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Ambition's Apex: The Private Art Gallery of the Aiken-Rhett House

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AMBITION’S APEX:
THE PRIVATE ART GALLERY OF THE AIKEN-RHETT HOUSE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate Schools of
Clemson University and the College of Charleston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Historic Preservation

by
Christine A. Mathieson
May 2011

Accepted by:
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Abstract

This thesis is an analytic in-depth examination of the private art gallery added to the Aiken-Rhett House in Charleston, South Carolina in 1858. The goal of the work is to imagine, understand, and contextualize the gallery, delving deeply into the lives, travels, and ambitions of its owners, William and Harriet Lowndes Aiken. Exploring all aspects of the gallery’s inspiration and design, as well as the provenance and significance of works of art housed in it, the paper poses two questions: why a gallery; and why this gallery. Answers to these questions are located in socio-historical analysis that focuses on the private gallery as a means of attaining the highest social position. A thorough investigation of the Charleston gallery, comparing it to its inspiration in Europe and to its contemporaneous New York counterparts, yields a clearer understanding of the gallery and a cogent sense of what it represented in its own epoch. Drawing from myriad sources an attempt has been made to create a coherent picture of how the Aikens’ art gallery derived from and reflected the society in which they lived; and how it served their ambition to occupy its highest stratum.
Dedication

TO THE CITY OF CHARLESTON FOR WELCOMING AND INSPIRING ME.
Acknowledgements

Many individuals and institutions provided invaluable guidance and assistance with research and writing of this thesis. Historic Charleston Foundation, Gibbes Museum of Art, The South Carolina Historical Society, and the Charleston Museum were treasure troves of information on the Aiken Family and their gallery. In New York, the New York Historical Society, the Museum of the City of New York, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art provided access to information and also pointed me to other sources. I would like to extend special thanks to Elizabeth Garrett Ryan for proposing the topic of this thesis, as well as for providing guidance and support as a reader. Her own thesis, chronicling the Aikens’ furniture and furnishings, informed my own. I am grateful to Historic Charleston Foundation for allowing me unrestricted access to its collections, archives and to the Aiken-Rhett House. Among the individuals there who deserve thanks and recognition are Brandy Culp, Valerie Perry, Bridget O’Brien, and Karen Emmons. The guidance I received from my thesis advisers and readers, Carter Hudgins, Ralph Muldrow, and Ashley Robbins Wilson must also be acknowledged; their suggestions, about both style and substance, improved the paper immeasurably. They were a great source of wisdom and encouragement, thorough and careful readers whose comments and critiques directed meaningful revisions of drafts throughout the writing process. Thank you to my friends and classmates for their support and humor throughout this process. Finally, heartfelt thanks to my family for their comprehensive support of all my endeavors, without which none of my academic achievements would have been possible.
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Introduction

Every era has its emblems of achievement and success; icons, the possession of which identify people as individuals of character, class and style. Power and money are a consistent *sine qua non*, but the way in which these are utilized to raise an individual’s social profile varies by time and location. The middle of the nineteenth century was a time when, in both Charleston and New York, any measure of ultimate success involved refinement, sophistication and philanthropy; a triumphant coda to a stellar career typically involving all three.

Collecting art was integral to a lifestyle for many elite Americans during the nineteenth century. While collecting art was not uncommon, having a private gallery in one’s home to display the collection was a rarity; the province of the few who acquired treasures they considered worthy of a gallery and in quantity requiring one. As such, it provided the means by which this rare individual cemented his position at the top of the social pecking order. The private art gallery came to be an identifier of ultimate achievement, a visible symbol of a man’s taste and his ability to indulge it.

Only a few dedicated private art galleries have been documented in America’s major cities during the antebellum period, although during the Gilded Age that followed private galleries became more common.¹ Most connoisseurs of art prior to the last third of the nineteenth century filled their homes with art, using drawing rooms, libraries and dining rooms, along with other available wall space, for displaying their collections.

Among the most prolific and respected of these connoisseurs were Thomas Handasyd Perkins of Boston, Robert Gilmor, Jr. of Baltimore, New Yorkers James Colles and Philip Hone, as well as Charlestonians, Joseph Allen Smith, John Izard Middleton, John Ashe Alston, and Charles Izard Manigault. Joseph Harrison, Jr. of Philadelphia was one of the exclusive clique of Americans who created private galleries for their art collections in the 1850’s. This small, elite group also included New Yorkers William Henry Aspinwall, August Belmont, and John Taylor Johnston, as well as Charlestonian, William Aiken, whose galleries will be explored in depth, as expressions of their lives and the societies in which they lived.

For these able and ambitious men who had met or exceeded their career aspirations, possession of a private gallery filled with personally selected art treasures was the ultimate goal, the attainment of which engaged the same single-minded energy that had enabled their vocational success. The private art gallery also facilitated their engagement with philanthropy, giving them an opportunity to control the means by which they contributed to the greater good of their communities. While the rationale for a private art gallery was similar in Charleston and New York, the sensibility underpinning design and contents differed, as a result of the divergent sociopolitical situations in the two cities.

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When William Aiken retired from politics in 1857, having served South Carolina as Governor and as its Representative to the U.S. Congress, his credentials for inclusion among the city’s antebellum elite were impeccable. He possessed vast wealth derived from a rice plantation, a classical education informing genteel hobbies like collecting art, and he had married into one of Charleston’s oldest and most respected families. That year, the Aikens embarked on a Grand Tour of Europe during which they would acquire art for the dedicated private art gallery being built for them as part of the second renovation of their Charleston house on Elizabeth Street.

In addressing the Aikens’ gallery, this thesis will attempt to answer two essential questions: Why a private gallery? Why this gallery? Answers to these questions will involve a thorough investigation of influences related to conceptualizing and furnishing the gallery, as well as a comparison of the Aiken gallery with its New York counterparts. Similarities and differences between the Aikens and individual New York gallery owners—what drove their ambition, what informed their choices—will be explored, incorporating regional concepts of education, refinement and sophistication, as well as markers of social and professional prestige. Inspiration for the Aiken’s gallery will also be addressed, examining their travels and the priorities that informed them.

While there is more written about the New York collectors and their galleries than about the Aikens, information disseminated tends to be fragmented, bits and pieces from a variety of sources, few of which explore the subject of their private galleries in any depth, and even fewer of which contextualize them. Existing commentary on the Aikens and their gallery has been almost entirely superficial, incorporating little analysis, with
assertions often based on facts gleaned uncritically from the same few sources. Accepting the information from these few sources at face value, without questioning or cross-referencing has led to conclusions that are not entirely accurate. In my research I have attempted to look more closely at the sources to which others have referred and on which they have based their scholarship. Deeper analysis of primary sources enables extrapolation to a clearer view of the Aikens’ predilections, motivations and taste, leading to a better understanding of the gallery they created.

In large part the process of informing and writing this thesis involved a close reading of primary source material; searching for other sources to confirm observations. Supplementary material included newspaper articles, some of them only tangentially related but offering snippets of relevant information; obituaries; personal letters and testimonials from friends and associates from which to infer missing facts. The process also involved organizing information from historical, sociopolitical and cultural sources to inform the more personal history of the family and the design and furnishing of their gallery. Understanding the socio-historical milieu was essential to achieving an understanding of the Aikens and the choices they made.

The task of finding and arranging scattered pieces of information, many of them obscure and indirect, involved following the evidence where it took me, delving into the details, thereby expanding the search. Research came to encompass investigations of the Aikens’ travels, the history and provenance of works of art, contemporaneous trends and fashions, personal and professional associations. It even involved close examinations of books, heretofore largely ignored, by which the Aikens were influenced. Putting all the
pieces together to form a cohesive whole was no small task; and it was a task made more difficult by the fact that some of the pieces of information, as well as some of the Aikens’ possessions, have been irretrievably lost. It is my hope, however, that the picture emerging from this thesis, derived from a more intimate understanding of the Aikens themselves, provides a sufficiently coherent image to answer the questions posed.

The history of the Aiken-Rhett House, from its construction circa 1820, through successive renovations, the second of which incorporated the gallery addition, is provided in the first chapter. The changes made to the house, reflecting architectural and design trends of the time as well as the needs of its owners, are catalogued and noted in context. This section does not provide extensive detail on the gallery addition itself since this topic is explored in depth in its own section at the end of the paper. It is provided merely as background to create a framework on which to build the analysis of the gallery and its owners.

Additional background information is included in a chapter covering the history of the Aiken and Lowndes families. William Aiken’s rise to prominence began with the legacy of his wealthy immigrant father and involved marrying into one of the most famous Charleston families. The pedigree of the Lowndes family could be traced back not only to the city’s earliest days, but also to the earliest days of Great Britain, to which Charlestonians long looked for validation and inspiration. The history of the two families includes information about the interrelationship of social and political realms, chronicling William Aiken’s career in South Carolina and Washington D.C., as well as his later associations with influential individuals and organizations active on the national level.
Unlike the Aikens’ gallery, none of the private art galleries of New Yorkers explored in this thesis survives, though records of their construction, contents or furnishing exist, as do varying amounts of biographical information about their owners. The gallery of William Henry Aspinwall was the one most extensively documented, having been the subject of a laudatory piece in Harper’s Weekly, written in February, 1859, in which his gallery was pictured and described in detail. There was also an article in The American Art Journal a decade later commending Aspinwall on his discernment in assembling his collection, as well as on the thoughtful way in which he furnished and illuminated the room to favor the display of art. A catalogue of Aspinwall’s collection, published in 1860 when he opened his gallery to public view to raise money for the U.S. Sanitary Commission, included a complete list of paintings as well as their location in the gallery’s rooms. Information about the way art was arranged in the Aspinwall gallery enables extrapolation to the other galleries about which less is specifically known.

August Belmont was a well-known personage, the subject of media interest and attention for his professional and social exploits, as well as his activity as a patron of the arts, collector and gallery owner. No images of the interior of Belmont’s gallery survive, though information may be gleaned from articles in newspapers and magazines, including his obituary, that offer commentary on his collection, which was widely praised. Belmont’s philanthropic activity was the source of additional information on his art, including a catalogue that was produced when he put his entire collection on loan at the

National Academy of Design to raise money for charity. Belmont also opened his private
gallery to public view during the Civil War to benefit the U.S. Sanitary Commission, for
which a catalogue was produced, and on subsequent occasions, about which newspaper
articles were written, commenting on the man and his art.

Most of what is known of John Taylor Johnston’s personal gallery derives from
retrospective commentary, including his obituary. Years before he served as first
President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Johnston’s efforts to bring art to the public
were lauded; indeed, it was the opening of his own private gallery to the public that
helped bring about the establishment of a museum with a permanent collection. Yet little
was written about the specifics of Johnston’s gallery. His financial difficulties later in his
life, necessitating the sale of his art collection, however, resulted in information being
disseminated in the form of catalogues and laudatory articles about his extraordinary,
eclectic collection of art treasures. That sale in 1876, yielding more than $300,000,
changed the nature of art collecting in New York where it came to be looked upon as a
shrewd investment, as much as an identifier of taste and class.

What is striking about the New York collectors is their determination to create a
new American standard of sophistication and taste, rather than faithfully adhering to an
older European one. During the antebellum years, New York was just beginning to assert
itself as a center of culture, having previously taken a back seat to Charleston, as well as

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6 The Catalogue of the Belmont Collection, also Daily Receipts of Exhibition and Distribution to Charitable
The New York Times, April 24, 1876.
8 Catalogue. The Collection of Paintings, Drawings, and Statuary. The Property of John Taylor Johnston, Esq. to be
sold at auction December 19, 20 and 22, 1876. New York Historical Society; “Sale of a Famous Gallery: Mr. John
Philadelphia and Boston. Established as a center of business and commerce, New York in the middle of the nineteenth century had not yet earned respect for aesthetic discernment and cultural activities. It was toward this end that ambitious men employed the vehicle of a private gallery to establish themselves at the top of the social order in a city likewise on the rise. The nature of their journey, unlike that of William Aiken’s, involved breaking new ground, envisioning the future rather than embracing the past.

William Aiken reflected the sensibilities of his Charleston milieu, in which the past was revered and the education, manners and taste of eighteenth century English aristocrats were the model. As such, an art collector seeking to create and furnish a private gallery and elevate his social status did not look to innovate. Rather, he sought to establish in his own home the traditional aesthetic of the English aristocrat. Inspiration for the Aikens’ gallery derived from Europe, which they had visited on several occasions. These trips were undertaken for the purpose of furthering their education according to the standards of the English aristocracy, and acquiring fine art that this education enabled them to recognize and appreciate it. This thesis explores in depth the Grand Tour the Aikens took while renovations to their house were ongoing in 1857-58. This trip directly informed their choices of art to fill their new gallery. Using the Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, the family’s itinerary and activities, both cultural and social, may be traced, at least to the degree that Mrs. Aiken chose to report. Close examination of the Aikens’ travels in Europe provides a glimpse also into their sensibilities and priorities as well as the attitudes and aspirations driving them.

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Supplementary information from a variety of sources enabled amplification and interpretation of Mrs. Aiken’s diary. The Travel Diary of William Aiken’s cousin, Joseph Daniel Aiken, reputed to have directed the second renovation of the house on Elizabeth Street and the design of the gallery addition, offers insight into the European inspiration of the “architect.” Essential also for extrapolating from Mrs. Aiken’s diary are travel guides used by the Aikens, as well as other books they are known to have owned and read while traveling. Information about events related to cultural and art history during the time of their visit in 1857-58 further amplifies Mrs. Aiken’s record of the trip.

The *Handbooks for Travellers*, published by English travel writer, John Murray, were the premier source of information for nineteenth century Britons and Americans touring the Continent. Copies of volumes of Murray *Handbooks* signed by members of the Aiken family survive, and these cerebral works, that read more like history textbooks than tourist guides, clearly informed the family’s travels. Also in the family’s possession were guides to specific cities in Europe by other experts, including John Stillman Hillard’s *Six Months in Italy* and Thomas Forester’s *Paris and Its Environs: An Illustrated Handbook*. Both Harriet and Henrietta Aiken read the work of Mrs. Anna Brownell Jameson, a well-known nineteenth century “feminist” who wrote extensively about art and art history. Mrs. Aiken chose to read Mrs. Jameson’s book about important private art galleries in England, while Henrietta possessed two volumes of her

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10 Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1849. The South Carolina Historical Society.
11 Various Murray *Handbooks for Travellers* signed by the Aikens, Collection of the Historic Charleston Foundation.
12 Collection of the Historic Charleston Foundation.
Choices the Aikens made about their gallery and the art they acquired to furnish it may be better understood in the context of the books that formed the basis of their “education” about Europe.

Among the most significant sources of inspiration for the Aikens seems to have been the Tribune at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, a room whose octagonal shape and Old Master paintings were re-imagined in the Aikens’ Charleston gallery. Johann Zoffany, a painter well known for his portraits of Charlestonians, immortalized the Tribune in a painting depicting both its ancient masterpieces and a group of English aristocrats on a Grand Tour enjoying them. This painting embodies the ideals of the eighteenth century English aristocrat’s Grand Tour, illuminating by its depiction appreciation for sculpture reflecting antiquity, Old Master paintings and a sensibility upon which the Aikens’ gallery would be modeled.

The Charleston milieu to which the Aikens returned in the fall of 1858 is explored, contextualizing their gallery and their activities within the framework of contemporaneous socio-political realities, civic pursuits, as well as architectural trends in both public and private buildings. In the world of antebellum Charleston, to be at the top of the social order required submitting to it; conforming to an ideal, rather than innovating and turning the eyes of that group in a new direction. Decisions made about the socioeconomic direction of the city during the previous decades played out in various ways during the years immediately preceding the Civil War. Charlestonians at the top of

that society, however, continued to enjoy their opulent, aristocratic lifestyle, building and improving homes, entertaining, and working to make their city a better place. Upon his return to Charleston, William Aiken became engaged in helping to create the Carolina Art Association, loaning many of the works of art acquired during the Grand Tour to their exhibition in 1859, aligning himself with other leaders in social and civic matters in the city.

The Aikens’ gallery itself is the subject of the final section. Included here is a look at the exterior and interior of the structure itself, as well as an in-depth examination of the art. The provenance and significance of the collection as aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual property as well as interior design is discussed. In this chapter, the observations of an oft-quoted nineteenth century observer are considered critically, in light of information from other sources. The examination of the gallery includes an exploration of how the art might have been displayed, taking into consideration the configuration of the space, the sensibilities of the owners and the conventions of the era. Attempts at envisioning the gallery as it was originally designed and furnished required much detective work. This involved evaluating extant works of art, exploring the list of works loaned to the Carolina Art Association, as well as factoring in retrospective input about the interior of the gallery. Contemporary trends and styles of the time, including discoveries about the use of physical space in the various New York galleries informed the analysis, as did as what was learned about the Aikens whose ambitions and taste the gallery reflected.
To create a coherent whole from an incomplete collection of disparate pieces of information, it is necessary to make educated guesses; to infer from what we know, to extrapolate from relevant parallels. To facilitate the process of assembling those discrete facts and details, cross-referencing of information is essential. What we know about the Aikens, gleaned from the many sources examined for this thesis, helps us imagine their gallery; and what we learn and can infer about the gallery informs our understanding of the Aikens.
Chapter 1
Evolution of the Aiken-Rhett House

What is today known as the Aiken-Rhett House evolved in three phases over a period of forty years, culminating in the last major renovation of 1857-58 (fig.1). Among the changes made in this last phase, the most unique and significant was the creation of a private art gallery which is the subject of this thesis. To fully understand and contextualize the gallery, an overview of the house and its successive renovations is necessary (figs. 2-7).

The house sits on land that was acquired in two separate purchases by John Robinson, a Charleston merchant. The first two lots, at the intersection of Judith and Elizabeth Streets, were acquired on December 25th, 1817 and an additional lot, extending along Elizabeth Street from the northern boundary of the two original lots to Mary Street, on May 25, 1820.\(^\text{15}\) It is likely that Robinson began building the original house shortly after his acquisition of the final lot. Fronting on Judith Street, this three story brick Charleston double house was set over a ground level cellar. Consisting of a central hall with two rooms flanking it on either side, the house incorporated a piazza running across the front.\(^\text{16}\) Robinson’s aim was to create an impressive house in a new neighborhood, away from the more densely populated lower peninsula.\(^\text{17}\) Unfortunately, shortly after the grand home was completed, Robinson’s financial situation forced him to sell it. The

\(^{15}\) Charleston County Deed Book G-9, 106.


house as offered for sale was described in an advertisement in the *Charleston Courier*, September 21, 1825 (fig. 8):

For Sale: The following valuable property is offered for sale on a liberal credit period. That desirable mansion house occupied by the subscriber in Wragborough [sic] being one of the healthiest situations in or near Charleston, fronting on Judith Street on the south and to the west on Public Mall. The house contains twelve upright rooms, four on each floor, all well finished, the materials of the piazzas and fences all of cypress and cedar; underneath the house are large Cellars and Storerooms. The lot of 120 feet on Judith and 281 on Elizabeth streets…

The property was quickly transferred to a consortium including Charles Edmonston, William Aiken, Sr. and Lewis A. Pitray. In June, 1827, Aiken bought out his partners, putting the property up for sale only a month after acquiring it. The house did not sell, however, and was either vacant or used as a tenement until after the death of William Aiken, Sr. in 1831. Title of the house passed to William Aiken, Jr. in March, 1833 at which point he and his wife, Harriet Lowndes Aiken, chose it as their primary residence, opting to renovate an existing house rather than to build an opulent mansion in the latest style. As historian Maurie McInnis puts it, Aiken, “despite being one of the wealthiest men in Charleston…chose to lavish his wealth on creating a residence that outwardly reaffirmed his commitment to the social order in Charleston while still creating a house that would awe his visitors with his own wealth and good taste.”

The Aikens also maintained ownership of 3,500 acres on Jehossee Island in Colleton County. When William Aiken, Sr. gave his son the newly acquired tract of

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19 Charleston County Mesne Conveyance Office, Vol. T-9, 238.
22 Colleton County RMC, Deed Book 1, p.19.
land on Jehossee in 1830, his admonition was, “Here are the means; now go to work and develop them.”

It was, perhaps, in the spirit of his father’s wishes for the land that William Aiken, Jr. took on the challenge of the house on Elizabeth Street as well. It is a testament to the vision—and ambition—of Aiken Sr., who had made his fortune in mercantile pursuits, to recognize the changing nature of the social scene in Charleston at this time, and to direct his son toward an agriculturally-based livelihood. During the eighteenth century, Charleston’s economy grew through the efforts of merchants and businessmen like William Aiken Sr., who not only amassed wealth but also achieved social acceptance. In the early years of the nineteenth century in Charleston, unlike its northern counterparts, the ideal of genteel life reemerged as a glorification of the landed gentry whereby the route to social prominence became circumscribed, linked to refined, agriculturally enabled leisure.

The acreage on Jehossee enabled William Aiken, Jr. to stake his claim to an elite planter’s life, a claim enhanced by his marriage to Harriet Lowndes Aiken whose family was one of Charleston’s most prominent. The house on Elizabeth Street would become both a vehicle for and visible symbol of the couple’s rise to the top of Charleston’s social elite.

The young Aiken couple undertook renovations to the house, commencing sometime after 1833, enlarging its footprint and updating the configuration of rooms, as well as redecorating the interiors to reflect the latest styles in furnishings and finishes. Their efforts “transformed the dwelling from a large and handsome but somewhat dated

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Federal dwelling, to one of the most fashionable Greek Revival edifices in town.”

Federal period windows were replaced with grand scale tripartite windows in keeping with the new, Greek Revival style of the house. To further modernize the exterior and perhaps to mask the alterations of the walls adjacent to the new windows, the brick was covered with stucco which was etched and penciled to resemble cut stone. The main entrance to the house was moved from Judith to Elizabeth Street which transformed the appearance of the double house to a “more prevalent vernacular Charleston form—a single house.”

Changes the Aikens made to the interior of the house paid no such homage to typical Charleston form. Renovations focused largely on the public areas of the house to enhance its use for entertaining. Changes associated with the new main entrance on Elizabeth Street encompassed reconfiguration of the main staircase and enlargement of the entry hall to include what had formerly been a room behind the parlor, creating a large reception area. Mirror image marble staircases, featuring dramatic, classically ornamented cast iron railings fitted with mahogany handrails, ascended from the front door to a landing set atop fluted Greek Doric columns (fig. 9). The use of marble in this application was extremely rare in Charleston where the material was typically used only for small projects such as mantles because it was not native to the area and was both difficult to obtain and prohibitively expensive. The Aikens’ aim was clearly to make a dramatic first impression on any visitor who entered the house, engaging in what David

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Kertzer calls “impression management.”\(^{28}\) The Aikens already clearly grasped the concept that became *de rigeur* in the Victorian age: that first impressions count; that “what people saw first had a disproportionate impact on the formation of opinions and judgments.”\(^{29}\) The Aikens’ marble entryway created a space that afforded flexibility in circulation patterns and was immediately impressive to visitors who, depending on their purpose, were directed appropriately.

Guests invited up the stairs could be sent in one of two directions. The route through the door straightaway gave access to the main stair hall that led to the library, the work yard or the upstairs bedrooms, as well as providing an alternative route to the dining room. To the right of the marble stairs, a doorway led to the newly configured pair of large drawing rooms in space that had formerly been the old parlor, the front passage and the dining room. The arrangement of the double drawing rooms, which could be opened and used as one large salon or sectioned off with pocket doors to create a more intimate space, enabled flexibility in social rituals.

The dining room was now housed in a new two story eastern wing, and was approached from the drawing rooms through the library, newly constructed in the space behind the east drawing room. The dining room could also be accessed from the drawing room via the piazza onto which the new triple sash windows opened. The reconfigured space of the main floor provided flexibility of movement between rooms used for


entertaining, accommodating larger groups, creating a grand, yet inviting, space.\textsuperscript{30} The red sandstone steps that had led to the original front door were moved to the rear and now led guests out into the garden via the rear door, accessible from the dining room through the library.

In addition to these major architectural changes, the Aikens’ redecoration of the house encompassed a host of new finishes and fixtures, including new marble chimney surrounds, silver plated hardware, mahogany veneered doors, ceiling medallions and plaster cornices. New furniture and furnishings, including grand chandeliers, completed the new look. It was at this point that William and Harriet had their immense collection of silver engraved with a family coat of arms and crest neither of which appears to have any historic provenance.\textsuperscript{31} Much of the furniture added at this time, most of it in the plain Grecian style, was from New York. A desk and bookcase specifically labeled Deming and Bulkley, identifies the pieces as having come from this New York company with warehouses in Charleston where their goods were in demand among the city’s wealthiest families.\textsuperscript{32} By 1839, the Aikens were fixtures in the Charleston social scene, known for their lavish parties and the fabulous space in which they were held:

Last night I was at the handsomest ball I have ever seen—given by Mrs. Aiken-Miss Lowndes that was—they live near Boundary Street in a house he has added to, & furnished very handsomely—2 floors were entirely thrown open—the orchestra from the theatre played for the dances—and the supper table was covered with a rich service of silver-light in profusion & a crowded handsomely draped assembly…"33

From this lavish home William Aiken conducted business and launched his political career which continued until 1857, encompassing service as a United States Congressman and South Carolina Governor. After his retirement from politics, the Aikens undertook another renovation of the house. Much of the work addressed aesthetic concerns, but major reconfiguration of selected spaces was undertaken to better adapt the house to the family’s new social needs.34 The 1858 renovation addressed four major aspects of the dwelling. Private space on the second floor was converted to public space; sleeping quarters and dressing rooms were expanded and improved; systems of the house were modernized, including installation of new plumbing, gas lines and service bells; and a new wing was added to house a dedicated art gallery.35

What had been a large, elegant bedchamber on the second floor of the east wing was transformed into a withdrawing room, intended to provide a social space for the ladies after dinner when the men retired to the library. By adding a third floor to the northeast and northwest sectors of the main house, as well as to the east wing, space for two new chambers as well as dressing rooms to serve existing bedrooms was created. The two new bedrooms featured fireplaces with decorative mantles and were equipped with state-of-the-art service bell pulls. New rooms in the north block, unheated and

33 From a letter written to Francis Kinloch Middleton, February 24, 1839. Cheves-Middleton Papers of the South Carolina Historical Society.
accessible only from the south facing bedrooms, served as dressing rooms for the chambers which had been upgraded and redecorated. These existing bedrooms were re-plastered, treated to new mantles and trim and were retrofitted with a gas light system.\(^{36}\)

Both main and back stairs were reworked. The main stair was fitted with a lower newel post as well as a new handrail and balusters to provide a more formal approach to what was now public space on the second floor. The back stair required complete rebuilding in order to provide access to the third floor and to upgrade its appearance for guests ascending to the public space over the dining room. Gas was installed throughout the house, the pipes integrated cleverly into decorative architectural details. Bell wires were installed behind the walls which were then resurfaced and refinished, painted or covered with wallpaper.\(^{37}\)

The crown jewel of the 1858 renovation was the addition of an entirely new wing of the house built specifically as a dedicated art gallery for the Aikens’ collection. Much of the contents of the gallery were acquired during their Grand Tour of 1857-1858, when they shopped for paintings and sculpture while the space was being constructed. The gallery wing was situated adjacent to the west end of the north elevation of the house, just off the main entrance hall. The one story gallery space was built over a cistern incorporated into a ground level cellar. The room was an elongated octagonal space incorporated into a rectangular structure. The gallery was approached through a vestibule that separated the wing from the main house. This vestibule could also be entered from

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\(^{37}\) Ibid, A5-6; Ibid, 12.
the back lot through a door just off the steps at the rear of the house. East and west walls of the gallery were fitted with two windows each to provide light, supplemented by a cupola in the ceiling surrounded by glass panels, which has been referred to as a skylight. A fireplace was set into the east wall. The corners of the octagon were punctuated with arched niches, one of which, at the southeast corner of the room, contained the entry door.

