility of the medium dictated the necessity of classical garb, pose, and accessories. Thus we read the following passage in an 1833 letter to Launitz:

...Major Noah came up to our shop in company with Carlow and his truck bearing a box containing a bronzed statue, in plaster, of Jefferson, larger than life. The major wished me to have it taken into our studio!, unpack it, put it on its feet, repair all breakages, and prepare it for a few days' exhibition. So, as you know the Major is friendly to me, I did not like to say no, and we got it in directly. It is a model by David, the French sculptor, from which he is now finishing a bronze statue. It has been ordered by some U. S. naval officer, whose name I forget, and he intends to present it to some public institution in the U. States...It represents the old Republican at the moment of having finished writing the Declaration, standing with the document in his left hand, his right hand on his heart...But the costume I hate. It is the old Quaker Coat and vest, breeches, shoes and buckles; and it has more the appearance of an old farmer than the statue of a great personage...²³

Frazee, as we see here, was not unwilling to restore the work of another artist, particularly when

asked by a friendly patron. In this case the patron was Morticae Manuel Noah, a noted editor and political writer in New York City. The statue of Jefferson had been done in France by Pierre-Jean David d'Angers, a neoclassic sculptor who also did the Odeon frieze and the group for the Paris Pantheon pediment. Major Noah's friend, Lieut. Uriah Phillips Levy, had commissioned the Jefferson statue from David. After it was shipped to America and then repaired by Frazee, Levy presented it to the United States Government in March 1834. Frazee must have been aware that this statue, with "more the appearance of an old farmer than the statue of a great personage," was then placed on permanent display in the Capitol. He was, however, too busy with his own work during these years to have given it much thought.

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In the spring of 1833, it will be remembered, T. W. Ward, a prominent Boston merchant and treasurer of the Athenaeum, had seen and admired Frazee's bust of Nathaniel Prime. And, as we know from the Autobiography, it was Ward who "opened the way to Boston" by persuading the Athenaeum to employ Frazee to model the heads of Nathaniel Bowditch and Daniel Webster. This was the chance Frazee had been waiting for, and so it was with great anticipation that he left for Boston in October 1833.

He had spent that summer finishing the Hobart Memorial, a monument for the Rev. Stephen Jewitt,²⁴ and doubtless other items, and was ready and eager for his journey to Boston.

He had also remarried. On March 3, 1833, he took as his wife Lydia Place, the only daughter of Thomas and Lydia Rogers Place.²⁵ Lydia was only eighteen--twenty-five years his junior. On October 6, 1833, they had their first of ten children, a girl they named Thalia.²⁶ (Frazee's love of things Greek even extended to the naming of his children). Less than two weeks after Thalia's birth, Frazee wrote to Lydia from the Tremont House in Boston, giving her the details of his journey. He had taken a steamboat to the end of Long Island Sound and then into Rhode Island, where they deposited some passengers at Newport. ("Newport is about as large a town as Newark.") They then sailed to Providence, disembarked, and took the stage coach forty-two miles to Boston.

Boston appears to be a fine place. It is much more quiet than New York, and the people are much more peaceable and sober minded. The streets run helter-skelter, all ways; and lead you everywhere and nowhere. My chest of tools arrived here today, so that I have just begun to work. I find the people very obliging and attentive to my wants...²⁷

Frazee reports in his Autobiography that immediately upon his arrival in Boston he found himself "in the society of great and distinguished men." Thomas W. Ward greeted him and took him to the house of Nathaniel Bowditch.

The doctor, it seemed, had not been told that Frazee was an American sculptor, and from the spelling of the name had assumed Frazee was either French or Italian. When Bowditch discovered the sculptor was American and had never been to Europe, he began to show signs of uneasiness. He asked Frazee many questions about what kinds of work he had done and with what success. "I saw plainly that he was afraid of being caught in the hands of a charlatan, whose unworthy chisel never sought integrity and whose marble would be an enduring libel upon his finely formed head and features." Frazee added that it wounded his pride to have to speak publicly of himself and to praise his work in New York. Ward assured Bowditch of Frazee's competency, even excellence, as a sculptor, and the old man "brightened up his countenance with a more cheering and confiding aspect."

It took Frazee less than a week to model Bowditch's head in clay. During that time the old gentleman warmed up to the sculptor, and the feelings were obviously reciprocated. The artist wrote Lydia:

The old Doctor I am modeling is quite a good humored man about 60 years old. This afternoon just before night he came running to my room where I work, and ordered me to lay down my tools instantly, and go take a ride with him to Brighton, a village 3 or 4 miles out of town and where his lady and family are now residing. So I hop'd into the gig with him and away we went like Old Scratch. The old man drove by everything on the road, saying that nothing would attempt to go before him. We soon arrived in

Brighton where I was introduced to his wife, and his sons and daughters, some of them grown up and some of them small. They are all plain, modest, genteel people,--like Bostonians generally. Tea was soon ready, and soon over; after which the Doctor kissed all his family farewell, and we bounced into the gig again, and soon left everything on the road behind us.²⁸

Six days later, Frazee informed Lydia that the people in Boston were delighted with his likeness of Nathaniel Bowditch. So much so, in fact, that they immediately engaged him to make the bust of the great senator, Daniel Webster. "It is highly gratifying," he wrote his young wife, "to be employed upon such noble works as these; yet, it pains me to be kept from you a week, or it may be 10 days longer."²⁹

Webster, like Bowditch, was somewhat apprehensive. He told Frazee that he hoped for a good likeness, but this had not yet been achieved, despite numerous attempts by both painters and sculptors. The only exception had been the portrait painted by Gilbert Stuart. All of the other portraits, including the model in wax by Ball Hughes, said Webster, were "complete caricatures." He also remarked that with Frazee he was more anxious than ever for a correct likeness, as this was the last time he ever intended to sit. Frazee replied that he had no fears of not doing justice to the work; that is, until the third setting, when Webster made some rather unpleasant facial expressions. "The truth is," Frazee

wrote in the Autobiography, "his face is a peculiar one and one remarkably different when the muscles are in repose from what it is when under the influence of inward emotion." To give himself time to study the best expressions, particularly those of the mouth and the changeable muscles of the face, the sculptor concentrated during the first few sittings on the cranium and less flexible parts of the head. Frazee considered this a profitable and wise approach, though by the third sitting there was nothing yet to see in the way of a facial likeness. At this point

Mr. Webster entered my room this morning with his usual pleasant salutation and walked up to where the model stood, while I was preparing some clay at the other end of the room. 'Well,' he said in a low tone, as if talking to himself, 'I can see no likeness there. I am afraid it is going to follow the track of all the rest.'

Though Frazee admits being somewhat hurt by this comment, he determined, as he wrote, to "keep cool," and managed to convince the senator to do likewise. There was no further trouble, and Frazee even managed to convince Webster to give him his last sitting by candlelight.

He had been seated a while when I observed to him how much I regretted my misfortune in never having seen him in public debate. That could I have once seen him delivering a speech in the Senate chamber upon some important topic, it would have enabled me to delineate with greater force the higher mental qualities. To this he quickly replied, if that, Mr. Frazee, will be of any service to you, I can go through the business for you here right off. I can show you how we do business down yonder. I said

it would oblige me very much. He immediately arose and commenced, first by stating the Preliminaries by the Clerk, on the Opening of Senate, then the Services of the Chaplain, personating himself as he usually stands during prayer. 'Now,' he said, 'It is my turn to speak.' He then put himself in a most grave and dignified attitude, looking as if he really saw the President of the Senate before him. Then, compressing his keen lips a moment, he began, 'Mr. President,' and went on in a very animated and impressive speech for a quarter of an hour, I working with my might the while in the clay to catch flying, as it were, the vivid and more noble traits as they flashed upon his noble features.³⁰

It is, of course, a great tribute to John Frazee's charm and ingenuity that he was able to persuade Webster to perform for him. One cannot imagine a more formal, mannered artist (for example, Horatio Greenough) so easily breaking the barriers. In instances such as this, Frazee's lack of aloofness, as well as his unself-conscious behavior, very nicely served his purposes. The modeled head of Webster, like that of Bowditch, met with immediate success in Boston and led to other commissions.

Frazee returned to New York with the two clay models and set to work translating them first into plaster and then into marble. Six months later, in April 1832, he received a letter from T. W. Ward in Boston. "The time is drawing nigh," wrote Ward, "when I shall hope to see the busts of Dr. Bowditch and Webster here in all their perfection." He then informed Frazee that he planned to exhibit them at the Athenaeum Gallery early the next month--"as proof of your genius and

skill."³¹ Frazee may have intended to finish the busts in time and deliver them to Boston for a May exhibition. But, as things developed, he was not able to do so until July. For, on the same day--April 20, 1834--that Ward had written from Boston, Thomas Perkins and Daniel Webster wrote Frazee from Washington.

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Perkins sent Frazee instructions about a commission to make a portrait bust of Chief Justice John Marshall for the Boston Athenaeum:³²

The consent of the Chief Justice of the United States has been obtained to sit to you for his bust. His official duties will prevent him from receiving you until the 22nd day of May when the court sits in the city of Richmond, where he resides and I request you to proceed to that place as near to the time as possible...In two days you would reach Baltimore and two more would place you at Richmond by the steam boat, or three if you come by way of the city, so that if you leave New York on 16th May, you will be in Richmond on the day appointed...You are to receive \$500 for the bust and your expenses of travel, until you return to New York to be paid.

To this rather specific command, Daniel Webster penned a personal, but no less curt instruction:

I have great pleasure in transmitting this, and hope you will find it convenient to wait on the Chief Justice, with your accustomed punctuality, as he has many engagements in various relations of life.

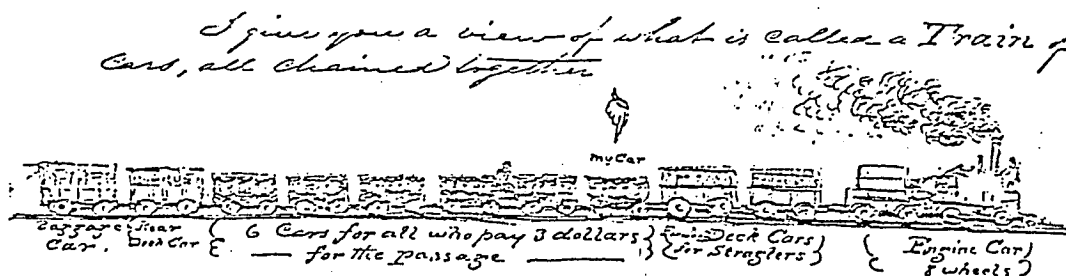
Frazee was no doubt elated, despite the abrupt formality of the two gentlemen from Boston. John Marshall was, without question, the most important personage he had yet been asked to immortalize in marble. Marshall,

who had fought in the Revolution and afterwards almost singlehandedly shaped the judiciary branch of the government, was in 1834 a grand old man of eighty. The sculptor immediately began preparing for his journey south. On Friday, May 16th, William Dunlap noted in his Diary that Frazee called on him and "is going to Richmond, Virginia to take a bust of Judge Marshall."³³ It is likely that Frazee also called on Gulian Verplanck that same day, for he gave Frazee a letter, dated May 16th, introducing the artist to Marshall as a "distinguished sculptor of this city," a self-taught artist, "who with no other advantages than those afforded by his own country, has risen to deserved celebrity." Verplanck closed the letter to Marshall by adding that Frazee was "a personal friend of mine and a man of great worth and intelligence."³⁴ So, armed with his instructions from Perkins and Webster and his letter of introduction from Verplanck, John Frazee set out for Richmond on May 16, 1834.

The next day John Frazee wrote a short note to Lydia Frazee saying that he had arrived safely (by "steam on water and steam on land") in Philadelphia. His chest of clay and tools, he added, had also arrived unharmed.³⁵ Although he had intended to depart immediately for Baltimore, Frazee discovered that he would save no time by so doing and that his expenses would be increased. He decided, therefore, to spend Sunday in

Philadelphia, and took some of that time to write to Lydia the details of his trip thus far. It was his first journey by train, something which clearly fascinated, even excited, the sculptor. His letter to Lydia, again beautifully descriptive, contains all the details (and even a drawing) of this wonderful adventure.

...We loosed our fastenings from the wharf at the Battery just at 6 o'clock and away we came in the Steamer Swan down the Bay in fine style. Weather too cool for comfort, so I put on my wrapper... Heard of nothing nor saw nothing remarkable in going down the Bay, nor up the Kills, nor down the Sound. Reached Amboy about 8 where the boat stopped a minute and landed a few passengers. Pushed on to South Amboy where we were unboated and stowed away in the Rail Road Cars.--and I, you know, for the first time.



The deck cars carry those who wish to go cheap. They are more open and more coarsely made than those in the middle, and those forward are subject to more noise and smoke and to greater danger in case the boiler bursts. The 6 small cars are very comfortably and neatly made, and each one carries 24 passengers without the least crowding! The other 3 cars will carry nearly double that number. So when this train is full they will take about 150 persons, and if there are more they can hitch on more cars.--A few minutes and we were off like a shot, at the rate of 15 miles an hour. The sensation to me, in this new conveyance was, at first, quite disagreeable and for several miles I was chuck full of fears, fits, and starts!--But a

person will get used to anything; and, as I could not help myself, I was compelled to get used to this, and am now pretty well reconciled to the Rail Car, except the eternal and deafening roar which the whole train makes upon the ear. This I don't like, it made my head ache some of the way. Past nine o'clock here we go over the bridge at Old South River, and no bones broken yet. On we go--roar, roar, roar, like a continual thunder.--Here we are at Spotswood, stopped to water. Don't laugh, for I can tell you that Madam Engine is an evaporating animal, as is a horse. Out we all jumped to stretch and straighten our legs and limbs. In 3 minutes the bell rang and such a scampering you never saw as there was among our troops to get their seats before she was off, and several who had stepped into the tavern had to run and climb in after she was underway.--On we go again, roar, roar, roar, over deep vallies, and through deep hills; now we skim along on the level plain,--now we dart under bridges, and now under aqueducts, now in a dense wilderness, now in open day again. Halloo! What's this! O! we are just passing another train from Philadelphia. We dart by each other as swift as two streaks of lightening!...Here we are at Bordentown $\frac{1}{2}$ past 11--Jump into the Steamer Trenton--quit steam on land and take steam on water again... Now we heave in sight of Philadelphia...Now we are at Chestnut Street Wharf...³⁶

Frazee was even more charmed by Richmond than he had been by Boston. His acute interest in the appearances and styles of living in different cities was certainly not unusual in America during these early years of the "transportation revolution." But Frazee, without question, had a keener eye for detail than most. A long letter to the N. Y. Commercial Advertiser, dated May 22, 1834, and published in that newspaper on June 5, 1834, bears the stamp of Frazee's charm, wit, and precision of observation. "I like Richmond very well," he told his inquisitive New York readers, and continued:

It is up and down, straight along, and every way, just as nature formed it; and that is the most beautiful, the most agreeable, and the most healthy. I hate your New York levelling system; there is no sense in it. The New Yorkers think they must bring everything in subservience to the passage of a carman's cart, laden with rum and molasses, and to that end, or something worse, everything is bent and bowed down to a stagnant level. So it will go on, I suppose, until the whole site of the city is flattened and made as prosaic as a nine-pin alley. But in Richmond they speak of hills and dales--and the city is much more picturesque and beautiful on account of those undulations.³⁷

Travel books and descriptive accounts of unusual places were, of course, extremely popular during the antebellum period. But Frazee, unlike Bayard Taylor and so many others, was not particularly interested in the exotic aspects of the places he visited. Although he shows a love of the "picturesque and beautiful," in the true early Romantic fashion, his real interest seems to be with more practical questions--that is, with the problems of urbanization and the various components of actual urban design. Frazee's dislike of New York's "levelling system" is thus not simply an aesthetic preference--it also is related to the pragmatic social problem created by the economic need of bringing "everything in subservience to the passage of a carman's cart." Cities, Frazee is saying, do not merely grow and develop haphazardly; there are always decisions made about urban design, and many of these choices relate to social and economic exigencies and not merely to "taste."

In his insistence that New York pays too much attention to commercial requirements and not enough to the effect of urban design on more human aspects, Frazee appears to be radically ahead of his time. Only A. J. Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted seem to have understood the profound relation between social change and urban design, but Frazee was dealing with these issues at least a decade earlier.

Such observations, however, were not limited to the actual laying-out, or planning, of a city. Frazee was equally interested in the physical and stylistic details of the buildings. Thus, in his description of Richmond for the Commercial Advertiser, he adds: "I have taken a lodging on the hill, near the Capitol, a noble structure of Ionic Architecture, and near this is the City Hall, of the Doric order, both of which surpass in style and grandeur any public building we have in New York." His comments on the more clearly vernacular aspects of architecture and life in Richmond were reserved, however, for Lydia's more private reading:

I am situated on the highest ground in this city. The houses in this part of town are built large and double, like country mansions, and they are scattered about, like houses in a village, which makes it very pleasant and airy. You would die laughing, to be here, where I have taken my lodgings, one day. It is a public house with a large open yard behind it, on one side of which there is a long house where the Negroes do their work chiefly. Then on the other side of the yard is a large barn, coach houses, and stables. Then there is a long

old-fashioned house within the enclosure that stands some distance from the hotel, and pretty near to the Negro house. And in this house in one of the lower rooms I have my bed, do my modelling, and everything. I will show you a ground plan of the whole concern...Over my room is a Methodist priest who is boarding here, and he is now 9 o'clock in the evening whining to himself alone some unearthly music!³⁸

In his letter to the Commercial Advertiser, Frazee also gave his readers a detailed account of the Chief Justice.

I must tell you something concerning my progress with the bust of Judge Marshall. I have taken two sittings; one more and I have him immortal. The venerable Chief Justice received me with every expression of kindness. His health is good, and he looks extremely well for one so advanced in years. He is drawing nigh to eighty. Yesterday he made me come and dine with him. He has no family about him excepting his domestics. His wife, he tells me, was taken to a better world about two years ago...He then went on to state that it seemed to be the constitution of his mind and nature to be cheerful in almost any condition of life. And indeed, I believe it, for I never met with a person of sweeter disposition, or a more even temperament; when first consulting with him as to how he would like to sit, he replied--"Just as you please, sir, suit your own convenience." I wanted him to have an easy chair to sit in. "No" said he, "Don't trouble yourself for that, I can sit on anything; I have been accustomed to everything, in every stage of life; I have been in the army of the Revolution and am used to sitting on logs and stones, and lying on the ground; I am not particular." I asked if he could bear the fatigue of sitting more than an hour each time. "Oh yes," he said, "I will sit for you as many hours, two, three or five, as you wish." He has a fine constitution, and eats with a hearty appetite. When the cloth is removed, he takes two or three glasses of Old Madeira Wine. He gave me some that he told me was thirty years old.

Work on the clay model of Marshall seems to have proceeded rapidly, for it was finished on May 26, only

five days after Frazee's arrival.³⁹ On that day, following the manner of the time, Marshall presented Frazee with a hand-written document: "This may certify that my Bust made by Mr. Frazee so far as I can rely on my own opinion, is well executed. Several of my friends in whose taste and judgment I place great confidence have looked at it and pronounce it an excellent likeness."⁴⁰ Even the most eminent and erudite of the American patrons, it seems, were more interested in the accuracy of physical representation than in any other aspects of style in portrait sculpture. Frazee, too, valued his ability to render reality with precision and accuracy, though one wonders if he did not occasionally crave a critique that might have also stressed his proficiency in capturing the more ideal, high-flown aspects of individual character. He, after all, was always striving to render nobility as well as reality.

It took Frazee nearly a year to finish the marble of the Marshall bust for the Boston Athenaeum. He received a letter, dated the first of March, 1835, from Colonel Perkins in Boston, with instructions that the finished bust should be forwarded to the Athenaeum, care of its Librarian, Dr. Seth Bass.⁴¹ In the summer of 1834, Frazee had received four more commissions from the Athenaeum to do the busts of Perkins, along with Lowell, Prescott and Story. Of these last four, only the Perkins,

along with the Marshall, was ready for sailing by the ninth of August, 1835.⁴² The busts were sent by ship⁴³ and arrived, as Frazee had predicted, within a week. On August 14, 1835, Dr. Bass wrote to Frazee that the busts had arrived "in good order." And then he too took the opportunity to congratulate Frazee on his successful efforts. "I believe," he stated, "both the likeness and the execution are equally perfect. A number of gentlemen have seen them and they have been uniformly approved of by all."⁴⁴

Dr. Bass must have known that Frazee was anxious to hear of the busts' safe arrival. Frazee had taken great pains only a week earlier in explaining to the Librarian the proper care and handling of the marble.

Now do, My Dear Doctor, have great care of these busts. They are works which I prize highly. You have none equal to them in your Athenaeum (in the modern sculptures) at least such is my opinion, and if your Boston connoisseurs differ with me on this point, please let me know the wherefore. Take care how you unpack them, lest you injure the marble; and I wish you to keep the muslin cloths round them until you have them in the place where you intend to exhibit them. They never, in any case, should be handled without there being a cloth over them, to keep the hand from soiling the marble.⁴⁵

When Colonel Perkins had first asked Frazee to model the head of Marshall, he had said: "Should your attempt be successful, of which I have no doubt, you will doubtless be called upon for duplicates." And this is exactly what happened. John Marshall himself, only

a few months before he died, ordered seven plaster casts, for which he enclosed a check for seventy dollars. "Have the goodness," he wrote, "to present one of them to Mrs. Ledyard of New York and one to Mr. Justice Story of the Supreme Court. The other five I will thank you to forward to me by some vessel coming from New York to Richmond."⁴⁶ There was also apparently a request for a marble replica of Marshall from a member of the Committee of Arts and Sciences of the New York City Corporation, for the minutes of the Common Council note that "the previous Committee had agreed to obtain said bust (of Marshall), but had not at that or any subsequent time reported to this board. From some conversation with a member of said committee, Mr. Frazee was led to undertake the business; he has now completed it and expects from the Common Council the remuneration for the same." The committee then examined the bust, "found it well executed," and resolved to pay Frazee five hundred dollars.⁴⁷ Today the Marshall bust is in the New York City Hall Collection, along with Frazee's bust of John Jay.

Joseph Story also ordered several plaster casts of his own bust, as well as at least one more of Marshall. In 1836 he wrote to Frazee, "A friend informs me that the plaster casts of Chief Justice Marshall are now ready for me, and also that my own bust for the Boston Athenaeum is also finished. You may remember that I wished to

have a plaster cast of the latter also for myself... I believe some of my family also wished you to send them a cast of my bust."⁴⁸ He mentioned his brother, Franklin H. Story, as someone possibly interested in such a purchase. Another person no doubt interested in the bust was his son, William Wetmore Story, then a student studying law at Harvard. In just a few years William gave up the law and became an aspiring young sculptor in Italy.

