



The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family: Volume 5 The Autobiography of Charles Willson Peale

David C. Ward

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This autobiography, written by Peale when he was in his eighties, spans American history from the 1740s to the 1820s, an era in which Peale was a primary actor in many of the young nation's significant cultural and political events. Peale begins by describing his difficult early years as an apprentice to a saddlemaker, and he then tells how he became an artist, one who eventually painted more than one thousand portraits of the generation that won American independence and established the Republic. He writes of his service in the Philadelphia militia during the American Revolution and of his fighting at the Battle of Princeton. He explains his involvement in Philadelphia's radical republican politics and the difficulties this caused his family. He discusses his involvement in the founding of such cultural institutions as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and his museum of natural history and art, the latter an institution he hoped would be his legacy. He recounts his experiences as a farmer and agrarian reformer, and as an inventor of fireplaces, a vapour bath, and the first American bridge design. Finally he includes a great deal of material on his wives and children, providing

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