Construction and furnishing of the gallery represented the final stitch in an ambitious tapestry that wove William and Harriet Aiken into the “genteel clique” of which they so fervently wished to be a part. Art collecting, well established in Charleston as “one of the most powerful conveyors of cultural refinement” had long been part of Aiken’s curriculum vitae, informing and directing his repeated trips to Europe. With the addition of a dedicated art gallery, the Aikens’ house—and their social profile—rose to new heights among the elite of Charleston.

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Chapter 2

History of the Aiken and Lowndes Families

William Aiken Jr. was a first generation American—and Charlestonian—the son of William Aiken, Sr., an immigrant from County Antrim, Ireland. Aiken, Sr. was eight years old when his family settled in South Carolina in 1787. He worked as a cotton merchant, taking advantage of the great opportunities that early nineteenth century Charleston presented to an energetic, ambitious, forward looking man.39 The Lowcountry to which Aiken Sr. emigrated was a thriving community, engaged in both agriculture and commerce that had produced an economic boom in the eighteenth century, driven in part by the work of men like William Aiken, Sr., who were able to quickly become very wealthy. In the eighteenth century, Charleston enjoyed both prestige among American cities and great wealth. The city was a “center of the British empire because she was a crossroads of trade.”40 By the late 1700’s, it was the fourth largest city in the country and the Lowcountry was the nation’s richest region. It has been estimated that the total “wealth per free capita” of the area was more than ten times that of New England, and about nine times that of the Middle States.41 Success derived from a diversified economy, incorporating the lucrative products of agriculture and mercantile activity, fueled by an influx of immigrants whose arrival tripled the population of the city between 1765 and 1790.42 Historian George C. Rogers describes the fluid situation in Charleston at that time

40 George C. Rogers, Jr., Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 3.
41 Peter A. Coclanis, Shadow of a Dream (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 125, 128.
as an “open city” in which commerce served the cause of patriotism, the metropolis itself, as well as those who engaged in it. It was in this milieu that William Aiken, Sr. made his fortune and established his position in the community.43 By the time his son came of age, Charleston had changed to become a “closed” society in which the city aimed to epitomize “an idea, a Southern way of life.”44 As Maurie McInnis describes the situation, “Despite an eighteenth century reality in which the city’s wealth was built on a diversified economy and local merchants were both extremely wealthy and socially prominent, by the nineteenth century, status was most closely linked with landed wealth. Thus mercantile pursuits fell out of favor, and the leisured and cultured life of the planter was the desideratum.”45 Socio-politically ambitious men would have to change their priorities to reflect this new sensibility.

William Aiken Sr.’s work as a cotton merchant not only proved lucrative, but also provided him with the collateral and courage to support the use of newly-emerging technology to improve the business in which he was engaged. Aiken’s observation of the need to improve transportation of cotton—and other goods—from inland and upstate areas of South Carolina to Charleston motivated him to help found and serve as first president of the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company. This increased his already substantial net worth. In the early nineteenth century, there was no easy way to get cotton produced by upcountry South Carolina farms to Charleston. The circuitous route of the cotton was overland by wagon to Augusta, Georgia, down the Savannah River to Savannah, thence carted to Charleston for coastal shipping. This process was not only

43 George C. Rogers, Jr. Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys, 26-54.
44 Ibid, 141-166, quote from 155.
slow but expensive. It was however known, whereas a railroad was new and untried. William Aiken, Sr., along with other entrepreneurial Charlestonians, decided to take the risk, investing their time and treasure in making the railroad a reality. In 1827, the South Carolina Canal & Railroad Company was chartered with the intention of laying track and running a railroad from upcountry to Charleston, with stops at Columbia, Camden, and Hamburg. Under Aiken’s leadership as President, the project began and by 1833, was running trains along 136 miles of track between Hamburg and Charleston. This all-steam railroad, pulled by an American-made locomotive, was unique and was also, at that time, the longest railroad in the world. It benefitted the community as an invaluable aid to commerce as well as a means of moving the state’s mail.⁴⁶

As he was cementing his position as wealthy innovator, raising his net worth and his social profile, the ambitious Aiken Sr. was also serving his community. Aiken engaged in a variety of civic minded activities, especially those focused on improving living conditions in the city. His work to beautify the City of Charleston was specifically praised in an article in the Southern Patriot in 1823 about his efforts to improve a section of Market Street, “part of which by his enterprise and wealth has been converted from a loathsome marsh into a handsome street.”⁴⁷ That same year, William Aiken Sr. ran for political office, seeking to serve in the legislature for the St. Philip’s/St. Michael’s

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⁴⁷ Southern Patriot 17 June 1823 (clipping in family Bible from HCF Archives).
district. He won the position and remained in public office for the remainder of his life which ended just eight years later.\footnote{Obituary of William Aiken, Sr. Charleston Courier 7 March 1831 and Southern Patriot 17 June 1823 (clipping in family Bible from HCF Archives).}

William Aiken, Jr. was born on in Charleston January 28, 1806, the only surviving child of William Sr. and his wife, Henrietta Wyatt Aiken, formerly of Prince William County, Virginia.\footnote{Yates Snowden and Harry Gardner Cutler, History of South Carolina, Vol.III (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), 198.} Educated in private schools, William Aiken, Jr. then attended South Carolina College, graduating in 1825. At that time the college, which was to become the University of South Carolina, was an innovative institution, boasting a Federal style campus with the first free-standing library in the country, containing more books than the libraries at Princeton and Columbia Universities. The design of this library was reputed to have been influenced by Charleston-born, Robert Mills, thought to be America’s first native born professional architect.\footnote{“Buildings as History,” University of South Carolina website. http://www.sc.edu/uscmap/bldg/buildings_history.html (accessed February 2, 2011).} At the time Aiken attended, South Carolina College provided an education aimed at aristocratic young men: broad, classical and elite.\footnote{John Morrill Bryan, An Architectural History of the South Carolina College, 1801-1855 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 3-58.}

After graduation, Aiken embarked on an extended Grand Tour, during which he followed the route favored by English nobility in search of the enhanced classical education required by their privileged position. This trip, William Jr.’s second to Europe (the first being one he took in 1820) was intended to complete the classical education undertaken at South Carolina College and to expose the young man to refined manners that characterized a proper, aristocratic gentleman. Indeed, “gentleman” is how Aiken
described his occupation on the ship’s log for the return voyage from Europe. Traveling from Liverpool to New York in July 1829, Aiken Jr. made his way back to Charleston, returning to receive a gift of land on Jehossee Island in Colleton County from his father.\(^{52}\)

Aiken encouraged his now genteelly educated son to pursue the planter’s life so as to conform to the antebellum idea of an “ideal aristocrat.” George Rogers attributes the change in outlook of Charlestonians to the decline of the city as the center of world commerce, and to specific events of the early nineteenth century, especially the panic of 1819, the Missouri Compromise debates of 1820 and the Denmark Vesey uprising of 1822. As a result, the city was “jolted…and changed ultimately her way of life—from a city that looked outward to one that henceforth looked inward.”\(^{53}\) In the increasingly “inward looking” and socially closed society of antebellum Charleston there emerged “an ideal of an individual who was classically and liberally educated and who was supported economically by agricultural or intellectual pursuits.”\(^{54}\) William Aiken, Sr. guided his son to engage in all the proper activities for an ambitious young man seeking excellence and to cement his position at the top of Lowcountry society in the milieu of his own time and place. Recognizing what historian Rosser Taylor termed the antebellum period’s “four pillars of the social order in South Carolina…ancestors, possessions, occupations and education,” Aiken groomed his son for success, creating the paradigm and providing the

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\(^{53}\) George C. Rogers, Jr. Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys, 138.

\(^{54}\) Maurie D. McInnis, The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston, 10.
resources William Jr. would use to make his way to the highest echelons of the Charleston social set.  

The legacy Aiken left his son was one of industry, civic duty and service, as well as great wealth. Recognizing the changing nature of Charleston society, however, Aiken Sr. directed his son away from the pursuits that had established him in Charleston and made him a wealthy man. Rather than encouraging William Jr. to succeed him in business and take responsibility for the railroad, Aiken Sr. pushed his son in a different direction by giving him a gift of undeveloped land on Jehossee Island in 1830. This land, described as “an almost valueless savannah,” comprised 3,500 acres in Colleton County. Aiken Jr. responded to his father’s gift of the land and challenge to develop it, displaying what would be a lifelong ambition to be the best at whatever he undertook. In just over a decade, Aiken had improved Jehossee to the point that it incorporated more than a thousand acres of productive rice fields “among the best cultivated in South Carolina.” Beginning with land that was tidewater marsh and timber swamp, Aiken reclaimed it at great expense of money and man hours, removing cypress and gum trees, along with their roots, and digging wide canals for flooding and draining the fields. When the plantation was fully operational, it had more than 1,500 acres of prime rice land under cultivation, making it twice as large as its nearest competitor, Hopeton Plantation in Glynn County, Georgia. Among the improvements Aiken made were: the canals, building a causeway connecting the plantation to Edisto Island, installing steam-  

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56 Colleton County RMC, Deed Book 1,19.
powered threshing and pounding mills to prepare the crops for market on site, and an overall plan for the operation that was widely praised for its efficiency. The 1850 Slave Schedules listed Jehossee as employing 878 slaves; the property itself was valued at $300,000 in the 1860 Federal Census.  

Operation of the plantation required the work of a large number of slaves, whose needs were apparently well provided for by Aiken who was lauded for the solicitous treatment he afforded them. Jehossee Plantation featured medical and school facilities for the resident slaves, as well as time and means for religious instruction. The way in which Aiken managed and cared for his slaves was praised and held up as an ideal that “merits the commendation of every lover of humanity… and would prove highly profitable to many of our own planters”59 His reputation was to have been “singularly thoughtful in his treatment of his slaves, taking pains to give them comforts beyond the line of what was strictly necessary or was usual.”60 Aiken’s treatment of his slaves received ultimate praise from Solon Robinson, noted journalist for the New York publication American Agriculturalist, who wrote: “I believe that he is more concerned to make his people comfortable and happy, than he is to make money.”61 In a retrospective interview with former slave, Robert Smalls in 1883, Smalls commented: “The only person down here

60 Obituary of William Aiken, Charleston News & Courier, September 8, 1887.
who treated his people well was Governor Aiken. He gave them everything they wanted.  

William Aiken Sr. left his son well situated for success from the standpoint of three of Professor Taylor’s four pillars; the fourth—ancestors—would require that the first three be put to use effectuating an advantageous marriage. This William, Jr. accomplished just one month before his father died with his marriage to Harriet Lowndes, whose ancestors had been early and influential immigrants to Charleston, actively engaged during colonial times, the Revolutionary War and succeeding decades. To be judged as having prominent ancestors, by Charleston standards during the antebellum period, required a familial connection to one of three groups: the seventeenth century English who founded Charleston and were beneficiaries of the original land grants; French seventeenth century Huguenots whose rice and indigo plantations were acquired with the proceeds of early success as planters or traders; and later immigrants who not only achieved financial success but also distinguished themselves during the Revolutionary War.  

William Aiken, by his marriage to Harriet Lowndes, connected himself not only to a family with its own ancient pedigree, but also ties by successive marriages to many of the other families whose names appear in the founding history of the Lowcountry. By the time William Aiken Sr. arrived in North America, the Lowndes family had been established in the Lowcountry for half a century, having brought with them an ancient and impeccable pedigree from their native England which facilitated the

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prominence they enjoyed in South Carolina. The Lowndes family traced its origins not only to the earliest days of colonial Charleston, but to its illustrious roots in England, originating with the Norman Invasion. The common ancestor of all Lowndes on both continents was William Seigneur de Lounde, a cohort of William the Conqueror during the invasion of Britain in 1066. The reward for his services included large land grants in Buckinghamshire, North Hamptonshire, Lincolnshire and Bedfordshire. Middlewich, Sanbach and areas of Cheshire were also home to large Lowndes estates, including Bostock House and Hassall Hall, as well as Overton Hall located east of Bostock on land now belonging to the University of Cambridge. The various branches of the Lowndes family prided themselves on their education, patriotism, service and spirituality, choosing as their motto, “Be just and fear not.”

The progenitor of South Carolina Lowndes came from the Middlewich branch of the family and was descended from John Lowndes, baptized at Bostock House in 1625. John Lowndes’ ninth child with wife, Jane Welde, was Charles, baptized at Middlewich in 1658, noted in the parish register as the “son of John Lownes.” Charles Lowndes and his wife, Sarah, had one son, Charles, known as “the younger.” This Charles Lowndes emigrated from Britain to the island of St. Christopher (now known as St. Kitts) in the Leeward Islands of the Caribbean where he married Ruth Rawlins, daughter of a wealthy planter. Resigning his position as Council Representative of St. Peter’s Parish in the town of Basseterre, Charles and Ruth Rawlins left the Caribbean for Charleston. They arrived in 1730 with their belongings, slaves, and three sons, William, Charles and Rawlins.

64 Emily Emerson Lantz, “The Lowndes Family-Distinguished Statesmen in England and America-Early Colonists to Southern Provinces”, Baltimore Sun, September 15, 1907.
After Charles Lowndes’ death, his widow and son, William, returned to St. Kitts but Charles and Rawlins remained in Charleston. Rawlins Lowndes was an attorney and served as Provost-Marshall for South Carolina from 1742-1752, and thereafter as a member of the legislature, Speaker of the House, Justice of the Quorum, and was appointed Associate Judge by the Crown in 1766. During the provincial congress of 1775, held in defiance of royal authority, Rawlins Lowndes was selected as a member of the Committee of Safety. When South Carolina declared its independence from the Crown, Lowndes was one of a group of eleven tapped to plan for a new, independent government, and subsequently elected member of the legislative council. On May 13, 1776, Lowndes was the first American jurist to issue an opinion on the Stamp Act. He pronounced it against the common rights and refused to endorse it. In 1778, Rawlins Lowndes assumed the presidency of South Carolina, serving subsequently as Senator for Charleston from 1782-1787. An anti-Federalist, Rawlins Lowndes, along with Aedanus Burke, was a leader of the opposition to ratification of the Constitution.  

Rawlins Lowndes was married three times, having many children with two of the three wives, though few of the children survived to adulthood. Thomas Lowndes, son of Rawlins and Mary Cartwright Lowndes, future lawyer, politician, Federalist member of the South Carolina House of Representatives and father of Harriet Lowndes Aiken, was born January 22, 1766 in Charleston. When Rawlins Lowndes died in 1800, his  


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surviving children inherited his considerable property holdings in estates on the Ashley, Combahee and Santee Rivers. Among those surviving children were Thomas and his half brother, William, sole surviving child of Rawlins Lowndes and his third wife, Sarah Jones. William Lowndes, born on Horseshoe Plantation in Colleton County on February 11, 1782 would also have a distinguished career in politics. This career was cut short, however, by his untimely death at sea in 1822 when he was the nominee from South Carolina for President of the United States, having been abruptly chosen over John C. Calhoun, the presumed nominee. Thomas Lowndes married Sarah Bond I’On, daughter of Jacob Bond I’On and Mary Ashby, with whom he had eleven children, the ninth of whom was Harriet, born January 18, 1812. Thomas Lowndes’ impressive portfolio of land included five plantations in the Lowcountry, a grand house on Broad Street in Charleston, and a house in Flat Rock, North Carolina. His political career was likewise impressive. Thomas Lowndes served in the South Carolina legislature and two terms in the United States House of Representatives, commencing in 1801. In the Lowndes family tree there appear many of Charleston’s most familiar names, including Huger, I’On, Poinsett, Pringle, Kinloch, Middleton, deSaussure, Pinckney, Horry, Rutledge, and Ravenel. The February 3, 1831 marriage between Harriet Lowndes, whose Charleston provenance was extraordinary, and William Aiken, one of the Lowcountry’s wealthiest citizens, served the ambitions of both very well.

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69 Aiken Family Bible, Historic Charleston Foundation Archive, Aiken-Rhett Collection, Box 1.
Having cemented his ties to Charleston’s elite by his wealth, education, occupation and pedigree, William Aiken turned his attention to establishing himself as a leader in civic and social affairs. After William Aiken, Sr.’s death, William Jr. and Harriet inherited the house on Elizabeth Street which, after its extensive renovation and redecoration, became the centerpiece of their social involvement and a base from which he conducted his political career. Elected to the South Carolina State House of Representatives in 1838, William Aiken served until 1842, subsequently serving in the State Senate until 1844. In that year, Aiken was elected Governor of South Carolina.

Combining politics with social functions was typical of Charleston’s elite, and William Aiken was known for doing this in the most lavish and impressive way. When he was elected Governor, Aiken arranged a party to celebrate at the Governor’s mansion; a fête that was noted by an observer as “a magnificent Democratic party,” at which the thousand guests consumed 1,800 bottles of champagne, as well as wine and brandy. On another occasion—this time at their house in Charleston—Aiken threw a lavish party described by a visitor from Europe, Fredrika Bremer: “I have, besides, been to a great entertainment given by the Governor of South Carolina, Mr. Akin [sic] and his lovely wife. There was very beautiful music; and for the rest conversation in the room, or out under the piazzas, in the shade of blossoming creepers, the clematis, the caprifolium, and roses, quite romantic in the soft night air. Five hundred persons, it is said, were invited, and the entertainment was one of the most beautiful I have been present at in this

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70 “Carolinians of Old Held Their Liquor.” Historic Charleston Foundation Archive, Aiken-Rhett Collection, Box 1.
The Aikens would have been particularly pleased with such praise from a visitor from the Continent, to which they looked for inspiration and validation of their gentility and sophistication—and to which they traveled again after Aiken’s term as Governor was complete.

Taking a break from political service, William Aiken arranged a trip to Europe, leaving Charleston in May 1847, accompanied by Mrs. Aiken and daughter, Henrietta, then just eleven years old. Prior to the journey, Aiken corresponded with John C. Calhoun, requesting letters of introduction to Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Richard Cobden in London, as well as Marshall Nicolas Soult, Monsieur F.P.G. Guizot and Louis A. Thiers in Paris, also requesting Calhoun’s input on others. Sir Robert Peel was a former Prime Minister of Great Britain, having also served as Home Secretary. Richard Cobden, interestingly enough, was Peel’s political opponent, associated with radical movements in Britain at that time. Nicolas Jean-de-Dieu Soult had been one of Napoleon’s Marshalls, elevated years after his service in 1847, to the rarefied title of maréchal-général. Soult had served as Prime Minister of France, as had Louis Adolphe Thiers and Francois Guizot. The choice of individuals to whom Aiken wished to be introduced indicates that the trip was not, in fact, a complete break from his professional endeavors and was undertaken for purposes related to business and politics as well as social ones. The Aiken

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family remained in Europe until October 1848 when they returned to Charleston by way of New York.\(^{75}\)

Returning to the United States, William Aiken was elected as a Democrat to the thirty-second, thirty-third and thirty-fourth United States Congresses, commencing in 1851 (fig. 11). During his last term as member of Congress in 1855, Aiken ran unsuccessfully for the position of Speaker of the House of Representatives. At the start of the thirty-fourth Congress in 1855, the assembled body was in turmoil following the previous year’s Kansas-Nebraska Act, and found themselves at odds with one another on the issue of slavery. The disunity interfered with House business, even in typically simple organizational duties routinely carried out by the group. In this session of Congress, no party held a majority of seats; 100 seats were held by Opposition Party members, 83 by Democrats and 51 by American Party members. When the Clerk of the House initiated the voting process for Speaker of the House on the opening day of the session, no one among the twenty-one candidates for the position received enough votes to be chosen. Two months later, after 133 ballots, Nathaniel Banks of Massachusetts defeated William Aiken and all the other remaining candidates to become Speaker of the House of Representatives.\(^{76}\) The disunity among members of the Congress continued and intensified during this session, over the issues of states’ rights and slavery. Aiken, while a Democrat “in principle and practice,” remained opposed to nullification and secession.\(^{77}\)


\(^{77}\) Obituary of William Aiken, Charleston News and Courier, September 8, 1887.
In this, he was like many wealthy Charlestonians of the planter class who, while committed to their lifestyle, including its stratified class structure and employment of slaves, still believed in trying to work within the Union. But as powerful as they were as lords of the social order, their authority did not prevail. “Their rhetoric—a defense of slavery, a belief in a hierarchical society—was hijacked by younger, radical politicians—men such as Robert Barnwell Rhett, who were not themselves fully members of the city’s aristocracy—to service a call for disunion…. At the end, when it mattered most [they] lost control of the machinery they had set in motion.”  

William Aiken, like his elite Charleston friends, believed that secession would undermine the society they had built, ultimately ruining it; he did not believe there was any hope that seceding states would be able to establish their independence. Once secession became a fait accompli, however, he supported the cause unstintingly: “he was a South Carolinian first and foremost, and was ready always to risk his large fortune in the common cause, if the State should decide to do so.”

While in Washington, Aiken continued to serve as a gracious host as he had in Columbia and Charleston. Known for being affable and charming, the hospitality which he “dispensed with lavish and judicious hands,” made his home a “social centre” that was enjoyed by “leading men of his party and other parties.” Aiken’s wealth, which had increased as a result of ongoing investments in Charleston and other places, enabled him to provide social situations effectuating camaraderie that did not exist in the political realm. It was at this time that Aiken began his close friendship with Hamilton Fish,

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79 Obituary of William Aiken, *Charleston News and Courier*, September 8, 1887.
80 Ibid.
likewise a former Governor, art lover and *bon vivant*, who served as Whig-turned-
Republican Senator from New York from 1851 to 1857. A moderate on the issue of
slavery, Fish took fire from the extreme factions on both sides of the aisle, as Aiken
likely did as well.

At the close of the turbulent thirty-fourth session of Congress, William Aiken
retired from politics and took his wife and daughter, Henrietta, on an extended Grand
Tour of Europe. For William and Harriet Aiken, both New York and the European
continent were familiar places; places to which they had many connections. One of those
many connections was to Hamilton Fish and his family, who likewise sailed to Europe
after the close of the stormy thirty-fourth Congress and remained there until 1860 when
he returned to the United States to campaign for Abraham Lincoln.

During the Civil War, Aiken, in spite of his misgivings about the viability of the
cause, supported the Confederacy, giving “large assistance to whosoever were in need”
but keeping a low profile, choosing to step back from public displays. It was surprising to
some, therefore, that when Union forces occupied the city of Charleston, they arrested
William Aiken, taking him “prisoner, under extremely painful circumstances, and sent
[him] to Washington under guard.” He did not remain in custody long, however. Most
likely because of his influential friends in the city, Aiken was “promptly” released and
permitted to leave Washington, returning to private life in Charleston.81

81 Obituary of William Aiken.
After the war, Aiken attempted to re-enter politics, having been chosen to serve as a Member of the thirty-ninth Congress, but he “was not permitted to qualify.”\textsuperscript{82} His prior political connections, along with his reputation as a thoughtful, evenhanded man committed to the common good, however, made it possible for him to continue his service to his state and his country. In 1867 philanthropist George Peabody, scion of a prominent Massachusetts family, offered a million dollars to establish a fund to encourage and underwrite education in the South, assuring that benefits of his largesse “be distributed among the entire population, without other distinction than their needs and the opportunities of usefulness to them.” A group was assembled to administer the fund, with Robert C. Winthrop, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senator from Massachusetts, appointed Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the group. Named as its agent was Barnas Sears, a Baptist minister who had served as President of Brown University during the Civil War and, subsequently, as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education.\textsuperscript{83} Among the members of the founding Board of Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund were Hamilton Fish of New York, who served as Vice Chairman of the group, and William Aiken of South Carolina, along with John A. Clifford, former Governor of Massachusetts, Episcopal Bishop Charles P. McIlvaine of Ohio, Samuel Wetmore, Esq. of New York, Charles Macalester of Pennsylvania, and representatives of the U.S. military, Major-General Ulysses S. Grant and Admiral David


G. Farragut (fig. 12). Serving as a member of the Board of Directors of the Peabody Fund was William Aiken’s last public position; one he held until his death twenty years after the Fund’s inception. During these two decades, however, he quietly continued his service to Charleston and his community, providing support, both spiritual and financial, albeit with a fortune diminished by the events of the War. Attempts to reorganize his plantation failed, and Aiken lamented the loss of livelihood as well as the lifestyle of the antebellum years. In a letter to his friend and fellow art collector, William Corcoran of Washington D.C., Aiken wrote:

I am now so bound down here, trying to nurse what remains of my property, that I cannot command my time… I think the South is ruined…. What a terrible change from plenty and happiness to poverty and ruin, and the question naturally occurs to my mind—who has benefited by it—certainly not the white or black man of the South, it is the first step taken towards the destruction of this once great and glorious republic.\(^\text{85}\)

The society in which Aiken had risen to be so prominent was gone, his ambitions betrayed.

After his death in 1887, members of this distinguished group honored William Aiken with a tribute in which they wrote of him:

The results of the Civil War, in which he had taken no active part, fell heavily upon him, depriving him of a large part of a great fortune, and leaving him with but a small fraction for the support of those dearest to him. But he bore his pecuniary reverses, and not a few most trying personal injustices, with cheerful resignation, and was ready to unite at once in any measures for the pacification, conciliation, and welfare of the Southern people, and for the restoration of peace, harmony and union to our country….\(^\text{86}\)


\(^{85}\) William Aiken to William Corcoran, Corcoran Papers, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

\(^{86}\) “Tribute to William Aiken, Ex-Governor of South Carolina, at the Annual Meeting of the Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund,” New York, 5 October, 1887 (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, University Press, 1887).
Of William Aiken his friend, Hamilton Fish, wrote:

Tender and warm in his affections, kind and genial in his intercourse, scrupulous in truthfulness and integrity, free from vanity or pretension, generous in his judgments as in his life, he was beloved...because the happiness of others was with him an object of life, and formed a large part of his own happiness.... Called to many high positions in public life, he fulfilled all their trusts with dignity, integrity, and ability; and when the disasters of a civil war surrounded him, its attendants—adversity, misfortune, and loss of property—diminished neither his calm cheerfulness, his hospitality, nor his warmth of heart.  

William Aiken’s ambitions elevated him to the top of antebellum Charleston society in this time when gentility, social engagement, a classical education, a commitment to civic duty and an interest in the arts characterized the ideal aristocrat. Aiken aimed to be the best, and he was. One of the wealthiest of Charleston’s elite, Aiken also had the largest and most productive rice plantation, a stellar political career, a reputation for giving the grandest and most lavish parties. Beyond merely being a collector of art, he had a private gallery in which to display his treasures. According to Maurie McInnis, “Education and travel provided Charleston’s upper class the link to European aristocracy and the intellectual framework that made antebellum Charleston a unique place in the realm of American material culture.” With all due respect I disagree, in the sense that a very similar sensibility directed the lives of wealthy and ambitious individuals in other parts of the United States, notably in New York. The aim of New Yorkers was not to fashion themselves after Europeans so much as to prove to their Continental counterparts that Americans could be educated and genteel, with

87 Note from Hamilton Fish read into the record of “Tribute to William Aiken, Ex-Governor of South Carolina, at the Annual Meeting of the Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund,” New York, 5 October, 1887. (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, University Press, 1887).
sophistication and taste of their own. But their pursuit of gentility proceeded as deliberately as did that of socially ambitious Charlestonians. Antebellum New Yorkers whose goal was to epitomize an ideal gentleman followed a path quite similar to the one taken by William Aiken: using wealth to engage gentility, civic involvement, philanthropy and cultural enrichment. During these decades, art collecting was a means for a successful individual in the North, as well as the South, to ascend the social ladder. A private gallery, emblematic of one’s commitment to art, educated taste—as well as one’s means to indulge it—served the highest ambitions of those aiming for the top rung. Wealthy New Yorkers with lofty social aspirations ordered their lives—and built private art galleries onto their homes--during the middle decades of the nineteenth century just as William Aiken did; and for many of the same reasons.
The middle decades of the nineteenth century were a time unique in many ways in America; a time of transition between ages, of calm before the coming storm of division and war, but also a time in the nation’s major cities, of great industry, change and achievement. America, still a young country, during the period from 1830 to 1860, was increasingly wealthy and engaged in commerce, yet the nation could not compete with Europe in the arenas of education and cultural activity. The nature of wealth and prestige was evolving, as mere pedigree and land ownership ceased to be criteria sufficient for attaining the highest level of acceptance in society. Powerful men of the mid-nineteenth century, some of them emerging from the middle or merchant class, vigorously pursued money, power, and influence in the premier cities of the United States, which included Charleston, as well as the leading cities of the Northeast. Their ambition led them to pursue high culture with the same vigor they invested in commerce, business and politics. Successful individuals, like the American cities in which they lived and worked, had ambitions to be viewed as genteel and sophisticated; they sought to prove to their communities—and to themselves—that they did great things with the wealth they generated.