Frazee and Launitz were obviously operating a brisk business. In some cases they even took the initiative and pursued promising leads. In an 1836 letter to a Richmond lawyer, Launitz reported on the progress of a grave monument the firm was making for that city. He then continued: "When you were here Mr. Frazee had some conversation with you on the subject of a Bust in marble of the late Chief Justice Marshall." We have two, he added, one which was made for the New York City Council, and Richmond could have the other. The price quoted was five hundred dollars, the same amount which the New York Aldermen paid.⁴⁹

The trip from Richmond had been far from uneventful--at least the part from Richmond to Fredericksburg in which Frazee, plus "four ladies and five men" had taken the mail stage. Writing Lydia from Fredericksburg Frazee reported that they should have been in Washington

already had it not been for the "great rain" that had been pouring torrents throughout a day and a night.⁵⁰ "Several times last night our lives were in imminent danger and peril." The torrents of rain "carried ruin and devastation in their course. Causeways were covered with the floods like sweeping rivers up to the horses bellies...carrying away bridges and tearing out gullies." Before too long the stagecoach turned over in a deep gully and the passengers had to crawl out and turn it rightside up. Some time later, one of the horses fell and had to be cut loose; "he made two or three desperate efforts and threw himself entirely off the end of the bridge into the ravine." Travelling in the 1830's, whether by boat or train or stage, seems always to have entailed risks.

In the Fredericksburg letter, Frazee informed Lydia that he intended to stay in Washington for only one day. But three days later he wrote from Washington that some of his friends "and the friends of Gen Jackson here," had urged him to take the bust of the "Old Hero" and that he had consented. Frazee concluded, "I am just now fixing up my clay for the Bust of Gen'l Jackson, and tomorrow morning he is to give me the first sitting."⁵¹ Frazee did not identify all of his friends in Washington, but said he was sharing a room with young Hiram Norris, also conducting business in Washington.

Whoever the others were, they were influential enough to arrange several sittings with the President.

The Jackson bust was not a commission; Frazee had simply been "urged" by his friends to do it. After several sittings, Frazee wrote his wife:

I am getting on with the head of Gen'l Jackson very well, and shall, I think, be ready to start for home on Thursday or Friday at farthest. The Old Veteran is beginning to get acquainted with me; and if I can only gain his affection, why then I shall feel doubly sure of his Friendship and Favor! Today he insisted on my dining with him, and he placed me at his right hand by the table with great regard and courtesy;--and his attention to me, in every respect, was marked with frankness, good feeling, and friendship.⁵²

Frazee finished his clay model, as he had predicted, within a week, but when he sent someone out for some plaster "to my utter surprise he returned and told me there was none to be had in Washington...So I shall be obliged to go or send tomorrow to Alexandria to get enough for my purpose, as I cannot do without it." This, he informed Lydia amid great apologies, would postpone his return yet a few more days.⁵³

The head of Jackson, like the Athenaeum busts, attests to Frazee's acute observation. His sharp eye and equally sharp chisel perceived every detail--each tiny wrinkle, every lock of hair, the turn of a lip, or the minute crease of an eyelid. The final product gives witness to the individual, specific, even peculiar aspects of the sitter. The Athenaeum busts, with

dignified naturalistic heads rising from draped togas, present us with a cast of imposing American characters, grimly serious "Boston Romans." Thus, despite all of his avowed commitment to the fine art of the Greeks, Frazee's real allegiance was more to the Romans, who had also seen the necessity of portraying their heroes as individual, yet noble, humans. The glossing over of specific detail in favor of a more generalized idealism was not for John Frazee, though his younger American colleagues were all beginning to turn in this direction.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV

- ¹Letter dated Washington, New Jersey, 10 July 1832, Boston Public Library.
- ²Ibid.
- ³This assertion appears in Caldwell, "John Frazee."
- ⁴Ornate neoclassical furniture, usually in wood with ormolu mounts, was being made in New York during these years by Charles Honore Lannuier and others. For example, see: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nineteenth Century America: Furniture and other Decorative Arts (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1970).
- ⁵Walter Barrett, The Old Merchants of New York City (New York: Carleton, 1863; reprint ed., New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), vol. 1, p. 13.
- ⁶"Autobiography," NYPL ms., p. 85.
- ⁷The bust of Nathaniel Prime was located in December 1977 in the possession of Sylvester G. Prime, Shelter Island, New York.
- ⁸"Autobiography," NYPL ms., p. 85.
- ⁹See Clifford P. Morehouse, Trinity: Mother of Churches; An informal History of Trinity Parish in the City of New York (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), esp. Ch. 6: "Hobart, Bishop and Rector."
- ¹⁰Letter dated 2 December 1831, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. The original, now lost, was in possession of Frazee's daughter, Lydia Frazee (Mrs. Ethelbert) Belknap. Copies of this and other letters were made in 1936, the year the copies were given to the Boston Athenaeum. Mrs. Belknap had, in 1902, donated several original Frazee letters to the Athenaeum.

- ¹¹New York Mirror, 29 June 1833.
- ¹²A letter from Frazee in New York to Launitz in Auburn is dated 16 July 1833, Boston Public Library.
- ¹³Information supplied by Cornell University Library.
- ¹⁴Wayne Craven, Catalogue of American Portraits in the New-York Historical Society (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), vol. 1, p. 352. This attribution to Frazee is here based on information supplied the New-York Historical Society by Wayne Craven. See also: Craven, Sculpture in America, pp. 85-90. The bust of Hobart was donated to the New-York Historical Society in 1884 by Lewis Morris Rutherford.
- ¹⁵New York Mirror, 29 June 1833.
- ¹⁶A reporter for the New York Evening Post, 4 November 1831, wrote that the model was completed and that the marble block for it had been received.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸North American Magazine, vol. 5, no. 29 (March 1835).
- ¹⁹The three of these statuettes that still exist are in: The Museum of the City of New York; the Detroit Institute of Arts; and the Schuyler Mansion in Albany.
- ²⁰A wood engraving of it was published in the New York Mirror, 24 October 1835.
- ²¹The Diary of Philip Hone, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1936), pp. 186 ff.
- ²²"The Statue in Breeches," an unpublished poem by John Frazee and in his handwriting, is in the possession of Marguerite C. Heath, Frazee's great great-granddaughter. From the mention of Lady Wenman, this poem must have been written subsequent to June 3, 1834, when Sophia Elizabeth Wykeham was created Baroness Wenman of Thame. See The Complete Peerage (London: The St. Catherine Press, Ltd., 1959), vol. 12, pp. 494-5.

- ²³Letter dated New York, 16 July 1833, Boston Public Library. See also Glenn Brown, History of the U.S. Capitol, 2 vols. (Washington: U.S. Gov't Printing Office, 1900), vol. 2, p. 179.
- ²⁴"I have sold a monument, to be made of E. Chester marble, to the Rev. Stephen Jewitt of Con't, finished and delivered to vessel for \$450." Letter from John Frazee to Robert Launitz, dated New York, 16 July 1833, Boston Public Library.
- ²⁵According to family records, the ceremony was conducted on March 3, 1833, by the Rev. Dr. Tappan.
- ²⁶Frazee had sired ten children in his first marriage, five of whom lived beyond infancy. They were: Cromneline (b. June 15, 1814); Sarah (b. January 1, 1816); Monroe (b. June 9, 1817); Adeline (b. 1818); Lora (date of birth unknown); Edward (date of birth unknown); (unnamed child who died in infancy); Atlas Probasco (date of birth unknown); Lewis Bancel (b. 1831); Adeline (b. about 1830). The ten children from his second marriage were: Thalia (b. October 6, 1833); Vitruvius (b. April 24, 1835); Octavia (b. February 9, 1837); John Place (b. January 4, 1839); Lydia Elizabeth (b. February 11, 1841); Orion (b. March 6, 1843); Loreda (b. March 14, 1845); Athenia (b. July 24, 1847); Roblado (b. 1850); and Bowditch, born after Frazee's death in 1852.
- ²⁷Letter dated Boston, 28 October 1833, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ²⁸Letter dated Boston, 24 October 1833, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ²⁹Letter dated Boston, 30 October 1833, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ³⁰"Autobiography," NYPL ms. pp. 88-92.
- ³¹Letter from Thomas W. Ward to John Frazee, dated Boston, 20 April 1834, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.

- ³²Letter from Thomas H. Perkins and Daniel Webster to John Frazee, dated Washington, 20 April 1834, copies in Boston Athenaeum and Frazee Papers, AAA. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ³³Barck, ed., Diary of William Dunlap, vol. 3, entry for May 16, 1834.
- ³⁴Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ³⁵Letter dated Philadelphia, 17 May 1834, copy in Boston Athenaeum. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ³⁶Letter dated Philadelphia, 18 May 1834, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ³⁷Letter datelined Richmond, Virginia, 22 May 1834, published 5 June 1834.
- ³⁸Letter from John Frazee to Lydia Frazee, dated Richmond, 22 May 1834, copy in Boston Athenaeum. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ³⁹In the Autobiography Frazee states that he "reached Richmond on the 21st of May."
- ⁴⁰Letter from John Marshall to John Frazee, dated Richmond, 26 May 1834, copy in Boston Athenaeum. Original was in the possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ⁴¹Copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in the possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- ⁴²Letter from John Frazee to Dr. Seth Bass, dated New York, 8 August 1835, Boston Athenaeum. Frazee wrote: "I have just shipped to your care the Busts of Judge Marshall and Col. Perkins--The vessel sails tomorrow, and, if good weather prevails, she will reach Boston in about a week from date."
- ⁴³Frazee enclosed a certificate from the shipping company in his August 8 letter to Bass. It states: "Shipped in good order by John Frazee on board the vessel called

the Schooner Clyde, whereof J. Godfrey is master for this present voyage, now lying in the port of New-York, and bound for Boston, two boxes containing each a marble bust."

- 44 Letter dated Boston, 14 August 1835, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in the possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- 45 Letter from John Frazee to Dr. Seth Bass, dated New York, 8 August 1835, copy in the Boston Athenaeum.
- 46 Letter from John Marshall to John Frazee, dated Washington, 27 February 1835, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in the possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap. Plasters of the Marshall bust are in the collections of: The Newark Museum; the New-York Historical Society; National Sculpture Society; Yale Law School; Harvard Law School; Court House, Montross, Virginia.
- 47 Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen for November 27, 1837, and the Proceedings of the Assistant Alderman for December 11, 1837.
- 48 Letter from Joseph Story to John Frazee, dated Washington, 22 February 1836, copy in the Boston Athenaeum. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee Belknap.
- 49 Letter from Frazee and Launitz, written by Launitz, to Philip St. George Ambler, Esq., Richmond, Virginia, dated New York, 29 August, 1836, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- 50 Letter dated 27 May 1834, collection of Stephen C. Millett, Jr., Bristol, R.I.
- 51 Letter dated Washington, 30 May 1834, Frazee Papers, AAA. This is the plaster bust of Andrew Jackson now in the Princeton Museum. "The head, in plaster, was formerly in the collection of the late Frank M. Widner, Jr., who obtained it from the artist's niece." (Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University, vol. 7, no. 1, 1948, p. 3).
- 52 Letter dated Washington, 3 June 1834, Frazee Papers, AAA.

- ⁵³Letter from John Frazee to Lydia Frazee, dated Washington, 5 June 1834, Frazee Papers, AAA.

CHAPTER V

THE ARCHITECT, I

Horatio Greenough, Hiram Powers, and Thomas Crawford were among the younger colleagues of Frazee in the field of sculpture. Although Frazee had no personal contact with the first two, his direct interest led, in large part, to Thomas Crawford's later success. Crawford was born of Irish parents in New York City around 1813, making him 23 years younger than John Frazee.¹ About 1827, when Crawford was 14, he went to work as an apprentice in the shop of a New York wood carver. Spending his free time sketching at the National Academy of Design, Crawford may have come to the attention of John Frazee who was, during the late 1820's, the only sculptor in the academy. In any case, starting about 1832, Crawford was employed by the stonecutting firm of Frazee and Launitz, where he received instruction from both partners in the carving of gravestones and ornamental pieces for architecture. And, during 1834 and early 35, Crawford worked on Frazee's busts of Perkins and Marshall.²

Crawford proved an ambitious and able student, though apparently at one point he quit his job, claiming

Frazee was not paying him enough for his work. It was Launitz who persuaded him to return, and also who excited the young man's imagination with stories of Rome and of the great sculptor Thorwaldsen with whom he had studied. Launitz talked of the beautiful sculpture galleries of the Vatican and of the antique and modern statuary that filled Italian streets and piazzas. Crawford was soon persuaded that a trip to Italy was necessary in order to complete his education as a sculptor. As for Frazee, he announced in no uncertain terms in his 1834 Autobiography, "Some say it cannot be done without a visit first to Europe, to Rome and her Vatican...For myself I believe not a word of this." As for Crawford, he sailed for Italy in May 1835, after working for Frazee for nearly three years. Two years later Frazee received a long friendly letter from Crawford:

I take great pleasure in sending you a line or so by a young countryman of ours, a Mr. Freeman, who has been here some time pursuing his studies in painting. I hope you will pardon me for not having wrote so often as I should have done, my only excuse is that I have been so bewildered in consequence of having placed myself in such a maze of art as is contained within the Holy City, that I have found it almost impossible to think of anything but that which is directly around me. You will understand the sensation if you remember how little I had seen at home of the Old Masters.

The principles of art which I learned while with you, as also the ideas you so often gave me concerning the working in marble, have been of immense benefit to me. I stayed a few weeks in another's studio, and then bolted and took a studio of my

own because I wished to model from the nude. After a time there came to me a gentleman from New Orleans who hearing I was an American came to see me. He gave me an order to copy the statue of Demosthenes which is in the Vatican. I got my marble, and after it was roughed, commenced and finished it myself. I could not employ anyone to assist me because at that time my pecuniary affairs was not in the brightest state.³

Crawford was at that time the only American sculpting in Rome; Greenough, Powers and others had settled in Florence. The ease with which the young man garnered commissions from American tourists in Rome is thus better understood. It was not, however, simply copies of classical statuary that were desired. It was not long before eminent travelers such as Frederick Law Olmsted and the Bruen family sought out Crawford for portrait busts in marble. Crawford explained:

During the last winter Mr. Olmsted and Mr. Schermerhorn called upon me. They are from New York. I modeled the portrait of Miss Olmsted who is a sweet pretty girl of 18. I need not tell you that this was my first portrait, as you well know what I had done while in New York. After her Mr. Olmsted sat, and then a number of others. You recollect our calling upon the Misses Breuen when I was leaving. Well I met a brother of theirs here, a fine young man. He sat, and then persuaded his father, who carries a most magnificent head, to sit also. I have done the best I could with these portraits and you must make allowances, Dear Frazee, for they being first work. I know you are a severe critic but I hope you will pass lightly over the faults which they have. I tried to work so much in your own pure style as I could, for to tell you the truth I have not seen any busts here that please me as well as yours.

Throughout the second half of the 1830's, more and more Americans, taking the fashionable grand tour, began to bring back "souveniers" of their travels. There was nothing better than a work of art. If they could find a fellow-American, such as Crawford, working in Europe, so much the better; Thomas Crawford, a "native son" imbued with the mysteries of European art, thus became an immediate success with Americans in Italy. It mattered little to his patrons that they could have obtained better carved and more realistic likenesses at home from the chisel of John Frazee. It is little wonder, then, that Crawford told his mentor:

I can never leave here. You get your study, then models, and casts are all about you. And then to break up your arrangements and move everything (I mean after some years residence) the expense becomes such as can only be incurred by those who have plenty. I have come to the conclusion that my sojourn in Italy will be a long one. Of this you need say nothing to my parents if you should see them. I am determined that my countrymen shall know me if possible. To accomplish this my sacrifices are, to me at least, something. I have left home, friends, a sure means of subsistence which was offered me by my father, and all this to struggle perhaps in poverty for many years for what many consider a bubble and a shadow. But you can appreciate the feeling I have on this subject and you at least will not think me foolish. Your good opinion I have always endeavored to obtain and while I have been working here, I have often said to myself--Take care, Tom, Frazee will see this.!

Frazee, however adamant he had been in his Autobiography, had evidently been musing about a trip to Italy himself. "You wished me to advise you concerning

coming out here," Crawford wrote him.

I do not know what to say about it. The advantages are greater for working, the prices are small in proportion. If you could get a national work of importance, I should say by all means come to Italy and finish it. But for one who has not this and who has already a reputation at home like yourself, I do sincerely believe that your fortune would not be increased by a residence in Europe. I mean to be understood so speaking only of Italy. With your preeminent merit England is the place for success. Here living is as high as at home, but rents are much lower and the price given to workmen small in comparison with ours. You are married, Frazee, and have a family. I am alone, young, and can live upon anything, as indeed I believe I shall be obliged to do for many years yet. Consequently you see that what would be beneficial for me might affect you very differently. For a person commencing I should say by all means come here.

Frazee, when working on the Jackson bust in June 1834 had shared a hotel room with one Hiram Norris, a young engineer who had recently been graduated from West Point and who Frazee apparently had known in New York. Norris, as we will see, had a matter of his own to clear up, and had managed to garner the aid of the President in so doing. There also seems reason to believe that Frazee, Norris, and other unnamed "friends of Gen'l Jackson" had been at the same time lobbying in Congress in favor of Frazee who was, just one year later (July 1835), appointed by the government as "Architect and Superintendent" of the New York Custom House, then in its initial stages of construction at the corner of Wall and Nassau Streets in New York.⁴

The original plans of this monumental Parthenon-like neoclassical structure were drawn up by New York's best-known architectural firm, that of Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis, early in 1833. But soon after the excavations were begun, a series of misunderstandings developed between the architects and the building commissioners concerning modifications the commissioners felt were necessary. In particular, the commissioners objected to the immense dome that was to project above the pedimented roof of the building. Town and Davis, unwilling to make any accommodations, resigned and were soon replaced by Samuel Thompson, known in New York as a "builder" but not an "architect." Thompson modified the original plans so that the dome would be recessed within the building instead of projecting outward above the roof. But it was not long before Thompson began to have his own problems with the commissioners. Ill feeling mounted throughout 1834, so that in April 1835 Thompson also resigned.⁵ Frazee and Norris, both much involved in New York building or construction circles, would surely have known of the friction between Thompson and the commissioners, and were no doubt busy in June 1834 paving the way for Frazee's appointment. Moreover, Frazee would have been especially interested because the building was to be made entirely of marble, and he

was, after all, New York's preeminent marble specialist. In any case, Frazee wrote proudly of his new position to his brother Noah, stressing the Custom House's monumental character and the large amounts of Eastchester marble being used.

In July last the government appointed me Architect and Superintendent of the Custom House, now building in this city,--at \$7.00 per day--This, with what sculpture comes to hand for me at this shop, engrosses all my time. Indeed, I am obliged to be three-fourths of my time at the Custom House. It will take yet four years and upwards to complete this building. Its size on the ground is 200 by 100 feet, all to be of white marble outside and inside, roof and all. Every floor is to be supported by arches of solid mason-work, and each floor paved with marble. All the door and window frames and sashes are to be made of metal. Throughout the whole edifice, from the cellar to the summit of the roof, there will not be one particle of wood.⁶

Why was Frazee so eager to have the Custom House position? It seems at first unlikely that a man so committed to the art of sculpture would want suddenly to devote three-fourths of his time to supervising the construction of a building based on plans not even his own. Frazee received his appointment in July 1835. Only five months earlier he had written to Noah: "I find myself getting deeper and deeper into the mysteries of my art, which is beginning to be better appreciated in this country than what it has hitherto been. Sculpture is the noblest branch of the Fine Arts, and where there is one that rises to celebrity and distinction in it, there are fifty who never reach above mediocrity."⁷

Frazee had at this point finished all his Athenaeum busts, had done the plaster of Jackson, and had been trying from time to time--without success--to garner commissions for larger, full-length figures such as his proposed Jefferson. And Crawford's recent departure for a protracted period of study and work in Italy must have pointed out once again to Frazee his own lack of European training. There is ample reason to suppose that by 1835, with no more significant commissions for portrait busts in sight, Frazee was beginning to worry. "It is indeed a hard struggle for me," he told Noah.⁸

There is no evidence of how Frazee came to the attention of the building commissioners. We do know, however, that while Frazee was conducting his "business" in Washington in May and June of 1834, the Custom House commissioners were also there attempting to settle their dispute with Samuel Thompson.⁹ Hiram Norris, the young West Point engineer, was also there, sharing a room with Frazee. It is likely that various members of this cast of characters came in contact with each other at this time, in that they were all related in some way to the multi-faceted politics of New York culture. It is also worth pointing out that when Frazee finally was appointed Architect and Superintendent of the New York Custom House in July 1835, he was permitted immediately to hire

a draftsman. For this job he picked Hiram A. Norris.

In a letter to Jackson, dated September 10, 1835, Frazee informed the President that he "engaged as my assistant, Cadet H. A. Norris, whom you very well know, and whose studies in the drawing and engineering departments at West Point have well qualified him for this station." Frazee then recommended \$3 per day salary for Norris, though the implication is that this was higher than normal for such a position, and continued: "I have thought it might prove most favorable to my wishes by addressing the President, who, being more intimately acquainted with both Mr. Norris and myself, and remembering the very unpleasant situation in which Mr. N. was placed, and the loss he sustained by the persecution of Col. Thayer,¹⁰ you would be gratified with an opportunity thus favorable for renewing your manifestations of sincere regard for the well-being of a truly excellent and worthy young man."¹¹ The "friendship and favor" that Frazee and Norris had sought from Jackson a year earlier now becomes apparent. As of September 1835, Frazee and Norris were "number one" and "number two" at the Custom House, jobs which both had acquired, at least in part, through the "friendship and favor" of Andrew Jackson. As for John Frazee, he had moved on from one kind of patronage to another.

Frazee's career at the Custom House has been treated recently by an architectural historian.¹² It has been shown that Frazee was responsible for "significant changes as the construction progressed...nearly all concerned with the details of the interior."¹³ A lithograph consisting of a four-part drawing, the only known general plan of the Custom House by Frazee, shows the artist's great love for ornamental detail--seen especially in the anthemion band around the crown of the roof.¹⁴ And Frazee's familiarity with marble led him to invent a system of grinding one block upon another until the stones made perfect contact at the joint. The blocks of marble which formed the columns were thus so closely joined that the joints could hardly be seen. "No work of this kind has hitherto been known to exist in architectural structure," reported a New York newspaper.¹⁵

Frazee's work at the Custom House was beset with difficulties. Samuel Thompson had absconded with his plans, so that Frazee and Norris had to draw up new ones. Deliveries of marble from upstate quarries were often late in arriving, and even then were likely to contain blocks cut according to older specifications. Disagreements developed between Frazee and building commissioner Walker Bowne concerning what kind of heating system to

employ and whether or not to bronze the iron doors.¹⁶ Another major dispute arose in relation to the furnishing of the Custom House: Bowne's estimate, for \$1,000, consisted mainly of the use of old government furniture, whereas Frazee's estimate for over \$18,000 called for new furniture. "The furniture for the building," argued Frazee, "should be neat and chaste in its style and in perfect keeping with the architecture of the rooms."¹⁷ These arguments and many more, usually involving a difference in opinion between Frazee and Bowne on matters of expenditure, continued over a five-year period. Finally, in October 1840, Bowne decided that the building was ready for the Collector and his assistants to move in.¹⁸ Frazee, knowing there were still many workmen employed in the "finishing and furnishing," disagreed. By December 7, Bowne was convinced that the building was ready and that Frazee was no longer needed. Without warning Frazee was dismissed. "With the conduct of Mr. Bowne I am ill satisfied;" wrote Frazee: "it appears to me as improper as it is ungentlemanly."¹⁹

In February 1841, Secretary of the Treasury Levi Woodbury ordered an investigation into the events leading up to Frazee's dismissal. The two-man committee found there were still men working on the building, that it was far from complete, and that it could not be finished without Frazee's supervision. Recommending that

Frazee be reinstated, they referred to his dismissal as "an act of gross injustice to one of the first Artists of the age." The committee also specified that any new furniture should "conform to the designs and patterns of the architect."²⁰ Frazee was reinstated on March 3, 1841, and worked until February 22, 1842, when the Custom House finally opened for official business. But because of disagreements among the architect, the collector and the commissioner, Frazee did not receive any pay after he was reinstated. A congressional investigation attempted in May 1842 "to inquire into all the circumstances attending the finishing and furnishing of the Custom House, and to ascertain how much is justly due, and to whom, for work done and materials provided since the 3rd day of March 1841, and by what authority such debt was contracted."²¹

Frazee introduced into the testimony a letter apparently written by Levi Woodbury, Secretary of the Treasury, to Walter Bowne, Commissioner of the Custom House, on March 3, 1841. But, his critics said, Frazee's letter was a copy, into which he had fraudulently inserted certain phrases that would accrue to his benefit, not the letter Woodbury had actually written. The letter is reproduced below, with the phrases underlined that were presumably added by Frazee:

I deem it proper to authorize Mr. John Frazee to be continued in the situation of superintendant of the building...And it is desirable that Mr. Frazee's plans, for the interior arrangements of the building, should be carried into effect, so far, especially, as regards the construction and arrangement of the fly-doors, furniture, and the painting and bronzing of the iron work.²²

The committee, which apparently had in its possession the original letter from Woodbury to Bowne, determined that Frazee's "was very far from being a true copy of the original." The original letter, they said, "contains nothing authorizing the 'construction' of the work, or the 'bronzing of the' iron work; those words being interpolated by Frazee in his fraudulent copy."²³ Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the committee refused to pay Frazee what he claimed was back salary of \$3,429. They gave as their reason the fact that Frazee, when he was reinstated in March, 1841, had agreed to work for free on the furnishings "from the great pride which he felt as architect of the building."

It was not until two years later, in 1844, after Frazee had been appointed an Inspector of Customs, that the charges of fraud reappeared in a New York newspaper. This prompted another hearing before the Secretary of the Treasury, where the charges were finally refuted and Frazee was exonerated.²⁴ At this hearing, Frazee explained that he had copied the letter from memory while in Washington and that any mistakes had not been

made with fraudulent intent. A letter, signed by 25 prominent New Yorkers, testified to Frazee's moral character and worth in the community. Another letter, from Collector of Customs Edward Curtis, was most helpful in Frazee's defense. It reads in part:

Doubtless it was a great indiscretion in Mr. Frazee to deliver a Committee of Congress, as a copy of an official document, what he had drawn up from memory; but knowing as I do the simplicity of his character, I am not surprised at it. He was in the habit, as he states, of carrying Mr. Woodbury's letter in his pocket, while the work was going on at the Custom House; and dealing as he is with the workmen, the mechanics, and with the material men, upon credit, he had frequent occasion for the use of the letter, by way of manifesting his authority. He had, to my knowledge, more than once been called upon to make copies of that letter for other persons, and did make them with his own hand. In this way, it was natural enough, that he should become very familiar with its contents. It was the evidence of his triumph over Mr. Bowne; it was his order of restoration to office; and it was his commission...

I am aware that many members of the last Congress condemned me for causing Mr. Frazee to be appointed an Inspector of the Custom...I know Mr. Frazee to be innocent. I believed him to be an honest man; and I knew that he had the undiminished respect of the community in which he lives...The friends of the Fine Arts, throughout the land, are his friends. An ardent devotee to his profession (so long as it afforded employment), of simple habits, not unaccustomed to poverty, mercenary feelings do not belong to him; and he is incapable of fraud...

He had completed the building, and Congress had refused to allow the balance claimed for his compensation; the hard time denied him employment as Sculptor or Architect, and he was utterly destitute of the means of sustaining life. After eight or nine years labor as the Architect of that noble structure, Mr. Frazee had reached the end of that great work without a dollar in his pocket; and was driven to the sale of part of his

household effects, to procure bread for his wife and children. Under these circumstances he applied to me for such employment in the Customs as he was quite competent to, and I did not hesitate upon the first vacancy to recommend him to the late Secretary, who affirmed his appointment. He had discharged his duty faithfully, but never has intended, and does not now design to continue in the service of the Customs whenever a renewal of prosperity in the country shall have caused, as it certainly will, a renewal of his business as an Artist.²⁴

The Curtis letter, summing up the facts and the tragedy of the situation, convinced the Secretary of Frazee's innocence. But it was not until 1859, seven years after Frazee's death, that Lydia Frazee, after suing the United States in the Court of Claims, received \$2,868 to cover "compensation, at the rate of \$4.00 a day, from the 3rd day of March, A.D. 1841, till the 21st day of May, A.D. 1842..."²⁵

It seems clear that Frazee continually regarded the Custom House phase of his career as a means of supplementing his income. His letter to Noah indicated that he had undertaken this salaried position in order to support his growing family, but had every intention of continuing "with what sculpture comes to hand for me at the shop." This letter, written in April 1836, does not indicate any hope for large or regular commissions in sculpture in the immediate years to come. The fact that Frazee, like so many other New Yorkers, was already beginning to feel the effects of the financial depression that would hit in full force the next year.

The Panic of 1837 began to be felt at least as early as late 1835, and certainly by 1836 when the charter of Biddle's Bank of the United States expired. Frazee, an ardent Jackson man, would most surely have agreed with the President that excessive speculation and inflation could only result in a severe depression. And Frazee, like Jackson, was already taking his own precautionary steps. One of them was the security of the Custom House job with its reliable paycheck from the United States government. He could not have foreseen that the appointment would quickly prove to be a source of difficulties and embarrassments.

By the start of 1837 we have further evidence of Frazee's financial difficulties, for by then he, along with most other New Yorkers, was suffering the worst of the Panic of 1837. And, like many others, Frazee found it necessary to convert his capital assets into cash. One such asset, possibly his most valuable, was the marble quarry in Eastchester which he had owned jointly with his brother William since 1826.²⁶ Along with a major quarry owned by Kain and Morgan, this had been one of the two largest sources of quarried, cut, and dressed marble for the thriving New York building trade.²⁷ On January 25, 1837, the Frazee brothers sold their quarry, as well as its machinery and tools, to

Horace Butler, a New York City builder, who immediately took on a partner named James C. Hall.²⁸ There is reason to believe that after Frazee sold his quarry to Butler and Hall, much of the marble contracted for the Custom House was obtained from this very same firm.²⁹

Three months after selling the quarry, Frazee took what must have been an even more painful step. Seriously disappointed by the consistently "cool treatment" given him by the government and disgusted by the lack of any significant patronage from the private sector, Frazee decided to dissolve his partnership with Launitz, cash in his share of the business, and close up shop. He thus wrote to Launitz:

I will now give you my views and wishes more fully upon the subject we were talking over last evening. I need not, however, make a long story over what may be comprised in a few words. So I will come at once to the main point. It is my wish to have our partnership concern closed up, as soon as the circumstances of our affairs will admit of it in a mutual way, and satisfactory, if possible to both of us. This proposal may be unexpected to you, perhaps, though I hope not offensive, as there is nothing in it intended to create ill-feeling or displeasure; and it cannot be considered as overreaching the right and privilege we both possess. You may wish, however, to know my reasons; and here they are:--

First,--I must tell you that the cool treatment-- (to use no harsher language) of Government towards me, has completely sickened my mind with regard to the Studio, and almost made me resolve never to lift the chisel again in America. In am disgusted with our workshop for the present. Another thing,-- the new Custom House is now reaching the critical stage of the work which requires all my attention,--

so much so, at least, that I wish to have my mind free from other concerns and cares.--Another and yet more important consideration is that I am urged from duty, stern duty, to secure for myself and family, as fast as possible, the entire avails of my own labor, talents, and energies. The sun of my life has passed its zenith, and is fast descending to its evening shadows. The short period left me (a brief moment at most!) and the decline of health and vigor, together with the wants and cares of a numerous family, all admonish me of the necessity for adopting the most prudent and economical course I can consistently devise.

All my views and wishes are now open to you. I charge no evil to you;--have no complaint to make against you;--shall lay no obstacles in the way of your future business, not take any steps, if I can avoid it, which may tend to embarrass you at the present time.

Now then, if it be your wish to continue the business of the shop, and keep the stock we have, let it be appraised by two or three marble-workers whom we may agree upon; and I am willing you should take it at their valuation. I want none of the marble, of course. Nor do I wish a sacrifice made of it. If the lease is taken of Wagstaff, you can have it made in your own name. I am through--and wait your reply.³⁰

Thus, after twenty years, Frazee was forced out of his beloved sculpture business by social and economic circumstances beyond his control. One can only admire his stoical resolve, his moral sense of "stern duty" to his family. And one must sympathize here with his final acknowledgement, after years of almost blind optimism, of the fact that he would not likely experience the much hoped-for success as a sculptor in America. Frazee worked long and hard over the next five years at the Custom House, and the ultimate outcome of this phase

of his career must have contributed a good deal more to his bitterness. The federal government, once again, failed to understand his importance and integrity as an artist. Every stand he took against Commissioner Bowne and the others was related to an insistence on high quality, particularly regarding the furnishings.

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Frazee made at least three trips to Washington during 1841 and 1842³¹ to testify before Congressional committees investigating problems relating to the Custom House. It is a tribute to Frazee's optimism, stamina, and resilience that, during these visits, he did his best to try to resume his career as a sculptor. Despite all the negative feelings he had developed over the past several years, he still looked to the government as the main source of patronage--especially for the large-scale monumental works that he so much wanted to execute. The proposed Jefferson statue, for instance, had never materialized into a commission, and of course Frazee still had this on his mind. Soon after he arrived in Washington in January 1841, he inquired about it. "I have been to the Capitol to-day and have talked with Mr. Hoffman about the Jefferson statue. He thinks it cannot be got through this session; and I have but little hopes of it myself."³² Undaunted by this failure, Frazee continued

in the same letter: "I can tell you nothing about my going to Raleigh, N. C. until I can talk with some Member from the State which I shall try and do tomorrow."

The next day Frazee saw several gentlemen from Raleigh about restoring Canova's famous statue of George Washington in that city. "They think that the statue is so mutilated and badly burnt, that it will be impossible to restore it. But, I cannot rest satisfied with their opinion and have made up my mind to go there and examine it myself; and, if it cannot be restored, perhaps, when I am there, I can enter into some agreement with the Governor to make a new statue for them."³³

Frazee added that he would be leaving for Raleigh on Tuesday, February 2. He would have preferred to go on Monday, but that day he was obliged to confer with the Committee on Ways and Means about the furniture appropriation for the Custom House.

Frazee did testify that day, and also tended to other affairs, despite the fact that it was a day of severe rain storms in Washington. "Rain or shine, I don't fail to go up to the Capitol every day, and drive forward all my business here as fast as I possibly can. But it is tedious, hard, dragging, vexatious business, I do assure you."³⁴ It is clear that Frazee was feeling the pressure of defending his Custom House activities

before some members of Congress while, at the same time, constantly trying to sell himself as a sculptor with others. One of his methods was to ask notables for letters of recommendation, something which must have been a "tedious, hard, dragging, vexatious business" for this still proud, self-assured artist. Nonetheless, he was able to meet with Justice Story, the old Boston jurist whose bust he had done some years earlier for the Athenaeum. Frazee obtained a letter of high praise from Story, as well as a similar letter from Edward Curtis of New York. These certificates, "with more from other Members, if I can get them," he intended to show to the Governor of North Carolina to "convince him that I am every way competent to execute a new statue for them" if the Canova was too badly damaged.

Three days later Frazee wrote Lydia from Raleigh. "It is more than 300 miles from Washington here, and I have traveled it in less than two days. How like fury this steam can push us round the earth, can't it?" After describing Raleigh ("no great shakes of a city") and his lodgings ("with a great wood fire in an old-fashioned fire-place"), Frazee went on to discuss the Canova statue. "I have seen the ruins of it, and those ruins can be restored about as easy as it would be for me to prevent the earth's rotary motion. It is broken

into a thousand pieces; besides it is all broken into lime."³⁵ Back in Washington, Frazee wrote that the Governor approved his proposal and said he would bring it up before the next Legislature which, he was sorry to add, would not meet again for two years. "So," Frazee bravely told his wife, "all my hopes must lie still for a long time." And then, resilient as ever, he went on: "I would certainly start for home tomorrow, but for some particular reasons which I will explain to you when I have you in my arms again. I am now out of employ; and there are likely to be vacancies in my line. I therefore consider it my duty to be on the lookout, and secure a good situation if I can. I am sure you will agree with me in this."³⁶

There is no direct evidence as to what position Frazee was trying to obtain, but it is possible that he was after Robert Mills' position as Architect of Public Buildings for the United States Government. Mills, who had been appointed in 1836 by Andrew Jackson, had distinguished himself as designer of countless post offices, custom houses, prisons, hospitals, and courthouses throughout the country. In Washington he had been responsible for the Post Office (1839) and the Patent Office (1839). The Treasury Building (1836-1842) was not complete in February 1841, but there was a good deal

of controversy concerning its design and various of its functional elements, and even some talk of Mills being forced to resign from his position.³⁷ Frazee would certainly have heard of this and may have even discussed it with Levi Woodbury, Secretary of the Treasury, who impressed Frazee at this time as being "favorable to me and my views." In any case, Frazee was back in Washington four months later, and wrote to Lydia: "My book of Drawings is at the Capitol. They think highly of the drawings, and also of the Edifice. Tomorrow, by request, I shall have the Book taken to the President's House. If I am not greatly mistaken these drawings will cause a considerable sensation here; and I hope a favorable one."³⁸ The book no doubt contained Frazee's architectural renderings for various proposed government buildings. There is no record as to whether or not the book caused the "considerable sensation" Frazee had anticipated. He must have been partly encouraged to continue in his efforts, for within the next few months at least two art-world notables contacted President Tyler in support of Frazee. Robert Weir, Professor of Drawing at West Point, wrote:

It gives me pleasure to join with others in recommending Mr. John Frazee as a person eminently qualified to fill the situation as Architect of Public Buildings at Washington. Mr. Frazee has been engaged for some time past in constructing the Custom House at New York--a work that does honor to our country, and which I feel confident could not have been accomplished without that mechanical knowledge

in adjusting the parts which he so well understands,-- giving to the work a unity that makes it appear as the result of art upon a single stone.³⁹

The next letter, signed "John James Audubon, the American Ornithologist," reads:

I have great pleasure in complying with your request that I should furnish you with a statement of my opinion of your abilities and character, in order to aid you in getting the Office of Architect of Public Buildings at Washington City. Not having the honor of knowing his Excellency, the President, I can only say to you that I should have addressed him personally in your behalf but for that circumstance--believing you fully deserve the office; so you are at liberty to show this letter to him, or to anyone else you think it likely I may be known to.⁴⁰

Nothing materialized for Frazee regarding the Architect of Public Buildings position. Mills was able to weather his own storm and secure his job, which he kept until his death in 1855. Frazee, meanwhile, had been reinstated in March 1841 at the Custom House, but by May 1842 his long seven years there had finally come to an end. Despite all the political problems involved with the completion of the building, Frazee must have been proud when it opened to the public in the spring of 1842. It was already considered, as it still is today, one of the grandest Greek Revival structures of the century. Philip Hone, always reliable on matters of taste, recorded in his diary:

The splendid edifice fronting on Wall, William, and Pine Streets is now entirely completed and has been occupied as the New York Custom House in all its

manifold and complicated departments since the first of May...The building of the Custom House was commenced in May, 1834, and the edifice finished, with its furniture complete, in May, 1842; cost, \$985,000.

The statement of the cost of this magnificent winding sheet of departed commerce is taken from an elaborate and well-written description published in the Commercial Advertiser of this afternoon. A stranger walking from Broadway down Wall Street would laugh heartily at these lugubrious expressions of mine, and be apt to remark: "If these are the grave-clothes of commerce, of what materials were her bridal clothes composed?" With his back to "New Trinity," the most beautiful structure of stone in America (and I know of none more beautiful anywhere), he passes the Custom House, which cost a million; eight or ten banks, each a palace for the worship of mammon; and the new Exchange, with a portico of granite columns such as Sir Christopher Wren had no notion of...these...would convey to the mind of the wayfaring man an image wholly different from that of commercial distress and pecuniary embarrassment; and yet that these do exist at this moment, in a degree altogether unprecedented, there can be no doubt.⁴¹

The depression which followed the Panic of 1837 had not yet abated by 1842. Philip Hone had sunk much of his money into the building of the new Exchange--along with "other fools who subscribed for it"--and "nothing but the interest will ever be paid out of the income." Unemployment was widespread during these years; even Hone had two sons out of work. And Frazee, his career as Architect of the Custom House at an end and his efforts to be appointed Architect of Public Buildings having failed, was clearly at a loss as to what to do next. He had not, however, lost his life-long desire to execute a full-scale public commission in sculpture, preferably an equestrian statue of George Washington.

He must have known that such a commission from the federal government was at this point impossible. And so he looked elsewhere.

And what better place to look than at home? New York, after all, had always been his base, and it was there, among the merchants and mechanics, that Frazee could locate most of his support. He thus set out to convince several New York gentlemen that an equestrian statue of Washington in the rotunda of the new Custom House would be most desirable, and that a general subscription among the citizens of New York could appropriately finance it. But, since the Custom House was federal property, permission was required of the President to construct a statue within it. Frazee thus wrote to President Tyler:

The undersigned, Architect of the new Custom House in the City of New York, having finished his labour in the erection and completion of that Edifice, proposes to erect in the Rotunda of said Building a Statue of Washington, in marble, to rest on a pedestal having its sides enriched with appropriate historical sculptures.

Frazee then went on to explain that it was on this spot that Washington stood when he was inaugurated in 1789 and that the event was still bright in the memory of many aged and respectable New Yorkers. He spoke of the "cherished feelings" among New Yorkers for the "new and noble structure just reared upon this devoted ground."

The spot, he said, would be even more cherished if it contained "an image of this great and good man." And then:

The means proposed for carrying the work into effect will be by a general subscription of the citizens, many of whom have already been consulted upon the subject, and their entire approval of the work warmly expressed, with assurances of their most liberal aid for its accomplishment, as soon as permission can be obtained from the president...⁴²

Edward Curtis, Frazee's friend and Collector of Customs, also wrote Tyler, assuring the President of his "hearty approval" of Frazee's "designs and objects." He too took pains to explain the appropriateness of place. "The spot chosen...has a deep interest with our fellow citizens here by its historical association with the Father of our Country." But to Curtis an even more important consideration would be the protection and security of the proposed statue "by having it placed within the massive walls of a Monument of imperishable construction." Curtis' letter was co-signed by sixteen prominent New Yorkers.⁴³

It took the President several months to respond, though the decision could not have been very difficult. Since there would be no costs involving the federal government, and since even the project itself would be administered by New Yorkers, none of the government's money or time would be spent. Tyler actually had nothing

to lose, and possibly nothing to gain, when he wrote:

Upon a full consideration of Mr. Frazee's application and of several other citizens for leave to erect a statue of George Washington in the Custom House of New York at the expense of the citizens of New York, I can see no good objection thereto. The statue may be thus erected in some suitable part of the building--provided it does not damage the same, and provided this Government shall in no event be looked to for reimbursement of the expense.⁴⁴

But, despite Tyler's approval of the project, the subscription for funds seems never to have materialized. Tyler's letter, in fact, is the last we hear of the projected statue of George Washington for the Custom House. By October of 1842 it must have been apparent that the project had no chance of getting off the ground, for at that time Edward Curtis was approached by several prominent New Yorkers to appoint Frazee to one of the positions then being filled at the Custom House. Frazee had once again aroused the sympathy of his fellow New Yorkers; this time their concern was based on a lung disease he had contracted while inhaling damp marble dust for so many years.⁴⁵ Frazee's friends urged Curtis to exert his influence in the artist's favor, pointing out that this was an opportunity for government patronage such as rarely occurs.

The undersigned citizens of New York respectfully ask your attention to this memorial on behalf of our fellow-citizen John Frazee, Esq., the architect of the splendid edifice you officially occupy. While engaged in preparing the designs and models of that beautiful structure, he was exposed for years to the dampness and cold of its unfinished walls. The

consequence, on the one hand, is a work whose excellence is unsurpassed and unapproached in America; on the other, a broken constitution, a severe and protracted illness; and a state of health resulting therefrom that will prevent his resuming the arduous profession of Sculptor.

We respectfully submit that this is an opportunity, such as rarely occurs, for the interposition of governmental patronage between a valuable public servant and the calamities that have undertaken him in the performance of his duties. An application of the appointing power in his favor, would, in our opinion, be equally just and expedient. Without assuming to dictate to you, we name the office of one of the Store-keepers as one suited to his qualifications, and entirely acceptable to his friends.

By a residence among us of a quarter of a century, Mr. Frazee has established the character of an upright and good citizen; a republican of the Jefferson school; and advocate of sound democratic faith and practice whenever and wherever found. Such are the men we wish to see holding office in our Republic.⁴⁶

Frazee did not get the office of Store-Keeper, as his friends had suggested. Instead, he was appointed Inspector of Customs, a position which he held from 1843 through 1847.⁴⁷ John Frazee thus joined the ranks of two American literary artists who desperately needed money and who were able to use political influence to obtain Custom House positions. Nathaniel Hawthorne was employed as a weigher and gager at the Boston Custom House from 1839 through 1841, and later, from 1866 through 1885, Herman Melville took the same position that John Frazee had once filled--Inspector of Customs in New York. Very few Americans, it seems, have been

able to support themselves and their families solely through their creative or artistic endeavors. Quality or popularity notwithstanding, the public's taste has been traditionally fickle and unreliable. It is somehow ironic that government patronage, when available, came to these men in the form of jobs at Custom Houses-- buildings dedicated to the world of trade and commerce, a world of which they themselves knew or cared so little.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER V

- ¹For biographical information on Thomas Crawford see: Robert L. Gale, Thomas Crawford: American Sculptor (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964).
- ²Crawford's work on these busts is mentioned in Thomas Hicks, Eulogy of Thomas Crawford (New York, 1865).
- ³Letter dated Rome, 30 June, 1837, copy made from original by Thalia Frazee Peters in possession of William E. Belknap, II, Nonquit, Mass.
- ⁴This building, later the Sub-treasury, is now Federal Hall National Memorial and is under the administration of the National Park Service.
- ⁵See Louis Torres, "Samuel Thompson and the Old Custom House," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 20 (1961), pp. 185-190.
- ⁶Letter dated New York, 3 April 1836, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ⁷Letter dated New York, 2 February 1835, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹Letter of Commissioners to Levi Woodbury, 5 August 1834, in which they mention having been with Thompson in Washington in May 1834. This letter from Letters received by the Secretary of the Treasury from Collector of Customs: Letters relating to the New York Custom House Building, 1832-1846, National Archives, Record Group 56 (hereinafter cited as Letters, Sec.-Treas.).
- ¹⁰Sylvanus Thayer (1785-1872). Called the "Father of the Military Academy," Thayer served as superintendant at West Point, 1817-33.