It was during this time that New York was beginning to overtake Boston and Philadelphia as a center of culture, art and architecture; transforming itself from a heavily populated, affluent center of commerce, to a sophisticated cultural mecca. About New York City, Dell Upton, well known for his observations on material culture, writes: “All
agreed that quantity—mere size and wealth—was not enough. Some elusive qualities of character and accomplishment were also necessary. This notion was internalized by the city’s movers and shakers, individuals whose ambitions went beyond amassing personal fortunes and wielding power in the socio-political arena. As a means of achieving dominance in their social set ambitious men, having become rich from their business ventures, sought to match the cultural sophistication of their European counterparts, to whom they were exposed on Grand Tours or other visits to the Continent. Viewed from the vantage point of the early twentieth century, it was noted that “a successful American who wished to show that he knew what to do with his good fortune…was really forced to have a ‘gallery.’ The Aspinwall gallery, the Belmont gallery…the John Taylor Johnston gallery…and the rest, were the glories of New York, the things upon which New Yorkers relied against the scoff of the foreigner that there was nothing to see in New York. In mid-nineteenth century New York, as Michael Gross phrases it, “the American art collector was born.” Self-made men such as Luman Reed, William H. Aspinwall, August Belmont, and John Taylor Johnston, began validating themselves by using their wealth to construct private galleries to house the significant art collections they acquired; looking to Europe not only as a source for the works of art but also as a “source for high culture.”

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92 Ibid.
EARLY GALLERIES

One of the earliest New Yorkers to seek entrée into high society by collecting art was atypical but instructive as a precursor to the others: Eliza Jumel, formerly Betsy Bowen. Bowen, it is alleged, had been a prostitute in Rhode Island, subsequently becoming mistress to Stephen Jumel, a French coffee planter who fled Santo Domingo during the slave uprising led by Toussaint L’Overture. The couple lived in Manhattan where, despite their wealth, they were shunned by established New York society.93 Legend has it that Bowen feigned mortal illness to persuade Jumel to marry her, which he did, but to no avail in their pursuit of acceptance.94 In 1810, the couple moved to a more luxurious residence, the Robert Morris House, which sat on substantial acreage in Harlem. Despite now being a respectable married couple and living on a fashionable estate, social acceptance in New York presumably still eluded the Jumels who relocated to Paris in 1815. Madame Jumel began acquiring paintings at a rate her husband found alarming; apparently even his wealth was not enough to cover the cost of close to one hundred “Old Master” works she purchased. Perhaps because she still sought legitimacy in New York or, as some suggest, because her husband was desperate to stop her spending spree, Eliza Jumel returned to Manhattan in 1816 with her large collection of paintings. The Morris-Jumel Mansion became home to the largest private art collection in New York up to that time. Among the canvases were works by Van Dyck, Rubens, Murillo, Tintoretto, Massys, and Parmigianino, although it has been alleged subsequently that many of these were copies. Hoping that her commitment to fine art would reflect on

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her an aura of cultured elegance, Madame Jumel lent her entire collection to the
American Academy of Fine Arts in 1817 for exhibition. “But her conniving reputation
was well known, and even an extraordinary exhibition could not open old Knickerbocker
doors to her.”

Four years later, she began selling off her collection, which now included 242
items, according to the catalogue prepared by Claude G. Fontaine, April 24, 1821. Called
Catalogue of Original Paintings From Italian, Dutch, Flemish and French Masters of the
Ancient and Modern Times Selected by the Best Judges from Eminent Galleries in
Europe and Intended for a Private Gallery in America, the volume was rife with
typographical errors and misspellings of artists’ names, such as “Pietro di Cortone” and
“Cannoletty”, highlighting the lack of sophistication, knowledge and education of its
progenitors. Items not sold at the auction were installed in the mansion, many of them
in a grand hallway. This gallery space was portrayed by Abraham Hosier in a circa
1830’s watercolor (fig. 13). In 1862, a visitor to the house, Miss Ann Parker, spoke of the
gallery: “The walls were hung with rare paintings—one especially a full length of
General Washington which was my admiration…she was very magnificent and amiable
in her manners and conversation and called our attention to the superb paintings on the
walls, where they were bought, etc.” Madame Jumel’s gallery was not so much a

95 Ella M. Foshay, Mr. Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art, 13.
96 Michel Benisovich, “Sales of French Collections of Paintings in the United States during the First Half of the
Nineteenth Century”, Art Quarterly 19 (Autumn 1956), 288; and John K. Howat, “Private Collectors and Public Spirit:
A Selective View” in Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds. Art in the Empire City. (New York:
Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 83.
97 Miss Ann Parker, “Diary”, typed transcript, Jumel Papers, box 1, folder 14, Manuscript Collection, New York
Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds. Art in the Empire City. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000),
83-84.
collection as the tangible culmination of a spending spree, a single minded means to an end for its ambitious owner.

At the other end of the spectrum in these early days of New York art collectors with private galleries was Luman Reed, for whom art collecting was a personal passion and whose private gallery reflected his patronage of American artists. Reed was born in 1785 in Columbia County, New York and lived his early life on a farm. Formally educated only through “ordinary school,” Reed was a self-taught entrepreneur who built a fortune from a dry goods and freighting business in Coxsackie, New York. His business took him frequently to New York City where he then opened a store in 1815. By 1830 he was among New York’s wealthiest 500 citizens and turned to art collecting as a means of furthering his education and establishing his reputation in New York society.98

Reed’s wealth enabled him to commission a house in 1831. The site of the house was on the east side of Greenwich Street, number 13, between Battery Place and Morris Street. The neighborhood was upscale, featuring grand Federal style row houses built in the 1820’s on the west side of Greenwich Street, which was known as “Millionaire’s Row” (fig. 14). Adjoining Reed’s property was a public space known as the Atlantic Garden, an “outdoor resort”, offering musical entertainment and ice cream during the summer. The draft book of Alexander Jackson Davis includes a one inch sketch of the building’s front façade captioned “house for Luman Reed” though the notation that Davis was paid only five dollars suggests that his design involvement was limited to the basic

98 Ella M. Foshay, Mr. Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art, 24-31.
exterior drawings, not details or interior plans (fig. 15). According to Davis’ notes, the builder was Isaac Green Pearson.

The house appears to have been a three story townhouse with a cupola, set over a raised lower level, four bays wide, with the door set to the right of center. Measuring thirty-six feet wide by fifty-six feet deep, the Neoclassical house also had a thirty-seven foot garden in the back and integrated state-of-the-art technology. Asher B. Durand, an artist of whom Reed was a patron, noted that the house was not ostentatious, rather was “of the very best quality and the mechanics employed ‘the best that money could procure.’”

Gas lighting, a heating system and drainpipe plumbing were installed, in keeping with Reed’s commitment to quality and functionality. The original plans for the house did not include a dedicated gallery space but by 1832, the third floor double parlor had been converted “to the purposes of a picture-gallery, as well as this could be done without a skylight in the roof.” The gallery space comprised two mirror-image rooms divided by double doors, each room also incorporating a single door connecting it to the hallway (fig. 16). Lighting for the gallery derived from four large windows, a pair at either end of the double parlor space, supplemented by centrally installed gas chandeliers and gas mantle lamps. Given the constraints of a gallery without a skylight and with large windows which were not ideal for the purpose, Reed consulted with his artists to ensure optimum lighting for his collection of paintings. One of these, Thomas Cole, suggested the use of a pulley system whereby works of art would be “hung on swings in order to be

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99 Asher B. Durand Papers, 1894, 121-22, quoted in Ella M. Foshay, Mr. Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art, 37.
100 Ibid.
brought into good light.”

The understated neo-classically ornamented room was anchored by red patterned carpeting and furnished with twelve mahogany chairs, ottomans, and long mahogany tables for books of engravings.

Having begun collecting works of art around 1830, beginning with acquisition of the “Old Masters” from dealer, Michael Paff, and others, Reed’s collecting expanded to include primarily contemporary American artists. Reed’s progression of collecting is recounted by Mrs. Jonathan Sturges, wife of Reed’s business partner and fellow collector, “Mr. Reed had conceived the idea of a picture gallery in his new house… Mr. Reed’s first essay was with Michael Paff, the principal “old picture” dealer of the period in New York. A few pictures were purchased, but Mr. Reed had too much intuitive good sense to be taken in by such “old pictures” as were on sale at that period of our country’s history, and he soon began to look around among our own artists, sought their personal acquaintance and examined their works and purchased with great good taste and judgment.” Reed’s stable of American artists included Asher B. Durand, Thomas Cole, William Sydney Mount, and George Whiting Flagg, whose work was commissioned by many prominent Charlestonians, including Mr. and Mrs. William Aiken. These artists, along with literary figures whose works inspired contemporaneous art, such as Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper, were frequent visitors to salons held at Reed’s home. Reed never completely abandoned European

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102 Ella M. Foshay, Mr. Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art, 24-31.
103 Ibid, 37.
105 Ella M. Foshay, Mr. Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art, 38.
art; his collection also included paintings by Italian, British, German, Dutch and Flemish artists. From the year 1830 to his death in 1836 Reed acquired at least sixty-five works of art. According to an inventory done after his death, approximately a third of Reed’s collection derived from European artists. Most of these were from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, acquired from dealers in the United States since Reed himself never went abroad. The remaining two-thirds of his collection consisted of contemporary American works acquired directly from the artists with whom he corresponded, advising them of his desire “of getting fine pictures to fill my gallery.”

Reed was reputed to be the first individual in New York to provide public access to his gallery, which he opened once a week. His approach to sharing his collection served as the model for New York collectors of the 1850’s to open their private galleries to the public. After his death in 1836, Reed’s collection was not exhibited publicly until 1844 when his house was sold. At this time a group of his friends acquired his collection which formed the core of the newly created New York Gallery of Fine Arts, the first permanent exhibition space in New York City. The commitment was made to keep Reed’s collection in its entirety intact and in New York. In 1858, the collection was relocated to the New York Historical Society which maintains the Luman Reed Gallery,

107 Reed to Mount, October 29, 1835, Mount Papers, quoted in Ella M. Foshay, *Mr. Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art*, 45.
first renovated in 1990 to simulate the look of the original gallery in Reed’s house (fig. 17).\textsuperscript{110}

By the 1850’s art had become a different sort of currency for the wealthy businessman; a means to further an ambition for which money would not serve. As the city evolved into a center of culture and class, its high achieving residents vied for position and acclaim. New York’s captains of commerce and industry stood, socially, between the merely affluent middle class and the merely pedigreed aristocracy. Art collecting was an emulation of the European elite whose suavity trumped the stodgy elitism of the Old Knickerbocker set. The acquisition of an art gallery proved an invaluable asset to an ambitious man on the rise; a vehicle by which to advance among—or surpass—the stuffy old guard of New York society and a means of contributing to the greater good in a way that enabled philanthropy simultaneously to serve personal goals.

WILLIAM HENRY ASPINWALL: PATRICIAN, COLLECTOR, PHILANTHROPIST

William Henry Aspinwall was an ambitious man whose intelligence and willingness to take risks made him a wealthy man, ever intent upon doing more, breaking new ground and rising higher in his social set (fig. 18). His ambition was served by his innate qualities and also by the fact that his city and his country were in a period of rapid growth and change that afforded a man with foresight and the boldness to invest in his vision of the future to prosper and advance. Wealth and power fueled his rise, enabling his immersion in the world of art, which took him to the pinnacle of New York high society.

Born in New York City on August 16, 1807, William Aspinwall could trace his ancestry back to John Howland who sailed to America on the Mayflower. Aspinwall’s father was a commission merchant, in business with his uncle in a firm called G & J Aspinwall on Pearl Street, engaged in importing and wholesaling dry goods. The venerated “old family” was part of an exclusive social set composed of people tracing their roots to the Dutch from New Amsterdam and to the early colonists of New England. For entrée into this exclusive group, affluence was not a prerequisite; indeed, unseemly love of money or showy flaunting of one’s riches could preclude acceptance: “Wealth alone could not open doors, but its acquisition by unscrupulous means or its ostentatious display could close them.”

Educated at Professor Lewis Bancel’s Boarding College, William Aspinwall was fluent in French and Spanish, which benefitted him in his later life as a businessman and art collector. Married to Anna Lloyd Breck, formerly of

Philadelphia, on October 4, 1830, Aspinwall, along with his cousin, William Edgar Howland, went into the shipping business in the firm of his uncles, G.G. & S. Howland. By 1834, the cousins took over and changed the name of the firm to Howland & Aspinwall. When Aspinwall assumed control of the firm, he expanded trade beyond existing clients in the Caribbean, initiating business to South America, China, Europe, the Mediterranean, and the East and West Indies. After setbacks that included a fire and financial losses from the Panic of 1837, Aspinwall’s business survived but he was motivated to ensure that it continued to thrive by expanding into related businesses that served the growing world market.\textsuperscript{112} The first of his new ventures was into ship design. Recognizing that better built ships would sail faster and more reliably to destinations shipping companies served, Aspinwall commissioned John Willis Griffiths, a naval architect, to design an aerodynamically superior vessel. What Griffiths designed was a ship named \textit{Rainbow}, which has been called the first clipper ship.\textsuperscript{113} These ships greatly increased the speed at which trade could be conducted and, using Rainbow and three other clipper ships, Aspinwall dramatically increased the firm’s revenue deriving from trade with Hong Kong and Canton.\textsuperscript{114}

In 1845, the U.S. Congress sold rights to private companies to carry mail across the oceans. One of the least desirable of these routes was between the Oregon Territory and Panama; this is the one Aspinwall chose, seeing opportunity in the future that made the challenge in the present a good investment. By 1848, Howland & Aspinwall was the agent for the newly incorporated Pacific Mail Steamship Company and commissioned

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 22-23.
three steam ships specifically to serve this route.\textsuperscript{115} Gold was discovered in California that same year and the California Gold Rush made Aspinwall’s new investment pay off handsomely.

William Aspinwall’s ambition went beyond mere profit to an integrated vision of the future. His vision was of a trade link that would enable cargo to be shipped directly from New York to California. Behind the scenes, Aspinwall was working on plans to build a railroad to make this possible, avoiding the sail around Cape Horn. His idea was successfully translated into a “continuous, integrated system of transport from New York to California with a trans-isthmian railroad connecting the two sea legs.”\textsuperscript{116} Thus was born the Panama Railroad Company, now known as the Panama Canal Railway Company, that links the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans across Panama.

By 1856, Aspinwall was a wealthy man and his ambition directed his energy and talents in new directions. As nineteenth century journalist Junius Henri Browne said of New York society, “Wealth is good; but refinement, and culture, and purity, and nobleness are better.”\textsuperscript{117} Resigning from the presidency of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, Aspinwall focused on establishing himself as a man of sophistication and benevolence. Approaching art collecting with the same energetic vision he had applied to his trade, William Aspinwall amassed a large collection of European paintings for which he created a gallery specifically designed to display them. Although his house at the

\textsuperscript{116} Col. Duncan S. Somerville, \textit{The Aspinwall Empire}, 25.
corner of University Place and Tenth Street was demolished in 1903, we can conjure up an image of his gallery with paintings in their designated places from a detailed catalogue of his art, along with a description and images of the gallery itself.

In 1856, William Aspinwall traveled to Europe.\textsuperscript{118} After two years abroad, he returned from Le Havre to New York, departing on August 9, 1858, on the \textit{Arago}, the same ship that carried William and Harriet Aiken back from Europe a few months later.\textsuperscript{119} Little is known about Aspinwall’s itinerary, the people he met or how he went about acquiring the works of art he brought back the United States. His travels and activities, however, may have been similar to those of the Aikens, as documented by Harriet Aiken’s travel diary of their European Grand Tour of 1857 to 1858. What we do know for certain is that while he was in Europe, Aspinwall acquired a large number of paintings to furnish a gallery space that he had commissioned to be built onto his house.

The Aspinwall house at the northeast corner of Tenth Street and University Place was built in 1845, designed by Frederick Diaper, whose work also included several Wall Street banks and the New York Society Library building.\textsuperscript{120} The gallery addition was completed in 1859 by the architect James Renwick, who was also the architect of Grace Church, St. Bartholomew’s Church and St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, as well as


\textsuperscript{120} John K. Howat, “Private Collectors and Public Spirit: A Selective View”, in Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds. \textit{Art in the Empire City}, 105.
the Smithsonian Institution and the original Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C. The plot on which the house was originally constructed was 126 feet along Tenth Street and 96 feet along University Place. The three story brownstone house fit tightly into the plot of land, taking up nearly the entire lot after the one story gallery addition was added on.

Renwick’s addition respected the original architecture of the house, providing access to the gallery space through a “fine arched gateway” on Tenth Street. A *Harper’s Weekly* article about the Aspinwall gallery links it to the contemporaneous gallery of August Belmont and lauds both men—comparing them to leading merchants in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy— noting that “the same mental energy that produces wealth is carried forward to the higher and nobler object—the cultivation of the intellectual in Art...” The value of art and its benefit to society is also noted, pointing out how these men’s contributions improved the cultural profile of the country.

From the description of the gallery, a visual picture emerges; enhanced by two engravings of the space. A catalogue of Aspinwall’s collection, noting the placement of each picture on the walls of the gallery, completes the image. So in spite of the fact that the gallery was demolished along with the house in 1903, such documentation provides, perhaps, more useful information than would the simple existence of the space in modern times. As far as is known, there is no private gallery from this specific time frame that survives and for which there is such detailed information about the building and its

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122 “Old Aspinwall House Gone”, *The New York Sun*, Sunday May 10, 1903.
124 Ibid.
furnishings. The rare insight we gather from the Aspinwall gallery informs our understanding of the others.

Entering the gallery through the arched gateway on Tenth Street, and through a door leading to a marble vestibule, the visitor then proceeded down a corridor that ran behind the two galleries—one designated the “large” gallery, the other the “small. The corridor was thirty-four feet long and nine feet wide, surmounted by a skylight, its walls hung with paintings. Into the north wall of the corridor was built a niche for sculpture, opposite the door leading into the large gallery. The large gallery was thirty-four feet long by twenty-two feet wide, opening also at its west end into the rear drawing room of the original house, and at its east end, into the small gallery via two arched doorways (fig. 19). The walls were embellished with wainscoting of substantial depth, elaborately carved in black walnut, the deep tone of which flattered the dark colored draperies “with which many of the pictures are surrounded” and harmonized with the “warm-toned carpet.” While restrained and subdued, the décor of the room was undeniably impressive: “With no attempt at trumpery show there is still such an effect of richness and good taste displayed at every point that the visitor cannot refrain from complimenting Mr. Aspinwall on the discrimination and judgment which is everywhere exhibited.” This gallery was dedicated to “religious and historical subjects” many of which were “Old Master” paintings. Paintings covered the walls and were also arranged on a pair of stands that flanked the west wall doorway (fig. 20). In the center of the room was an

125 “Mr Aspinwall’s Gallery”, Harper’s Weekly, February 26, 1859.
127 Ibid, 265.
oblond *divan de milieu*, provided so that visitors could sit on all sides and gaze at the works of art.\textsuperscript{128} It has been noted by observers that the gallery also had chairs and ottomans, providing flexible seating capacity in all three gallery areas when needed.\textsuperscript{129}

Lighting for the gallery, both natural and artificial, was carefully considered, consisting of a domed skylight and gas chandeliers.\textsuperscript{130} From the appearance of the skylight, its inspiration may well have been the “Crystal Palace” at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London (fig. 21). Aspinwall’s domed skylight was bisected by solid ceiling in the center to ensure that light fell on the paintings rather than flooding the entire room with light.\textsuperscript{131} As a visitor put it: “In arranging the light of the galleries, it has been the design of the owner and his architect to throw the light on the pictures and leave the spectator in shadow…”\textsuperscript{132} Clever use of screens directed the light, even blocking it out entirely when desired. At night, the gallery was lit entirely by gas chandelier.\textsuperscript{133} As described by the writer of an article in *The American Art Journal*: “The unpleasant glare of the sun is kept out by means of large screens suspended from the ceiling causing a mellow light to fall upon the pictures, which is pleasing to the eye, and does away with the disagreeable dazzle which is to be found in most galleries.”\textsuperscript{134}

Through the pair of arched openings on the east wall of the large gallery, the visitor entered the small gallery. Like its larger counterpart, this salon featured elaborate

\textsuperscript{128} “Mr Aspinwall’s Gallery”, *Harper’s Weekly*, February 26, 1859.
\textsuperscript{130} “Mr Aspinwall’s Gallery”, *Harper’s Weekly*, February 26, 1859.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
wainscoting and had no windows; the only interruption of wall space being the pair of arches. This room, illuminated like the large gallery, by gas and skylight, measured twenty-two feet long by eighteen feet wide. The small gallery was designated for “modern” art and contained about sixty paintings.\footnote{Ibid, 265-266.} The description of the large gallery as having been somber as a result of its old paintings’ age darkened appearance in contrast to the rich, brilliant color of pictures in the small gallery, suggests that the mood in the latter was different.

Art placed in the corridor of Aspinwall’s gallery was an eclectic mix of European and American works. Here hung Gilbert Stuart’s \emph{Portrait of Washington} that had originally been painted for President Madison, as well as a Sassafarato \emph{Virgin}, a seventeenth century oil painting, and Thomas Gainsborough’s eighteenth century \emph{Gipsy Girl}. The sixteen paintings here were joined by Richard Caton Woodville’s marble \emph{Columbus Discovering America}, displayed in the niche.\footnote{“Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures in the Gallery of W.H. Aspinwall, No. 99 Tenth Street,” New York, 1860, 43-46.}

The large gallery was anchored on the east wall by three paintings (fig. 22). Over the arched doorway on the left was Correggio’s \emph{The Marriage of St. Catherine}. Above the arched doorway on the right was Guido’s \emph{The Holy Family}, acquired from the collection of the Count de Bruhl, Prime Minister of the King of Poland. Between the arched doorways was a life-size picture of the Virgin Mary surrounded by cherubs, a renowned painting by Murillo called \emph{The Immaculate Conception}, which had formerly been in the gallery of the King of Holland.
On the south wall of the large gallery were twenty paintings of varying sizes (fig. 23). Among these were, in the center of the top row, *Esther Touching the Sceptre of Ahasuerus* by Ferdinand Bol who was a student of Rembrandt; on the far left side of the top row, Paul Veronese’s *A Musical Party*, from the gallery of the Marquis Besogna in Naples; on the extreme right side of the top row, *The Erythroean Sybil* by Giovanni Guercino, from the Mecarini Palace at Pisa where it was reputedly a tourist attraction “cited in the guidebooks;” and second from the left in the bottom row, Titian’s *Herodias With the Head of John the Baptist* from the gallery of the Duc di Montalbo, Palermo.

The west wall of the large gallery featured two large paintings on either side of the door to the drawing room, as well as four smaller pictures arranged above (fig. 24). Flanking the doorway were full-length portraits of *The Marquis Langamey* by Van Dyck, purchased from the Marquis Durazzo of Genoa, and *A Knight of Malta* by Velasquez.

Twenty-five paintings were displayed on the north wall (fig. 25), including Rembrandt’s *Landscape with Figures*, from the gallery of Count Stadion, engraved and dated 1653; another painting called *Landscape with Figures*, this one by Jan Both, formerly in the gallery of Cardinal Fesch; and *The Four Ages* by Sir Joshua Reynolds On stands in the large gallery were displayed four pictures: *Profile of Our Saviour* by Leonardo da Vinci; *Head of Our Saviour* by Carlo Dolci, said to have been purchased from “the gallery of a distinguished family at Florence”; Titian’s *Portrait of Paul III*, an original on paper; and *Head of An Old Man* by Balthasar Denner of Hamburg.  

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Aspinwall’s small gallery contained contemporary works. On the east side of the gallery were nineteen paintings of varying sizes, arranged in three rows (fig. 26). In the center of the top row was a large painting, *Wreck of the Admiral of the Spanish Armada on the Coast of Scotland*, by the artist Gudin, a former sailor in the American Navy working in Paris; Frederic Church’s *The Beacon on Mount Desert Island, Coast of Maine* hung on the left in the second row; and *Plane in Normandy with Cattle*, by Brascassat of Paris was placed on the right side of the second row.

The south wall of the small gallery featured thirteen paintings in three rows (fig. 27). The top center painting was *Our Saviour at Emmaus*, by Carl Muller, identified as “a professor of historical painting at Dusseldorf.” A painting by Daniel Huntington of New York entitled *The Village Coquette* sat second from the left in the second row. *The First Dancing Lesson* by Compte of Paris appeared in the bottom row on the left side.

On the west wall, bisected by the double arched doorways, hung eleven paintings, with three large canvasses arranged in a row at the top (fig. 28). Eight smaller paintings were arranged in two rows between the doorways. One of the large paintings was *Indian Rendezvous* by John Frederick Kensett of New York. Angelica Kauffman’s *The Torch of Love Extinguished* was one of the smaller paintings, appearing on the right, second from the bottom.

The north side of the small gallery held seventeen pictures in three rows (fig. 29). The most prominent of these was *The Death of Wallenstein, Duke of Friedland*, painted
by Carl Pilotty, listed as professor at Munich. In the bottom row, second from the left was Brussels-based artist Eugene Verboeckhoven’s *The Shorn Sheep*.\(^{138}\)

It has been suggested that Aspinwall, like other American collectors at the time, may have been duped about the authenticity and/or provenance of the “Old Master” paintings he purchased in Europe, but much of this derived from commentary by art critics writing for publications like *The Crayon*. *The Crayon*, owned by William Stillman and John Durand, was, according to Frank Luther Mott, author of *A History of American Magazines*, “the best art journal of the period.” The basis for its editorializing, however, was aestheticism and the essential principles established by John Ruskin, whose aim was to promote contemporary artists of the time.\(^{139}\) The magazine published articles specifically warning collectors about buying “Old Master” paintings, suggesting that nothing of significance would be made available for sale.\(^{140}\) Reflecting on the situation with the benefit of hindsight, however, it is clear that Aspinwall had a lot of money to spend on art and so could afford genuine masterpieces being sold by Europeans in financial straits, willing to part with them for the right price. Several of his pieces, however, were likely not genuine, rather being “attributions (to Leonardo, Pontormo, and Titian, for example) that today would probably seem overenthusiastic.”\(^{141}\)

William Aspinwall’s gallery played a significant role in his rise in New York high society. The gallery’s existence and carefully chosen contents made him a much talked

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about celebrity. When installation of his gallery was completed, Aspinwall and his wife, Anna, threw a lavish housewarming party, during which the gallery was the focus and the central attraction, even serving as a ballroom for the event. The affair was the talk of the town, apparently catapulting the Aspinwalls to the apex of New York’s social scene. On another occasion, on April 19, 1861, the Aspinwalls hosted a dinner party for Major Robert Anderson, commander at Fort Sumter until the week previous, when it was surrendered to the Confederacy. The dinner was a celebration of the Major, also unveiling a portrait of him in the gallery. Aspinwall, who had considered aiding clandestine resupply of Fort Sumter when it was under siege, had a longstanding connection to Charleston, including an old friend there, James Petigru, with whom he corresponded on a regular basis. Aspinwall urged the staunchly pro-union Petigru, a native of Abbeville, who had served as South Carolina Attorney General in the course of a long career, to “do what he could to combat the ‘fire-eaters’ in that city.” In response, Petigru, who was called a “rebel among rebels” for his outspoken opposition to secession, despaired of his uncomfortable position in Charleston. In spite of his minority position in an emotional conflict, Petigru’s funeral procession to St. Michael’s Church on March 11,

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142 “Old Aspinwall House Gone”, The Sun, Sunday May 10, 1903.
143 Col. Duncan S. Somerville, The Aspinwall Empire, 75.
144 Aspinwall also corresponded with Abraham Lincoln, to whom he wrote about the financial exigencies related to resupply of Fort Sumter on March 13, 1861. This letter is preserved in The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress.
1863 included every Confederate military officer in Charleston and all of former Governors of the state, including William Aiken, a personal friend and fellow unionist.\footnote{David Shi, “A Rebel Among Rebels”. www.furman.edu/president/42.htm. (accessed December 28, 2010).}

Major Anderson, having apparently hurried directly to New York from Charleston after the surrender, was grateful for the party raising his spirits, as noted by Aspinwall’s cousin, Jane Woolsey: “If anything could cheer a man it would be such enthusiasm and almost love as are lavished on him here. He says they had not a biscuit to divide among them for nearly two days and were almost suffocated.”\footnote{Col. Duncan S. Somerville, The Aspinwall Empire, 75.} Parties were a regular part of the Aspinwall’s life, apparently; this one described as “a very handsome party, as usual with their entertainments.”\footnote{Ibid, 75.} The Aspinwall gallery, both a separate entity with its own entrance, and an integral part of the house connected via the large gallery to the drawing room, was an ideal party space, offering a multitude of social possibilities. For public openings, the gallery space could be completely closed off, isolated from the house, by closing the door to the drawing room and directing visitors to the gallery entrance on Tenth Street.