- ¹¹Letter dated New York, 10 September 1835. Letter contained in 27th Congress, 2nd Session, House Report no. 735, May 28, 1842, item no. 6, p. 14.
- ¹²Louis Torres, "John Frazee and the New York Custom House," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 23 (October 1964), pp. 143-50.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 144.
- ¹⁴Collection New York Public Library.
- ¹⁵"We are pleased to see Mr. Frazee's method subsequently pursued with success in the setting of columns in the large room of the Merchants' Exchange." See New York Commercial Advertiser, 13 July 1842.
- ¹⁶Frazee was in favor of the Perkins Hot Water System and of bronzing (rather than painting white) the iron doors. After much argument, Frazee got his way in both instances, but only with the aid of Secretary of the Treasury Levi Woodbury. For further details see: Torres, "John Frazee."
- ¹⁷Letter from John Frazee to Jesse Hoyt (Collector of Customs), 10 November 1849, Letters, Sec.-Treas.
- ¹⁸Letter from Bowne to Woodbury, 1 October 1840, Letters, Sec.-Treas.
- ¹⁹Letter from Frazee to Woodbury, 8 December 1840, Letters, Sec.-Treas.
- ²⁰Letter from Ely Moore, et al. to Woodbury, 26 February 1841, Letters, Sec.-Treas.
- ²¹The Reports of Committees, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 1841-1842, 5, Report no. 1065, p. 1.
- ²²Ibid., p. 17-18.
- ²³Ibid., p. 18.

- ²⁴Refutation of the Charges Against John Frazee, Architect of the New-York Custom House, with the Decision of the Secretary of the Treasury Hereon (New York, 1844). A copy of this pamphlet is in the Harvard College Library, E. J. Wendell Collection. The gentlemen who attested to Frazee's character and worth were: Jeremiah Towle, A. Vanderpoel, Elijah F. Purdy, Robert H. Morris, S. Cambreleng, C. W. Lawrence, B. Bates, Donald Fraser, Ely Moore, Silvanus Miller, E. W. Laight, J. N. Catlin, M. J. Baily, Wm. S. Coe, Redwood Fisher, John R. Peters, Chas. Dusenbury, Chas. Augustus Davis, Moses G. Leonard, S. A. Houghton, Peter Cooper, Stephen Allen, B. F. Butler, F. B. Cutting.
- ²⁵"Lydia Frazee, Administratrix of John Frazee, vs. The United States," Reports from the Court of Claims, submitted to the House of Representatives during the first session of the Thirty-Sixth Congress, 1859-1860, 2, Report no. 216.
- ²⁶Liber of Deeds 37:42, November 27, 1826, Westchester County Office of Land Records, White Plains, New York.
- ²⁷See: S. L. Mitchell, The Quarries of Marble Situated Between East-Chester and the River Bronx, New York, 1824, in the possession of the Eastchester Historical Society; and J. Thomas Scharf, History of Westchester County, New York, 2 vols., Philadelphia, 1886, vol. 2, p. 736.
- ²⁸Liber of Deeds 74:293, January 25, 1837, Westchester County Office of Land Records, White Plains, New York.
- ²⁹"I came on [the train to Washington] in company with Mr. Hall and a Mr. Mathews who is interested with Mr. Hall in the claim now before Congress, for losses on the basement marble of the new Custom House." Letter from John Frazee to Lydia, dated Philadelphia, 26 January 1841, from a copy made by Ethelbert Belknap, April 13, 1936, in the possession of Stephen C. Millett.
- ³⁰Letter dated New York, 18 April 1837, collection the Boston Public Library.

- ³¹These trips were in January 1841; May 1842; and October 1842.
- ³²Letter from John Frazee to Lydia Frazee, dated Washington, 28 January 1841, from a copy made by Ethelbert Belknap, April 13, 1936, in the possession of Stephen C. Millett.
- ³³Letter from John Frazee to Lydia Frazee, dated Washington, 30 January 1841, from a copy made by Ethelbert Belknap, April 13, 1936, in the possession of Stephen C. Millett.
- ³⁴Letter from John Frazee to Lydia Frazee, dated Washington, 1 February 1841, from a copy made by Ethelbert Belknap, April 13, 1936, in the possession of Stephen C. Millett.
- ³⁵Letter dated 4 February 1841, from a copy made by Ethelbert Belknap, April 13, 1936, in the possession of Stephen C. Millett.
- ³⁶Letter dated 8 February 1841, from a copy made by Ethelbert Belknap, April 13, 1936, in the possession of Stephen C. Millett.
- ³⁷See H. M. Pierce Gallagher, Robert Mills (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), esp. Ch. 9 "Public Buildings."
- ³⁸Letter dated 25 June 1841, from a copy made by Ethelbert Belknap, April 13, 1936, in the possession of Stephen C. Millett.
- ³⁹Letter from Robert Weir to His Excellency, John Tyler, President of the U.S., dated West Point, 6 September 1841, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ⁴⁰Letter from John James Audubon to John Frazee, no date, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ⁴¹Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone, pp. 610-11, entry for July 13, 1842.

- ⁴²Letter dated New York, 8 March 1842, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ⁴³Letter dated New York, 8 March 1842, Frazee Papers, AAA. The other signatures on this letter are: G. C. Verplanck, James G. King, Prescott Hall, Geo. W. Bruen, Daniel Jackson, Robert Dyson, Joseph Hoxie, Thomas Lord, S. G. Ogden, Jr., David C. Colden, Martin E. Thompson, Robert Smith, Nathaniel Richards, Duncan E. Pell, Peter Smith, William Taggard.
- ⁴⁴Letter from President John Tyler to John Frazee, Edward Curtis, and others, dated Washington 10 May 1842, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ⁴⁵Frazee's affliction, similar in effect to coal miners' "black lung," is known technically as ultramicroscopic siliconiosis. It is known to have afflicted marble carvers as early as the Italian Renaissance.
- ⁴⁶Letter to Edward Curtis from Joseph Hoskins, F. B. Wakeman, Alexander Ming, Jr., Ely Moore, W. R. Peters, Charles Ferris, Daniel Jackson, W. S. Coe, Peter Cooper, S. Cambreleng, David Vandervoort, dated New York, 11 October 1842, Frazee Papers, AAA.
- ⁴⁷In the United States Official Register for the years 1843-45 and 1847 John Frazee is listed as Inspector of Customs, New York, at \$1,094 p.a. Presumably this would have been true for 1846 as well.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARCHITECT, II

It has generally been agreed among scholars that Frazee's career in the arts came to an end after the 1830's. "He died in 1852;" wrote one critic, "what he was doing in the intervening years after his work on the Custom House ended in 1841 we do not know."¹ There are, however, several references to busts, grave-stones and other monuments that Frazee presumably executed from the mid-1830's well into the 1840's. Most of these references, existing today in hand-written notes by Frazee's daughter Thalia, are to works that have not been located, and they include monuments or busts of James Madison (1835), F. A. Talmadge of New York, Dr. Gardiner, Bishop Parker, Franklin H. Story, Benjamin Custis, C. P. Curtis, and J. P. Davis--all of Boston--and Col. Joseph Elsworth of Connecticut.² There is also a reference in a letter from Frazee to Launitz that reads: "I have sold a monument, to be made of E. Chester marble, to the Rev. Stephen Jewitt, of Conn't., finished and delivered to vessell for \$450."³ This too has not been located.

But there are several works by Frazee that have been located recently, among them the gravestone of Jane Probasco Frazee. Probably executed in 1833, it is a simple marble monument in the form of an elongated Grecian urn, bearing the inscription: "To Jane the Wife of My Youth." It is located in the Baptist cemetery in South River, New Jersey.⁴ Frazee's bust of Nathaniel Prime has recently been discovered in the possession of one of Prime's descendants near New York City.⁵ And the grave memorial to William Leggett, a commission of 1839, has also been definitively located. Leggett, for many years the well-known editor of the New York Post, had died at his home in New Rochelle in May 1839. The New York Mirror, six months later, reported:

We learn that arrangements are in progress for the erection of a monument to the memory of William Leggett, our former correspondent and friend. Mr. Frazee has been engaged to execute it, and has already prepared a beautiful design. It is an obelisk, standing on a pedestal. On the pedestal is a space for the inscription and above, on the obelisk, is the bust of Mr. Leggett in basso relievo. Early in the spring the monument will be erected in New Rochelle...⁶

The obelisk type of monument seems to have occasionally appealed to Frazee. He had employed it earlier in the Elbridge Gerry Monument in the Congressional Cemetery, and returned to it later in his design for the Pulaski Monument.⁷

From the 1840's we have at least one extant marble bust by Frazee, that of the New York merchant George Griswold.⁸ Lydia Frazee, in a biography of her husband that she wrote for her children, related the charming story of how Frazee came to do Griswold's bust:

In 1842 or 1843, I forget, Mr. George Griswold, Merchant of New York, had sat for his bust by Mr. Brown, Dentist of Park Row. Mr. G. was not pleased with the likeness nor with the execution of the work. Father was rather out of the art work-- 'twas after the completion of the Custom House and he had taken rooms corner of Wall and Nassau Streets as an architect for Public or Private Buildings. Mr. Griswold called in, inquired for him, said, I have just come from Mr. Launitz studio and inquired of him who was the best artist in the marble line. Mr. Launitz replied that was an unfair question to put to an artist in the same work, but to tell the truth, it is John Frazee. To him I will go, he said. So father executed in marble a very fine bust of him.⁹

If Lydia's memory was correct that the Griswold bust was modeled around 1843, we can assume that this is the last dated extant sculpture by John Frazee. Some of the unlocated busts, though, might well date from that year or later. Nonetheless, because of Frazee's failing health during these years, it is safe to state that there were no major works in sculpture executed after the completion of the Custom House in 1841. Lydia's reference to her husband having taken an office at Wall and Nassau Streets as an architect is certainly tantalizing, but again nothing is known of any building activities.

This would have been the end of the story of John Frazee's career, were it not for the recent discovery by this author of what in many ways would have been Frazee's most ambitious work--his four large watercolor drawings and plans (dated 1848) for the proposed Washington Monument.¹⁰ The New York Washington Monument project, similar to the one in Washington, D.C., was--in the manner so popular in the nineteenth century--an open competition organized and run by a private association.¹¹ "The New York Washington Monument Association" was incorporated in 1833 to erect a memorial to George Washington in New York.¹² There had been occasional demands for such a memorial since 1802, when the issue first arose in the Common Council.¹³ In 1833 a committee was formed, a large sum of money was collected, and at least two designs were exhibited publicly: one by Ball Hughes at the American Academy and the other by G. Jones at the National Academy.¹⁴ Frazee was also interested in the competition, and although he does not seem to have exhibited a design at this time, he did show his early conception to William Dunlap, who recorded the event in his Diary.¹⁵ He also wrote on the subject in the New York Evening Post for December 28, 1833.¹⁶

The article, entitled "Statue and Monument to Washington--What are the Best Materials?," is a long,

eloquent defense of the use of marble for outdoor monuments. There had been much talk, it seemed, on the subject, with many people claiming that the climate of New York would be destructive to marble. These people had apparently offered the dilapidated condition of several marble gravestones as examples. Frazee spoke to this issue when he wrote:

Are the wrecks of pedestals made of this paltry slabbage veneered upon a parcel of bricks slovenly piled together to be regarded as evidence of the durability of marble? Are such miserable patch-works...any proof whatever that good and solid marble will not endure for ages and ages, if wed in large masses, and hewn and put together as it should be? We think not...It is indeed a truth, and a lamentable one, that there are yet but very few structures of this kind in our country that deserve the name monument. The most of those in our cemeteries are of very small dimensions. These have chiefly been made of the worst kinds of marble, put together in the slightest manner, and without any solid foundation. How can such things be called monuments, when they perish and fall in ruins before the very eyes of the makers? In marble that is hard, sound and pure, and free from sulphurates, there is nothing to be apprehended from either the cold or the heat of the climate. The writer of these remarks has for twenty years been constantly led by his profession to examine with the nicest attention everything in relation to monumental structures.

After thus treating the question of the durability of marble, Frazee then went on to discuss the various prototypes and preferences for marble in ancient Greece.

Pliny says expressly that white marble was the best and most beautiful material for statutes. The Pentelic marble, taken from Mount Pentelicus near Athens, was thought the most excellent of the Greek

marbles. It was selected by Scopas, Praxiteles, and other famous sculptors, for their noble works. This marble is pure white, and much harder than the celebrated marble of Paris. When broken, it shows large particles which sparkle like grains of rock salt. It is very similar to our East Chester marble...

Frazer was not only writing this article in defense of marble for aesthetic reasons, but also as propaganda for the ten-year-old East Chester marble quarries, in which he and William had a large interest. The direct threat had apparently come from Ball Hughes, whose design for the monument specified that only the base be made of marble with the statue of Washington itself made of bronze. Exhibited at the American Academy, this design evidently found a number of partisans, many of whom favored it in large part because of the supposedly greater durability of bronze. Frazer obviously saw this incipient movement as a threat not only to his status as a marble sculptor, but also to his status as owner and proprietor of a marble quarry. He was, therefore, in this article speaking individually as an artist and also as a representative of the young East Chester marble industry. He had also, we will remember, spoken for his "marble friends" in his letter to Verplanck concerning the tariff on marble; that letter, dated January 24, 1833, was written only a month after the Evening Post article, which concluded with a typical flourish of aesthetic and patriotic zeal:

When I look at a house with a dark exterior, if I am any great distance from it, I cannot divest myself of the idea that it is anything else in effect than the mere shadow of a building...Such too will be the character of the monument we are about to rear if we make a pedestal of marble and place upon its summit a statue of bronze. The statue is, in a strict architectural sense, a component part of the great structure, and so that harmony and beauty may pervade over all, the whole exterior should be of one material, and of one uniform color throughout. What is there on earth so appropriate for a statue of Washington, what so consonant with the purity and sublimity of his character, as the beautiful snow-white marble? The association seems meet; it is becoming, it is delightful. But compare the sombre austerity of bronze;--aye, and let the mind contemplate a Nero,--not a Washington!

Frazee, as it happened, had nothing more to worry about regarding Hughes' proposal, for the monument project lay dormant for almost ten years and he spent most of that time busy at work in the Custom House. Then, on April 18, 1843, "the Washington Monument Association of the City of New York" was newly incorporated, with John Trumbull as president.¹⁷ A year later, in June 1844, the association accepted a design for an extremely ornate granite "Gothic" monument proposed by the New York architect Calvin Pollard. It was accepted, however, with the reservation that it was "subject to an alteration, or the substitution of any more approved design, prior to the commencement of the structure."¹⁸ Pollard's lavish Gothic ornamentation met with immediate disapproval among all manner of New Yorkers, most of whom agreed that such medieval reference was badly suited for

a monument to the Father of the Republic. Consequently, many additional Washington Monument projects were drawn up and presented to the association in the next several years, all of them representing one aspect or another of the various "revival" styles then so popular in New York. But this eclecticism did not win favor with everyone. George Templeton Strong, the keenly observant diarist, had visited the association in June 1847 to view some of the submitted plans, and he was not particularly impressed. All the designs, he wrote, are

on a scale of impracticable splendor and magnitude, and with two exceptions, all execrable. One by Lafever, a combination of obelisk, church steeple, and gas house chimney intended to look Egyptian, and five hundred feet high, is horribly ugly, but has a sort of knowing original preposterous nightmare look that's rather taking, and I'd rather see it adopted than any of its competitors but one, a gigantic, nondescript structure amplified and magnified from the Scott monument (as are most of them) and put in, I think, by Arnot. It is late perpendicular Gothic, abundantly faulty in proportion and detail but looking very rich and effective on paper. The rest are beastly.¹⁹

George Templeton Strong could not have seen John Frazee's project, for it was not submitted until a year later. If he had, one can hope that he would not have found it "beastly." Frazee's project was exhibited in four very large watercolor drawings at the Art-Union in New York in June 1848.²⁰ The Art-Union, then located at 497 Broadway, was one of the great cultural phenomena of the antebellum period, and in many ways the most

appropriate choice for such an exhibition. Founded in 1839 (first as the Apollo Association), the Art-Union quickly became a broadly based, lavishly organized, publicly funded organization catering directly to the needs of American visual artists and their constantly growing "popular" audience. The organization was funded yearly through subscription, with members of the public--throughout the country--buying as many shares as they wanted, at five dollars a share. Each share represented a lottery ticket entitling the owner to a chance in the annual year-end lottery drawing held in New York. At this time, the original works of American art which throughout the year had been purchased and exhibited by the managers, were raffled off to subscribers. In addition, each subscriber was sent, upon subscribing, a large engraving of one of the works of art purchased by the Art-Union that year. The Art-Union was an immense popular success, the lottery fulfilling the American love of chance, and the acquisition of art works fulfilling the growing need (particularly among the middle class) for "culture" and "refinement." Monthly exhibitions of works acquired by the Art-Union were extremely well attended, the numbers of visitors each month often in the thousands. In their annual report of 1848, the year Frazee showed there, the managers declared: "The Gallery of the American Art-Union, since its opening on the 15th

of May last, has been thronged with admiring visitants from country and city. It has been estimated, upon reliable calculations, that since that period, up to this evening [December 22] more than half a million of observers have viewed the works of art there so freely exhibited..."²¹

The Art-Union's popularity, at its height in 1848, was attested to by the many journal writers of the period. In the Knickerbocker Magazine of November 1848, an effusive observer wrote that the Art-Union Gallery "is no longer a superfluity; it has become a necessity." The writer continued:

It is part of the public property as much as the fountains, the parks, or the City-Hall. The retired merchant from Fifth Avenue, the scholar from the University, the poor workman, the news-boy, the beau and the belle, the clerk with his bundle--all frequent the Art-Union. Its hall shows the progress of the hours as well as Trinity clock. First come the noisy boys and girls, on their way to school; then the staid merchants drop in as they go down to their counting-houses; then appear the strangers from the country, who set off early after breakfast to see the lions; about noon the gentlemen in moustaches and yellow kids lounge about the seats, yawning in the faces of the fashionable ladies who alight from their carriages here on their way to Stewart's,...in the evening come the working men, whose shoulders through the day have been free from the restraints of broadcloth and buckram, don their uneasy Sunday-coats and come hither by hundreds, escorting their wives and children, and all their female relations..."²²

The Literary World, also in 1848, described at great length the continual and enormous crowds at the Art-Union in language similar to that found in the Knickerbocker

Magazine. This writer was especially impressed by visits to the Art-Union in the "evening, when the red glass over the door beams like a lurid, extra-sized, semicircular planet over the drifting current of Broadway...Then it is that it counts its friends and finds amongst them the representatives of every section of the social system..."²³

There was clearly no better place for Frazee to exhibit his lavish Washington Monument proposal. Other artists had occasionally shown their designs at the American Academy, the National Academy, or in the offices of the Washington Monument Association at the Merchants' Exchange, but the audiences in these places were always limited. Frazee, knowing the winning design would be determined by the number of public votes, estimated that an exhibition at the Art-Union would provide the largest possible exposure. It is not known how Frazee arranged for such an exhibition, since it was rather unusual for the managers to show anything other than the works owned (and later to appear in the lottery) of the Art-Union itself. There were, in fact, only four of such "special exhibitions" in the entire history of the organization, Frazee's being one of them and the only one arranged by the artist himself.²⁴ But, the managers often had difficulty buying and exhibiting art works for the Art-Union until late each year when the subscription money would finally come pouring in during the autumn months preceding

the lottery. Such may have been the case in 1848, and may have made it easier for Frazee to fill a gap in the otherwise not very crowded exhibition schedule in June of that year.

Frazee's drawings are painstakingly executed in pen and ink overlaid with lovely watercolor washes. They are extremely large and two of them, in particular, contain many small, beautifully drawn details of architecture and sculpture elements. They rank with the works on paper of A. J. Davis as among the most impressive architectural renderings of the American antebellum period.²⁵ But Frazee's drawings, unlike those of Davis, integrate sculpture with architecture in a cohesive yet monumental plan. When the drawings were exhibited, they were accompanied by a long, elaborate explanatory text, written by Frazee in the form of an open letter to the New York Washington Monument Association, and published as a pamphlet.²⁶ This carefully conceptualized document stands with the drawings as a final tribute to the intelligence and sensitivity that Frazee so assiduously cultivated all his life. It is also an extraordinary documentation of many aspects of life and thought in America in the 1840's.

Throughout the 1830's and '40's, New York architecture was characterized by a proliferation of various

revival styles, the most popular being the Gothic, the Egyptian, and the Greek. (Later decades also witnessed building activity in Renaissance, Romanesque, and Moorish styles.) Practitioners of these numerous revivals included the best-known and most active architects of the period: Ithiel Town, A. J. Davis, Minard Lafever, Calvin Pollard, Richard Upjohn, James Renwick, and others. Most of these architects were able to, and often did, design buildings in any of these styles. This eclecticism reached its peak in New York in the decade after the Great Fire of 1835, when so many new buildings were erected. Eclecticism, however, was never appealing to John Frazee, whose allegiance to the art of the Greeks persisted throughout his life. It was therefore in an effort to defend his Greek design for the Washington Monument against the other rival styles, that Frazee wrote his open letter to the association:

In the rearing of a monument to the venerated father of our country, the first consideration that presents itself to the mind of the artist is--what are the great and prominent objects which such a structure should embrace? Keeping this question in view, I have conceived that the Monument, in its leading features, should be national, historical, and triumphal; embracing the great events of the American Revolution, and of Washington's public life and character. As a work of art, the purest principles of Grecian taste, order and style should be employed; and its compositions combine the architectural and sculptural, with the historical and poetical, in one general unbroken unity.

Frazee continued by pointing out that he would take a

brief view of the three major styles mostly employed in public structures, and then discussed at length his own proposal. "First," he wrote, "we will consider the Egyptian."

What are the great and leading characteristics of this style? They are the short parallel, disproportional column, with its capital occupying more than one-fourth of the entire height; the excessive and continuous inclination of the walls of their temples, from the ground to the crown line of the building. The immense breadth of wall, and its great height, without entablature to relieve its monotonous effect. These are the ruling features. They constitute the germ and type of the style; and they are everywhere so marked and severe, and of such hard, cold, and sepulchral cast, that they seldom fail, as we look upon them, to affect us with gloomy and uncheering impressions.

Frazer was particularly interested in delegitimizing the Egyptian obelisk, no doubt because this form of monument was already beginning to take hold in America. Solomon Willard's Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown had already been constructed, as had Robert Mills' Washington Monument in Baltimore. Both were obelisks, as was Robert Mills' prize-winning 1833 design for the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. Comparing the Bunker Hill Monument with a factory chimney, Frazer particularly disparaged the visual and mental associations with vernacular building that such a monument seemed to necessitate.

Look at the Bunker Hill Monument; what is it but a great square, stone post, piled up with bits of granite to a lofty height? Take away the associations of the spot, and this monument offers you

no greater attraction than does the fortifications at Newport. There is the cold, naked wall in both. The monument, indeed, gives you a stairs, and a lookout at top, which is its chief attraction. There are brick chimneys of similar form and interest, seen towering above the factory shops, in every city in the Union. This monument presents us no assemblages of beautiful art; no sculptured subjects of history, or of sublime allegory...Egyptian architecture is not favorable to them.

Frazee, above all, was concerned with the meaning of Egyptian architecture, feeling the culture and ideology it represented to be fundamentally antithetical to America itself. He was convinced that "with our time, Egyptian architecture has no affinity. It is the architecture of tyrant kings--of severe and despotic dynasties; it therefore can never harmonize with the glorious principles of republican achievement, nor with the mild and benevolent precepts of Christianity." Frazee's condemnation, however, appears rather restrained when compared with the following denunciation printed in the North American Review: "Egyptian architecture reminds us of the religion which called it into being, the most degraded and revolting paganism which ever existed. It is the architecture of embalmed cats and deified crocodiles."²⁷

Having thus dealt with Egyptian, Frazee then proceeded to discuss the "towering pretensions" of Gothic style. He began by pointing out that it was natural for British architects already practicing in the Gothic

revival style to bring it with them when they emigrated here in the nineteenth century. It is, he added, "the darling style in the nursery of British art." But it is continually surprising to see how many Americans have taken to Gothic, a style so completely at variance with principles of republicanism. "It is a style replete with flouncing tinselry, littleness, and pretension, it is undignified and unclassic in all its chief outlines and proportions, and withal of barbarian origin."

Frazee then quoted a letter from Benjamin West, the American artist who had been President of the Royal Academy in London, to Samuel Coates, President of the Pennsylvania Hospital in West's native Philadelphia, regarding the Gothic design of the new (1817) hospital building. West had written: "It is the Gothic taste I combat with, as inapplicable to the building in question; for that architecture is the insignia of a period when the civilized world had passed away; science had fled, and the mind of man lay in darkness. Then arose monkish superstition, and with it monkish taste. But now that science has arisen, let the citizens of America, in their streets and in their highways, proclaim its ascendancy..."

Proclaiming the ascendancy of science was for West, as also for Frazee, a simple matter of returning

to the architecture of the Greeks, especially for public buildings. Frazee was quite sure that if American architects and patrons had earlier paid attention to the words of West "our public ways and grounds would have never been disgraced by the obtrusion of such misapplied examples of architecture as the N.Y. University, the Masonic Hall, the Orphan Asylum, and the new State Arsenal in New York, and the Smithsonian Institute at Washington." As for the Greek style: "There is no other architecture so grand and imposing; none in which the principles of form and elegance, science and strength, are so beautifully blended, and with which sculptural subjects so appropriately harmonize." [underlining added]

Most of the remainder of this document is given over to the elaboration of the details and explanation of the symbolism of Frazee's own proposal--a gigantic classical conception based on the plan of an open circular temple, embellished with Corinthian columns, topped by capitals representing "American" iconography, a dome of immense proportions with glass insets, various friezes with symbolic processions in bas relief, relief panels showing great moments of the Revolution, and a huge seated statue of Washington in the center of the rotunda. The artist's own description is worth reprinting here, in that it is impossible to recreate or

paraphrase the complexity of concept and grandiosity of language contained within it.

Wishing to symbolize with columns, the thirteen original States of the Union, I determined upon adopting the plan of the open circular Temple, the Greek monopteral style, as being the form most appropriate to my objects. I have chosen the monopteral in preference to the peripteral style, as I think the latter, with its closed cella within the colonnade, is too confined in its character, and seems better suited to a sepulchral than a triumphal Monument; while the former style, by unfolding to the eye the entire circle of the colonnade with its inner and outer entablatures, and the great central group of Washington and the Youths, it thus presents in a single view to the beholder, a broader, brighter, and more impressive scene of grandeur and beauty. The Order in its general features is Corinthian, with its proportions taken chiefly from the Athenian examples. The Colonnade stands upon a pedestal of thirteen sides and angles, a column rising over each angle. The diameter of the Temple, at the base of the columns, is one hundred feet; the columns are eight feet in diameter, two of which are pierced with stairs, by which to ascend to the Corridors are each in the average about three hundred feet in extent, and they will contain nearly two thousand persons at any one time. The steps within the two columns mentioned, will be formed out of the same blocks of marble of which these columns will be built, by cutting away the marble to form the opening for the passage, thus leaving a cone at the axis, and a rim-wall at the periphery of the column, to which wall and cone the steps remain united, while at the same time they form a spiral wall to strengthen and support the column.

By this method of constructing the stairs, independent of their beauty and interest, we gain a great saving of both material and labor; also more room for passage, and more strength in the column. The Dome, upon its exterior, is characterized by its thirteen ribs, corresponding with the columnar centres; and thirteen star lights of glass, from which the interior of the Dome is illuminated. The ribs terminate against the plinth of a beautifully foliated pedestal, which, while it makes an elegant finish to the Dome, supports the Statue of

History, who is riding, in her winged car, looking over the world around her, and recording its great events. This Statue is two hundred and fifty feet from the earth, an altitude that I would not wish to exceed had I fifty millions at my disposal.

Looking into the interior of the Dome, we are first struck with the brilliant effect of the thirteen star-lights, which are set in the second range of Lacunaria, of panellings of the ceiling. These stars are nearly six feet in diameter and are intended to be made of glass eight inches in thickness, bevelled and polished like so many diamonds, so that their effect, as seen when standing upon the Rotunda, or from without, when the sun is shining upon them, will be strikingly beautiful. On pedestals above the entablature, and round the entire circle, are seen the winged Genii of the thirteen States, each reclining upon a shield, on which will be sculptured the Arms of the States respectively. They bear a wreath of laurel leaves and flowers, hanging from their shoulders in festoons; thus binding together the whole Union, in one symbolical chain of divine beauty and sentiment. In the centre of the vault above is the great spreading eagle hovering over all...

On the frieze of the exterior entablature is seen a Triumphal Procession of the whole Union, celebrating the great event of the victory of the American Revolution, and the achievement of Civil Liberty. Washington and Lafayette are seated in a triumphal car, drawn by eight horses, and which heads the procession, or rather exhibits the most grand and interesting point in it. Virgins and children go before, strewing flowers in the way, and others with garlands, are dancing to the music of the minstrels who follow on; while behind the car of the Hero are seen horsemen, soldiers and citizens, pressing forward in the glorious train...

The capitals of the columns deserve some notice here, as the enrichments of them are my own invention, and purely American, yet they are engrafted upon Corinthian proportions.

An American Indian stands on the astragal below--one under each angle of the abacus, which they bear up and support with their heads and arms. The four intervals between the Indians, are each taken up by two American deer, and a sheaf of Indian corn. The animals are in a rearing attitude, and feeding on

the sheaf, which stands upright between them, with the flowering tassels of the stalks rising gracefully upon the centre of the abacus, while the waving leaves hang pendant from the sheaf, shading the vase of the Capital.

Although this Capital, in its general effect, resembles the Corinthian, yet the development of the human form, its grace and action, together with the horned stags, give out broader and richer masses of light and shade than is seen in the Corinthian Capital, and make it of higher interest to the eye and contemplation of the beholder. This may, I think, be considered an American Capital.

Descending to the lower divisions of the Monument, we see several panels of the Polygon filled with sculptures in relief. Those which are shown in the drawings are sketches of the Declaration of Independence, the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Bunker Hill, and the Surrender of Cornwallis. There are other battles and subjects with which to fill the remaining eight panels, should this design be adopted. These panels are eleven feet high by nineteen in length; it will be seen then that the figures in the reliefs are much larger than life. The trophies piled upon the eight buttresses are the spoils of war, taken from the enemy. The four recumbent horses on the pedestals at the extreme angles of the terrace, have each a wreath round the neck, representing them as victors in the combat, and as worthy of a wreath for their bold energies, as the noble auxiliary to the soldier upon the battle field. The height of these horses from the lower pavement is thirty seven feet.

From the terrace you enter the Monument on four sides, passing in under an eagle of immense size, standing on a segment of a sphere, with raised wings, hovering over and guarding the entrance, to see that no desecrating hand enters there. The lower apartment in which you enter first, is very large, and may be used as a repository for arms and ordinance for special purposes. From this apartment you ascend a stairs to the second floor, on which are thirteen rooms, about 14 by 20 feet in size, on plan, and 20 feet high. These rooms may be appropriated to various purposes, not inconsistent with the high and distinct character of the Monument. One, or more, for a library of military and scientific works, for a repository of military archives,

escutchions and apparatus; also for meetings of military officers, &c.

These rooms, as the section will show, will all be well lighted by windows thrown in back of the large corridor, and concealed from the eye below by the pedimental faces that crown the cornice of the pedestal, and make the break-wall of the corridor all round.

In ascending another flight of spiral stairs, we land upon the floor of the Rotunda; and speaking figuratively, in the presence of the GREAT AND ILLUSTRIUS FATHER OF OUR LIBERTIES. The height of the pedestal bearing the group is twenty feet from the floor. The size of Washington is large heroic, being ten feet high sitting. He sits on a simple throne between the youths. The one at his right hand, who is also seated, is holding up an open scroll of the Constitution; the youth on his left stands reclining on a pillar, and holds in his left hand the scroll of the Declaration unrolled. A sheathed sword entwined with the olive wreath, hangs against the pillar. The attention of both young men is strongly fixed on the face of Washington, who, with his eyes turned towards the youth on his right, points to the noble document as the broad and enduring foundation of our Government. Thus the great man sits, calm and dignified, like an ancient sage, expounding and inculcating to the rising youth of his country, the grand and glorious principles of civil liberty...

In the bassi-relievi of the Monument I propose to build, Washington will, in several instances, be conspicuously seen as the Military Chieftain on horseback, larger than life. In several of these reliefs he will also be shown as the Statesman--as President of the Union, addressing the Senate. His Farewell Address will be one, and this closes his public office. I have thus presented him in his high and active stations, both Military and Civil. He has served his country in the field and in the councils, and has now retired from the scene of his public labors. But his usefulness is not ended. His heart and his soul is yet alive to the great interests of his country, and to the permanency of the noble institutions which his valor and his wisdom so efficiently aided in establishing. And now we see him on all favorable occasions, (as his

history tells us), giving advice and counsel to all around him, but especially to young men who visited his hospitable dwelling at Mount Vernon. It was on these occasions that he addressed these youth with much warmth and fervency upon the subject of Free Government, and of our Republican Institutions, and of Civil Liberty; urging them to vigilance, discretion, and energy, in maintaining the integrity and permanency of our glorious Union; and it is in this last beautiful scene of his life and usefulness, that I have chosen to represent him in the great Statue within the Temple. The public is now to judge of the propriety of my choice.

Frazee completed the document by stating that the monument must be executed in pure white marble, that the estimated cost was one million dollars, and that it would take ten years to complete.

By the end of 1848 enough votes were cast by the citizens of New York to allow the Association finally to declare the winner. In early January 1849 the following announcement appeared in the newspaper: "the subscribers to the Washington Monument have finally decided on Mr. Lafever's plan for its construction. His design received 367 votes, that of John Frazee 222, and the others together, 140."²⁸ Minard Lafever's prize-winning design was of an obelisk atop a massive pyramidal substructure, the total height being 500 feet.²⁹ It was simple, imposing, monumental, and bore none of the Victorian literary allusions and massive sculptural programs that characterized Frazee's design. It would also take far less money and less time to build. But, like so many other abortive architectural competitions

of the nineteenth century, it was never erected. In 1848 the cornerstone was laid for Mills' Washington Monument in Washington; the publicity attending this event, and the subsequent attention to the construction, no doubt deflated the energy and eventually the entire momentum behind the New York project.³⁰

Frazee's project, like the many that G. T. Strong saw, was undoubtedly "on a scale of impracticable splendor and magnitude." His estimates of time and money were too high, and the large numbers of proficient marble-carvers required to execute it were simply nonexistent in America. Given all these factors, it seems therefore almost miraculous that Frazee's design came in second, garnering a total of 222 votes. Part of this can be explained by the fact that it was shown at the Art-Union, where it was exposed to and admired by large numbers of New Yorkers. But most important is that its very meaning--its complicated networks of symbols and allegorical programs--struck a deeply responsive chord in the hearts and minds of Victorian Americans. That is, Frazee was appealing directly to the sentimental mythology that explained America to Americans, and created an iconography appropriate to this end.

In his own words, John Frazee based his conception on national, historical, and triumphal features.

If we interpret "national" as patriotic, and if we understand "triumphal" as heroic, then we have from Frazee himself the three elements that have been seen by contemporary historians to comprise the intense consolidation of American nationalism in the 1840's. Specifically, nationalism fermented and took final shape in these years through a definition and consolidation of patriotic, historic, and heroic elements. Taking each of these separately let us briefly analyze Frazee's Washington Monument iconography in order to see how completely and profoundly it touched upon these most sensitive aspects of American national identity.

First, the national or patriotic. Here we find the most abstract elements of Frazee's symbology, for they are based in large part on comprehension of the number thirteen. Moreover, these compounds of thirteen correspond to actual architectural or structural elements, which are by necessity more abstract than sculptural or pictorial elements. There are, then, thirteen columns which are meant to correspond with the thirteen original states of the nation. The dome features thirteen ribs and thirteen starlights. Thirteen "Winged Genii," each personifying the "Spirit" of one of the thirteen states, are held together by a wreath of laurel leaves and flowers, thereby binding together the Union.

An eagle, America's own choice of symbol, is conceived in immense size, perched on the segment of a sphere (again, America). Certainly the most elaborate of these fanciful national conceits are the capitals of the columns, which feature American Indians, American deer, and Indian corn. No doubt inspired by Benjamin Henry Latrobe's corn and tobacco capitals for the Senate building, Frazee nonetheless made his own modifications, in particular "the animals [which] are in a rearing attitude, and feeding on the sheaf." Despite the fact that "this capital, in its general effect, resembles the Corinthian," Frazee felt sure that it could "be considered an American Capital." We see the tendency here, which continued to persist for well over a hundred years, to attempt to identify certain characteristics of art made in America as peculiarly American art. The close correlation of this tendency with feelings of nationalism and patriotism is clear.

Frazee's second aim, that his monument be historical, is closely related--if not the major underpinning--of his first insistence on a national theme. As is well known, all nations have been built upon foundations of history and tradition. The problem which confronted the new United States (and which differed from the "new" nations of Europe) is that it quite

simply lacked these essential ingredients of nationalism. "Of them [the European nations] it can be said that the nation was a product of history. But with the United States, history was rather a creation of the nation, and is suggestive that in the New World the self-made nation was as familiar as the self-made man."³¹ The adherence and persistence of regional or ethnic cultural traditions notwithstanding, the majority of middle class Americans in the nineteenth century seem to have desperately needed the cohesive national identity which was supplied by a sense of a common (though short) official history. Various episodes from the American past had already been glorified to near mythic proportions by the time Frazee came to conceptualize his iconographic program. Bancroft, Parkman, and other early historians had given great weight, in particular, to victorious moments from the military and political record. By designing relief panels of the Declaration of Independence, the Battles of Trenton, Princeton, and Bunker Hill, and the Surrender of Cornwallis, Frazee thus selected the grand mythic episodes which were already engrained in the popular consciousness. These were illustrations of national triumphs which would immediately bring forth myriad feelings of pride and patriotism in the viewers. Nothing had to be explained,

interpreted or analyzed. These narrative elements are in sharp contrast with the symbolic, classicized, immense Statue of History, "who is riding in her winged car, looking over the world around her, and recording its great events."

Frazee's treatment of Washington himself fulfills the triumphal or heroic aspects of his schema, while at the same time providing us with some of the clearest insights into the meaning of Victorian nationalism. Since America was a new, recently-born nation, the need for a symbolic father was far greater than it is today. Throughout the antebellum period (and before the advent of Abraham Lincoln) there was no one other figure who approached the mythic proportions of Washington in the American pantheon. The eagle, the stars and stripes, the Liberty Bell, Mount Vernon--all were richly potent symbols adhering to the hero-god-father, George Washington. School children, farmers, merchants, immigrants knew the stories and symbols that helped them venerate the father of their country. Little did it matter that much of the mythology had been the literary invention of the indefatigable Parson Weems, or that many of the new immigrants had other countries with other fathers in their recent memories. George Washington served everyone's purpose, including John Frazee's.

Frazee's design for the monument was meant to be a true shrine, where hundreds of people could congregate and be newly inspired with the high and holy sentiments of noble heroism and selfless patriotism that characterized their "father." The Triumphal Procession on the frieze of the outer entablature features "Washington and Jefferson...seated in a triumphal car, drawn by eight horses, and which heads the procession, or rather exhibits the most grand and interesting point in it. Virgins and children go before, strewing flowers in the way, and others with garlands are dancing...behind the car of the Hero are seen horsemen, soldiers, and citizens..." A ten-foot seated statue of Washington shows the hero sitting on a throne between two youths, one holding the Declaration and the other the Constitution. "Thus the great man sits, calm and dignified, like an ancient sage, expounding and inculcating to the rising youth of his country, the grand and glorious principles of civil liberty." Relief panels show Washington as Military Chieftain, Statesman, President, and delivering his Farewell Address--illustrating all his "high and active stations both Military and Civil...maintaining the integrity and permanency of our glorious Union."

Frazee's design for the Washington Monument,

though never executed, remains nonetheless a final statement, a recapitulation, of the artist's life and work. Infused throughout with the "Grecian classicism" he had always admired, it combined sculpture and architecture in a typically Victorian, high-flown iconographic program. This iconography focused on the multifaceted elements of nationalism, historicism, and heroicism--elements which just as much characterized John Frazee as his country itself. Frazee, ever the optimist, the wide-eyed youthful American, remained true to his ideals, his art, and his nationalism throughout his life, despite the fact that so few of his naive expectations were realized. His own personal self-confidence and optimism thus parallel that of his country, as both of them attempted to mature in those highly energetic, hopeful, confident years that were soon to be exploded at Fort Sumter. The Washington Monument design, a visual summary of antebellum culture, is also a monument to John Frazee.

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Over the next four years Frazee became more feeble, due largely to his lung disease. His children, always loving, became more and more devoted to his welfare. Early in 1852, his son Vitruvius escorted him to

Crompton Mills, Rhode Island, where Frazee was to visit his daughter Sarah Probasco Frazee, the wife of the Rev. Dr. George Chevers. The trip, as we learn from Vitruvius, almost proved fatal. He wrote the following account to his sister, Thalia, in New York:

After serious adventures, etc. Father and I arrived here alive. We came up the wrong day as on Sunday there are no accomodations. Your Father was so feeble when he arrived at Stonington that it was with great difficulty that he reached the cars and arrived at the depot and on inquiring where Crompton Mills was we were informed that it was 3½ miles off. What was I to do. Why, I had to get Father there and to accomplish that I had to walk through the country until I could hire a wagon to take him to the place. This was all done with great difficulty. Father is now confined to his bed very sick and it will be necessary for me to stay here until he gets better as there is no one else to take care of him. Sarah has her baby and domestic affairs to attend to. The expenses attending our journey were greater then I expected owing principally to Father's inability to help himself and it will be necessary for your Father to have some money immediately to pay his expenses here for we are both very short of funds.³²

John Frazee died two weeks later, on February 24, 1852. His final illness had begun four months earlier in New York. "His last effort with the chisel was in giving the finishing touch to the bust of Gen. Jackson, which had remained in his studio seventeen years, without an order for completion. This was in November last, and while assiduously at work, his mallet fell from his hand, and his worn-out body followed it to the floor."³³

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER VI

- ¹W. Francklyn Paris, The Hall of American Artists (New York: New York University Press, 1951), p. 57.
- ²These names appear in a list with the heading "JF Monuments" in the handwriting of Thalia Frazee Peters. This list is in the possession of Stephen C. Millett, and a copy of it belongs to Marguerite C. Heath.
- ³Letter to Robert Launitz, dated New York, 16 July 1833, collection the Boston Public Library.
- ⁴Jane Frazee's grave was located around 1950 by the late Dr. Fredrick Stohlman of Princeton, New Jersey.
- ⁵It is in the possession of Sylvester G. Prime of Shelter Island, New York.
- ⁶New York Mirror, 28 December 1839. The Leggett Memorial is in the graveyard of Trinity Episcopal Church, at Huguenot and Monument Avenues, New Rochelle, New York.
- ⁷The Pulaski Monument is located in Monterey Square, Savannah. Made of Italian marble, it was designed by Robert Launitz and completed in 1854. According to Frazee family tradition, however, the original design was by Frazee. An old (ca. 1900) hand-written biography of Frazee in the possession of Marguerite C. Heath, contains the following paragraph: "He designed the Pulaski Monument long before Congress felt that it could afford to pay for it, which design was afterward borrowed from his widow and put up in Savannah in 1853 or 54 by Robert Launitz with alterations of the plinth and top of column."
- ⁸The marble bust of George Griswold was acquired in 1977 by the Old Lyme Historical Society, Old Lyme, Connecticut.
- ⁹"Life of John Frazee as written by Lydia Frazee," no date [after 1852], copy supplied the author by Stephen C. Millett. Original was in possession of Lydia Frazee

Belknap. In the same document there appears: "Previous to his Mr. G., Father modeled and cut in marble the bust of Sam Engle, your friend..." ("your" refers to the children.)