The considerable intelligence and energy that enabled William Aspinwall to make his fortune was put to work in service to philanthropy, much of it connected to his immersion in the world of art. He is reputed to have opened his gallery to the public on a regular basis.\footnote{John K. Howat, “Private Collectors and Public Spirit: A Selective View” in Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds. Art in the Empire City, 105.} One of the biggest and best known of these openings was for charitable purposes. In April 1864, Aspinwall’s gallery, like August Belmont’s, was opened as part of the Metropolitan Fair to benefit the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which received
Aspinwall’s commitment to making art serve the public good was instrumental in the formation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Unlike the situation in Europe where great art museums had been underwritten by royal authority, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was a creation of individuals whose time and treasure produced an entity that, only after it existed, was endorsed by the municipality in which it was located. Aspinwall was one of the original trustees of the museum, one of a group of prominent New Yorkers who took charge of establishing the institution; a group that included John Taylor Johnston, William Cullen Bryant, Frederick E. Church, Richard Morris Hunt, Frederick Law Olmsted and John F. Kensett, among others. Aspinwall’s contribution of time, money and art, was substantial; a manifestation of his conviction that making art accessible to the public would immeasurably enrich their lives. His contributions to the museum reflected a philanthropic impulse that also led him to be part of a group advocating for a grand public park--an advocacy that resulted in the creation of Central Park--and to be a charter member of The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Aspinwall’s philanthropic enterprises cemented his membership in the exclusive cadre of individuals at the top of New York high society.

William H. Aspinwall died on January 18, 1875, after which his wife continued to live in their house and maintain the art gallery until her death. On April 7, 1886, ninety pieces from the Aspinwall art gallery were sold at Chickering Hall, by Ortgies & Co.,

fetching $43,845. It was noted at the time that “the greater the painter the lower was the price paid for his production,” a fact perhaps explained by the controversy surrounding some of Aspinwall’s “Old Master” paintings, the authenticity of which had been questioned.\textsuperscript{153}

William Aspinwall might well have settled for membership in the exclusive group to which his familial pedigree entitled him. Just as he forged ahead into new territory in commerce, however, he broke new ground in the socio-cultural world of antebellum New York. Having nothing to “prove”, he set and attained goals well served by his adventures as a collector of art and owner of an exceptional private gallery in which it was displayed. His situation as a descendent of one of New York’s oldest families differed markedly from that of others whose climb to the heights of social prominence began in a different class or even in a different country.

AUGUST BELMONT: ARRIVISTE ART CONNOISSEUR AND PHILANTHROPIST

August Belmont’s ambition was to climb to the very top of the New York social
ladder, no matter what was required (fig. 30). His life was characterized by extraordinary
opportunities of which he took full advantage. Born in Alzey, in Germany’s Rhineland on
December 16, 1816 to a well-to-do Jewish land owner, August completed his education
in Frankfurt and was, by the age of fourteen, in the employ of the Rothschild Banking
House. Advancing in the operation, Belmont was posted to Naples in 1833 where he
excelled in money matters and also “developed that love for the fine arts which was ever
after so noticeable in his character.” In 1837, he was dispatched by the Rothschilds to
Havana, Cuba, then a possession of Spain, to protect their investments. Learning of the
Panic of 1837 in the United States, Belmont, sensing an opportunity, left Cuba for New
York where he set up his own firm handling foreign exchange transactions. He used his
link to the Rothschild’s famous name to attract clients and quickly became the
Rothschild’s exclusive agent in the city.

Belmont’s success and reputation as a businessman was matched by his renown as
a man-about-town who frequented popular clubs such as Niblo’s Garden. It was here,
in August, 1841, that Belmont supposedly initiated the now legendary duel he fought

154 “August Belmont is Dead,” The New York Times, November 25, 1890.
155 Ibid.
156 Niblo’s Garden, located on Broadway at Prince Street, was built in 1828 by William Niblo as part of an
entertainment complex that, in addition to an auditorium seating 3000, included an outdoor garden which was a
fashionable summer hangout in the mid-19th century. The complex was destroyed by fire in 1846, rebuilt in 1849,
burned again in 1872 after which it was rebuilt by A.T. Stewart who is said to have been the first New Yorker to
incorporate a gallery space into the original design of his house at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street in 1869. Niblo’s Garden
was demolished in 1895, the property now occupied by a modern office building.
with William Heyward of Charleston. At the time, both men were residing at the American Hotel, which was described contemporaneously as “the hotel par excellence of a certain clique of fashionables.” Using assumed names, Belmont and Heyward were said to have traveled to Elkton, Maryland where they fought a duel at the Delaware border to settle a dispute which, according to some, was over a woman named Mrs. Coles. The convoluted story derives from what is called a “platonic love scene” in which Belmont ultimately challenged Heyward to a duel. According to author Stephen Birmingham, “dueling was an established social climbing technique, and August Belmont seems to have chosen his opponent more for his publicity value than anything else.” Heyward was viewed in New York as an old guard American gentleman, the epitome of moneyed class; “a member of the ancient and noted Heyward family of Charleston”, a city which was then revered for its gentility. Confirming the senselessness of the event, The New York Times reported retrospectively that “one fire, it seems, was sufficient to appease the wounded feelings of these chivalrous gentlemen… Taking to their carriages, the sanguinary Southerner and the Hebrew were driven to Wilmington.” Belmont was wounded, some thought mortally, but recovered fully except for a residual limp, which

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157 Stephen Birmingham refers to Heyward as “Edward Heyward, son of William Heyward” but all articles written contemporaneously about the event refer to Belmont’s opponent as “William.”
159 “August Belmont’s Duel;” The early morning encounter over 40 years ago, from the Elkton (MD) Whig, May 6; Reprinted in The New York Times, May 9, 1882, and postscript.
160 “H., the elder brother to the duelist, said B was too intimate with a certain lady. For this B called H all manner of hard names. H however, refused to fight B therefor. B thereupon, whilst at Niblo’s, and in the presence of H the younger, said that H the elder, was no better than he should be. For this, we were informed that H the younger chastised B. H immediately received a challenge, which was accepted, and the above is the result so far as known.” From “Affair of Honor”, Weekly Herald, August 28, 1841, Vol. V, Issue 49, p. 407.
162 Ibid, 58.
infirmity was more than compensated for by the fact that the event significantly raised Belmont’s social profile.\footnote{Stephen Birmingham, “Our Crowd”: The Great Jewish Families of New York, 58.}

Interestingly, an alternative version of this tale was provided in the 1892 obituary of Belmont’s wife, Caroline, which seems less believable but reflects better on August Belmont. In this rendition, the impetus for Belmont’s challenge to Heyward is the latter’s “uncalled for remark” about Caroline Perry, a woman then a stranger to August Belmont, while the three of them were inexplicably all in Grey’s Hill, Maryland. According to the storyline of the obituary, Belmont’s selfless chivalry was what brought the couple together for the first time, resulting in their marriage nine years later.\footnote{“Mrs. August Belmont Dead,” The New York Times, November 21, 1892.}

Belmont continued his rapid rise in social standing, serving as Consul General at New York for the Austrian government, a position from which he resigned in 1850, a year after his marriage to Caroline Slidell Perry. His marriage to Caroline, daughter of Commodore Matthew C. Perry and the niece of Oliver Hazard Perry, a hero of the War of 1812, was another strategic move by a man intent upon ascending to the pinnacle of the New York Social set. The premier social event of 1846 was the wedding of John Jacob Astor, Jr. to the daughter of wealthy aristocrat, Thomas L. Gibbes of Charleston, to which Belmont was not invited. This snub may have precipitated Belmont’s 1847 marriage proposal. Two years after their engagement, the once Jewish \textit{arriviste}, Belmont, cemented his status when he married the daughter of an old, revered American family in the fashionable Episcopal Grace Church favored by New York’s high society families. Belmont’s wedding was a lavish affair attended by everyone who was anyone in New
York at the time, including some members of the Astor family. The marriage to Miss Perry also gave Belmont entrée into elite social venues, such as the all-Protestant Union Club, from which he had been previously excluded. Wayne Craven notes that Belmont’s “Jewishness waned with his increasing Americanization” to the point that he lost connection with the Jewish community as he continued to establish his credentials entitling him to fully participate in the life of high society.

Caroline Perry Belmont, while a descendent of a distinguished American family, was still required to “earn” her membership in New York society. This is not to say that it was necessarily Mrs. Belmont who directed her own efforts to scale the heights of high society, or even that she chose the accoutrements necessary to do so. Reputedly it was her husband, August, who arranged her schedule, planned their parties, wrote notes for her, even personally selected her clothing and jewelry. According to some who have studied the couple, Caroline deferred to her husband in all things; that he manipulated her so as to create the perfect partner he required for his ambitious social goals. Having done so, August Belmont then celebrated his marvelous creation; hyperbolically praising his wife to friends and associates for her brilliant style and social sense. Known for her beauty, Belmont’s money enabled Caroline to swaddle herself in the most fashionable and expensive clothing such that even the au courant, dressed-to-the-nines crowd at the opera turned to ogle her when she made her entrance (fig. 31). One opera patron reported: “I watched Mrs. Belmont at the opera, ermine and sables slipping from her shoulders, her slender throat wearing a string of pearls, the largest known in this republic, and every

opera glass in the house turned upon her."\(^{169}\) When her husband, who had always been involved in Democratic politics, was appointed chargé d’affaires to the Hague by President Franklin Pierce, Caroline accompanied her husband to the Netherlands where they lived until 1857. While in Europe, all of their possessions which had been put in storage in New York were destroyed by fire. This afforded them the opportunity to acquire all new furniture and furnishings from the finest dealers and shops on the Continent. By 1855, Belmont had begun shipping crates back to New York, including art the couple had been collecting. By the time they returned to New York themselves, 250 crates were there waiting for them. Among the items in these crates were 110 paintings, 179 books, dozens of carved figures and pieces of sculpture, bureaus, armoires, dressing cases, chandeliers, champagne coolers, toothpick stands, snuff boxes, music boxes, a bronze barometer, a mother of pearl dish held by two gilt bears, Delft cows, and a bronze Puss-in-Boots.\(^{170}\)

While the Belmonts were in Europe, a new house at 109 Fifth Avenue at the corner of 18\(^{th}\) Street, much grander than their old one on 14\(^{th}\) Street, was remodeled for them; the decision having been taken to customize an existing brownstone rather than to build a new one.\(^{171}\) "The choice of the 18\(^{th}\) Street location and the brownstone veneer perhaps indicates the desire of an outsider—a European and a Jew—to associate himself with established local traditions."\(^{172}\) Tradition for Belmont, however, was a larger and more splendid version than for others. The house was five bays wide, three stories tall,

\(^{170}\) Ibid, 140.
\(^{171}\) Catalogue: “The Belmont Gallery 1864” title page.
\(^{172}\) Wayne Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 49.
proportioned more like a mansion than a typical row house. To the exterior of this oversized traditional dwelling, Belmont added double porticoes on the Fifth Avenue side and a bay window on the 18th Street side. An addition with a separate entrance at 4 East 18th Street was added to the rear of the house. This was intended as gallery space to house the Belmont’s newly acquired collection of art (fig. 32). Belmont’s residence was unique in its time for having both a ballroom and a dedicated art gallery. The Astors, with whom he was still competing, only had a space that doubled as a ballroom and a gallery. August Belmont’s home was “interiorly one of the most elegant and luxurious in town. His picture gallery alone is said to be worth $400,000 or $500,000.”

In 1857, back in New York, ensconced in a palatial home furnished with treasures amassed from their travels abroad, the Belmonts resumed their social climb, quickly becoming known for their lavish entertaining. At the time it was not typical, even among the wealthiest members of New York society to entertain groups in their homes. Rather, large dinners were hosted in restaurants such as Delmonico’s. The Belmonts spearheaded a change to in-home entertaining, introducing to New York a practice common in Europe. The food and wines they served also reflected a European sensibility, as was to be expected, given that they were selected and prepared by a classically trained French chef whom the Belmonts imported and employed in place of the cook engaged in similar New York City households. Their dining room is reputed to have accommodated two hundred guests each of whom was furnished with a place setting of

\[^{173}\text{Catalogue: “The Belmont Gallery 1864” title page.}
^{175}\text{Wayne Craven, Gilded Mansions, 46.}\]
gold service. Mrs. Belmont, it was said, was “a woman of charm and distinction, to whom fortune had allotted means and opportunity to take the lead in entertainments of the grandiose foreign order, in a great house, with an illuminated picture-gallery and everything on a corresponding scale.” 

When wealthy, prominent people visited New York, it is said their first priority was obtaining a letter of introduction to Mrs. Belmont.

The Belmonts’ style of entertaining had a direct influence on the architecture that characterized the subsequent gilded age, during which mansions were designed with imposing spaces to accommodate such grand scale social functions. One of these was the home of A.T. Stewart, built in 1869, a marble Beaux-Arts mansion on the corner of 34th Street and Fifth Avenue (fig. 33). This house was the first in New York to be designed with an art gallery in its original plan, along with other massive spaces dedicated to entertaining. His gallery elegantly incorporated all the elements that earlier private galleries, retrofitted or added onto existing homes, had attempted. Located adjacent to the first floor at the rear of the building, extending across almost the entire width of the house, measuring 75 feet long by 30 feet wide, Stewart’s gallery soared fifty feet to a ceiling punctuated with a large skylight. This provided the only natural light; the gallery was designed with no windows in order to maximize hanging space for art. Paintings were arranged in tight formation, hung from floor to ceiling in the “French Salon style.” Those that did not fit on the wall were propped up against walls or against the sculptures that were displayed in the center of the room (fig. 34). Among those sculptures was the

176 Mrs. Burton Harrison, quoted in Wayne Craven, Gilded Mansions, 45.
177 Wayne Craven, Gilded Mansions, 46.
well known piece entitled, *Greek Slave*, by Hiram Powers, whose work also appeared in the Aiken gallery in Charleston.\(^{178}\)

Having established themselves as gracious hosts of parties to which all of New York aspired to be invited, “receptions that were distinguished by the presence of everyone who was really worth knowing.” August Belmont’s art gallery then became the vehicle that transported him to the pinnacle of New York high society.\(^{179}\) Belmont’s collection consisted of more than one hundred paintings and various sculptures that he had shipped back from Europe. The gallery was composed almost entirely of contemporary European paintings, a fact which bespoke the idea that American art was inferior, although a few of Belmont’s pieces had been made by Americans. This predilection set the standard for the gilded age that followed, in which American art was out of favor.

No images survive of the interior of the Belmont gallery but descriptions enable a general idea of how it was constructed and arranged. In all likelihood the display of art in Belmont’s gallery, installed in 1858, closely resembled that found in William Aspinwall’s gallery addition completed the following year. The large room was brightly lit with both natural and gas lighting. The gallery, described as airy, incorporated a central, rectangular, glass-domed skylight, the first of its kind. Unlike earlier galleries, created from existing space in homes, this one was designed specifically for its purpose and was housed in its own separate wing, making illumination from a skylight feasible. Architectural details included four pairs of carved “allegorical figures”, representing the

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\(^{178}\) Wayne Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 72.

disciplines of painting, music, sculpture and architecture, punctuating the corners of the room.\footnote{180}

The gallery space was an integral part of the Belmonts’ frequent lavish entertaining, forming “one of the most delightful rooms in a charming house.”\footnote{181} The importance of the gallery as a social space, was reported by The New York Times, which commented: “surrounded by these pictures, many young women and men… took their first plunge into the whirl of fashionable New York life. Hence these pictures have impressed themselves on many persons as witnesses of the most pleasing experiences of their lives.”\footnote{182}

Prior to arranging his art in the newly constructed gallery at his home, Belmont, at the request of a group of men, including Gulian C. Verplanck, William Evarts, and Jonathan Sturges, put his entire collection on loan at the National Academy of Design on Tenth Street where it was favorably reviewed, bringing acclaim and praise to its owner. It was at Belmont’s insistence that the all proceeds from the exhibit be “applied in aid of one or more of the numerous charitable institutions which adorn our city.”\footnote{183} The Crayon, the premier art journal from 1855 to 1861, wrote of the exhibition, “Lovers of the beautiful will find in this collection works by Delaroche, Gallait, Rosa Bonheur, Meyer, Koek-Koek, Meissonier, Chavet….”\footnote{184} Of Belmont, The New York Times said he “has displayed rare taste in their selection and has very wisely preferred the finest works of
modern artists to the mediocre productions of the old masters.”\textsuperscript{185} The exhibition netted close to $4,000 after expenses, which was distributed among sixteen New York charities, including the Colored Home, Association for Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, Home for the Penitent Magdalenes, and the New York School of Design for Women.\textsuperscript{186} The exhibition was a success, benefitting artists and art lovers, as well as the recipients of its largesse, which moved \textit{The New York Times} to hold it out as exemplary, and to urge other collectors to follow Belmont’s lead. “It is to be hoped that the liberality of Mr. Belmont, in affording the public an opportunity to examine his collection, may induce the owners of other fine collections to follow his example. It is a positive injury to art to take its finest works and shut them up in the rooms of a private house, where they can be seen only by the limited number of its inmates.”\textsuperscript{187} Indeed, owners of other fine galleries, in New York and other cities, including Charleston, did take pains to provide the public opportunities to examine their collections, not only opening up their own private galleries, but also advocating for permanent public space dedicated to fine art and education about it. They conceived the idea for museums and contributed to them their time, treasures and capital.

After the exhibition closed, Belmont’s art collection was installed in the gallery at 109 Fifth Avenue that had been designed to showcase it. Sorted by the school to which each artist belonged, the collection comprised 115 works by 83 artists. Among the twenty-eight French School artists were Rosa Bonheur, Paul Delaroche, Alfred de Dreux,\textsuperscript{185} “Mr Belmont’s Pictures”, \textit{The New York Times}, December 19, 1857.\textsuperscript{186} \textit{The Catalogue of the Belmont Collection, also Daily Receipts of Exhibition and Distribution to Charitable Institutions}, 1857.\textsuperscript{187} “Mr Belmont’s Pictures”, \textit{The New York Times}, December 19, 1857.
and Horace Vernet. Madou was one of nineteen artists of the Belgian school which also included F. Willems, Gallait and E. Verboeckhoven. The list of sixteen Dutch School artists contained names such as Louis Meyer, B.C. Koekoeck and Bosboom. The group of nine German School artists featured four paintings by A. Achenbach. Eleven artists were classified as “miscellaneous,” including some Americans and a few so designated for the medium of their work (ie. pencil drawing) more so than their affiliation.  

Over the years, Belmont added to his collection. In 1858 he purchased a piece called Chess Players by Meissonier from the French Gallery on Broadway for $4,000 which was said to be a good example of the artist’s style that would benefit the gallery. Belmont’s gallery was a showcase for his refined and intellectually impressive taste as much as for the art itself; he prided himself on bringing the best of the European salons to New York. He also prided himself on being a patron of the arts and a generous benefactor committed to raising awareness of the arts. He opened his gallery on successive occasions to demonstrate his benevolence and commitment to educating and elevating the public. It was also his intention to benefit a charitable cause on those occasions when he charged admission. Artists and art students were always admitted free of charge, however.  

In 1864, from April 4th to 9th, Belmont opened his gallery to benefit the U.S. Sanitary Commission’s support of Union troops in the Civil War. The exhibit was open to anyone able to pay the admission fee of one dollar. In an interesting juxtaposition, years later, Belmont’s gallery featured the work of the deceased artist, J. Beaufain Irving,

188 The Catalogue of the Belmont Collection, also Daily Receipts of Exhibition and Distribution to Charitable Institutions, 1857.  
189 The Crayon, Volume 5, 1858, 23.  
a former confederate soldier “who came a poor man to New York”.\textsuperscript{191} The exhibit was intended to raise money for the artist’s widow. Irving’s work was interspersed with the permanent installations in the gallery, mounted on the walls or placed on easels in the gallery itself or in its vestibule. The New York Times implied that Irving’s art would not have found a place in Belmont’s gallery had his sad life not evoked sympathy: “It was natural that he should receive from many quarters more sympathy and more encouragement than his pictures would otherwise have won.”\textsuperscript{192}

Belmont’s connection to both sides involved in the Civil War derived from his longstanding and ongoing involvement with politics, the pursuit of which served his ambitions as well. A leader in the Democratic Party, Belmont was sent as a delegate to the 1860 Democratic National Convention in Charleston in support of Stephen Douglas. It was at this convention that the Democratic Party split, necessitating another convention at Baltimore in June where Belmont was named Chairman of the National Democratic Committee, a position he held until 1872. A strong supporter of the Union, Belmont took it upon himself to urge northern statesmen to seek compromise with the south, as well as to correspond with their southern counterparts advocating against secession which he was convinced would “mean civil war, to be followed by a total disintegration of the whole fabric after endless sacrifices of blood and treasure.”\textsuperscript{193} Among the southern leaders to whom Belmont wrote were Julius Izard Pringle and William Marten, with whom it

\textsuperscript{191} August Belmont’s Gallery, On Exhibition for the Benefit of the Late J. Beaufain Irving’s Family,” The New York Times, May 24, 1877.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{193} Letters Speeches and Addresses of August Belmont, privately printed (1890), 29.
appears he had an ongoing correspondence. He also wrote to William Aiken, after which he inquired of Marten if the Governor would receive his letter. It is not known if Aiken and Belmont were personally acquainted, but their paths might well have crossed in New York or even in Europe since they traveled in some of the same circles and shared interests in art and politics, as well as ambitions to rise in their respective social circles. Belmont remained active in national and local politics.

Because his gallery was completely separate from his house, Belmont was in a position to be able to welcome the public without undue risk or disturbance. Indeed, he provided specific directions to visitors to access the gallery through its basement door on 18th Street. On April 25 and 26, 1876, the Belmont gallery was opened to the public to benefit the Women’s Centennial Union and visitors were directed to 3 East 18th Street. By this time, Belmont had added some paintings to his collection, including The Twins by Bouguereau and The Slave Market by Gerome, as well as statuary. His patronage was credited with establishing Bouguereau’s stature in the United States; his work was thereafter represented in the collections of many prominent New Yorkers.

It was reported that the gallery was opened from nine in the morning until six in the evening and was filled throughout the day with visitors who had paid one dollar each.

Even in death, August Belmont was larger than life. His funeral at the Church of the Ascension was attended by scores of prominent and influential people from the

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194 Ibid, 29.
196 “August Belmont is Dead,” The New York Times, August 25, 1890.
worlds of business, politics and high society. After the service, his body was taken by
hearse to Grand Central Station, whence the coffin was taken by train to Newport, Rhode
Island where Belmont maintained a country house. Belmont’s body was accompanied on
the journey by family and friends, including Hamilton Fish, a fellow art collector and
close friend of William Aiken. In Newport, final services were held in a chapel built by
Belmont himself as a memorial to his daughter, Julia Ellis Belmont, who had predeceased
him. After his death and the death of his wife Caroline, August Belmont’s art collection
continued to be shared with the public. In 1893, one hundred and twenty paintings from
his collection were loaned by his sons to the National Academy of Design for their
summer exhibition. It is a tribute to Belmont’s wise selections that his collection
remained of interest.
JOHN TAYLOR JOHNSTON: CONNOISSEUR AND COMMITTED PATRON OF THE ARTS

John Taylor Johnston whose ambitions were for his city and its people as well as for his own purposes, was a first generation American, born in New York on April 8, 1820 (fig. 35). Throughout his life and career, Johnston’s work, while enriching him, served the interests of others. Having completed his secondary school in Edinburgh, Scotland, Johnston went on to earn degrees from New York University (then called University of the City of New York) from which he graduated at the age of nineteen, and Yale Law School. After being admitted to the New York Bar in 1843 via his employment in the office of Daniel Lord, Johnston embarked on an extended tour of Europe, leaving the US on September 25, 1843, “visiting all the great art centres,” returning July 31, 1845. Offered the presidency of the newly founded Somerville and Easton Railroad in 1848, Johnston left the practice of law to take on this new challenge, repeatedly reinvesting his profits in this obscure, heretofore insignificant company. He built the operation into what became the Central New Jersey Railroad by developing the areas of New Jersey through which the train tracks ran. It is said that “a number of the towns in Central New Jersey owe their existence to him.” Johnston, a clever, forward-looking and ambitious young man, subsequently made the decision to acquire the Lehigh and Susquehanna rail lines, giving him ownership of anthracite and coal fields in Pennsylvania, which made him wealthy. His marriage, in 1851, to Frances Colles,

200 Wayne Craven, Gilded Mansions, 42.
daughter of James Colles, helped to cement his socio-cultural standing in New York.\textsuperscript{201} James Colles, a native of New Jersey, made his fortune in New Orleans and was, in the mid-1850’s, a well established New York art collector. Having retired in 1840, he and his family spent three years traveling around Europe, amassing art and decorative art for their elegant home on Tenth Street which, according to Metropolitan Museum of Art curator John Howat, “set the standard for elegance and sophistication in New York.”\textsuperscript{202}

In 1856 Johnston built his own house at 8 Fifth Avenue at the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Eighth Street, just north of Washington Square, to accommodate his growing family and elevated stature. No vestige of the house remains but photographs show that it was identical to other brownstones on the street: three bays wide, four stories high, with simple cornice and understated details. The house was distinguished from its neighbors only by its façade which was completely faced in marble (fig.36). Marble had often been used for detailing on buildings in New York, such as for door and window surrounds and entrance steps. It had not been previously used as a façade material for a residence, having only been used occasionally in commercial buildings. One such application was the A.T. Stewart Department Store, built at Broadway and Chambers Street in 1846, which was known as the Marble Palace. In this era, unlike in the Gilded Age that followed it, wealthy individuals chose to distinguish themselves in subtle ways, rather than in over-the-top, public displays. Johnston’s decision to follow the established, New York vernacular “brownstone” form embellished with an innovative and sumptuous material is indicative of his desire, like Belmont’s, to fit in with his  

\textsuperscript{202} John K. Howat, “Private Collectors and Public Spirit: A Selective View” in Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds. \textit{Art in the Empire City}, 93.
neighbors, but also to elevate himself within the group by displaying his wealth and taste. The interior of the home served this purpose as well, decorated in *au courant* styles then popular among the upper classes in Europe. The sumptuous interior included a ballroom outfitted with a suite of Louis XVI style furniture made by Ringuet-Leprince and L. Marcotte, upholstered in yellow silk damask. Art historian Catherine Hoover Voorsanger characterizes the Johnston suite as “a remarkable document of patrician taste in New York in the mid 1850’s.”

Having made his fortune and established his position in the community, Johnston undertook an ambitious hobby: aggressively collecting art from a variety of sources. Although we know that Johnston acquainted himself with the European art world during his travels in the previous decade, it is unclear if he began acquiring works of art for himself at that time. We know that following his marriage in 1851 he began actively collecting, possibly influenced by his wife’s connection to the art world through her family. By the beginning of the next decade, his paintings were too numerous to be accommodated by wall space in his house, at which point he converted a space above the stables behind the house into an art gallery. There is no image of the gallery itself, but given the constraints of the city space and the typical configuration of a stable, it was presumably rectangular. Because of its position on the top floor, it was likely to have included a skylight, almost always incorporated into gallery space at the time to maximize natural light. Here Johnston displayed a collection of more than three hundred

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204 Wayne Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 42.
works of art, comprising oil paintings, watercolors, drawings and sculpture, representing 175 artists from Europe and the United States.

Among his collection by Europeans were Ricardo Madrazo’s *Interior of Santa Maria Rome*, J. Becker’s *The Reapers’ Return Home*, Charles Louis Muller’s *Scene at the Conciergerie Prison During the Roll Call of the Last Victims of the Reign of Terror, 9th Thermidor, 1793*, which contained seventeen portraits; Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier’s *Soldiers at Cards*, J.G. Meyer Von Bremen’s *The New Sister*, Edouard Zamacois’ *The Two Confessors* and Sir Joshua Reynolds’ *Theophila Palmer*. Among works by Americans were F.E. Church’s *Niagara Falls*, Winslow Homer’s *Prisoners From the Front*, J.F. Kensett’s *Afternoon on Connecticut Shore* and E.D. Palmer’s sculpture, *Disappointment*. Also in Johnston’s collection was Spalatro’s *Vision of the Bloody Hand*, a painting by Washington Allston. This painting, according to a letter written by Charlestonian, Elias N. Ball, had been commissioned by his uncle, H. S. Ball who was a close friend of Allston’s and a frequent visitor to his studio. When his uncle was killed in the steamer Pulaski explosion in 1838, the painting was passed to Elias. In 1866, Elias Ball wrote to John Taylor Johnston entreating him to purchase the painting. This was, presumably, to ensure this treasure was consigned to a good home when the family in whose possession it had always been was presented with the necessity of raising cash after the Civil War. Ironically, this painting was among the inventory of works being sold when Johnston found himself in financial straits.\(^{205}\)

\(^{205}\) *Catalogue. The Collection of Paintings, Drawings, and Statuary, The Property of John Taylor Johnston, Esq. to be sold at auction December 19, 20 and 22, 1876.*
Johnston was committed to the idea that with good fortune comes responsibility to help and elevate others; to the concept of *noblesse oblige*. In keeping with this he opened his gallery to a select group of the public once a week, as well as inviting New York artists to a gathering at the gallery once a year. Johnston was also instrumental in persuading other collectors that art should be shared because it was “morally and socially uplifting.”206 From these efforts came the idea for a permanent museum to showcase art and enable education of the public. On April 13, 1870 the legislature of the State of New York passed an “act of incorporation” that formally created the entity, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was to serve as “a museum and library of art…encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the application of arts to manufactures and practical life…advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction and recreation.” In addition to offering his vision and his paintings in service to the institution, Johnston contributed $10,000 to this newly formed organization (fig. 38).207

Just as the art collection represented the pinnacle of John Taylor Johnston’s achievements, the visual evidence of his success, it became a primary victim of his losses. In 1873, the failure of J. Cook, a banking house, contributed to an American economic depression. Among those affected by this was John Taylor Johnston who sustained losses such that he was forced to auction off his art collection. By December 1876 he was offering the entire collection for sale, including a few works he had loaned

206 Wayne Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 42.
to the Metropolitan Museum. The catalogue accompanying the announcement of the auction details everything Johnston housed in his gallery, the sale of which netted him $327,792, a record amount for an art sale in the United States. The collection was exhibited at the National Academy of Design from November 29, 1876 until the three day auction began at Chickering Hall on December 19th. The quality of the collection was praised for its balance of European and American art, the selection of which elicited positive reviews for its owner: “Mr. Johnston’s pictures, too, were selected with such intelligence, that the entire group has a certain unity which more pretentious galleries do not possess.”

Prices for individual items from the Johnston gallery ranged from as little as $16 for a sepia landscape by Thomas Birch of Philadelphia to as much as $12,500 for F.E. Church’s Niagara Falls, purchased by William Aiken’s friend, William Corcoran of Washington D.C. Washington Allston’s Spalatro’s Vision of the Bloody Hand, of such concern to the Ball family of Charleston, was purchased from Johnston by H.R. Bishop for $3,900. Bishop displayed it in his country house on the Hudson River which subsequently burned and was lost, along with the painting. Samuel P. Avery, who conducted the auction, was the most prominent art dealer in New York at the time. Avery himself purchased a large number of works, including William Adolphe Bouguereau’s

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208 Catalogue. The Collection of Paintings, Drawings, and Statuary. The Property of John Taylor Johnston, Esq. to be sold at auction December 19, 20 and 22, 1876.
The income Johnston derived from the sale of his paintings was substantial and impressive; so much so that it has been speculated that it persuaded prosperous Americans, even those who lacked Johnston’s intellectual and aesthetic bent, to view art as a shrewd investment.\footnote{Wayne Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 44.}

Joseph M.W. Turner’s *Slave Ship*, which fetched $10,000 from Alfred Pell of Boston, had been purchased by Johnston directly from John Ruskin, the British art critic, thinker, essayist and proponent of naturalism in art (fig. 37). The fact that Johnston dealt directly with Ruskin confirms that for him, art collecting was an intellectual pursuit as well as the pursuit of renown. The relationship also suggests that his art collecting priorities may have been informed by the thinking and theories of Ruskin, whose five volume opus, *Modern Painters*, was published during Johnston’s prime collecting years, between 1843 and 1860.\footnote{Nancy Scott, “America’s First Public Turner: How Ruskin Sold The Slave Ship to New York”, in *The British Art Journal*, Vol. X, No. 3, 73.}

When he acquired Turner’s painting, Johnston organized a lavish party for unveiling it in the gallery space at his home on April 11, 1872. A group of more than 200 prominent guests attended, including more than forty painters and a variety of influential individuals from the worlds of business, politics and academia. Among the attendees were Winslow Homer, J.F. Kensett, and Christopher Pearse Cranch, an essayist and polymath artist, associated with the Hudson River School, who reported on the event for

The Independent.\textsuperscript{214} Also in attendance were many well known individuals, including soon-to-be President of the United States, Chester A. Arthur and then-Harvard student, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt attended with his cousin, James Roosevelt, a railroad tycoon colleague of Johnston’s and the future father of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.\textsuperscript{215} In May 1872, Johnston offered the painting on loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art which had just opened its doors on February 20 of that year.\textsuperscript{216} The presence of the painting in the fledgling museum was noteworthy, as it was in the newly opened Museum of Fine Arts in Boston to which it was loaned almost immediately after being acquired at Johnston’s auction.\textsuperscript{217}

In 1877, John Taylor Johnston developed the “creeping paralysis” which would gradually rob him of his mobility, effectuate his retirement, and ultimately take his life in 1893. Johnston remained President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art until 1889, and it is clear that the Museum remained of the utmost importance to him. In spite of his infirmity, Johnston never missed an annual meeting of the Museum. The last time Johnston appeared in public was at the annual meeting of the Museum in 1892.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid, 73.
CONCLUSION

Success is defined differently in each place and time, with aspirations of the ambitious following suit. In the antebellum years in the great cities of America, wealth and power were not sufficient to satisfy society’s elite. To qualify as admirable and iconic, it mattered a great deal how the wealth and power were achieved, as well as how they were exercised and utilized. It was repeatedly noted by contemporaneous commentators how the wealthy art collectors discussed in this chapter had engaged in businesses that furthered the needs of society as well as enriching themselves. Intellectual engagement and sophistication were the means by which accomplished, successful men achieved the highest levels of social acceptance. To be admired, one had to have something more than merely the finest, most expensive and fashionable possessions. Cultural sophistication, refinement and philanthropy were requirements for scaling the heights of New York society. In the leading cultural capitals of America at that time, a private art gallery was a vehicle that enabled all three, whereas in prior years, the pedigree of an old family and substantial land holdings were necessary to attain the highest level of social acceptance.

It during this period, however, that definition of cultural sophistication and refinement began to change in New York and other major northern cities. Upper class New Yorkers seeking to burnish their socio-cultural credentials began to differentiate themselves from the social exigencies of the old guard and from the cultural traditions inherited from their British forebears. Manners in New York changed, as did the orientation of connoisseurs who began to reject the traditional Grand Tour with its
emphasis on antiquity and the art of Old Masters. During this time, ambitious men from New York still traveled to Europe to complete their education, to view and acquire works of art, but their aims had changed. Rather than seeking to emulate the aristocratic ideals of eighteenth century English gentlemen, these elite New Yorkers set out to create a new gentlemanly ideal. In New York, innovation and wit came to define the leaders of society who were lauded—in business and in cultural pursuits-- for creating new paths to mastery, rather than faithfully following the old ones.

As influential New Yorkers were increasingly striving to differentiate themselves from the past, prominent Charlestonians like William and Harriet Aiken determinedly embraced and revered it. The English ideal of gentility was deeply ingrained in their notion of sophistication, directing their manners as well as their “pursuit of refinement” and taste in art. The Grand Tour of Europe was essential to this pursuit.

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219 Thanks to Maurie McInnis for this apt phrase, which she used as the title of her book, *In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad, 1740-1860.*
The Aikens’ Grand Tour of 1857-58 was undertaken in large part to inspire and furnish the private art gallery being built for them in Charleston. Their itinerary as well as the books and guides they used to inform their journey and the art they acquired to install in their gallery reflects their commitment to the traditional English socio-cultural ideal. The art gallery addition to the Aiken-Rhett House was inspired by European sensibilities which influenced both its concept and execution. Rather than following architectural trends in United States at the time to conceptualize their private gallery space, the Aikens looked to the historic center of “good-taste” and gentility: Europe. On their extended journey around the Continent, the Aikens visited galleries, both private and public, as well as churches, monuments and museums that served as the inspiration not only for the concept of a private gallery, but for its form and contents as well. The reputed “architect” of their gallery, William Aiken’s cousin Joseph Daniel Aiken, also traveled extensively throughout Europe, commenting on architecture, design and art in his travel diary. His predilection for classical European architecture likely also informed the design of the art gallery addition. The following examination of the Aiken family’s last Grand Tour explores European art, architectural, and design influences on the 1857-58 art gallery addition to their house on Elizabeth Street.
The notion of a “Grand Tour” of Europe began as a specific undertaking in the seventeenth century as the capstone of the classical education of royal or aristocratic men from northern Europe, especially England. Originally focused on classical antiquities in Rome and Naples, the curriculum of this extended educational trip was expanded in the latter half of the seventeenth century to include France as well as Italy, ultimately extending to other European capitals as well. The term “Grand Tour” itself is said to have been used first by a British Roman Catholic Priest, Richard Lassels, in his 1670 book, *The Voyage of Italy*. Lassels advocated for young men spending time abroad to experience for themselves the glories of the past that inspired literature that formed the core of their education. The Grand Tour later subsumed works of art inspired by ongoing excavations in Italy (Herculaneum at Naples 1731, Pompeii, 1764, etc.) as well as the great paintings and sculpture of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods.\(^\text{220}\) The work of Englishmen James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, who created the first detailed surveys of Greek architectural antiquities, facilitated the study of monuments unearthed in those excavations. They began their work in 1751, publishing the first volume of their opus, *The Antiquities of Athens*, in 1762. The documentation produced by Stuart and Revett revolutionized the practices of architecture and classical archaeology, as well as inspiring the Greek Revival style that would remain popular in Europe and in America for more than one hundred years.\(^\text{221}\)

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During the eighteenth century, aristocratic European young men were joined on the Grand Tour by Americans, many of these Charlestonians, who maintained close ties to England and sought to conform to the British model of an ideal aristocrat. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars brought a temporary halt to the Grand Tour but the practice resumed in earnest after those conflicts were resolved.\textsuperscript{222} By the end of the eighteenth century, every proper English gentleman was expected to complete his education with an extended trip around the Continent, touring cultural monuments and great works of art. Their curriculum was the inspiration for wealthy Charlestonians for whom the Grand Tour of Europe was an essential aspect of an elite education and a marker of social status. Aristocratic Charleston gentlemen traveled the Continent in the belief that “refinement was most fully realized in European palaces and mansions.”\textsuperscript{223} William D. Smyth points out that “Europe excelled in the culture of the past… was a place, too, where Americans could attain a cultivated and well-ordered life… buy art and sculpture and ‘experience’ the masters firsthand. Such attainments completed the ‘education’ of those Americans who traveled and gave them a mark of achieved status.”\textsuperscript{224} Over time, the Grand Tour evolved to incorporate social events during which travelers from South Carolina met their friends abroad, as well as a buying spree during which the wealthy elite purchased art, artifacts, furnishings, and the latest fashions in the premier cities of Europe. For prominent South Carolinians, as among the English


aristocracy, an art collection was a marker of upper class status; evidence of one’s taste and sophistication, and of the education that was necessary to inform them.

William Aiken was a sort of “exhibit A” of how a young man with money who lacked pedigree might go about ascending to the pinnacle of the increasingly rarefied Charleston society. Aiken chose to be a gentleman planter at Jehossee and increased his considerable fortune thereby; he married Harriet Lowndes whose family provided him with what he lacked; and, knowing that “art acted as a cultural identifier,” he acquired a collection of paintings and sculpture during several Grand Tours. That Aiken’s collection would ultimately be housed in a private gallery, a rarity even among the most elite, secured his place among the aristocracy of Charleston.

Having completed his education with the three year Grand Tour immediately following college graduation, William Aiken returned subsequently to Europe on two occasions with his family, returning from these trips to the United States in 1848 and 1858. The Aikens’ last Grand Tour was intended to educate their daughter, Henrietta and to enhance their own education and exposure to high culture and European splendor. It was, as well, a social call on European elites—a chance to see and be seen, to meet friends from America and make the acquaintance of Europeans—and a shopping trip. This ritual journey also provided inspiration for the design and contents of the private gallery they would create when they returned to Charleston.

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OVERVIEW OF THE AIKENS’ FINAL GRAND TOUR

The Aikens’ trip to the Continent in 1857-58 was undertaken during the second renovation of their house on Elizabeth Street in Charleston. An important goal of this trip for the Aikens was to buy works of art for the dedicated gallery that was part of that endeavor; indeed, during the trip they had plans for the gallery sent to them. Armed with guidebooks, including several by John Murray, embraced as an invaluable source by the Grand Tour set, a massive amount of luggage, and introductions for social activities, they left Charleston by steamship for New York and sailed from there to England. Joseph Daniel Aiken, who is said to have overseen the second renovation of the house and the construction of the gallery, had been on an extended tour of art and architecture in Europe several years before, and kept a detailed and opinionated diary of his travels and observations. While in Paris in the fall of 1858, the Aikens received an envelope, presumably from Joseph Daniel Aiken, containing plans for the first floor of the main house and the newly constructed gallery space (figs. 40, 41). Postmarked Charleston, October 2, 1858, the envelope was addressed to “Hon William Aiken care of Messrs Hottinguer Paris France,” suggesting the envelope was sent to the French banking firm. Markings on the envelope show that its route from Charleston to Paris was by way of Boston, where it was postmarked “Boston 6 October,” and possibly London, given that handwritten on it is the word “Londres.” The envelope arrived in France on October 18, 1858 (fig. 39). 

228 Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
229 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58 and Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1849.
230 Aiken-Rhett Papers, Charleston Museum.
Examining where the Aikens went and what they did there provides a good picture of what their intentions for the journey were. Such an examination also helps piece together how and why the Aiken private art gallery was conceived, its inspiration and its provenance. Information about the design and contents of the Aiken gallery is incomplete. To determine what it might have looked like and what it housed, it is helpful to consider the travels of its owners. The record of this is also incomplete, but using Harriet Aiken’s travel diary, that provides a general itinerary framework, along with guidebooks, including John Murray’s *Handbooks for Travellers*, that didactically laid out what the sophisticated traveler must see and do in various European destinations, it is possible to get a sense of what the Aikens would have done and seen at the time they were visiting Europe. The account of their trip in Harriet Aiken’s diary highlights both the social nature of the journey and the strong connection between Charlestonians and Europe. The speed with which they crossed the ocean and continued to maintain when moving around the Continent is surprising, as is the lack of detail in Harriet Aiken’s accounts of their activities. Detail and advice from Murray’s *Handbooks for Travellers* and other books they owned at the time, however, enables inferences to be made about what the Aikens could have seen at the time they visited various European cities.

**Murray’s Handbooks for Travellers**

In the mid-nineteenth century, the premier authority for elite travelers was John Murray, who produced regularly updated versions of his *Handbook for Travellers* to a variety of locations throughout the world, upon which people like the Aikens depended.
during their sojourns in Europe. Americans would routinely begin their Grand Tour in England where, before embarking on their journey to the Continent, would purchase appropriate Murray volumes to guide them. Elite travelers used his erudite commentary to inform their visits, and his useful travel advice to ensure that they apportioned their time properly. In fact, several volumes of Murray *Handbooks* bearing the dated signatures of Mr. or Mrs. Aiken, survived the Aikens’ trip and are in the collection of Historic Charleston Foundation (figs. 55, 56).

The *Handbooks for Travellers*, published by John Murray and his son, were not merely “guidebooks.” The text of each volume was intended to educate already enlightened users and to direct them most efficiently and effectively to sites and sights that would enhance their learning in keeping with their genteel sensibilities. In the words of Antoni Maczak, “A visit to France, according to John Murray III, should have been preceded by a reading (or at least a perusal) of Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (namely in Napoleon III's edition), the medieval chronicle of Froissart (on the Hundred Years' War) and Arthur Young's analytical travel account of France on the eve of the Revolution. This suggestion expressed the editor's view of his clients.” In addition to extensive instructions about essential cultural activities, many pages of the Murray guides are devoted to specific practical advice, including the going rate for customs duties on pieces of art being exported and how to tip—or bribe—locals to facilitate an efficient, peaceful and enjoyable trip. Also provided for many locations was advice on how best to travel

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from place to place, what to expect from servants, how to deal with different classes of people in various locales, and what local customs needed be observed. Information from these influential contemporaneous Murray *Handbooks* provides insight into the Aikens’ travel priorities and sensibilities. Several other guidebooks known to have been in the Aikens’ possession along with the more extensive, detailed diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, aid in extrapolating what William, Harriet and Henrietta Aiken would have seen, done, and noted on this journey.

**THE JOURNEY BEGINS**

The Aikens sailed from Charleston to New York on Saturday August 15, 1857 on the Steamer *Marion*, arriving on Tuesday August 18th. While in New York, they socialized with Harriet’s niece, Marie Huger Lowndes Cottonet and the mother of her husband, Edward Laight Cottonet, who came into the city from their country house, Nuits at Dobbs Ferry (NY). The Aikens were also visited by Harriet’s brothers, Rawlins and William, who resided in the New York area. The Aikens’ connection to New York was significant, including friends and family, but time precluded more visits before they embarked on their journey to Liverpool on the steamer, *Persia*, on Wednesday August 19th.  

Charlestonians traveling to Europe had expectations of meeting their acquaintances but, as Harriet notes, the only people they knew on this particular ship were a couple called the Westons and a Mrs. Peabody. By Saturday August 29th they

\[232 \text{Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 1.}\]
were in Liverpool where they stayed only long enough to eat breakfast before going on to Manchester.

**THE EXHIBITION OF ART TREASURES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM: MANCHESTER, SEPTEMBER 1857**

In Manchester they visited what Mrs. Aiken refers to as “the Art Nuivu Exhibition.” This clearly was a reference to the “Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom,” which had been opened just two months earlier, heralded by a personal visit from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, along with their children and Prince Frederick William of Prussia (fig. 42). This exhibition, characterized as possibly the “greatest art show ever” by the BBC, featured, among its 16,000 exhibits, many paintings of the “Old Masters” so beloved by the Aikens and other Charlestonians. Included among these was a painting called *Madonna and Child with St. John and the Angels*, which had only shortly before been attributed to Michelangelo and was, after the exhibit, known as the “Manchester Madonna.” The exhibit also featured thirty-three paintings by Raphael, thirty-nine by Rubens, twenty-eight by Rembrandt, and thirty by Titian. The Aikens would have had a lot to look at in Manchester where the fifty-six by six hundred foot pavilion housed “1,173 ancient pictures, 689 modern pictures, 386 portraits, 10,000 objects of art in the general museum, 260 sketches and original

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233 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 2.
drawings, 1,475 engravings, 500 miniatures, 597 photographs, 63 architectural drawings, and 160 pieces of sculpture” (figs. 42, 43, 44, 45).235

The Manchester Exhibition was noteworthy in its time, lauded and attended by a host of famous personages from different countries and different walks of life. Among these were the French Emperor Louis Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington, Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Palmerston, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Gaskell and Friedrich Engels, who wrote about it to Karl Marx, saying “everyone up here is an art lover just now and the talk is all of the pictures at the exhibition…”236

Mrs. Aiken’s diary, which noted much more about who they met than what they saw, had no commentary on what they looked at in Manchester or what they thought about it. They stayed four days in a factory city with nothing else to recommend it to elite Grand Tourists such as themselves, however, so in all likelihood they spent all four days touring the exhibition. Like several other stops on this trip, the visit to the Manchester Exhibition provided the Aikens with an opportunity to do something new, unique, special; to have an experience their friends in Charleston could not have had. Clearly also, the exhibition brought together an extraordinary collection of great works of art. The art, so much of it works of the “Old Masters,” may well have influenced buying decisions during the remainder their trip.237 The Aikens may well have been influenced, also, by the way in which the art was displayed; the way in which pictures were arranged

237 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 2.
on the walls, as well as the attempt to bring art to the general public by the efforts of the elite few. At Manchester, wealthy mill owners paid entry fees so their employees could visit the exhibition, offering a glimpse of high culture to people who might never have seen a real painting before, much less great works of art in such profusion in this one place.\textsuperscript{238} William Aiken’s later involvement with the Carolina Art Association, to which he lent his paintings for public viewing, may well have been inspired and informed by what he saw during the Manchester Exhibition. The impact of the Manchester Exhibition on the Aikens may have been significant. Its impact on the history of art as accessible culture was, in the opinion of art historians, enormous: “No single date marks the beginning of any new movement in the history of ideas, but this much can be said, that 1857 is a turning-point in the history of art appreciation.”\textsuperscript{239}

\textbf{COMPANION TO THE MOST CELEBRATED GALLERIES OR ART IN LONDON}

While in Manchester, Mrs. Aiken acquired a book, \textit{Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London} by “Mrs. Jameson”, demonstrating her interest in English sensibilities related to private galleries.\textsuperscript{240} The book, now in the collection of Historic Charleston Foundation, was signed in blue ink, “Harriet L. Aiken, Manchester, Sept 2, 1857” (fig. 46). In the general introduction of the book, Mrs. Jameson discusses “The collections and galleries formed in England between 1795 and 1840…The reciprocal duties of those who have galleries and those who visit

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them…Pedantry of connoisseurship as regards the old masters…Advantage of a taste for art…The difference between a liking for pretty things, and the feeling and comprehension for art.”241 She discusses the high points of each of seven galleries and the artists represented within them. Galleries addressed by Mrs. Jameson were: The Queen’s Gallery, Bridgewater Gallery, Sutherland Gallery, Grosvenor Gallery, Lord Lansdowne’s Gallery, Sir Robert Peel’s Collection, and Mr. Rogers’ Collection.

About the Queen’s Gallery Mrs. Jameson writes of the “Remarkable specimens of Rembrandt in the gallery.”242 Among the works in the Queen’s Gallery were paintings by Rubens, Potter, Teniers and Canaletto, housed in the Grand Corridor at Windsor Castle. Writing on the Bridgewater Gallery, Mrs. Jameson notes “its refining influence on the public taste.”243 Among the artists contained in this gallery were: Delaroche, Guido, Raphael, Tintoretto, Titian, and Teniers. The Sutherland Gallery was located in Stafford House and had the “most remarkable pictures in it” which included Murillos, Durers, Van Dycks, Tintoretto, Domenichinos and Parmigianos. The Grosvenor Gallery is referred to as “one of the sights of London”, founded by the first Earl of Grosvenor and added to since then. This gallery was one of the first to be opened to the public, in this case on Sundays.244 The collection included the works of Rubens, Rembrandt, Andrea del Sarto (copies of whose work and self portrait were installed in the Aikens’ gallery), and Gainsborough. The Collection of the Marquess of Lansdowne was characterized by a

242 Ibid.
predominance of the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds and also included works by Hackett and Ruysdaal. At Lansdowne House, which was also known as Shelburne House while it was the property of the Second Earl of Shelburne, there was also a Sculpture Gallery which featured an original Venus crafted by Canova for Lucien Buonaparte.245 The Aiken gallery would also include a Venus, this one a copy done in the style of Canova, called Venus Italica. Lansdowne House had two octagonal rooms, incorporating sculpture niches, in which art was exhibited, making it appear similar to that of the Aikens’ gallery (fig. 47).246 In the private gallery of Sir Robert Peel, paintings of Dutch landscapes predominated. The final gallery discussed in the book is that of a Mr. Rogers. In this section “The art of selecting and arranging a small collection of pictures” is discussed, as are the “greatest painters”, Titian, Tintoretto, Annibale Carracci, Rubens, and Guido.247

The private galleries described in Mrs. Jameson’s book contained primarily Old Master paintings and portraits, which would likewise predominate in the Aikens’ gallery. Mrs. Aiken’s interest in the manners and taste of the English aristocracy and in their art collecting predilections is reflected in her acquisition of this book. It is not known if the Aikens were able to visit any of the galleries featured by Mrs. Jameson, but Harriet Aiken’s interest in its subject matter is significant; the book may have directly influenced the Aikens’ own endeavors.

246 John Woolfe and James Gandon, Architects, Vitruvius Britannicus, or The British Architects, Containing Plans, Elevations, and Sections, of the Regular Buildings both Public and Private, in Great Britain, Vol. IV; By Permission of His Most Excellent Majesty George III, 1767.
VITRUVIUS BRITANNICUS AND PATTERN BOOKS: THE INFLUENCE OF JOSEPH DANIEL AIKEN

Joseph Daniel Aiken’s 1849-50 Grand Tour which documented more extensive travel to Great Britain may well have encompassed visits to these and other galleries in English houses, including Chatsworth and Hardwick Hall, both in Derbyshire. Of Chatsworth Aiken wrote of the sculpture room: “here are Chef d’oeuvres of Canova, Chantry, Thorwaldson, etc. etc. it is one of the finest collections in Europe, a splendid bust of Napoleon, bust of Pius IX Statues of Napoleon’s mater, & Pauline, Statue of Achilles, the arrow through the heel, Venus & Cupid Endymion (the original) Mars & Cupid etc…” He characterized Hardwick Hall’s picture gallery as “the most interesting part of the building…containing near 200 portraits of the nobility of England for centuries back, by the best masters, such an imposing array of handsome visages & rich production of art is indeed rarely if ever to be met with.”