- ¹⁰There are four oversize (about 5' x 2') watercolor drawings, consisting of: 1) Perspective View; 2) Section; 3) Plan of Rotunda and Terrace; 4) Elevation. They were donated to the Library of Congress in 1928 by Frazee's granddaughter, Mrs. Thomas W. Hastings, but were "lost" until December 1976 when they were relocated for the author by Mr. C. Ford Peatross of the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. Because of their bad condition, with much recent paint loss, they are now in process of restoration.
- ¹¹See: Jacob Landy, "The Washington Monument Project in New York," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 28:4 (December 1969), pp. 291-294; Jacob Landy, The Architecture of Minard Lefever (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), esp. Ch. 14: "The Washington Monument Project in New York."
- ¹²Minutes of the association, from 1833 to 1835, are in the New-York Historical Society.
- ¹³See: Dorothy C. Barck, "Proposed Memorials to Washington in New York City, 1802-1847," New-York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin, 15 (October, 1931), pp. 79-90.
- ¹⁴See: Cowdrey, American Academy of Fine Arts, 2, 1954: Hughes exhibited a "Sketch of the Proposed Monument to Washington, designed for the Park, or Bowling Green. Height to be 35 feet; the figures to be colossal, and cast in bronze; the pedestal to be of American marble. It represents Washington surrounded by three figures--justice, wisdom, and victory." See also: Cowdrey, Exhibition Record, 1, 272: "A Design for a New York Washington Monument" was exhibited by J. G. Jones.
- ¹⁵See: Barck, Diary of William Dunlap, 3, p. 745: the entry for Saturday, September 21, 1833, contains the following: "Call on John Frazee. Model for the Monument of Washington." There is no indication of what Frazee's 1833 "model" looked like, nor if it was at all related to the drawings he exhibited in 1848.

- 16 New York Evening Post, 28 December 1833, "Statue and Monument to Washington--What are the Best Materials?" This article, signed with the printed name "Wincklemann," is co-signed with John Frazee's autograph in ink. The original clipping, with Frazee's signature, is in the Frazee Papers, AAA, and was unquestionably authored by him. The reference, of course, is to Johann Wincklemann, the 18th-century classical archeologist and scholar, to whose ideas Frazee's article was clearly indebted.
- 17 For the 1843 project see: New York Evening Post, September 6, 7, 1843; New York Commercial Advertiser, September 7, 1843; New York Daily Tribune, September 8, 1843; and I. N. P. Stokes, Iconography of Manhattan Island (New York, 1928, reprint ed. New York: Arno Press, 1967), 1, 1780, 1782, 1785.
- 18 New York Evening Post, 17 June 1844; New York Daily Tribune, 18 June 1844.
- 19 Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 1, p. 297.
- 20 Cowdrey, American Academy of FineArts, 1, 264, 274.
- 21 Ibid., p. 211.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., p. 212.
- 24 In addition to Frazee's 1848 exhibition, the other "special exhibitions" were: Exhibition of the Paintings of the Late Thomas Cole (1848); Paintings by Daniel Huntington, N.A. (1850); and The Washington Exhibition in Aid of the New-York Gallery of the Fine Arts (1853).
- 25 This opinion was concurred by C. Ford Peatross, Architectural Historian, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

- 26 Description of J. Frazee's Design for the Washington Monument (In Four Large Drawings), Now Exhibiting at the Art-Union (New York, 1848). A copy of this pamphlet is in the Frazee Papers, AAA.
- 27 Quotation from an 1836 issue of North American Review, in Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition and Americans (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 106.
- 28 New York Commercial Advertiser, 5 January 1849, p. 2.; New York Daily Tribune, 5 January 1849, p. 1.
- 29 Reproduced first in Minard Lafever, Architectural Instructor (New York, 1856), pl. c. See also: Landy, Minard Lafever.
- 30 The Washington Monument in Washington was not finished until 1888, but from the mid-1840's (even before the cornerstone was laid) it became a central icon of American national identity. See, for example, a popular lithograph of 1847, Elements of National Thrift and Empire (drawn by J. G. Bruff and lithographed by E. Weber & Co.), which illustrates a vast scene full of the symbols of government. Dramatically placed in the middle of the composition is the Washington Monument. Collection: Library of Congress.
- 31 Henry Steele Commager, "The Search for a Usable Past," American Heritage Magazine, February, 1965. Reprinted in Nicholas Cords and Patrick Gerster, eds., Myth and the American Experience (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1973), p. 136.
- 32 Letter from Vitruvius Frazee, Crompton Mills, Rhode Island, to Thalia Frazee, New York, dated 11 February 1852. Original in possession of Robert E. Belknap. Copy supplied to author by Stephen C. Millett.
- 33 "Death of Frazee the Artist," New York Daily Times, 5 March 1852, p. 1. John Frazee is buried in Brooklyn, at Greenwood Cemetery, Lot. no. 19577, Section 186.

CONCLUSION

The transition from artisan to artist, taking place in America during the antebellum years, has been examined in detail through the life and work of John Frazee. The path he followed was not easy, the rewards were not always great, and the successes often dubious. For Frazee, at least, the transition presented one difficulty after another, with every small triumph seemingly counteracted by another setback. If one accepts the fact that Frazee's art itself was as good as, if not better than that produced by his contemporaries, how then do we account for the countless problems and frustrations that characterize his career?

Foremost in the case of John Frazee, as also with anyone who began as an artisan, were the joint problems of social class and social mobility. The artisan was, by definition, a skilled worker. Although the artisan elicited a certain degree of respect from the community (usually associated with the product he made), he remained a member of a relatively low class in the social structure. Merchants, lawyers, ministers, teachers, and other professionals all regarded themselves as higher class than "mere" artisans. Even painters and carvers--craftsmen involved in decorative work--

suffered from the same class distinctions. Many of these class biases seem to have originated in and evolved from long-standing European notions. Since medieval times there had been mild social discrimination against painters, carvers, and practitioners of certain other "low" crafts. As late as 1837, an English writer, W. B. Adams, remarked in English Pleasure Carriages: "...a foreman of painters they may treat with respect, but working painters can at most be favored with a nod." A century earlier in France Diderot had commented on the fact that only children of the poor became painters, and only some few of these actually became artists. "Nos plus grands artistes sont sortis des plus basses conditions."

The rank of fine artist, on the other hand, implied a much higher, more respectable social status, and this too derived largely from European associations. For many centuries, and most particularly the eighteenth century, it had been possible for talented artists to become favorites of kings or popes and thereby gain a generally approved, sometimes even venerated, status in the community at large. Such artists were occasionally even knighted, a symbolic gesture which was always taken as a sign of a particular artist's "natural" nobility.

One of the basic problems, then, that Frazee faced was the fact that he was perceived as low class due to his early and well-defined artisan status. Despite his efforts to compensate, especially through self education, Frazee ultimately failed--in terms of his personal behavior and social activities--to approximate the role of gentleman-artist. According to Thomas Cummings, who wrote the early history of the National Academy of Design in 1865, John Frazee "was wanting in that exterior refinement which would have rendered him more popular." It is clear that the purportedly high degree of social mobility within the Jacksonian period did not necessarily apply to artisans who wanted to become artists.

There were, however, some men of humble origins and trained in America as artisans who were able to achieve this status change. Hiram Powers and Thomas Crawford can be cited as two examples. These two men, both a generation younger than Frazee, took certain steps to insure their successes that Frazee ignored. Both decided, when fairly young and unencumbered with families, to take the prescribed trip to Europe. Powers had started as a clockmaker's apprentice in Cincinnati and then moved on to modelling wax figures for a tableau of Dante's Inferno at Dorfeuille's Western Museum.

With the interest and financial assistance of his Cincinnati patron, Nicholas Longworth, Powers was by 1834 in Washington modelling busts of Jackson and others. A year later, with the help again of Longworth, Powers went to Italy and never returned. Before long he was a well-known celebrity, creating works in marble for American gentlemen and European nobility. Powers always knew the "right" people, assumed the proper stance, and always played the acceptable, even fascinating, role of the American expatriate artist. He was surely better known and more acceptable from across the Atlantic than he would have been had he stayed at home.

Thomas Crawford, as we have seen, served a three-year apprenticeship with John Frazee before departing in the mid-1830's for Italy, and he soon became the fixture in Rome that Powers was in Florence. Beginning there with commissions for portrait busts of visiting Americans, Crawford soon moved on to larger public work, such as an equestrian statue of George Washington for Richmond and the female figure of Liberty atop the United States Capitol building. A good deal of his social success can be attributed to his marriage to Louisa Ward, the daughter of Samuel Ward, the New York banker and art collector. Both Louisa Ward and Hiram Powers's wife were able to create proper social settings (such as

Mrs. Powers' "little Wednesday afternoons") which greatly enhanced their husbands' careers.

By the mid-1830's, when Powers and Crawford departed as ambitious young men for Italy, Frazee was already forty-five with five surviving children from his first marriage and several of what would be ten children from his second marriage. It would have been as difficult to leave them at home as to bring them to Europe. Furthermore, Frazee, since 1818, had been moderately successful in his marble business and depended largely on this activity as the major source of income for himself and his family. Powers and Crawford had no such established businesses to leave behind and thus nothing to lose. Crawford was wise enough to point this out to Frazee in his 1837 letter from Rome.

More important even than family and finances was Frazee's actual attitude to Europe, especially to Italy. Unlike his younger American colleagues, Frazee harbored an intense patriotism which was coupled with a dislike and suspicion of Europe that bordered on xenophobia. His early first-hand experience with foreign sculptors working in America no doubt contributed to this distaste, but more important were the actual historical facts of Frazee's early development. Already twenty-two at the time of the War of 1812, Frazee

experienced then and throughout the following decades the pronounced distrust of Europeans that characterized so much of his generation. This attitude, especially vis-à-vis the British, was made patently clear in Frazee's poem about Ball Hughes's "Statue in Breeches." These impulses, moreover, were fed by Frazee's continued associations with other artisans who, before and during the Jacksonian period, were intent on protecting their own products and industries from what they perceived as threats of foreign competition. John Frazee, because of his psychological and social proclivities, as well as his economic position, was ultimately and fundamentally unable to travel to Europe. It would have been for him a betrayal of everything he believed.

Frazee's strong adherence to his artisan roots also contributed to his problems. He was loyal not only to his family and his country, but also to his fellow workers. He thus made it very difficult for gentlemen-patrons and gentlemen-artists to disassociate him from his colleagues, the large numbers of artisans and mechanics whom he identified as his peers. Frazee was, in a sense, trying to lead two lives--one as a downtown artisan, the other as an uptown artist--and such a schizophrenic existence was bound to cause confusion. His involvement in the New York Workingmen's Party, just

when his career as an artist was beginning to show promise, can be seen as symbolic of the double identity he was assuming. Frazee's transition from artisan to artist would certainly have been smoother had he been able to turn his back on his artisan identity. His unwillingness, even inability, to do so attests to the strong elements of loyalty and community shared by New York artisans in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Frazee could no more ignore his fellow workers than he could his own family. It was thus not so much that he chose to make life difficult for himself; in many profound respects his options were limited.

Another problem, one which became more pronounced as the years passed, was Frazee's strict adherence to the aesthetic tenets of neoclassicism. Although this was without doubt the accepted style for art until the 1830's, it was increasingly replaced by the various styles loosely known as romanticism. Sculpture, in particular, took on qualities that made it more anecdotal and more sentimental. Noble stalwart patriots in marble were now vying for aesthetic importance with such "contemporary" works as Hiram Power's Greek Slave. In the 1830's and '40's, Hiram Powers, Thomas Crawford, Horatio Greenough, William Wetmore Story, Randolph Rogers, and others began sending home to America slickly polished

marble maidens and other figures representing poignant moments from recent history or sentimental illustrations of literature and mythology. Randolph Rogers's statue of Nydia, the Blind Girl, inspired by Bulwer Lytton's Last Days of Pompeii, was a huge success, with several hundred replicas purchased in the United States, and Crawford's Orpheus and Cerberus was bought by subscription for the Boston Athenaeum. Scores of other such pieces followed. Soon a second generation of American expatriate sculptors contributed to this growing outpouring of romantic marmorean subjects.

Certainly by the mid-1830's--that is, almost immediately after Frazee's Athenaeum busts--Frazee's noble neoclassicism must have seemed cold, rigid, and out of date. The new sentimental works in sculpture were everywhere, and many years later Henry James, in his 1902 biography of William Wetmore Story, looked back and reflected on it. He referred to this "peculiar taste" where the sense to which the work of art appealed "was not, in any strictness, the aesthetic sense in general or the plastic in particular, but the sense of the romantic, the anecdotic, the supposedly historic, the explicitly pathetic."

The taste of Americans had become decidedly Victorian, but Frazee could not adapt. This was perhaps

in part due to a certain obstinacy, although it was no doubt easier for sculptors just starting out to adopt romantic stylistic and iconographic devices than for an artist already self-trained and inculcated with the powerful ideals of neoclassicism simply to assume another style. For Frazee this easy flexibility was impossible. Had he been surrounded with other native sculptors in New York, or associated through the academy with re-definitions of style in sculpture, it might have been possible. But Frazee remained alone in New York, isolated from a sense of community in his art. The shifts in taste and style were being born in Europe and exported to America, where they must have seemed altogether foreign and incomprehensible to Frazee. One can imagine the older man's unfavorable reaction to young Hiram Power's Greek Slave when it was exhibited at the Dusseldorf Gallery in New York in 1848. This, of course, was the same year Frazee's Washington Monument designs were shown at the Art Union.

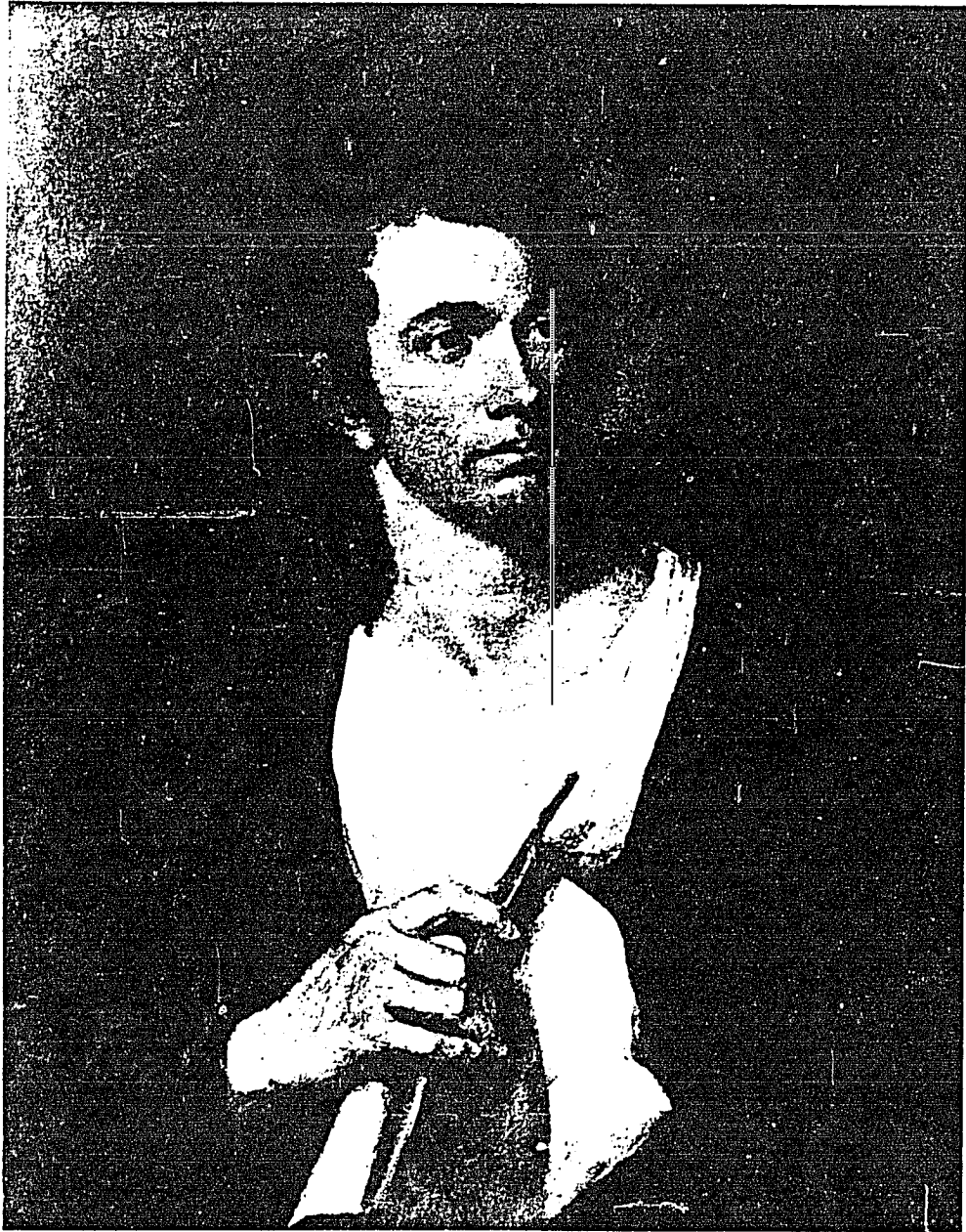
Along with the shift to romanticism in terms of style, the 1830's also witnessed a change in popular conceptions and perceptions of artists themselves. Novelists, playwrights, and journalists, in America and abroad, all contributed to the increasingly popular definition of the "true" artist as the archetypical

romantic hero--the eccentric, dreamy, spiritual genius living somewhat outside of the mundane everyday realities. This image of the artist emerged and was nourished in America during the antebellum years by a continuing cast of characters from Hawthorne's Owen Warland, to Melville's Pierre, and including Henry James's Roderick Hudson. The image, of course, often had little correlation with the social reality, but there were nonetheless certain artists and certain situations that helped promote or sustain the stereotype of the impassioned, eccentric, alienated artist. Washington Allston, the Boston artist who spent the last twenty years of his life suffering the "romantic agony" of unsuccessfully trying to finish his last picture, is of course the primary example of the romantic artist in America. It is no accident that he was also America's favorite. Other artists, especially the expatriates, seemed from afar to be leading exactly the sort of counter-cultural, extra-societal lives that the Americans at home expected of them. From Thomas Cole tearfully bemoaning lost civilizations as he wandered over the Roman campagna in the 1830's, to Harriet Hosmer riding bareback and unescorted through the streets of Rome in the 1850's, Americans were conveniently able to "locate" their artists somewhat outside of the mainstream of life. The

old Calvinist suspicion of art and artists was now replaced by a similar feeling, but this time probably more related to a supposed threat of artists and art activity to the industrial economy. In other words, if artists were merely making art and not contributing to society in a more useful way, then they would be best dealt with as eccentric outsiders. Certain artists and their promoters counteracted by imputing a moralizing, educative element to their work, especially to landscapes. Others did not.

Frazer was one of those artists, and possibly the only sculptor, who did not assume a public romantic stance, and who therefore did not feed into the complexity of images associated with the romantic artist-type. His life was essentially too real, too immediate, and too much like their own to ignite successfully the fantasies of Americans. All this added to Frazer's frustrations through the years as he continued trying to be accepted as a true fine artist. It was not until several years after his death that at least some Americans were ready to acknowledge the problems associated with the romantic stereotype. In an unsigned article in The Crayon in July 1859, we finally read: "The time has long gone by since artists formed a society by themselves, a little community indifferent to the things

of ordinary life, prized by the great men of the times and equally scourged by peaceable, honest, commonplace citizens. That artist--a civilized gipsy, who lives from hand to mouth, alternating between misery and luxury, working no one knows how, and producing masterpieces no one knows where...a gambler, immoral, warmhearted, skeptical and devout, volatile and profound, ironical and reverent--this living paradox has no existence except on the stage."



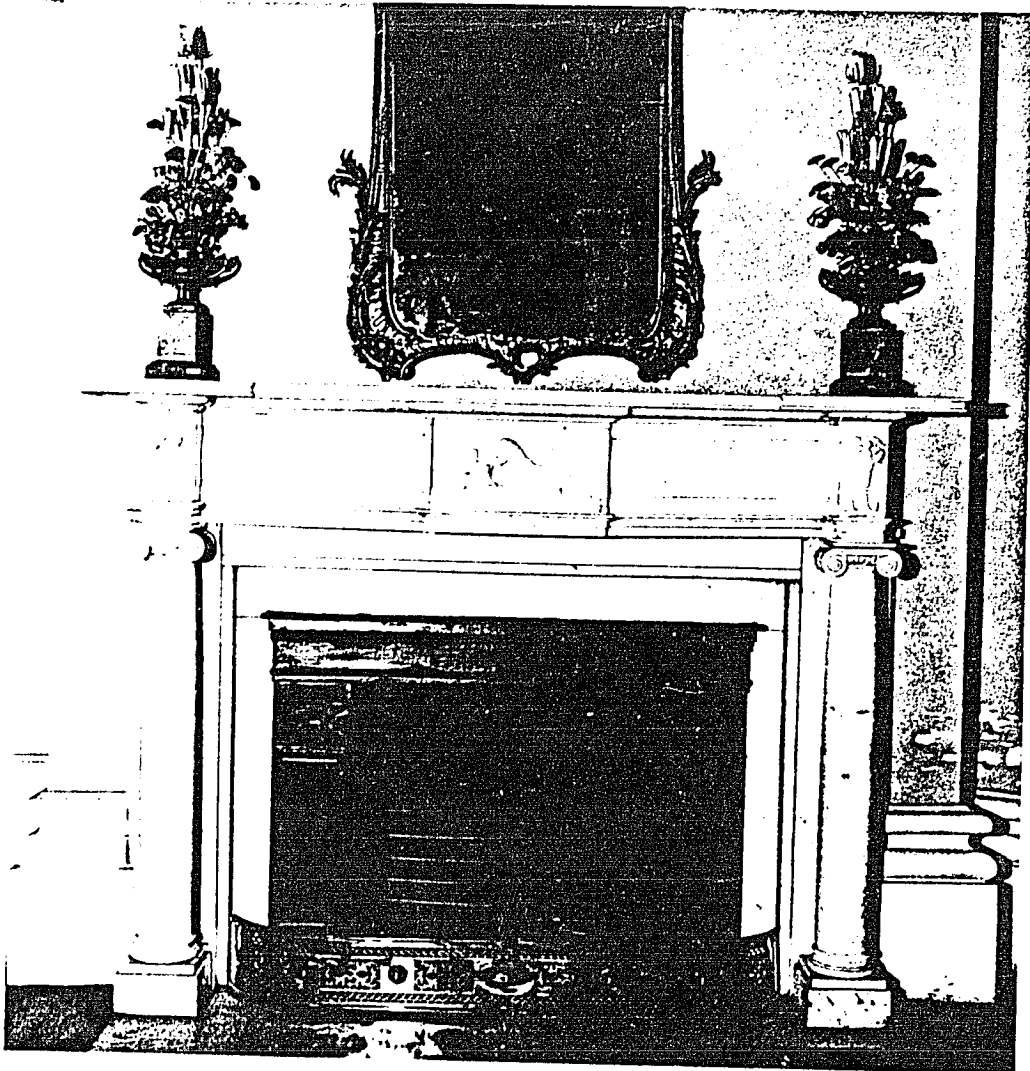
1. Asher B. Durand: Portrait of John Frazee,
Collection Stephen C. Millett



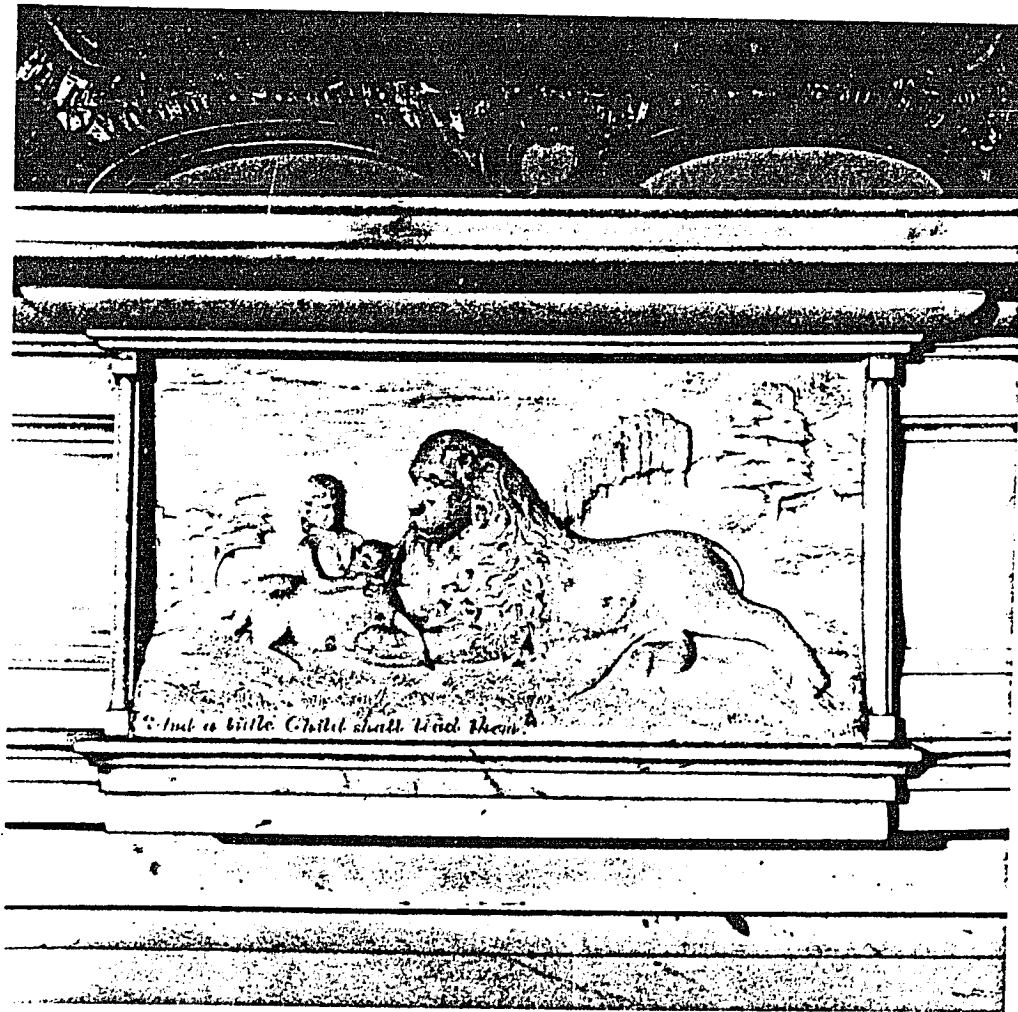
2. Henry Shumway: Miniatures of John and Lydia Frazee (mid-1830's), Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts



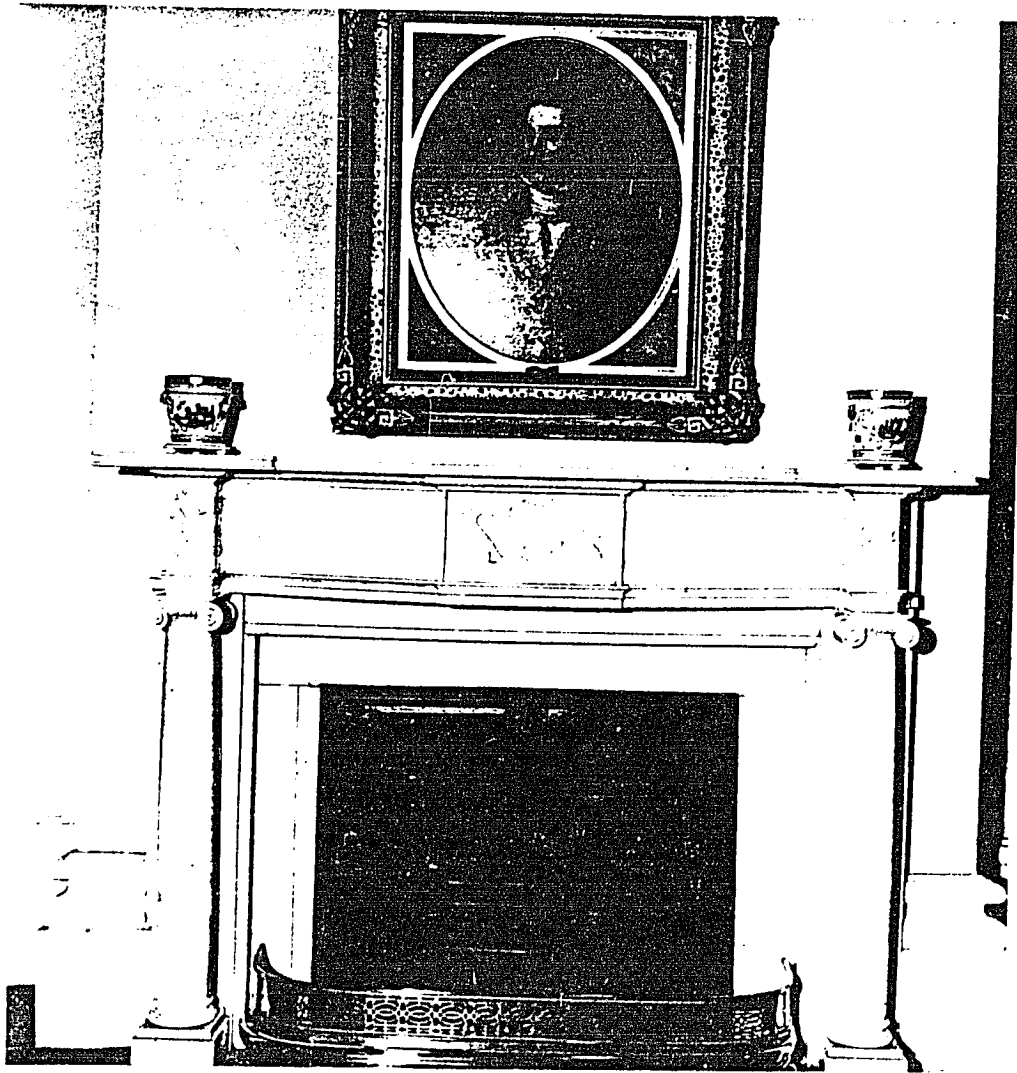
3. John Frazee: Self Portrait Bust (20th-century bronze cast after 1827 plaster), Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts



4. W and J Frazee: Mantelpiece (1818),
Telfair Museum, Savannah



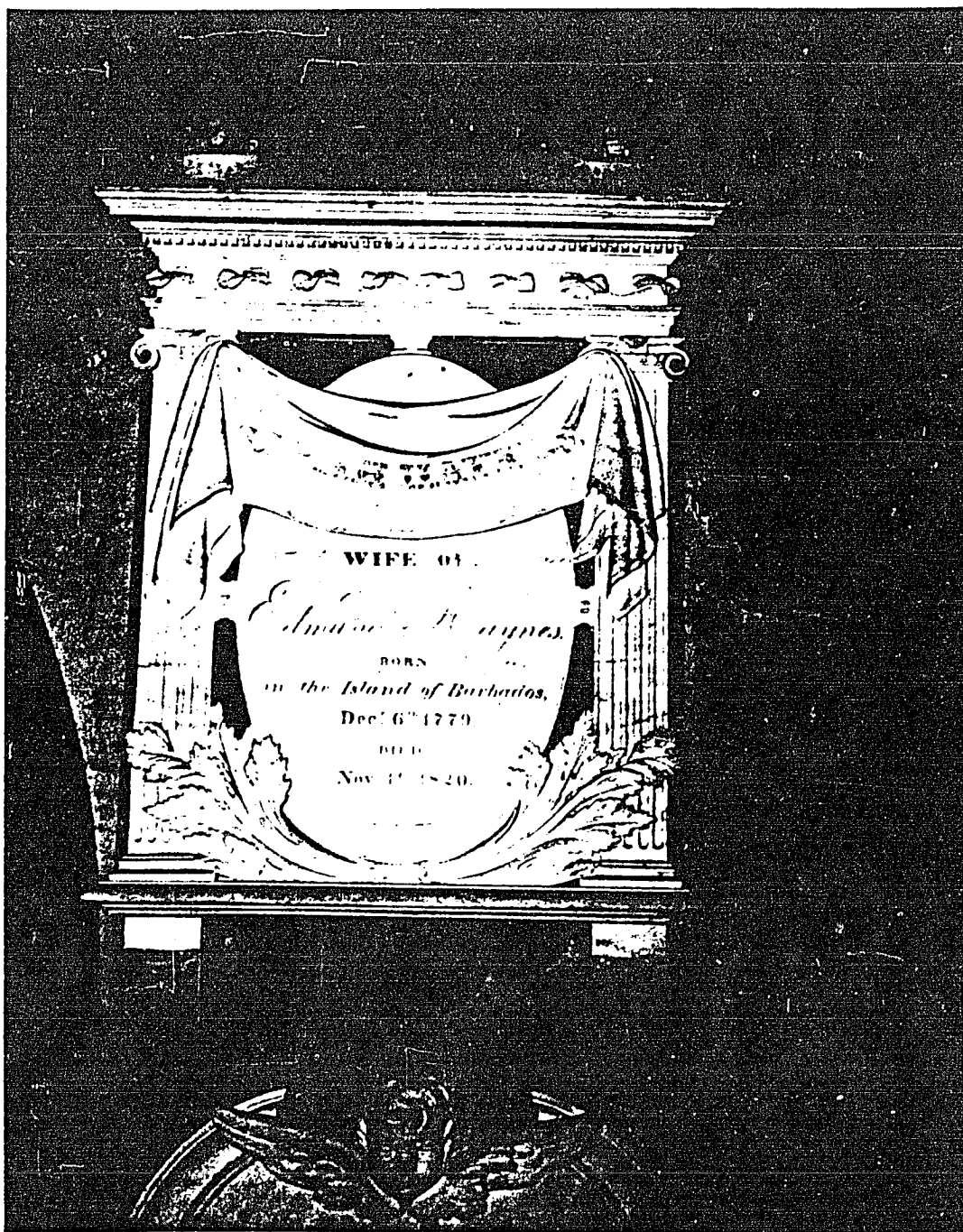
5. W. and J Frazee: Relief panel
(detail of 4)



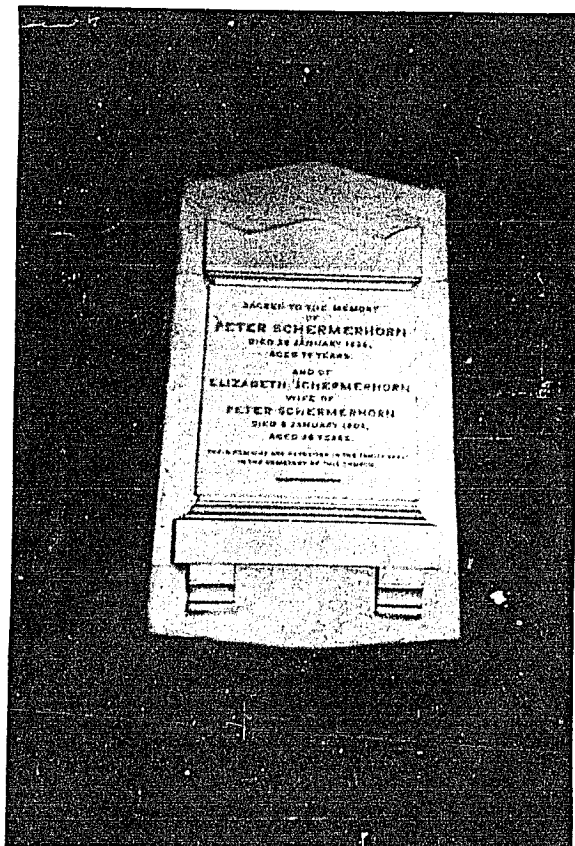
6. W and J Frazee: Mantelpiece (1818),
Telfair Museum, Savannah



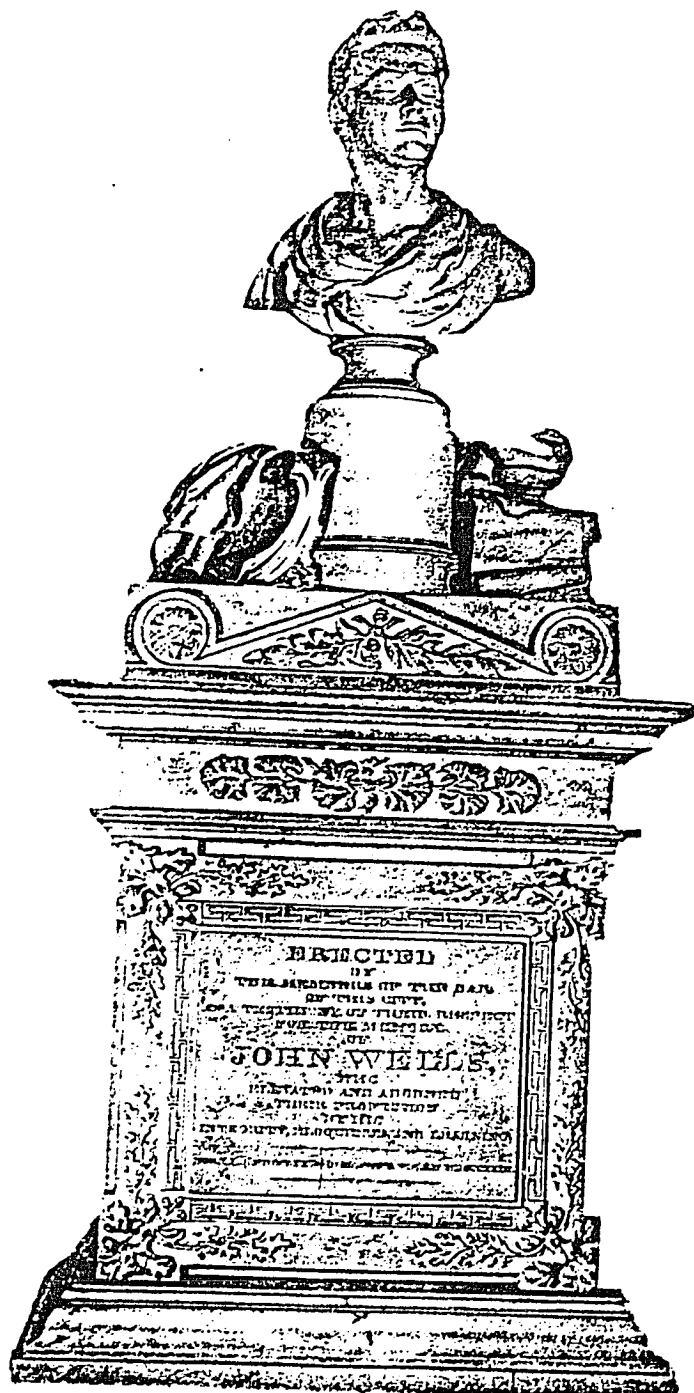
7. W and J Frazee: Relief panel (detail of 6)



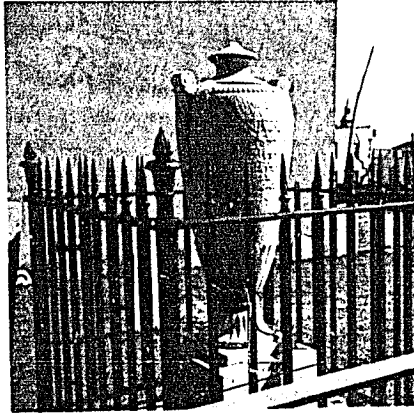
8. W and J Frazee: Monument to Sarah Haynes (1821),
Trinity Church, New York



9. John Frazee: Monument to Peter Schermerhorn (1826), St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, New York



10. John Frazee: Monument to John Wells
(1825), St. Paul's Chapel, New York



11. John Frazee: Grave of Jane Probasco Frazee
(1832), South River, New Jersey



12. John Frazee: John Jay (1832), United States Congress



13. John Frazee: John Jay, City Hall,
New York



14. John Frazee: Bishop John Henry Hobart,
New-York Historical Society



15. John Frazee: Nathaniel Bowditch (1834),
Boston Athenaeum



16. John Frazee: Daniel Webster (1834),
Boston Athenaeum



17. John Frazee: Thomas H. Perkins (1834),
Boston Athenaeum



18. John Frazee: John Lowell (1835),
Boston Athenaeum



19. John Frazee: Joseph Story (1835),
Boston Athenaeum



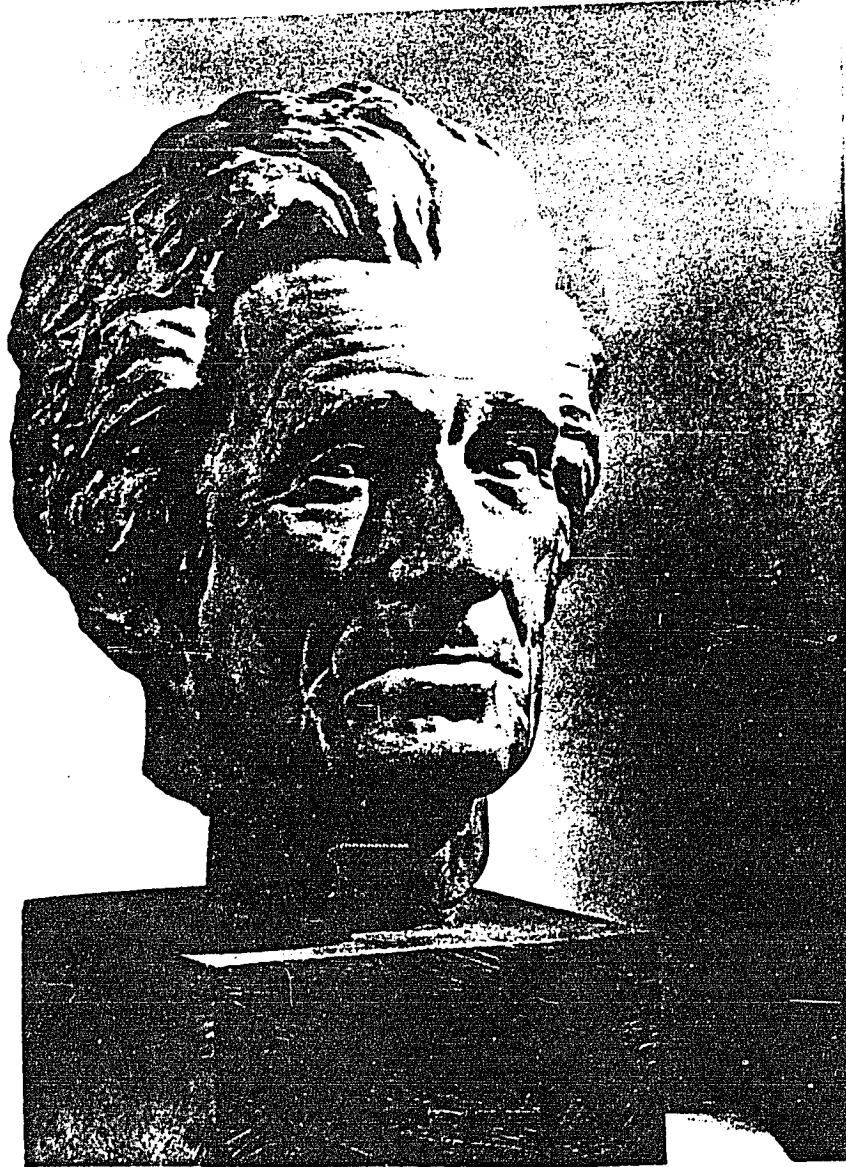
20. John Frazee: William Prescott (1835),
Boston Athenaeum



21. John Frazee: John Marshall (1834),
Boston Athenaeum



22. John Frazee: John Marshall (plaster),
The Newark Museum



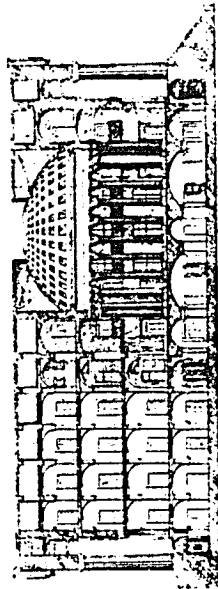
23. John Frazee: Andrew Jackson (1834),
Princeton University Art Museum



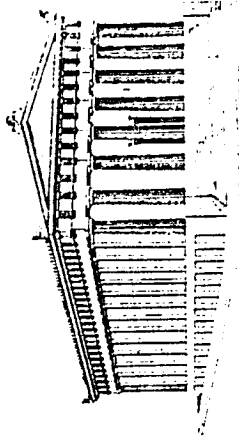
24. John Frazee: George Griswold (about 1843),
Old Lyme Historical Society

CUSTOM HOUSE,
NEW BUILDING IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
JANUARY, 1837.

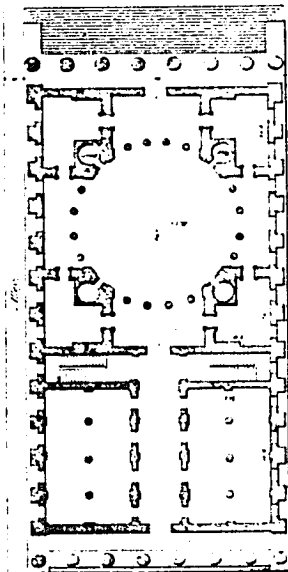
Arch. Frazee. Drawn and etched by the author.