In his diary, Joseph Daniel Aiken displays an interest in architecture, and his observations would have served him well when supervising the second renovation of William Aiken’s house and the construction of the art gallery. It is possible that Joseph Daniel Aiken also perused eighteenth century English Pattern Books such as Vitruvius Britannicus, which includes drawings of several octagonal rooms, to inform the construction of his cousin’s gallery. In Volume IV of this book, octagonal rooms within linear plans feature prominently, appearing in Nuthall in Nottinghamshire, as well as Holkham Hall in Norfolk where two octagonal rooms formed a portion of the

248 Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1849-50, 3-4, 5.
249 John Woolfe and James Gandon, Architects, Vitruvius Britannicus, or The British Architects, Containing Plans, Elevations, and Sections, of the Regular Buildings both Public and Private, in Great Britain, Vol. IV; By Permission of His Most Excellent Majesty George III, 1767.
building’s statute gallery; Sandon Hall in Staffordshire; Newnham in Oxfordshire; and Shelburne, among others (figs. 48, 49, 50, 51). In *A Book of Architecture, Containing Designs of Buildings*, by James Gibbs, Plate 44 features an octagonal room with niches in “the plan, Front and Section of a House made for a Gentleman” (fig. 52). 250

**AN UNUSUAL ITINERARY: FIRST TO VISIT NEW PLACES AND LONDON FOR A DAY**

The Aikens’ overall itinerary was not wholly typical of Grand Tour travelers of the time, although their travel in Italy fit the standard mode more closely. The typical traveler arriving from the United States in Liverpool traveled south to London, stopping along the way at Birmingham, Warwick and Windsor Castles, Kenilworth, Stratford-upon-Avon and Oxford. Based in London for a period of a week or more, the Grand Tourist could take short trips to Hampton Court, Cambridge or Winchester. Taking the train from London to Dover, the channel crossing ended in Calais or Boulogne, whence the traveler could proceed to Paris. From Paris, the itinerary typically included stops along the way to Switzerland, after which the traveler moved on to Italy. In Italy, the most popular itinerary involved spending the Christmas season in Rome, traveling from there to Naples and Pompeii in the early spring and returning to Rome for Holy Week and Easter. This is the plan the Aikens followed. Some travelers, according to William Smyth, chose, as the Aikens did, to visit the capitals of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, stopping on their way to Vienna, visiting Prague, Dresden, Berlin and Potsdam. They

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would sometimes stay longer in the area to visit Frankfurt, Bavaria, the Rhine Valley, Bonn, Cologne, as well as cities in Belgium and Holland.  

The Aiken’s unusual route at the start of their trip could reflect the fact that they were experienced travelers, already familiar with the traditional attractions. The trip may also have been arranged around social events or planned meetings with friends. Almost certainly, the trip was arranged to enable the family to be among the first to view some exhibits or treasures that, like Manchester, were entirely new or newly reopened, as well as to arrive at a grand hotel only recently opened, like the Hotel de Louvre in Paris. Examining the travel guides they would have used, it is evident that their choice of some destinations specifically reflected a desire to visit museums, galleries and attractions newly opened or built since their last trip to Europe. Among the “new” places the Aikens visited were the New Gallery at the Zwinger in Dresden, opened in 1855, the Palais de l’Industrie gallery built for the Paris World Fair in 1855, the New Louvre, completed in 1857, and the Imperial Jewel Office in Vienna that had been closed since the revolutionary conflicts of 1848 and only reopened the year of their visit.

Traveling by train to London, the Aikens stayed in that city only one day, according to Mrs. Aiken’s diary, their plan being to return to London for a longer stay in the spring of 1858. Here they visited “Fenton’s, Saint James Street”, a possible reference to the studio of the well known photographer, Roger Fenton. Fenton’s broad range of

253 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 2.
work included portraits of Queen Victoria, documentary pictures of the building of a bridge, photographs of Kiev, Russia, and images of combat during the Crimean War in 1855 that brought him great renown. Fenton’s work inspired photographers such as Alexander Gardner who documented the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{254} If the Aikens had a photograph made of themselves Mrs. Aiken does not mention it and it does not appear in any archive. More likely, the Aikens would have called on Fenton to admire his work which was remarkable in its time, and of a fine artistic quality that endures. Individuals admiring of English sensibilities and in search of cultural enrichment might well have gone to Fenton’s studio to acquaint themselves with his unique and innovative art form, especially having just seen photographic art featured at the Manchester exhibition.

The Aikens left London for Paris on Saturday September 5, 1857, making a few stops along the way. They stayed briefly in Brighton where Mrs. Aiken noted she was suffering terribly from “neuralgia,” drove from there on Monday to Newhaven by carriage (what Joseph Daniel Aiken calls a \textit{voiture}), and sailed from there to Dieppe on a steamer.\textsuperscript{255} Noting that Dieppe was a “sea bathing place,” Harriet Aiken wrote of their amusement at seeing “the Country people.” Like several other entries in her diary, this one gives evidence of Mrs. Aiken’s hauteur and sense of superiority over many of the common people the Aikens encountered during their travels. In this case, the condescension seems cheerful, displaying amusement, rather than the annoyance caused to Mrs. Aiken by other individuals whose bearing, behavior or voices evoked negative comments.


\textsuperscript{255} Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 3 and Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1849.
PARIS

On Tuesday September 8 the Aikens took the train to Paris with “a ridiculous quantity of trunks” and spent ten days at the Hotel du Louvre, which they found “very magnificent and comfortable.” The Hotel du Louvre is described as having only been opened in 1857 and was “said to be the largest and most magnificent establishment of the kind in Europe.” Mrs. Aiken must have been delighted to have the chance to be one of the first of her social set to stay in this grand hotel. Mrs. Aiken was disappointed not to have a “French maid”, but was pleased to socialize with “many acquaintances” and Mr. Mason, their minister. By “minister” Harriet Aiken likely meant an American diplomat in Paris. In the 1855 issue of The Crayon, it is noted that Americans traveling abroad frequently met with American consuls or ministers who gave them advice on many things about the locality, including direction for purchasing art. Among the Aikens’ papers and books were French language books and guides. It is clear, therefore, that that the Aikens were fluent in French. Although the Aikens remained in Paris until September 19th, Harriet Aiken writes nothing about what they did there or even who they met. There is no mention in the diary about plans to return to Paris at the end of their Grand Tour, though we know that they did because they received an envelope there in 1858 containing the plans for the gallery being constructed in Charleston.

256 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 3.
258 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 3.
259 “Picture Buying”, The Crayon, Vol. 1, 1855, 100.
260 Books of Aiken Family found at Historic Charleston Foundation.
261 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 3; and envelope with plans October 1858. Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
Presumably while in Paris, the Aikens visited the Louvre itself, as well as the eponymous hotel, but no mention is made of it in the diary. The Louvre was a major attraction in Paris, having opened to the public as an art Museum in 1793, originally called the Museum Central des Arts. In 1804-1811 the building was enlarged, a new north wing was built from the design of Fontaine. In 1852-57, Napoleon III commissioned the “New Louvre” which consisted of new buildings along the Rue de Rivoli and completion of the north wing that linked the Louvre to the Tuileries. A visit to the newly completed “New Louvre” would surely have been on the Aikens to-do list during this trip, which visit they could have accomplished on any day of the week. Interestingly, the Louvre was open to foreigners with a passport at all times, but to everyone else, only on Sundays and “fete days.” 262

The Louvre Grand Gallery is described as being 1,330 feet long by 42 feet wide, containing close to 1,500 paintings. A portion of this space was lit from above by a skylight which “forms a tolerable gallery,” although, in the opinion of Thomas Forester, whose book, *Paris and Its Environs: An Illustrated Handbook*, the Aikens owned, the transverse light in the gallery from the windows is “disadvantageous to pictures.” 263 It is noted that when Napoleon gathered these works from various collections “the world had never contained under a single roof so choice a display of the sublime chefs-d’oeuvre of art.” 264 It is noted that many of the works in this collection were well known throughout Europe from engravings and copies. The Musee des Antiques, opened to the public in

263 Ibid, 68.
264 Ibid, 69.
1803, is described as being located in the basement of the Louvre Palace and containing only sculpture, including roughly 240 statues and 230 busts among which were the celebrated antique sculptures *Diane a la Biche* and *Apollo Belvedere*. Works of sculpture by other artists, including Michelangelo and Canova, were exhibited in separate space, on the ground floor.\textsuperscript{265}

The Forester *Handbook* discusses and describes some of the private art collections maintained by individuals whom he characterizes as “wealthy foreigners; or persons enriched, like Marshal Soult, by the spoils of conquest.”\textsuperscript{266} Marshal Soult was one of the men to whom William Aiken had asked John C. Calhoun for a letter of introduction; a request which may, in fact, have been related to art, not politics.

While in Paris in 1858, the Aikens purchased the red *boulle*-work table with ormolu mounts that was later placed in their home in Charleston (fig. 120). This piece had purportedly been housed previously in the Palace of Louis Philippe circa 1840, which the Aikens may have visited, either on this trip or their previous Grand Tour in 1848.\textsuperscript{267} Shopping for items of furniture as well as fashion was certainly an important activity for the Aikens in Paris, as it was in Florence and Rome, where they also purchased works of art.

Knowing how enamored the Aikens were of new things and of being among the first in their social set to see them, it is certain that, while in Paris, they visited the *Palais de l’Industrie*, an exhibition hall built for the World Fair in Paris in 1855. This hall was commissioned by Napoleon III who wanted to create a structure that would be grander

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid, 69.
\textsuperscript{267} HCF Object Summary, Catalog No. O96.3.6.
than the English Crystal Palace built for the World Fair four years earlier. It is likely that
this windowed, sky-lit venue, designed by Jean-Marie-Victor Viel and Alexandre
Barrault, located between the River Seine and the Champs Élysées, also served as a direct
inspiration for the gallery the Aikens were constructing (fig. 53). Thomas Forester
described the structure as a “spacious gallery that had light transmitted through
rectangular skylights.”268 The walls of the gallery were hung with paintings, the space
filled with art from all over the world—including for the first time, artifacts from
colonies of France. Works by contemporary French artists predominated, especially the
work of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Eugene Delacroix.269 Looking at the picture
of the exhibition hall, it is clear that it was also punctuated with large windows that
flooded the gallery with light.

**Germany: Cologne, Berlin**

From Paris the Aikens went to Cologne for a day, after which they spent a week
in Berlin. Here Harriet Aiken mentions they went to the Tier Garden, the wondrous
creation of renowned landscape architect, Peter Joseph Lenné, constructed in 1830. Mrs.
Aiken notes they also visited numerous “Palaces and Public Buildings,” among which
would almost certainly have been The Museum, known as the Altes Museum, designed
by the well known German architect, Karl Friedrich Schinkel in 1830.270 The museum

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consisted of an antiquarium, a sculpture gallery and a picture gallery. The picture gallery included works by artists of the Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, Flemish and German schools, including *Leda and the Swan* by Coreggio, as well as works by Raphael, Murillo, Titian, Carlo Dolci, van Dyck, and Rembrandt. The sculpture gallery, which was not highly rated by Murray, did house a bust of Julius Caesar and a piece called, *Hebe*, by Canova, a copy of whose work, *Venus Italica*, was in the Aiken’s collection in Charleston. Among the palaces likely to have been visited by the Aikens were those of Prince Karl, Prince Albert and Prinz Wilhelm of Prussia.271

While in Berlin, the Aikens also met with their minister—this one a Mr. Wright—and had the “honor” to meet Count Datzfeldt and Mr. de Satuers before leaving for Leipzig. Leipzig appears to have been a purely social destination since the entry speaks only of an “immense and curious” hotel and a band playing music for restaurant patrons. On September 29, the Aikens moved on to Dresden where they met Mr. and Mrs. Izard “in the gallery of Paintings” at the Hotel Bellevue, which Murray notes is “first-rate, charges in proportion.”272 It is likely that in Dresden the Aikens took pleasure at being among the first to have the chance to visit the New Gallery at the Zwinger, where they could have viewed Raphael’s *Madonna di San Sisto*, along with works of other Old Masters, including six paintings by Correggio, a Virgin and Child, known as the *Madonna della Rosa* by Parmigiano, *Il Christo della Moneta* by Titian, Rembrandt’s *Portrait of His Mother*, and Rubens’ * Judgment of Paris* and *Garden of Love*, among


many other famous works of art. Murray notes that Dresden had been called “the German Florence,” bespeaking its rich store of art and artifact. Mrs. Aiken had nothing to say about visiting the splendors of Dresden, however, which might be explained by the fact that she was ill—too ill even to accept an invitation to tea from Mrs. Stockton.

**AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE: VIENNA, PRAGUE, TRIESTE**

On Thursday October 8 the Aikens moved on to Prague, which Harriet Aiken characterized as “a very envious and interesting place” but not, apparently, envious and interesting enough to warrant a stay of longer than a single day. It was in Prague that evening that the Aikens lost “Murray”, which the diarist suspected was stolen by a waiter, and the loss of which distressed them a great deal. That the loss of this book was so upsetting—worth mentioning in a travel diary that otherwise devotes few words to the specifics of the trip-- is testimony to how much travelers depended on Murray to inform their travel choices. That Mrs. Aiken thought a waiter would want this book could suggest an assumption that working class people desperately envied and wanted to emulate the wealthy elites they served or simply disdain for the lower classes to whom she automatically ascribed dishonorable motives and behavior and to whom she assigned blame.

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274 Ibid.
275 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 4-5.
276 Ibid, 5.
The Aikens’ visit to Vienna, whence they traveled from Prague, may have been planned to correspond with the reopening of several attractions that had been closed since the Austro-Hungarian revolutionary conflicts of 1848. The Imperial Jewel Office, for example, which Harriet Aiken notes they were able to visit, had not yet reopened when the 1857 edition of Murray’s *Handbook for Travellers to Southern Germany* was published.**277** During the journey to Vienna, Mrs. Aiken was distressed that the family did not have the carriage to themselves, rather being seated with “a most disagreeable and vulgar woman, whose harsh tones swept from our ears the pleasing sounds which our little Countess had convinced us could be given by the German language.”**278** In yet another indication of how intimate the world they operated in was, the Countess to whom Harriet Aiken refers is a woman the Aikens met previously by chance on a train, who turned out to be a friend of a friend.**279** Mrs. Aiken’s pique at the vulgar woman was lessened by the favoritism she seems to have enjoyed at the border where Custom House Officers waved them through without searching their trunks. Her spirits were further lifted when they arrived at the Hotel de L’Imperatrice Elisabethe where, to her great amusement, fawning porters, valets and maids kissed their hands.**280**

The Aikens spent ten days in Vienna, visiting galleries, churches, and the aforementioned Imperial Jewel Office, deemed “magnificent” by Harriet Aiken. This museum contained, among other things, items reputed to have been the Regalia of

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**278** Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 6.

**279** Ibid, 5.

**280** Ibid, 6-7.
Charlemagne, retrieved from his grave at Aix-La-Chapelle, a destination mentioned in Mrs. Aiken’s Travel Diary but not noted as a destination. 281 Mrs. Aiken anticipated, but was not present for, the installation of a statue of Arch Duke Charles “the vanquisher” (of Napoleon at Aspern) in the Bergplatz, honoring victory in the revolutionary conflict that had caused so many of Vienna’s cultural attractions to be closed during the previous decade. 282 She also mentions attending the ballet and an opera she calls “Prophète”, no doubt referring to Giacomo Meyerbeer’s Le Prophète, a French language drama—a love story—played out in the setting of the religious wars of the sixteenth century. This grand opera was being performed in theaters around Europe during the 1850’s, having been first performed in Paris in 1849. Interestingly, Le Prophète had been performed in New York in 1853 at Niblo’s Garden, scene of the confrontation that led to August Belmont’s duel with Charletonian, William Heyward in 1841. 283

Among the galleries most likely to have been on the Aikens’ Vienna to-do list were those housed in the Belvedere Palace which contained antiquities, portraits of European princes and the Imperial Picture Gallery, deemed by John Murray to be “second only to that of Dresden in all Germany.”284 The nineteenth century saw the rise of the national art museum, of which the Belvedere, like the Altes Museum in Berlin, was

281 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, Appendix/notes, 1.
a prime example. The Belvedere Picture Gallery, designed by Christian von Mechel in 1781, was installed in Upper Belvedere Palace, which was part of a massive Baroque estate, consisting of two palaces connected by ornate gardens. The complex was built as a summer residence for military hero, Prince Eugene of Savoy, known as the “Hammer of the Turks”, by Johann Lukas von Hildebrandt circa 1720 (fig. 54). The picture gallery, a rectangle punctuated at the four corners with octagonal rooms, was arranged according to artists’ school: Italian, Flemish, German, Spanish and Dutch. The extensive collection included works by Old Masters such as Raphael, Rembrandt, Coreggio, Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Dürer and Leonardo Da Vinci. In this gallery, the Aikens would also have seen paintings by artists, copies of whose work they displayed in their own gallery, including Andrea del Sarto, Salvator Rosa, and Anthony van Dyck. The Belvedere Picture Gallery might have inspired the Aikens’ gallery space both for its architectural design and details, as well as its contents. The Lower Belvedere Palace incorporated a gallery that housed portraits when the Aikens visited, possibly informing their commission of George Whiting Flagg’s portrait of Harriet Aiken.

From Vienna the Aikens took a train to Trieste, a destination chosen mainly for its steamship terminal on the Adriatic Sea from which the Aikens would travel to Venice. While there, however, Mrs. Aiken wrote of their visit to the Cathedral of San Giusto in detail wholly lacking in other entries, noting that the San Giusto Cathedral was constructed from fragments of old Roman buildings in the fifth century.

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286 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 8-9.
ITALY: VENICE

The voyage by steamer from Trieste was not pleasant, apparently, but the Aikens arrived safely in Venice on Thursday October 23, and Mrs. Aiken reports they spent a week sightseeing “always in a gondola.”287 She reports they saw paintings in churches and visited the “Convent of Armenians celebrated by Lord Byron,” recommended by John Murray for its “curious oriental manuscripts.”288 One of the highlights of their time in Venice seems to have been meeting the Fish family at the table d’hôte at their hotel. New Yorker Hamilton Fish, William Aiken’s friend and former Congressional colleague, was in Europe on a Grand Tour with his family during the same time as the Aikens. The two families’ paths would cross several times, though it is not clear from the diary entry whether these meetings were by prearrangement or by chance.

Murray’s Handbook devotes several pages to the beautiful churches mentioned in Mrs. Aiken’s diary. He notes even in the minor ones, the distinctive architecture as well as the works of art to be found housed in them, with in-depth history and description of the Cathedral of San Marco, which was no doubt on the Aikens’ Venice itinerary.289 In all likelihood, the “sightseeing” undertaken by the Aikens included visits to palaces, such as the Balbi Palace, lauded by John Murray for its distinctive “Lombard” architectural style, as well as its collection of fine paintings and Canova’s Icarus and Daedalus sculpture grouping.290 Certainly during their week in Venice the Aikens would have visited the Doge Palace, about which John Murray writes in detail, noting the paintings

287 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 9.
290 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 9.
on view in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, including their exact location within the room. Here the Aikens might have viewed sumptuous painting incorporated into the walls and ceilings of the salon, as well as great works of art on canvas, such as Tintoretto’s *Paradise*, among other works of art, blackened by the great fire of 1577 but still, as Murray points out, magnificent. In the Murray *Handbooks*, works of art recommended to travelers are typically described in great detail, placed on the wall of the gallery in relation to one another and the architecture, as well as in the context of both human and art history.

**MILAN BY WAY OF VERONA**

Leaving Venice, the family traveled by train to Verona where Mrs. Aiken noted attending an English church service during which they “could not hear a word,” a visit to Juliet’s Tomb, and the spinach for which Verona was, apparently, famous. By the afternoon of Tuesday November 2, the Aikens had arrived by train in Milan where they spent a week touring cathedrals, churches, galleries, and took a day trip to Lake Como. Harriet Aiken’s account of their time in Milan mentions only their visit to the Arco della Rosa which, she notes, is “close to the Palazzo della Imperiale e Nelle Corte, which Palace received the Emperor when he visits the Lombard capital.”

It is likely that while in Italy they would have used George Stillman Hillard’s book, *Six Months in Italy*, to supplement John Murray’s *Handbook*. A copy of Hillard’s book, signed by Henrietta Aiken, October 25, 1857, survived the trip and is housed in the

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291 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 10.
collection at Historic Charleston Foundation (fig. 57). Hillard’s style is different from Murray’s—concise rather than verbose— but his guide for travelers is equally high flown and opinionated, focused more intently on the visuals than the extensive history and literature associated with the various venues. Hillard suggested the Lake Como trip undertaken by the Aikens, giving directions also to visit the nearby the Stelvio, which directions the Aikens could not have followed, given the single day they spent at the Lake. Hillard does not consider Milan worth much time and points the travelers only to the Ambrosian Library, the Theatre of the Fantoccini, and the Brera Gallery, with which he is not impressed, pointing the visitor only to Raphael’s Sposalizio about which he waxes poetic in great detail.292

Joseph Daniel Aiken noted his visit to the Brera, recommending its “rooms of fine painting, embracing many by the old masters.”293 Aiken’s visit to Milan also included a visit to the “Elegant villa of Somariva,” which might likewise have been visited by the William Aiken family, since it contained, “one of the most heavenly groups of Statuary in existence, a Cupid & Psyche by Canova, there was also a Palamedes by the same artist several of his models and an elegant Mars & Venus by one of his Pupils.” Aiken notes the “Zigzag flights of steps, the dripping Prattling sound of water, the grottoes & terraced garden all constituted this pattern of an Italian nobleman’s residence.”294

Hillard directs the Milan visitor to the Cathedral, the exterior of which he deemed “disappointing,” but the interior of which he lavishly praised.295 He insists that the visitor

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292 George Stillman Hillard, Six Months in Italy, in Two Volumes, Volume I (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1856), 18.
293 Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1949-50, 38.
294 Ibid, 39.
295 George Stillman Hillard, Six Months in Italy, in Two Volumes, Volume I, 8-18.
to the Cathedral climb to the gallery in the tower to enter an octagonal room from which there is a panoramic view of Lombardy below and the Alps in the distance. The view, as well as the octagonal gallery itself, may have served as an inspiration for the Aikens’ gallery in Charleston.  

**Sacred and Legendary Art**

At that time, Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* was housed in a room adjacent to the Cathedral. Mr. and Mrs. Aiken had undoubtedly viewed this famous painting, called the “most interesting object in Milan” by Hillard, on a previous journey. They may well have wanted to revisit it with Henrietta, whose art history education was an important feature of this trip. Indeed, Henrietta acquired her own books to direct her art education, including both volumes of Mrs. Jameson’s *Sacred and Legendary Art*, signed “Henrietta A. Aiken Roma January 1858” (fig. 58).  

These books touch on various aspects of art, particularly religious subjects, themes and meaning of symbols. The first volume addresses the significance and origin of legends portrayed in art, offers a distinction between historical and devotional subjects, the meaning and significance of colors in paintings, and patron saints in art. It goes into great detail on all the subjects of religious art including angels, the four evangelists, the twelve apostles, the “Doctors of the Church” as well as Saints. The book includes illustration plates by artists such as Andrea del Sarto (represented in the Aiken gallery), Giotto, Raphael, Murillo, Durer, Poussin and

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296 Ibid, 15.  
Pietro da Cortona, among many others. Renditions of different last supper scenes, painted by Raphael, Giotto and Da Vinci, are included in the book (fig. 59).

Mrs. Jameson wrote as a non-Roman Catholic to point out how the religious art of the Renaissance set the foundation for all other fine art. “We cannot look round a picture gallery—we cannot turn over a portfolio of prints after the old masters, nor even the modern engravings which pour upon us daily, from Paris, Munich, or Berlin—without perceiving how many of the most celebrated productions of Art, more particularly those which have descended to us from the early Italian and German schools, represent incidents and characters taken from the once popular legends of the Catholic Church.”

The second volume continues to address important religious subjects in art, including patron saints, “The Virgin Patronesses”, martyrs, bishops, and saints. Again, images of works by Old Master painters such as Donatello, Raphael, Perugino, Titian and Botticelli are included. Mrs. Jameson also mentions where the original paintings are located, such as in the “Florence Gallery”, the Leuchtenberg Gallery, The Louvre, Strasbourg Cathedral and the Vatican, among many other locations. These volumes were clearly used as a teaching tool and reference for Henrietta to learn about the subjects and meanings of Renaissance art. The study of art was a major component of the Grand Tour and this trip was certainly intended to enhance Henrietta’s education, serving as a sort of finishing school as she entered adulthood.

299 Ibid.
EN ROUTE TO FLORENCE BY VETTURINO

After spending a week in Milan, Mrs. Aiken wrote of beginning the journey to Florence “in Vaturino,” by which she almost certainly meant “vetturino,” a horse drawn carriage. Murray provided detailed information on how to engage a private vetturino, the vehicle which transported travelers, and the driver of which provided meals and lodging for them at inns along the way to their final destination. Murray warns travelers to choose their vetturino carefully, advising them to inspect the carriage and horses as well as to confirm what is expected from the driver before signing a contract. Presumably the Aikens took Murray’s advice and chose carefully, but the trip from Milan to Florence was not without unpleasantness. Setting out by vetturino on Monday November 8, the family’s first stop was Lodi where their lodgings were “rough but tolerably comfortable.” Their second stop, “Piacentia” (Piacenza) was comfortable but Mrs. Aiken notes they were served by men, not women. At Borgo San Domino, they had a “wretched” dinner and Mr. Aiken was treated disrespectfully, in his wife’s estimation. On the tenth they arrived at Parma where they stayed two days, visiting the Cathedral and Battisterio, which Mrs. Aiken declares “the most splendid in Italy.” They also went to look at paintings by Correggio in a camera di Correggio housed in a convent, as recommended by George Stillman Hillard, who found nothing else worth seeing in Parma. Their next stop was Modena, which Mrs. Aiken thought “a most wretched place”, though she notes the presence there of churches, and a “most beautiful picture gallery.” That she was ill and suffering from hives most likely soured Mrs. Aiken’s view.

301 George Stillman Hillard, Six Months in Italy, in Two Volumes, Volume I, 94-96.
BOLOGNA

Arriving in Bologna on Saturday November 13, the Aikens settled in for five days, about which Mrs. Aiken says nothing, other than noting that they stayed at the San Marco hotel.302 She makes no mention of the excellent “sausages” recommended by Joseph Daniel Aiken, who had nothing else to say about Bologna.303 The Aikens’ stay of five days suggests they thought the city worthy of their time, however, which might have been spent engaged in activities recommended by both Murray and Hillard. Both highlight the Palazzo Bacchiocchi, featuring statues of Napoleon, and a Picture Gallery, the Pinacotheca of the Accademia. Both of the travel writers also noted the distinctive local architectural convention of building covered porticoes to provide shelter from the strong sun, conjuring up an image of Charleston’s piazzas. Given that it was in November that the Aikens found themselves in Bologna, hot sun would have been less of a problem than snow in the Appenines that Hillard mentions encountering when he made the same journey from Milan to Florence.304

Murray is more enthusiastic about Bologna than is Hillard, educating the visitor about the history and style of the Bologna school of art, the most noteworthy masters of which were Ludovico Carracci and his cousins Agostino and Annibale, as well as Domenchino and Giovanni Lanfranco. Murray recommends visits to the Accademia delle Belle Arti, distinguished by its Gallery of Pictures on the first floor, consisting of eight

302 Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 11.
303 Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1849-50, 44.
304 George Stillman Hillard, *Six Months in Italy*, in Two Volumes, Volume I, 102-104.
rooms arranged around a monastic corridor, two of which were specifically rearranged in 1849 to feature the Old Masters, all of which he describes in great detail (fig. 59). 305

**Florence**

Traveling, as Hillard did, by way of Pianora, Mrs. Aiken was pleased to finally arrive in Florence as the sun was setting on Wednesday November 18, 1857, taking up residence at the Hotel d’Italie for a six week stay. John Murray characterized the Hotel d’Italie, located on the promenade along the Arno River, called the *Lungarno*, as “one of the best conducted in Italy,” and Mrs. Aiken was pleased with the “civility” of the hosts. 306 Her spirits were further lifted by a chance meeting with acquaintances, including “Mr. and Mrs. Eior,” whom she notes meeting at the “Piscine.” The Aikens were also pleased to meet Mrs. George Jones of Newport, Rhode Island and Mrs Bruen L. Perkins, who had sailed on the Persia with them months earlier. 307 Mrs. Jones was most likely Mary Savage Nuttall Jones, wife of George Noble Jones, a prosperous gentleman farmer with plantations in Georgia and Florida, as well as a Gothic Revival style summer “cottage” built at Newport by English architect, Richard Upjohn in 1839. After the outbreak of the Civil War, Jones cut ties to Rhode Island and sold the house which was

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307 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 12.
thereafter called “Kingscote” by its new owners, the King family. Mrs. Perkins, whose primary residence was in Boston, was also a Newport “cottager”.