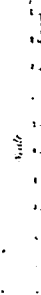
Longitudinal Section



Elevation

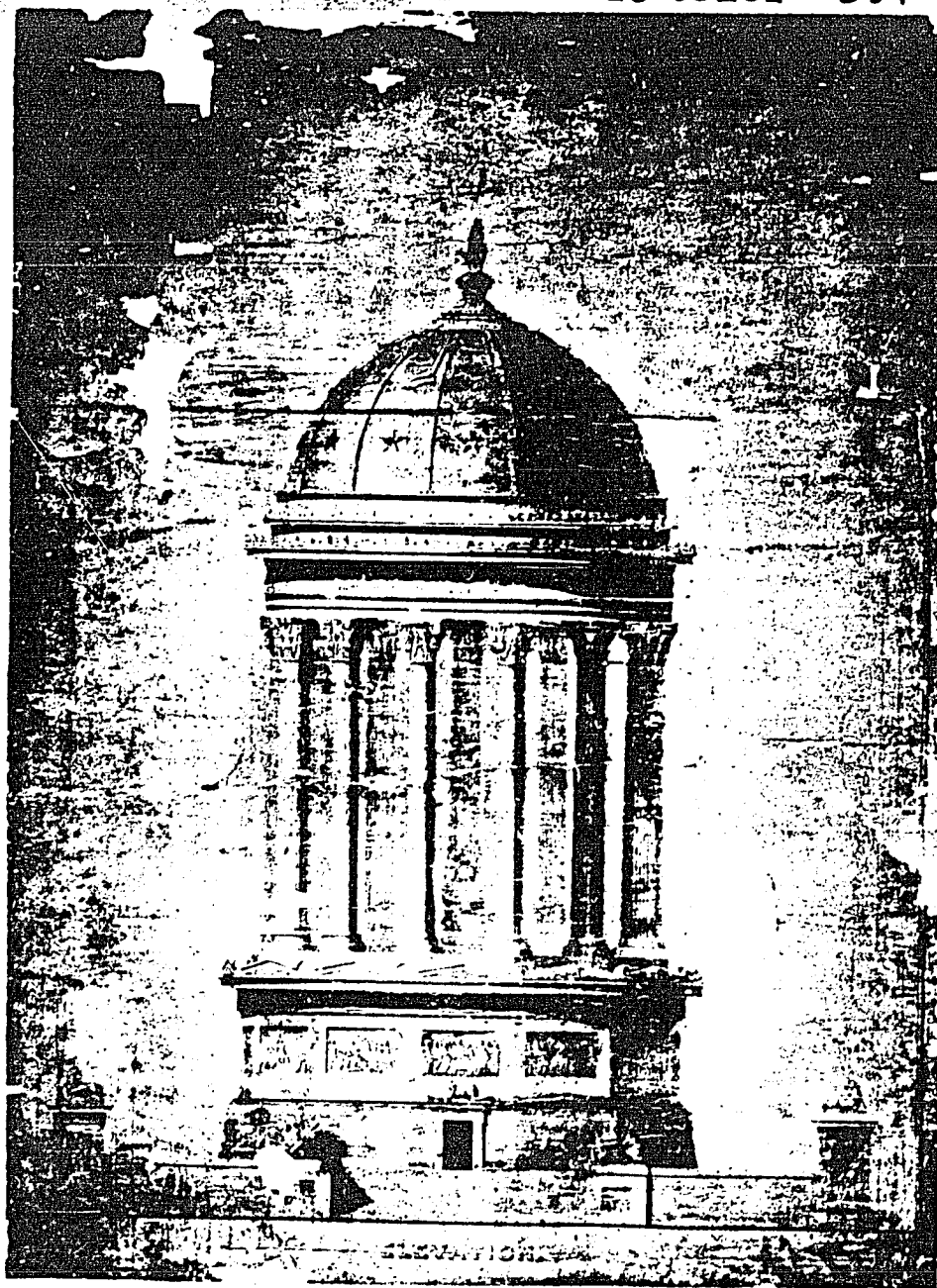


Plan of Principal Floor

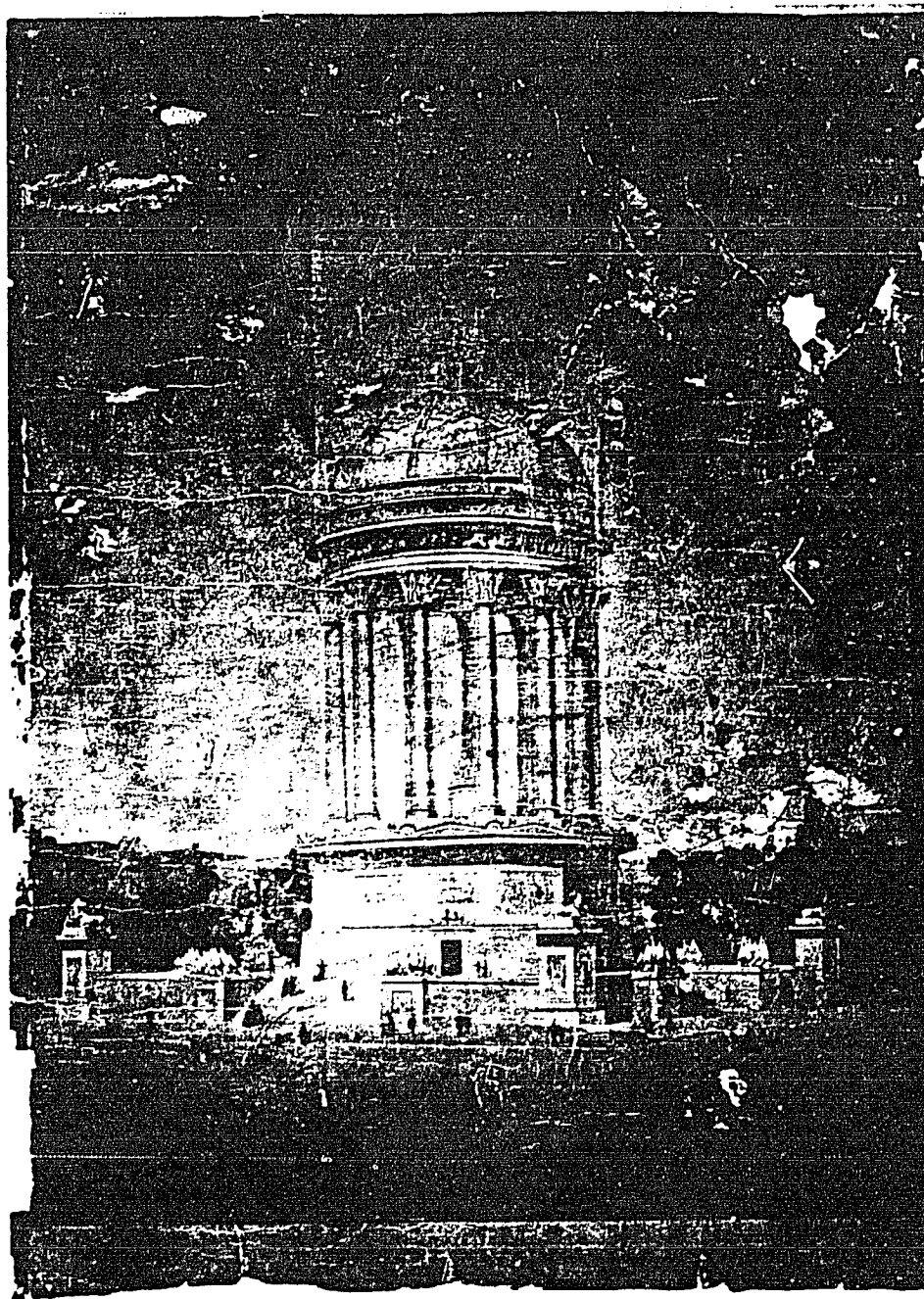


25. John Frazee: Architectural drawings,
for New York Custom House (1837),
New York Public Library

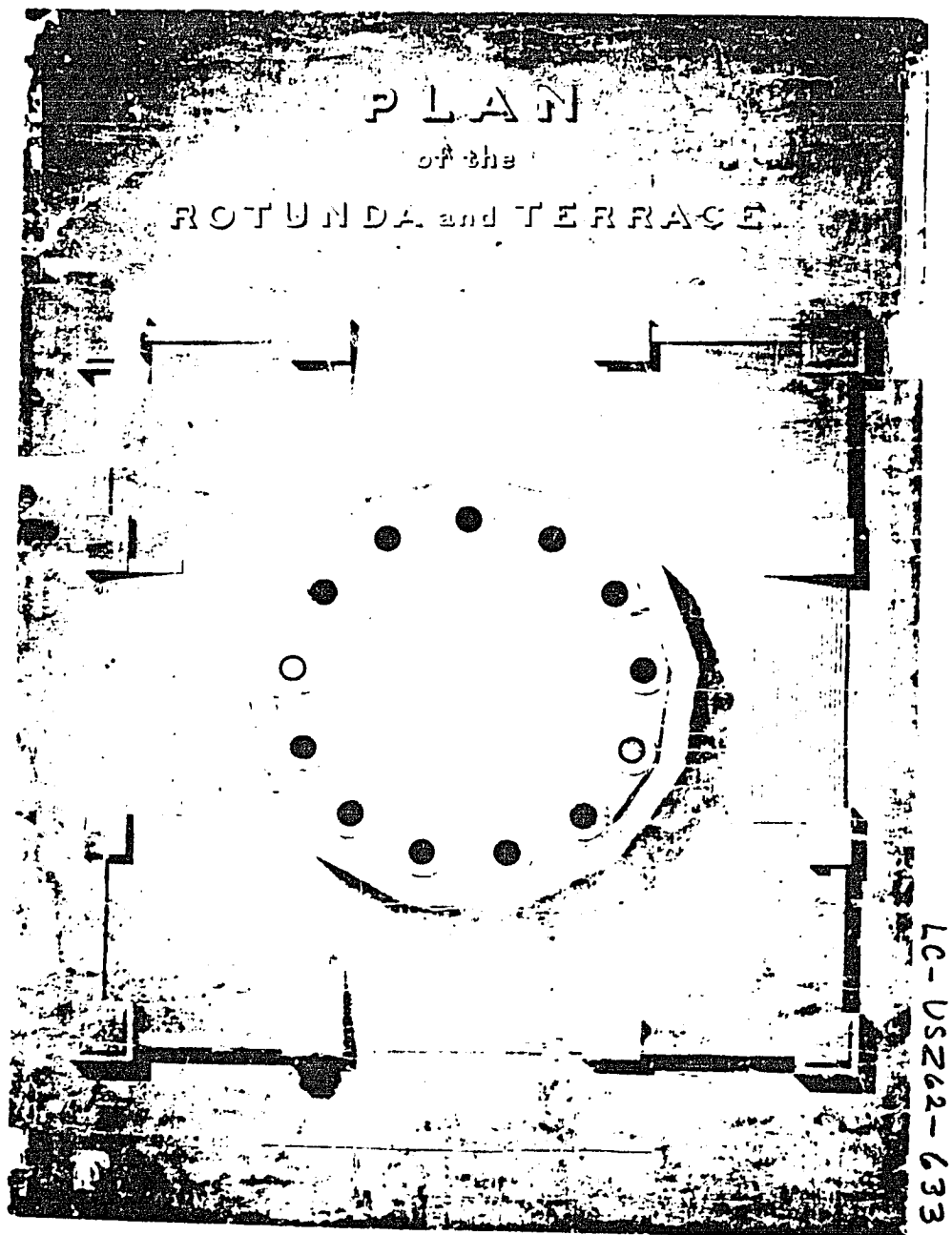
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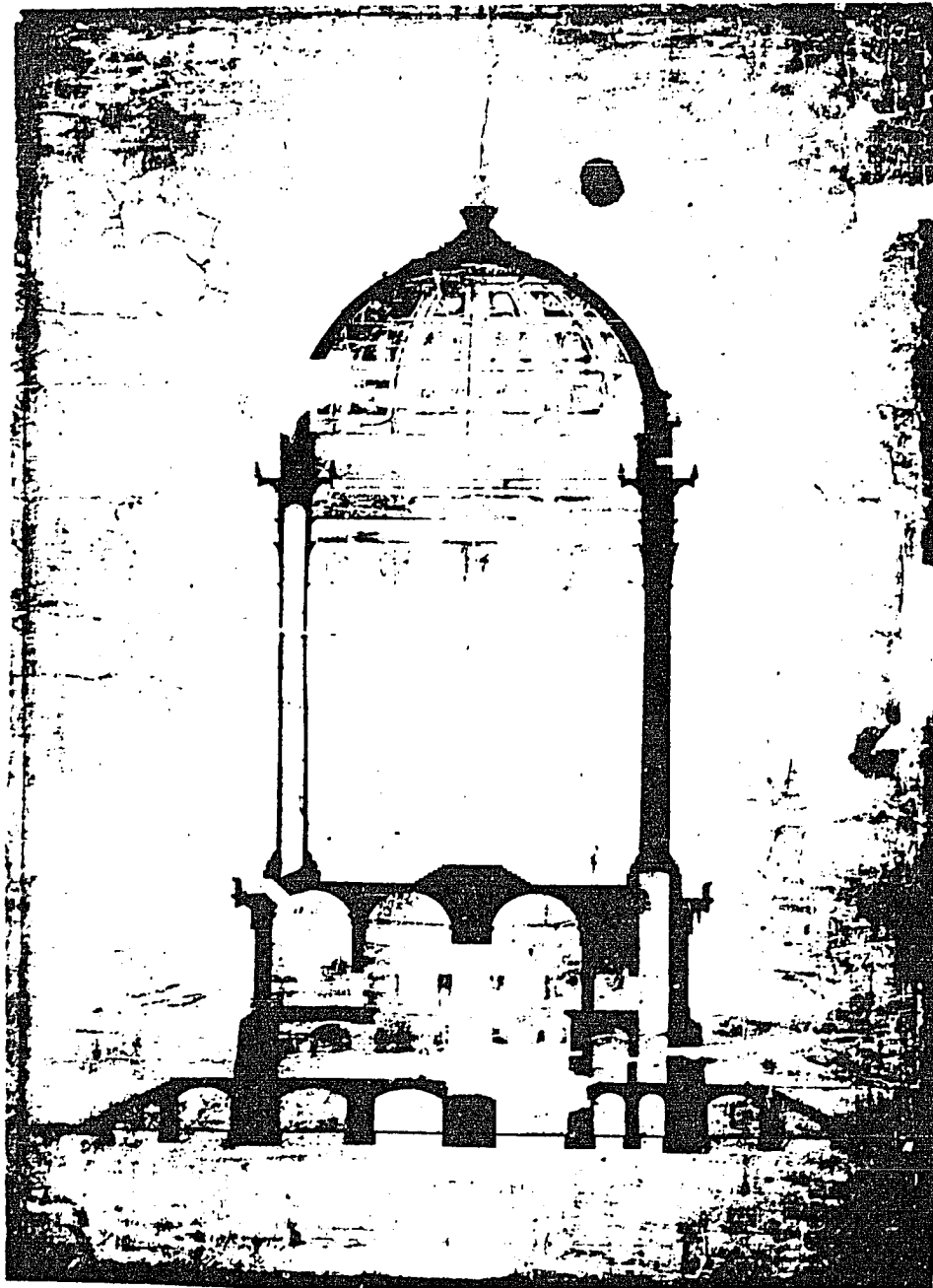
26. John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument:
Elevation (1848), Library of Congress



27. John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument: Perspective View (1848), Library of Congress



28. John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument:
Plan of the Rotunda and Terrace (1848), Library
of Congress



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29. John Frazee: Drawing for the Washington Monument: Section (1848), Library of Congress



30. John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing relief panels to right of entrance depicting episodes from the life of Washington



31. John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing relief panels to left of entrance depicting episodes from the life of Washington



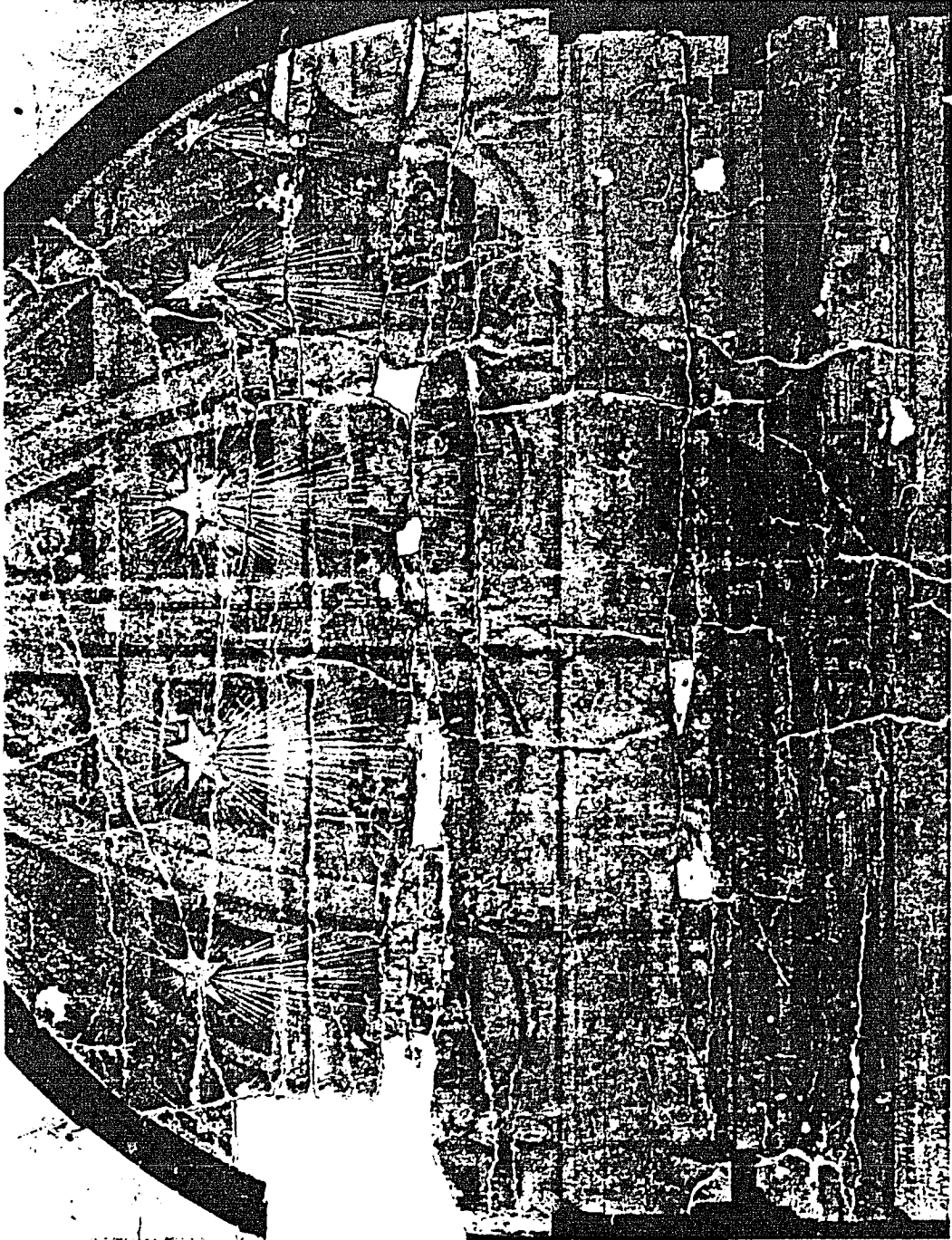
32. John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing Statue of History atop the dome



33. John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing Statue of George Washington seated between two youths



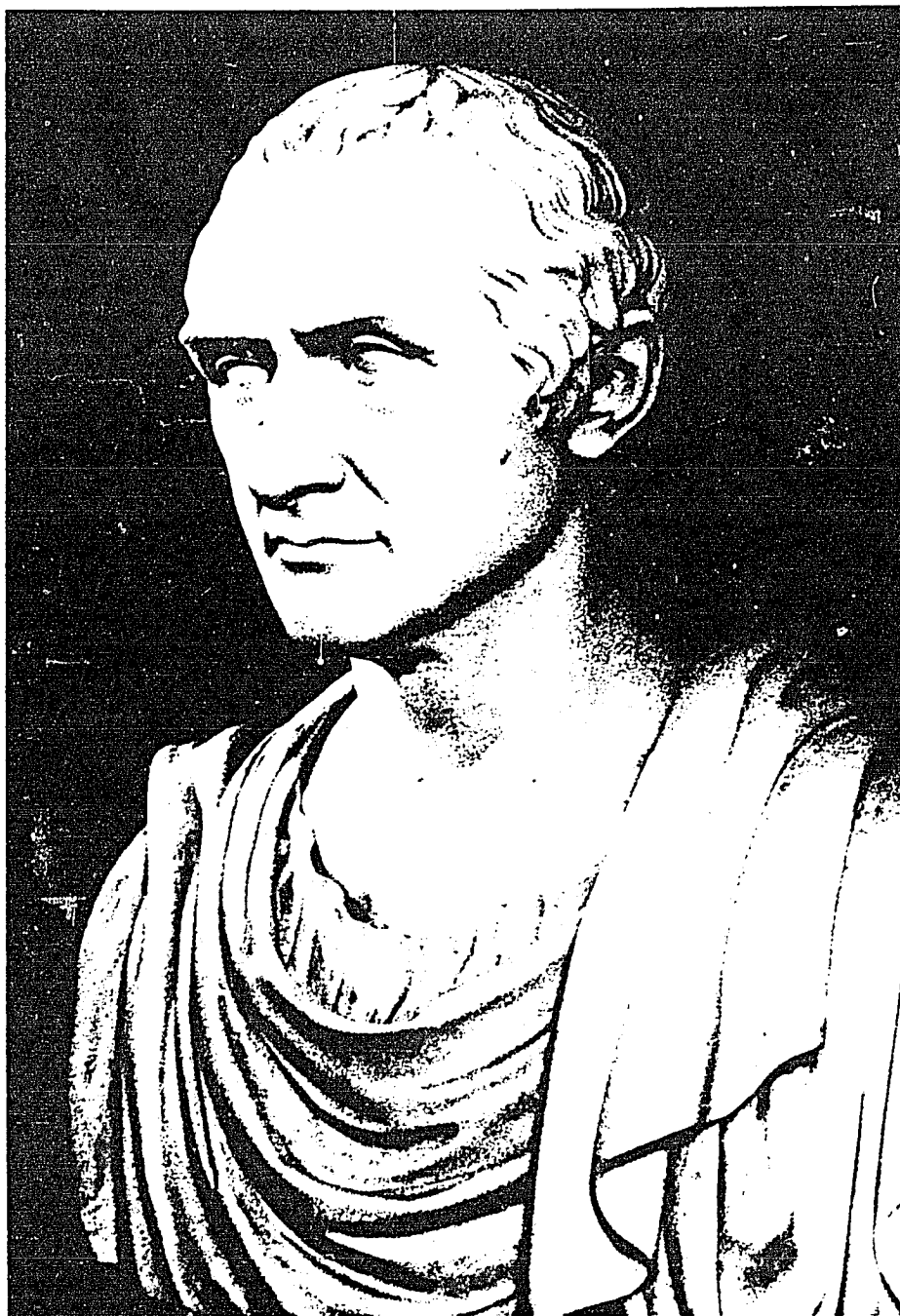
34. John Frazee: Detail of 27 showing one of "four recumbent horses on the pedestals at extreme angles of the terrace"



35. John Frazee: Detail of 26 showing part of exterior of dome
"characterized by its thirteen ribs...and thirteen star lights
of glass"



36. Attributed to John Frazee: Luman Reed
(1830-35), New-York Historical Society



37. Giuseppe Ceracchi: John Jay, United States
Department of State



38. Giuseppe Ceracchi: George Clinton,
New-York Historical Society



39. Thomas Crawford: Mary Hone Schermerhorn
(Rome, 1837), New-York Historical Society



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