While in Florence, Mrs. Aiken noted that they ordered statues, one of which was from Hiram Powers, “bought some pictures,” and “Etta” studied Italian. Powers’ name had first become known in America when his Greek Slave statue went on tour around the country in 1847-48 (fig. 61). Powers rise to prominence was enhanced by the fact that the United States government chose to feature his work at the 1851 London World Fair held at the Crystal Palace. Joseph Daniel Aiken, visiting Powers’ studio in 1850, commented on the warm welcome he had received from the artist, whom he described as “an exceedingly clever fellow.” Powers, who had a strong connection to South Carolinians, was at that time just completing busts of Miss Hampton and Mrs. Preston, as well as the statue of John C. Calhoun that would be installed in the City of Charleston in 1850 and destroyed in 1865 (fig. 62). Aiken describes the Calhoun statue as “a little larger than nature, but will be a good likeness, in the left hand he holds up a scroll on which is inscribed at his suggestion “Truth, Justice & the Constitution,” the right hand across the breast points to the scroll.” Aiken notes, admiringly, that Powers was also engaged in making copies of his own masterpieces to sell to tourists, including, “a finished duplicate of his inimitable greek [sic] slave, it is the perfection of female loveliness, next to it stood his Eve, rather larger, but if possible equally peerless, next was a bust of the great father

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of his country, & a bust of Proserpine, very sweet; in the same room.” Mr. and Mrs. William Aiken’s purchase from Powers was one of these “duplicates,” in this case, a bust of *Proserpine*. While in Florence along with the Aikens in 1857, William Aiken’s good friend Hamilton Fish purchased seven sculptures by Powers, including the fourth carving of the artist’s *Fisher Boy*, which Fish displayed at his New York home and bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art after his death.

**Uffizi Gallery**

Over the course of six weeks’ residence in Florence, the Aikens would certainly have done many other things as well in this art and culture-rich city. It is clear they visited the Uffizi Gallery, for which they had a French language guidebook that referred to this museum as the *Galerie Imperiale et Royale de Florence*. The Uffizi was one of the world’s most significant museums, the first in Europe to provide for public viewing of great art. In 1560, Medici duke Cosimo commissioned the artist, Georgio Vasari, to design a palace with two wings, “along the river, almost floating in the air,” to contain the administrative offices—uffizi—of the duchy of Tuscany. The building was later added onto by Bernardo Buontalenti and Alfonso Parigi, with its construction finally finishing in 1581. The Uffizi was first used as an art gallery by Francesco de Medici,

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311 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 13.


313 *Galerie Royale de Florence* (Florence: Imprimerie Soliani, 1855) Collection of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Cosimo's son, who designated certain rooms on the upper floors of the building to be used to exhibit objects from his collection, which he began acquiring in 1574.

In 1581, Francesco renovated the top floor of the Uffizi into a gallery, a place for “walking with paintings, statues and other precious things.” The gallery, punctuated with classical antique sculpture, featured frescoed ceilings and large windows to provide maximum light. Within this framework was introduced a unique space, called the Tribune, designed by Buontalenti in 1584. Octagonal in shape, this gallery space was surmounted by a shell-encrusted cupola that provided light from above for the eclectic works of art housed in this distinctive room (fig. 63). The date 1601 was discovered etched into the cupola, suggesting this was the year the Tribune was completed. “Through windows made from Oriental crystal, natural light falls softly upon the paintings on the walls covered in red velvet, on the sculptures and precious objects...The room symbolizes the cosmos and its elements: the lantern with its wind rose represents air; the shells, water, the red walls, fire; the marble and semi-precious stones of the pavement, earth.” The Uffizi was officially opened as a museum in 1765, having then been open to visitors—restricted to connoisseurs—for two hundred years.

By the time of the Aikens’ visit, the walls of the Tribune were filled with paintings of the Old Masters, its floor intersected by masterpieces of sculpture. George Stillman Hillard, who advises visitors to the Tribune to expect to be “surprised, delighted and astonished,” offers this description of the gallery:

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315 Ibid, 8, 92.
316 Ibid, 8.
The room is in shape an octagon, about twenty-five feet in diameter. The floor is paved with rich marbles, now covered with a carpet, and the vaulted ceiling is inlaid with mother-of-pearl. It is lighted from above. Here are assembled some of the most remarkable works of art in the world. There are four statues, the Venus de Medici, the Knife-Grinder, the Dancing Fawn, the Apollino, and a group, the Wrestlers. On the walls are hung five pictures by Raphael, three by Titian, one by Michael Angelo, four by Correggio, and several by artists of inferior names.\footnote{George Stillman Hillard, \textit{Six Months in Italy}, in Two Volumes, Volume I, 114.}

After praising the Tribune, Hillard proceeds to disparage many of its works, even those by renowned artists, pointing out, for example, that the paintings of Raphael on the walls of the Tribune are “not ranked in the very first class of his works. Three of them are portraits; one is of an unknown Florentine lady… Another is the head of Pope Julius II.”\footnote{Ibid, 117.} Only three pictures in the Tribune merit unqualified praise from Stillman: “\textit{Holy Family} by Michael Angelo and the Two \textit{Venuses} by Titian.”\footnote{Ibid, 121.} Between the two Titians, Hillard notes the presence of a \textit{Holy Family} by Andrea Del Sarto, an artist whom he says, “would have been a better painter, had he been a better man, and not had a bad wife.”\footnote{Ibid, 122.} The Aikens were admirers of Del Sarto, selecting copies of two of his works, \textit{Madonna of the Harpies} and a Del Sarto self portrait, for inclusion in their private gallery. In their French language guidebook for museum, the \textit{Galerie Imperiale et Royale de Florence}, the corner of the page detailing the Tribune was marked with what appears to be a deliberately folded corner, the only one in the book (fig. 64).\footnote{Galerie Royale de Florence, 174.} Murray, who characterizes the Uffizi collection as the “richest and most varied in the world, though less extensive than the Vatican and the Louvre”, writes in greater detail and in a slightly less disparaging manner about the Tribune, whose history he recounts...
and which he incorporates in his floor plan of the museum (fig. 65). 322 “The space was originally constructed by Francesco I as a ‘cabinet of miscellaneous curiosities’ …[including] astronomical and philosophical instruments… [and] his rich collection of medals and gems…” Murray admires the works of art but is critical of their placement in this room. “Here are assembled some of the most valuable works of the gallery; but as this room was not intended for their reception, it is not particularly well adapted for the pictures.” 323 Murray’s opinion of the Tribune is not typical of observers or critics.

Zoffany’s Tribuna of the Uffizi, 1772-78: “The Gentlemanly Hang”

Neither travel writer mentions a painting by eighteenth century German artist, Johann Zoffany, which hangs in the Tribune, and is a depiction on canvas of the room itself (fig. 66). 324 Commissioned by English Queen, Charlotte, the painting, Tribuna of the Uffizi, 1772-78, is an intricate—and logistically accurate—portrayal of the works of art housed in the room, incorporating English gentlemen visiting the gallery as part of the scene. These men are integral to the icons of western culture they are gathered to look at in the Tribune. This painting is intended to be a representation of the Uffizi, set inside the Tribune, peopled with famous (to contemporaneous Englishmen) individuals viewing the masterpieces in the room. This painting is a visual metaphor; an expressive

323 John Murray, Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy, Part II: Duchies of Parma, Vicenza, and Modena, North Tuscany and Florence, 149.
324 Zoffany is cited as a portrait artist whose work had been commissioned by Charlestonians, including Ralph Izard; Angela D. Mack and J. Thomas Savage, “Reflections of Refinement: Portraits of Charlestonians at Home and Abroad”, 23-27, in Maurie D. McInnis, In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad 1740-1860 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).
representation of how art was arranged to be viewed by elite Englishman on the Grand Tour, to which the art of Old Masters was central and essential.\textsuperscript{325}

Professor Alan Farber has identified the works of art depicted in the Zoffany painting as well as the gentlemen represented viewing it, among whom is depicted the artist himself (fig. 67). Among the English gentlemen are George, 3rd Earl Cowper, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire; George Legge, Lord Lewisham, later 3\textsuperscript{rd} Earl of Dartmouth, Lord of the Bedchamber to the Prince of Wales; Joseph Leeson, Viscount Russborough, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Earl of Milltown; George Finch, 9\textsuperscript{th} Earl of Winchilsea, Gentleman of the Bedchamber, Groom of the Stole; Sir Horace Mann; and Hon. Felton Hervey, ninth son of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Earl of Bristol, Equerry to Queen Caroline of Ansbach, Groom of the Bedchamber to William Duke of Cumberland.\textsuperscript{326} Paintings reproduced by Zoffany include: Correggio’s \textit{Virgin and Child}; Raphael’s \textit{St. John}; Rubens’ \textit{Horrors of War}; Titian’s \textit{Venus of Urbino}; and Holbein’s \textit{Sir Richard Southwell}. Zoffany depicted also all the sculptures in the Tribune, as well as objects on the floor and the shelves. Farber points out that the eighteenth century gentleman was educated to be a “dilettante or connoisseur. As a symbol of status…[they] became avid collectors of art, especially painting. The practice of collecting art helped provide the upper ranks of English society a common class identity.”\textsuperscript{327} The style of arranging the art in the Tribune is also significant, according to Carol Duncan, who notes the juxtaposition of the various schools of art favored by these aristocratic men of taste and breeding:

\textsuperscript{325} Alan Farber, “The Gentlemanly Hang: Tribuna of the Uffizi 1772-78.”
\textsuperscript{326} Alan Farber, Zoffany Tribuna Diagram.
\textsuperscript{327} Alan Farber, “The Gentlemanly Hang: Tribuna of the Uffizi 1772-78.”
Probably the most fashionable way of hanging a collection in the late eighteenth century was what might be called the connoisseur’s or gentlemanly hang. This installation model was practiced internationally and corresponded rather precisely to the art education of European aristocrats. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was widespread agreement that for cultivated men, aside from the sculpture of classical antiquity, the masters most worth collecting were sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian, Flemish, Dutch, and French. Men of taste and breeding, whatever their nationality, were expected to have learned key critical terms and concepts that distinguished particular artistic virtues of the most popular masters… A gentlemanly hang, be it in England, Italy, or France, might group together on one wall contrasting examples from opposing schools.  

Contained in the Zoffany painting are both the inspiration and the rationale for the concept, design and arrangement of the private gallery that the Aikens built at their Charleston home. The aim of Charlestonians abroad was, by all accounts, to become educated and refined, according to the standards of the English aristocracy; to acquire fine art along with the education to recognize and appreciate it. What the Aikens produced in Charleston—a distinctive gallery to cement their elite status among Charleston’s cultured elite—derived from the ideals pictured in the Zoffany painting. The Aiken’s gallery—octagonal room with skylight, the emphasis on Old Masters, juxtaposing different schools of painting with one another, punctuating the gallery space with sculpture—all this derived from the concept of the Tribune, glorified as a mark of taste and refinement by the Zoffany painting that depicted it and its admirers.

**Palazzo Pitti**

The Palazzo Pitti is another Florence venue which the Aikens certainly visited, most likely many times over the course of their six week stay. Murray says of the Pitti

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that it “may be visited daily for weeks without exhausting [its] interest.”\(^{329}\) The original palazzo was built for the Pitti family, rivals of the Medicis, in 1457. It was designed by Filippo Brunelleschi and built by his protégé Luca Fancelli after Brunelleschi’s death. In 1549, the property was sold to the Medicis. The transfer of the property to Pitti’s rival is noted by Hillard, who quips that this “furnishes an instructive commentary upon the saying, that fools build houses and wise men buy them.”\(^{330}\) Palazzo Pitti became the Medicis primary residence, which they connected by elevated corridor across the Arno River to the Uffizi. The palace was enlarged in 1560, at which time Bartolomeo Ammannati designed and constructed the courtyard and two tangential wings. Cosimo II de Medici commissioned further changes, improving the view and completing the piazza. The formal Boboli Gardens that serve as the palazzo’s back yard sit at the egress of the corridor from the Uffizi over the Arno.\(^{331}\)

This magnificent palace, the arrangement of which paid homage to classical antiquity and whose salons were filled with works of Old Masters, is likely to have served as inspiration for the Aikens’ gallery. Indeed, the Aikens’ gallery incorporated copies of two paintings the originals of which hung on the walls of the Palazzo Pitti. In their gallery the Aikens displayed copies of Carlo Dolci’s *Penitent Magdalen* and Andrea Del Sarto’s *Madonna of the Harpies*. Also installed in the Aiken gallery was Del Sarto’s self portrait which hung in the Uffizi at the time of their visit. It is possible that when


\(^{331}\) Ibid.
Mrs. Aiken spoke of “buying some pictures”, these were among them. Murray recommends picture dealers, Gagliardi, at the Piazza Santa Maria Novella and Metzger on the Borgo Ognissanti, as well as a painter, Pompignoli, in the Piazza di Santa Croce, who was a “good copyist of the old masters.”

Joseph Daniel Aiken notes his visit to the Pitti, describing its exterior as “rough & dark” but marveling at the magnificence of its interior halls and the art displayed in them, highlighting the works of “Michael Angelo, Raphael, Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian, Leonardo da Vinci, van Dyck…” Aiken mentions Canova’s Venus, commenting that while it is “much celebrated,” it is “not without faults.” Canova’s Venus at the Pitti at that time was the Venus Italica, an eighteenth century interpretation of the Medici Venus of classical antiquity. Mr. and Mrs. William Aiken liked Canova’s work well enough to own a copy of his Venus Italica which they displayed in the gallery at their Charleston home.

**BUYING PICTURES AND SCULPTURE**

While in Florence, the Aikens spent time shopping, acquiring works of art, including the “statue from Powers” noted in Mrs. Aiken’s travel diary, the bust of Proserpine, and the copy of the Venus Italica also buying Mary Magdalene, a full size sculpture of a reclining figure, signed “D. Menconi, Firenze 1858” (Appendix A, fig. A1, A5, A4). Mrs. Aiken noted that while they were in Florence they “also bought some

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333 Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1850, 46.
334 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 13.
pictures,” which may have included their copy of Andrea del Sarto’s *Madonna of the Harpies*, the original of which hangs in the Uffizi, and a Self Portrait also by Andrea del Sarto. Another painting known to have been in the Aikens’ collection, a copy of Raphael’s *Madonna della Sedia*, signed by “Agostino Doglio,” the original of which hangs in the Pitti Palace, may also have been purchased at this time. Mrs. Aiken notes they purchased a “mosaic table” labeled “Baebetti/Atelier Sculpture/Florence/Place S. Croce No. 7695.” They also bought a number of fashion items, including a blue and brown hat from the “Magazin Francais Modes et Nouveautes de Paris” and an item from the furrier at Giovanni Calvelli. (figs. 68, 69).336

**ROME**

Arriving in Rome on December 22, 1857, the Aikens checked into the Hotel de Europe, located at the Piazza di Spagna, characterized by Murray Handbook’s editor, Octavian Blewitt, as “the healthiest situation in Rome…excellent in every respect, but dear.” Although they spent two months in Rome, Mrs. Aiken wrote little about their stay. The highlights of the trip seemed to have been reuniting with the Fish family at the hotel, attending “excellent” English church services, and meeting their Minister, Mr. Cass, whom they knew from a previous visit. Harriet Aiken also mentions attending a charity ball which she did not think “handsome” and disparaging the manners of other

336 Aiken Rhett Papers, Charleston Museum, Box 41.  
guests, as well as a reception given by Mrs. Cass which she “found very stupid.” Mrs. Aiken also apparently enjoyed shopping in Rome, making several purchases at the “Rue Condotti” shop of Diego D’Estrada, “Graveur de Camee et de Portraits en Coquilees” (engraver of cameos and portraits in shell). A receipt for her purchases shows that she bought several brooches, one fashioned in Etruscan gold.

Joseph Daniel Aiken’s diary entries on his time in Rome suggest what the William Aiken family might have done and seen in the city, and what might have inspired the concept and contents of their gallery. Noting the “commanding position” of the Capitol, Joseph Daniel Aiken describes the works of art in the galleries, including the “heads of Emperors & the Gladiator” which he characterizes as “remarkable.” Paintings by Tintoretto, Guido, Claude, Correggio and Domenchino are specifically noted and praised. Writing of the Vatican, Aiken points to its wealth consisting of its “masterpieces of paintings, and its antique chefs d’ouvrres of Sculpture.” He notes that Raphael’s Transfiguration is displayed in the same room as Domenchino’s St. Ambrose Administrating the Host to St. Jerome, as well as other paintings by Raphael. Describing the gallery’s statuary, he characterized it as the “most extensive in the world,” containing among other masterpieces, “the celebrated ‘Apollo belvidere’, & the Laocoon.” A Canova copy of Perseus with the Head of Medusa is also mentioned, as is a room “appropriated to animals in marble… superb vases, columns, & baths of beautifully variegated marble; Egyptian sculpture & antiquities; frescoed ceilings etc.”

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338 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 114.
339 Aiken Rhett Papers, Charleston Museum, Box 41.
340 Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1850, 47.
341 Ibid, 48.
THE VATICAN

The William Aiken family no doubt spent many hours admiring the treasures at the Vatican, also visiting St. John Lateran. This was recommended by the Murray Handbook and noted by Joseph Daniel Aiken (who was probably using Murray as a guide) as “much smaller than St. Peters…yet a magnificent Church, ornaments with mosaics, paintings, frescoes Statuary etc, is in great richness & profusion.” Aiken thought the façade of this place “more elegant than St. Peters,” a characterization with which George Hillard concurred. Aiken also highly recommended a visit to the Villa Borghese, an elegant palace with a “fine collection of antique figures & some good modern figures… several fine paintings, rich vases.”342 Both the Murray Handbook and George Hillard recommended attending Christmas services at St. Peters, which the Aikens did.343 Presumably they spent their time revisiting Rome’s venues, introducing Etta to art and artifact.

NAPLES, POMPEII, AND VESUVIUS

After traveling to Naples on February 25, 1858, touring in the area, stopping at Pompeii, where they had bad weather, and at Vesuvius, where they had a “pretty good day,” they dined at the Inn and drank “lackirinacristi,” actually Lacryma Christi, a Campania regional wine made from grapes unique to Vesuvius.344 Mrs. Aiken found the beggars “an annoyance” and the country people “dirty and disagreeable,” and complained

342 Ibid, 48; and Octavian Blewitt, A Hand-Book for Travellers in Central Italy; including The Papal States, Rome and the Cities of Eturia, 399; and George Stillman Hillard, Six Months in Italy, in Two Volumes, Volume I, 333.
343 Octavian Blewitt, A Hand-Book for Travellers in Central Italy; including The Papal States, Rome and the Cities of Eturia, 395; and George Stillman Hillard, Six Months in Italy, in Two Volumes, Volume I, 229-33; and Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 19.
about there being “nothing fit to eat” at an Inn near the Piscina Mirabilis. On March 16, the Aikens left for Sorrento where they stayed for three days at the Hotel del Sole at which the people “were civil.” On an excursion to Paestum—an ancient Greco-Roman city frequented, like Pompeii and Herculaneum, by travelers on the Grand Tour—which Mrs. Aiken found “very fatiguing,” they met “Mr. and Mrs. McEnzie Parker,” who had just returned from Egypt.345

BUYING PICTURES

Based on the observations of a late nineteenth century visitor to their gallery who noted specific works of art, the Aikens also purchased paintings while in Rome, though it is not clear in every case whether they were obtained during this Grand Tour or were bought on their previous trip. One of the only contemporary paintings known to have been acquired by the Aikens on this trip was a piece called Romeo and Juliet, by American artist, Luther Terry, who had expatriated to Rome in 1839 (Appendix B, fig. B16).346 Other paintings noted by the observer in the Aiken gallery which would have been obtained in Rome included a piece she attributed to Salvator Rosa, obtained from the gallery of Prince Buonacorsì, and one by David Teniers said to have come from the gallery of Prince Torlonio. Paintings noted by the observer that might also have been purchased in Rome were A Flight Into Egypt by Carlo Marrattì and Three Strolling

345 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 19.
Musicians attributed “Michael Angelo” (Appendix B, fig. B17).

A painting that survives and still hangs in the Aiken-Rhett House is The Virgin Mary with the Child and St. Elizabeth with St. John the Baptist, in a Landscape, signed V. Morani “fecit in Roma 1858.” (Appendix B, fig. B9). While in Rome the Aikens would also have ordered Shepherd Boy, signed and dated 1858, from American sculptor Edward Sheffield Bartholomew, who died just months later (Appendix A, fig. A3). The sculpture called First Grief which has been attributed to another American sculptor in Rome, Thomas Crawford, dates from 1857 and so would likewise have been ordered while the Aikens were in Rome (Appendix A, fig. A2).

The Aikens remained in Naples, returning to Rome for the “grand Ceremonies of the Holy Week—Palm Sunday at Saint Peters,” with which Mrs. Aiken was not impressed since they had seen “much the same thing at Xmas.” Feeling ill again, Mrs. Aiken had to leave the church where Etta enjoyed hearing the Miserare, and passed up an opportunity to visit the Sistine Chapel because of the crowds. Critical of the demeanor of the priests and Cardinals performing Mass at St. Peter’s, Mrs. Aiken praised the English service they attended on Good Friday and reported that Easter Sunday was “very grand,” and the fireworks at the conclusion of the pageant on Easter Monday were very beautiful.

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349 Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 15-19.
Northern Italy: Viterbo, Radicofani, Siena, Leghorn, Genoa, Turin, and Return to France and England

Leaving Rome on April 8, the Aikens moved north again, stopping at “Virobo” (most likely this was Viterbo), Radicofani and Siena. On Monday April 12, they traveled by train to Pisa from which they took an excursion to Leghorn the next day where they ran into Mr. and Mrs. Bruen at the train station. After spending two nights in Genoa, the Aikens sailed to Turin where they spent two nights before returning to Genoa, about which Mrs. Aiken speaks in glowing terms, enjoying the fact that the “Mediterranean Sea [is] constantly in sight.” The last entry in Mrs. Aiken’s Travel Diary has them leaving by vetturino for Nice on April 22, 1858. Notes in the appendix, however, help us extrapolate where they traveled. Mrs. Aiken’s notes indicate letters written in May and June from London (to Miss Anne Lowndes and Miss Sallie Lowndes, respectively) and from Paris during the same months (to Mrs. Singleton and Miss Kinloch), as well as during August (to Miss Taylor, Rawlins Lowndes and Miss Moses). We know that the Aikens were in Paris to receive the plans for their art gallery around October 18, 1858, and that they returned to the United States from Le Havre, sailing on the Arago, arriving in New York on November 30, 1858.
Chapter 5
The Charleston Milieu: 1858

The Charleston to which the Aikens returned in 1858 was a place still enamored of the past; a city in which the elite lived happily with the traditions they had endorsed for centuries (fig. 70). It was a city in which construction—of both public and private buildings—continued briskly, social occasions bringing the city’s wealthy elite together abounded, and commitment to civic and philanthropic involvement continued to grow. It was a city in which art would play a role in both social and civic affairs in the years leading up to the Civil War. The Aikens’ art gallery was central to a genteel way of life, enabling both private social functions and public philanthropy. It was, also, emblematic of the sensibility of the society to which its owners belonged. To judge from the flurry of civic and social activity into which the Aikens entered on their return, one might not recognize the precarious position of a city in decline, on its way to the ruin secession and war would bring.

The society in which Charlestonians lived in 1858 derived from choices made decades earlier. The sensibility of city’s leaders who revered the past and looked to Europe to inform standards and conventions led to what historian George C. Rogers characterized as a battle for the soul of the city. “The crucial battle in 1832 and 1833 in Charleston was not so much tariff or no tariff, or slavery or no slavery, as it was whether or not the city should be of the world.”354 Those who advocated embracing the future were defeated and overruled, which resulted in decisions like ending the railroad tracks at

354 George C. Rogers, Jr., Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 161.
Line Street, a decision described as equivalent to holding up a hand to the industrial future and saying “Do not enter.” A European visitor, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, was stunned to learn that, in the middle of the nineteenth century in a country increasingly known for its inventions, innovative technology and manufacturing activism, the Lucas rice mill on the Ashley River was importing a steam machine from England.

The choices made, based on a belief that commercial and industrial operations would damage order and destroy ambiance, derived from a veneration of the past that was a hallmark of southern life and education, a feature that came to increasingly distinguish the region from other parts of the country during the nineteenth century. Even among the elites, the diverging path during these years was striking. During colonial times and the early years of the republic, the ideal education of a gentleman was similar, regardless of region. Indeed, the parameters of education for a fine gentleman were essentially identical in all regions of America and in Great Britain. The study of the classics, amplified by a Grand Tour, comprised essential curricula for a refined gentleman. At the end of the seventeenth century, Harvard President William Brattle put it succinctly: “Liberali liberaliter instituendi—-Gentlemen must be educated like gentlemen.” As time passed, the goal of education changed in Boston and New York, moving toward a more technical emphasis to meet the needs of an increasingly specialized and industrialized society. This was not so in the south where reverence for

356 Ibid.
357 Walter J. Fraser, Jr., Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 22.
the past—and a love of familiar ritual—restrained technology and kept the education of a
gentleman firmly anchored in the broad curriculum of the classics.\textsuperscript{359} South Carolinian,
William Grayson, defined the goal of education as to “improve the manners, morals and
mind of the Student.”\textsuperscript{360} The deliberate decision to venerate the past, rather than embrace
the future naturally led to a fear of “outsiders” as well as of change and innovation, all of
which set in motion the decline of the city of Charleston.

In 1800, Charleston was the fifth largest city in America, having slipped from the
fourth place it occupied in 1775. By 1860, its rank, based on population, fell to twenty-
second.\textsuperscript{361} The city’s status in world trade also declined, as did its output and
manufacturing.\textsuperscript{362} Having failed to diversify its economy, Charleston descended to the
bottom of the list of America’s major cities in terms of industrialization.\textsuperscript{363} The decline in
wealth and influence—which intensified during the antebellum years—was relative,
however: in 1860, the average free South Carolinian (regardless of race) was “financially
better off than most other Americans.”\textsuperscript{364} Indeed, during the years immediately preceding
the Civil War, personal property and real estate values, bank deposits and exports all
increased.\textsuperscript{365} Some have suggested that Nullification, which slowed development in the

\textsuperscript{359} Bertram Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 92-93.
Brown.
\textsuperscript{361} Walter Edgar, \textit{South Carolina A History} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 287.
\textsuperscript{362} Peter A. Coclanis, \textit{Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country 1670-1920}
\textsuperscript{363} Walter J. Fraser Jr., \textit{Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City} (Columbia: University of South
\textsuperscript{364} Walter Edgar, \textit{South Carolina A History}, 287.
\textsuperscript{365} Peter A.Coclanis and Lacey K.Ford, “The South Carolina Economy Reconstructed and Reconsidered:
Structure, Output, and Performance, 1670-1985, 93-110 in Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Joseph F.
1830’s, actually spurred it on in the 1850’s at which time Charlestonians were emboldened; confident that their way of life would prevail.\footnote{From South Carolina; Public Feeling in Charleston The Leading Men in the Secession Movement Misgivings about the Issue”, Charleston December 9, 1860; published in The New York Times, December 15, 1860.}

In Charleston, these years saw construction of both public buildings and private residences, increased participation in the arts and philanthropy, and a social whirl in which wealthy elites like the Aikens enjoyed their status at the top of an affluent social set in large part unfazed by political events. Poet and social commentator, Paul Hamilton Hayne, reflecting in 1870 on antebellum Charleston characterized it as an idyllic place where,

\begin{quote}
    culture, refinement, hospitality, wit, genius, and social virtue, seem to have taken up their lasting abode… A constellation of distinguished men—writers, politicians, lawyers, and divines—gave tone to the whole society, brightened and elevated the general discourse of men with men, and threw over the dull routine of professional and commercial labor, the luster of art, and the graces of fastidious scholarship.\footnote{Michael O’Brien, Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 58.}
\end{quote}

Upper class Charlestonians, following the traditional British model of culture and aesthetics, were deeply committed to the arts as an essential of life.\footnote{Maurie D. McInnis, The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston, 12.} The Aiken home was newly renovated and redecorated in \textit{au courant} opulence, now boasting the rarity of a dedicated art gallery to display treasures acquired in Europe. The house was ready to play host to glittering social occasions attended by those distinguished men and their wives and provide access to art to the community through the benevolence of its owner.

Charlestonians’ homes were a reflection of who their owners were and where they fit in the society in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the days immediately before
the Civil War, entertaining at home was an integral part of the life of Charleston’s elites. It is noteworthy that among the changes the Aikens made to their house during the 1858 renovation was to add guest chambers as well as additional upstairs public space, suggesting that they planned to entertain in their home. As an older couple with just one grown child, there was no other reason to create additional bedroom space at that time. Having retired from public life, just returned from what would probably be their last trip abroad, William Aiken and his wife renovated their home to suit full time residence and a commitment to social involvement.

In Charleston, unlike New York, entertaining did not take place in restaurants or clubs. The low country had no need of an August Belmont or his French chef to originate a trend to home entertaining featuring lavish spreads set out by servants. In Charleston, entertaining—often on a grand scale—typically took place in the home which was at the center of social activity through the antebellum years. It has been suggested that Charlestonians “put forth their houses as the most important documents of the cultural achievements of their society.” Grand parties featuring massive amounts of food and drink were integral to the social routine of the elite. The list of necessary items for a party in the home of Mrs. Charles Alston in 1851 offers a glimpse of how affluent, influential Charlestonians entertained during the antebellum years. Described by a guest as “the handsomest ever given in Charleston,” Mrs. Alston’s party required the following list of supplies:

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18 dozn plates-14 dozn knives-28 dozn spoons—6 dozn Wine-glasses—As many Chapaigne [sic] glasses as could be collected—4 wild Turkeys—4 hams 2 for sandwiches & 2 for the supper tables, 8 pates—60 partridges—6 pr of Pheasants—6 pr Canvass-back Ducks--5 pr of our wild ducks—8 Charlotte Russes—4 Pyramids 2 of crystallized fruit & 2 of Cocoanut—4 Orange baskets—4 Italian Creams—an immense quantity of bonbons—7 dozn Cocoanut rings—7 dozn Kiss cakes—7 dozn Macaroons—4 moulds of Jelly 4 of Bavarian cream—3 dollars worth of Celery & lettuce—10 quarts of Oysters—4 cakes of chocolate—coffee—4 small black cakes

Cultural engagement as an expression of refinement and taste was integral to the lives of people in this social set, comprising musical and literary pursuits, as well as collecting art. Although possession of a private gallery was a rarity, art collecting had been an identifier of the refined elite of Charleston, beginning more than a century before the Aiken’s gallery was unveiled. Early collectors, including Joseph Allen Smith, John Izard Middleton, and John Ashe Alston, compiled sophisticated and eclectic collections, patronizing artists at home and abroad, and attempting to bring art to the public view. As early as 1784, efforts were undertaken to create an art academy of some sort, in keeping with the museums then opening in Europe. Those efforts failed, and in the nineteenth century, collectors devoted themselves largely to amassing Old Master paintings or copies of them. At the end of the 1850’s, the Aiken’s collection, in which copies of important works of the Old Masters predominated, was in step with its cultural milieu in which copies of great paintings were unapologetically acquired and admired.

Unlike in New York where non-original art was disdained, in Charleston, such homages to the Old Masters were embraced. Art critic, John Ruskin, a man respected by many art collectors in New York said,

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Never buy a copy of a picture, under any circumstances whatever. All copies are bad; because no painter who is worth a straw ever will copy...whenever you buy a copy, you buy so much misunderstanding of the original... You may, in fact, consider yourself as having purchased a certain quantity of mistakes; and, according to your power, be engaged in disseminating them.\^\textsuperscript{372}

In Charleston, however, it was the snobbery of John Ruskin that was disdained; the positive view of copies based on a rationale that made sense in the time and place. Commenting on the art critic’s disparaging commentary, \textit{The Courier} opined: “Mr. Ruskin is remarkable rather for his eccentricities than for correct taste....It is equally true that good copies from great masters, both in painting and sculpture, are very important and very useful acquisitions either to a private collection or to a public gallery.”\^\textsuperscript{373} Of course, copies of great paintings also served those who did not have an opportunity to view the originals in European museums.\^\textsuperscript{374}

The broad, generalized education of the lowcountry gentleman based on the British model lent itself to an approach to art collecting likewise predicated on reverence for the old rather than patronage of the new. Charlestonians, like the English elite after whom they fashioned their lives, tended to be “irreclaimably of the old school in painting;” they accepted the British notion that proper education informing collecting the “right” pictures resulted in “moral virtue.”\^\textsuperscript{375} In their view, there was a direct connection between connoisseurship and benefit to society, a connection deriving from the subject


\^\textsuperscript{373} \textit{The Courier}, April 10, 1858.

\^\textsuperscript{374} Maurie D. McInnis, \textit{In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad 1740-1860}, 40-41.

matter of the pictures, more so than the aesthetic aspect of the work. Old Master
paintings, therefore, were studied and revered; copies of them desired for the access they
provided to the universal message the images expressed.376 Collections in Charleston
aimed at matching the taste of eighteenth century English nobility, taste that incorporated
the great works of Italian, Dutch and Flemish paintings. These art collections were
intended to demonstrate their owners’ broad knowledge and familiarity with these
disciplines and the provenance of their subject matter.377

CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND PHILANTHROPY: CAROLINA ART ASSOCIATION

Two years after the South Carolina Historical Society was founded by a small
group of Charlestonians, including James Petigru, Frederick Porcher, and Mitchell King,
another group of men succeeded in establishing the Carolina Art Association.378 In the
fall of 1856, Colonel James H. Taylor devoted himself to creating a public art gallery in
Charleston. Assembling a group of thirty associates, he sought to create an art association
to manage and underwrite this task. By February 1857, after decades of failed attempts
by groups of prominent Charlestonians to create an enduring academy that would
promote the fine arts, the Carolina Art Association was established in Charleston with
130 charter members.379 Predicated on the idea that “a picture gallery [was] an important
feature of modern life,” this group forsook the notion embraced by earlier organizations

that the art academy existed to nurture artists, and focused more intently on displaying
great art and enabling public viewing. Elite art collectors from Charleston’s first
families, including John Ashe Alston, N.R. Middleton and Joseph Manigault, endorsed
the idea of a permanent public art collection to “soften the manners of our people,”
believing that it was a “necessity for an art gallery to exist in a cultured community.”

In the past, efforts at establishing an art academy had been undertaken for and by
artists. The group organizing the C.A.A., however, consisted primarily of influential men
from the realms of business and politics eager to engage in public philanthropy. The
first President of the organization was Governor Robert F.W. Allston, who was assisted
by nine vice presidents, including William Aiken, who accepted the position shortly
before embarking on his Grand Tour. Other vice presidents included William Henry
Heyward, John Ashe Alston, J. Izard Middleton, and R.B. Rhett. Colonel Taylor
served as Treasurer, with two secretaries, one of whom was A. Sachtleben, the
eponymous author of the “Carolina Art Association: A Sketch of its History by One of its
Founders.” Among the “Counselors” for the group were N.R. Middleton, Charles E.W.
Flagg, William Porcher Miles, Joseph Manigault, and Joseph Daniel Aiken, who also
served on the Art Committee. Under the leadership of these individuals, the C.A.A.,
which aimed to create a permanent collection, was established, predating the

383 Constitution of the Carolina Art Association with the Rules for the Government of the Executive Board and Names of the Officers, 1858-59.
establishment of both the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The Carolina Art Association launched its inaugural exhibit, composed of 176 works of art on loan from private collectors in Charleston in the Apprentices Library Society on Horlbeck Alley in April, 1858. The exhibit also included pieces by local artists who were given the opportunity to showcase their work. Catalogues for exhibits in succeeding years show an increasing number of works being shown, supplementing the pieces on loan from collectors which continued to be displayed. The organization, which was officially chartered by the State on December 21, 1858, actively sought members who were charged dues of $10 a year. Membership increased steadily, however the organization’s treasury did not. Owing to the “continual transportation, hanging up and taking down of the loaned pictures, together with a somewhat too liberal salary paid to the hall-keeper, Mr. Purse...involved the art association into debt to the amount of $1300.” To address the shortfall, thirteen members of the Association’s board contributed $100 each. General Martin proposed that a committee be formed to increase the membership rolls, which was successfully accomplished, enrolling 300 new members in just two weeks, generating $300 for the Association. At the same meeting, James Rose proposed holding a fair to raise additional funds.

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384 Sallie Doscher, “Art Exhibitions in Nineteenth-Century Charleston,” in *Art in the Lives of South Carolinians*, Nineteenth Century Chapters, SD-11.
In May 1860, a fair to benefit the Association, said to be the “most brilliant and successful enterprise of its kind ever held in this city,” generated $4,000. This fair was not organized by the influential men in charge of the organization. Rather, the “fair” that was undertaken was probably similar in concept to the Sanitary Commission Fairs held in New York to raise money for various causes. In both cases, it was the ladies who took charge of these events which were often only tangentially related to art. Mr. Rose, the originator of the idea of a fair, recognized how essential the ladies were to their enterprise. In a letter written to the directors of the Association, Rose highlighted the contribution of the ladies and the important role they would play in the continued success of the Association: “With these views, a committee has been appointed to invite the cooperation of the ladies, without which they could entertain no hope of success, and with which they would have no fear of failure.” The ladies who took charge of the fundraising fair to benefit the Carolina Art Association included Mrs. Governor Allston, Mrs. James Rose, and Mrs. Dr. E. Horlbeck.

Indeed, the woman’s fair was a fixture in the middle of the nineteenth century, showcasing women’s handiwork, along with contributions from the organization for which money was being raised. It is clear from a contemporaneous article about the Carolina Institute Fair organized in Charleston in 1850 that the event featured women’s handiwork along with agricultural products and accoutrements. About this event The

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386 Ibid.
387 Documents of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, Vol. II. Nos. 61 to 95, New York, 1866, 54, 73, 96, 101, 279.
388 Letter from James Rose, Broad Street, March 20, 1860, from the Archives of the Gibbes Museum.
*Charleston Daily Courier* wrote: “[The] samples of needlework, embroidery, and millinery attest that the delicate fingers of Eve’s industrious daughters have been busy in lending their cooperation.” The report suggests that the agricultural items were what drew the crowds, however, to the detriment of attention to the ladies’ work— a reality of which the article was critical: “We are disposed to find fault with some of our friends who hurry over this department of the exhibitions, as too trivial for more than a hasty glance, and who would confine their panegyrics [sic] altogether to the Cotton Bale and Bundles of Hay. There are few things, alas! too few, that our young ladies generally can or will do in the way of industrial pursuits.”

With increased membership yielding more income from dues, and the money raised from the Fair, the C.A.A. was able to begin to establish a permanent collection, for which they commissioned a painting—*Sergeant Jasper Raising the Flag at Fort Moultrie*—from Emmanuel Leutze, best known for his 1851 painting, *Washington Crossing the Delaware.* They also bought *The Death of Jacob Surrounded by his Sons* by Charles L. Nieper, *Shipwreck on the Coast of Scotland* (artist unknown), and a copy of *Portrait of German Reformers,* originally painted by Lucas Cranach.

The Art Committee, of which Joseph Daniel Aiken was a member, was solely responsible for “the right of accepting, purchasing or disposing of the pictures and statuary.” Exhibitions by the C.A.A. during the antebellum period show the

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392 Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection Database: Works of Art:

393 Sallie Doscher, “Art Exhibitions in Nineteenth-Century Charleston,” in *Art in the Lives of South Carolinians,* Nineteenth Century Chapters, SD-12.

commitment of the organization to popular taste of the era, depending heavily on Old
Master paintings, although some eighteenth and nineteenth century pieces—including
some by American artists—were included. 395 Family portraits were also well represented
among the works exhibited by the C.A.A. 396 William Aiken loaned ten pieces from his
collection to the second annual Carolina Art Association exhibit, all of them likely
acquired during the European trip from which he had returned several months before.

Pieces from the Aiken collection that were part of the 255 works of art in the exhibit
included: his copy of Canova’s Venus Italica, Hiram Powers’ bust of Proserpine, a copy
of Andrea Del Sarto’s Madonna of the Harpies, identified as Madonna in the Pitti Palace
at Florence, a copy of Raphael’s Madonna della Sedia attributed to a Florentine artist,
“Doglio (Agostino),” and a Magdalen after Carlo Dolci. Also loaned from the Aiken’s
collection for the exhibit were The Virgin Mary with Child and St. Elizabeth with St. John
the Baptist, in a Landscape, signed “V. Morani, fecit in Roma 1858; A Female in an
Attitude of Prayer by an unknown artist; St. Catherine with the Wheel and Palm Branch,
also anonymous; and an unattributed Madonna and Child. 397

The Carolina Art Association continued to have financial setbacks, but was able
to increase its membership rolls and successively enlarge its permanent collection. In
November 1861, however, the massive fire that consumed so much of Charleston swept
through the Apprentice’s Library Society, destroying all of its contents except for one
painting, Sir Thomas More Parting with his Daughter on his Way to his Execution by

395 Catalogue of the Carolina Art Association (1858); Catalogue of the Carolina Art Association (1860).
396 Gabriel Edward Manigault (President of C.A.A. 1882-1899), “History of the Carolina Art Association,” Archives of
the Gibbes Museum.
Co. Steam Printers, 1859.
Charleston artist, John B. Irving. This marked the end of the effort to bring art to the public until years after the end of the Civil War when, in 1879, the Carolina Art Association was resurrected.

In its later years, the Association undertook a greater variety of tasks, establishing a school, and involving itself in various aspects of art and in architecture. In 1883, a drawing class offered by the Association was underwritten by a scholarship, endowed by Charlestonian, S.T. Ravenel and New York art collector and private gallery owner, John Taylor Johnston, who had been the first President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1944, the Carolina Art Association published a book called This is Charleston: An Architectural Survey of a Unique American City, the text of which was written by Samuel Gaillard Stoney. The book provides an exhaustive photographic survey of Charleston buildings, both public and private, with notations indicating whether they were still in existence as well as whether they should be considered “notable” in a local, regional or national sense, or “valuable.” This vintage booklet, supplemented with the work of Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel and Jonathan Poston, makes it possible to get a sense of architectural trends, innovation and flavor in Charleston in the late 1850’s and a sense of how the Aikens’ newly constructed art gallery fit into that milieu.

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400 Samuel Gaillard Stoney, This is Charleston: A Survey of the Architectural Heritage of a Unique American City (Charleston: The Carolina Art Association, 1944).
Toward the end of the antebellum period, Charleston saw an increase in the construction of public buildings that was matched by residential construction that brought the number of dwellings in the city to 6,700—more than double the number of homes that had existed in 1800, though the city’s population growth over the same period was minimal. The effect was different, however, between public and private building enterprise and from neighborhood to neighborhood. Maurie McInnis asserts that, “A visitor to Charleston in 1810 who returned in 1860 would, on some blocks, feel as if he or she had never left and, on others, hardly recognize the place.”

During the 1850’s Charleston architecture, as respected public buildings, became more eclectic, embracing a variety of styles ranging from the familiar Greek and Classic Revival prevalent in earlier years in the city to Gothic Revival, “Italian Villa,” even Moorish. In this decade, a European aesthetic continued to be the inspiration for both public buildings and private residences, with one notable public exception. In 1853, construction began on the new U.S. Custom House, characterized as “national architecture,” inspired by northern models as a means to urban progress. Several Charleston architects competed to be appointed architect in charge of this project, among them Edward C. Jones, Edward White Brickell and P.H. Hammarskold. The city preferred the drawings submitted by Jones and wanted him in charge, but were overruled by the Federal government which was footing a substantial part of the exorbitant cost of

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402 Ibid, 17.
the project. Ultimately, Boston architect Ammi Burnham Young was chosen to oversee
the task, which incorporated designs of all three Charleston architects, as well as those
submitted by the Savannah based J.S. Norris (fig. 71).\textsuperscript{405} Kenneth Severens, cultural
historian and former Professor of Fine Arts at the College of Charleston, suggests that in
spite of the conflict, the great cost and the overruling of Charleston’s choices by the
Federal government, Charlestonans in the mid 1850’s were pleased with the project.
Severens suggests that they perceived the new Custom House “in beautiful
harmony…with the fortunes of our city, before which now looms up a future bright in
promise and glorious in prospect…a structure whose elegance and beauty will fittingly
symbolize the glorious mission of commerce, with its humanizing and refining
influences.”\textsuperscript{406}

Reflecting the mindset of the society that welcomed the Custom House, the mid-
to-late 1850’s was a time of renewed interest in the building of civic institutions. Among
the projects undertaken were the Work House, designed by Edward C. Jones, who was
also responsible for Roper Hospital; and the District Jail, credited to Louis J. Barbot and
his partner, John H. Seyle. These men, along with George Edward Walker and Francis
D. Lee, were among the best known architects working in Charleston during this period.
Their work on public buildings, as well as houses of worship, showed remarkable
variety.\textsuperscript{407} Architecture—and architects—were of increasing interest and importance in
the decade before the Civil War; the subject of newspaper articles extolling their work.

\textsuperscript{405} Courier, October 12, 1850; Mercury, October 11, 1850; “Charleston The Palmetto City,” Harper’s New Monthly
Magazine, No. LXXXV, Vol. XV, June 1857, 9; Kenneth Severens, Charleston Antebellum Architecture and Civic
Destiny, 171-172; and Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, The Architects of Charleston, 237-238.
\textsuperscript{406} Courier, July 15, 1854 and Kenneth Severens, Charleston Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny, 175.
\textsuperscript{407} Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, The Architects of Charleston, 8.
During the period, Charleston supported and encouraged native architects who were credited with doing “ambitious things every day in brick and granite, which everybody goes to see.”

Edward C. Jones rose to prominence in Charleston for his design of the Greek Revival style Westminster Presbyterian Church, built on Meeting Street in 1848-50. In 1850, his plans were used to construct Italian Villa style Roper Hospital on Queen Street (fig. 72). This building, with its towers and piazzas, was described by a contemporaneous observer as “graceful and airy, particularly suited to its objects.” In the same year, Jones served as surveyor and architect of Magnolia Cemetery. One of the most unusual buildings designed by Jones was the Zion Presbyterian Church, built in 1859 by contractor, David Lopez, at 123 Calhoun Street (fig. 73). This building, constructed for a congregation composed primarily of African Americans, but of which Jones was an elder, is of no identifiable style. The structure, which features twin porticoes, was built to accommodate 2,500 people, with doors that opened outward to enable an efficient exit in the event of an emergency.

John H. Seyle and his partner, Louis J. Barbot who had studied architecture in the firm of Edward C. Jones, collaborated on several projects in Charleston during the years immediately preceding the Civil War. The most unusual of these was the Charleston “Club House,” erected for Mr. Albert Elfe. This building featured both architectural and

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408 “Charleston The Palmetto City,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, No. LXXXV, Vol. XV, June 1857, 5. The Harper’s observer emphasizes the point that the brick used in Charleston was gray, not red; the “flashy red loaves from the more fashionable ovens of the North” which were considered “wretchedly vulgar” by Charlestonians.
409 Ibid, 11.
411 Ibid, 218.
technological innovations. Conceived to be surrounded by flower beds and “meandering walks”, anchored by five fountains the water for which was supplied by reservoirs within the structure itself, the building was described by The Courier as being furnished in the “highest style of the Corinthian order.”

The description of the three-story Club House went on,

The front view will present a rusticated base with arched windows, with all ornamental appendages allowed or admitted by the order. Above will be enriched with pilasters, entablatures, and balustrades. The windows are the largest size consistent with good effect and proportions, and are so arranged that the sashes may be run entirely within cases in the walls, so as to allow the fullest and freest admission of air… The entrance will be surmounted by a Corinthian pediment… The front will be finished externally, with the imitation brown stone mastic (the building being of brick), with terra cotta ornaments and projections somewhat in the style of the Mills House… the other portions of the exterior will be cemented—the roof will be of the best slate…

After competing unsuccessfully for the commission to design the Calhoun Monument, Barbot and Seyle collaborated on the Spring Street Methodist Church. That same year they designed and constructed the brick Charleston Fire Engine Company house, a structure that would later be the German Fuselier Hall and was demolished in 1937.

After the partnership broke up in 1859, Barbot designed a building intended to be the Catholic Orphan School for Boys, slated to be erected on Queen Street across from Archdale Street. His design incorporated soaring ceilings, piazzas, and state-of-the-art technology, including a heating system combining fireplaces and hot air, and indoor

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412 *Courier*, August 27, 1853.
413 Ibid.
414 *Courier*, July 11, 1854; April 5, 1856.
415 *Courier*, July 21, 1856; and *News and Courier*, August 23, 1837.
plumbing fed by a 10,000 gallon cistern. There is no record of whether this building was ever built.

George Edward Walker’s work focused on school buildings, including the “Free School No. 6” built early in the decade on the east side of Meeting Street between Mary and Wragg, the site of today’s Courtenay Elementary School. This project was lionized for its integration of “taste and utility,” by the writer of a letter to The Courier who identified himself as “H.” Walker’s next big project was the design of the library for the College of Charleston, the plans for which he drew in 1854 and construction of which was completed in July, 1856. Based on the parameters of the plan of the library at the University of South Carolina, this structure is an amalgamation of Greek Revival and Italianate styles, featuring a portico atop Tuscan pilasters and arched two-story Italianate windows; quoins punctuate the corners of the building for maximum effect (fig. 74).

Francis D. Lee, who for part of his career was a partner of Edward C. Jones, had a portfolio more eclectic than any other Charleston architect of the time. His Farmer’s and Exchange Bank building, constructed in 1853-54 at 141 East Bay Street, would be characterized as Moorish Revival; Lee called it “Saracenic”. The building is notable for its honeycomb vaulting, known as “Muquarnas,” its horseshoe arches and the striped effect created by alternating types of brownstone (fig. 75). The interior of the two story building with coffered ceiling and “arabesque work from floor to ceiling…lighted with

416 *Mercury*, May 24, 1859.
418 Ibid, 244.
419 *Courier*, June 30, 1853.
rays from the summit,” matched the exterior’s eclecticism. Lee was also responsible for “Gothicizing” the Unitarian Church at 6 Archdale Street in 1852-53, as well as constructing the Vanderhorst tomb at Magnolia Cemetery in an Egyptian style (fig. 77, 76). In 1859, construction of Lee’s design for St. Luke’s Church at the corner of Charlotte and Elizabeth Street began (fig. 78). The Courier reported that the style of this building was “perpendicular Gothic, of the Tudor period…from extreme lightness when compared with the other styles of Gothic… peculiarly adapted to our Southern climate.” The Greek cross plan church was intended to have a 210 foot high steeple but the start of the war interrupted construction and the steeple was never built. Its interior features a fifty-five foot ceiling supported on quatrefoil columns surmounted with Gothic vaults. In 1948, this congregation merged with St. Paul’s Church in Radcliffeborough. The New Tabernacle Fourth Baptist Church bought this building in 1950.

In contradistinction to the eclecticism of public building architecture was the lack of it in the design of private homes during the 1850’s. Toward the end of the decade, architects began to be engaged for the design of ordinary residences, but this should not suggest a period of stylistic innovations in private homes. As in the case of the Aiken’s renovations, Charleston home builders looked to Europe for architectural inspiration, deriving from their experiences abroad as well as from the landscape itself. An observer from New York, writing in 1857, described the city as “rising, like another Venice, from the ocean,” adding that it was built, “like Venice, upon flats and shoals of sand and

422 Courier, May 13, 1859.
The idea of Charleston as Venice was not original, the connection between the two cities having been noted—and embraced—decades earlier by Henry Cruger, a friend of Hugh Legare, who wrote:

Beneath a southern climate and sunny skies, in a champain [sic] country, and with a choice harbor, the structures of [Charleston], as you approach from the water of Sullivan’s Island, corresponding to the Lido, forcibly induce a mutual recollection—and when the moon has thrown its light around, as the solitary passenger, through deserted and sepulchral streets of Charleston meditates upon her time-worn, rusty and mouldering edifices, he is gloomily reminded of the blank, icy and desolate aspect of that other city afar, now manifestly “expiring into the slime of her own canals.”

The aesthetic affinity between Charlestonians and Italy was evident in the Italianate style that was increasingly employed in certain upscale residential projects.

Throughout the decade, however, the majority of homes continued to be constructed in the traditional styles of the previous century, designed and erected mostly by anonymous builders. Those who ventured into the realm of more dramatic architecture risked being deemed “less than fully refined” by members of Charleston’s pedigreed elite families who assumed the role of the arbiters of taste and fashion and, oddly enough, volunteered expression of their disdain to a reporter for a northern newspaper. Even when a “name” architect took on a residential project, it was most often designed to blend with the neighboring homes, not to stand out. An example of such a non-descript architect-designed home was the two story clapboard house on the corner of Rutledge Avenue and Doughty Street constructed in 1857 (demolished in 1963).

and attributed to Francis D. Lee (fig. 79). An exception to this was the Colonel John Algernon Sydney Ashe House, located at 26 South Battery, designed to stand out by Edward C. Jones in 1853. This dwelling was Italianate in style, incorporating an asymmetrical plan in an L-shape, a double tiered piazza with arched loggia, an octagonal stair hall with correspondingly shaped skylight, and an octagonal drawing room. Brackets and arcades, associated with Jones’ work on public buildings, were also incorporated into the design of this house (fig. 80). 429

Also unusual, though not attributed to an architect, was the house built at 94 Rutledge Avenue for Edisto Island cotton planter, Isaac Jenkins Mikell, in 1853-54 (fig 81). This large home is modeled on an Italian villa, boasting a portico floored with Minton tile, supported on cypress wood carved Corinthian columns, adorned with sculpted rams’ heads. 430 This house was characterized by an observer in 1857 as “one of the most ambitious of the private dwellings of Charleston,” as well as a singular departure from the usual style of modeling.” 431

During the 1850’s in Charleston, most residential innovations tended to be functional and technological, rather than aesthetic, although individuals often added a unique feature to their homes to personalize it. Indoor plumbing began to be common during the 1850s; a house on Broad Street incorporated a private bathroom for every bedroom. Innovative building systems involving the use of iron and steel were also an

emerging feature of the decade.\textsuperscript{432} The Charleston Gas Light Company was organized in 1846 and introduced its service to the city in 1848. A plaque commemorating this group—a pioneer in providing public service—is mounted on the Charleston Gas Light Company building at 141 Meeting Street, designed by Edward Brickell White in 1878.\textsuperscript{433} Gas lines for lighting, widely introduced for street lamps in Charleston in 1848, became increasingly common in homes built or renovated, like the Aiken’s, in the 1850’s.\textsuperscript{434} In new construction, as in renovation of existing homes, the emphasis was less on aesthetic innovation and more on serving the needs of the homeowner; on building a house suited to the way the owners lived and to the purposes to which they would put the space. As in the case of the Aikens, whose addition of new guest quarters and the art gallery served their intention to entertain and in general bring more people into their Charleston home, other newly constructed houses were built to accommodate the specific technical and social needs and desires of their owners.

Housing for the wealthiest Charlestonians was still clustered on the lower peninsula where many fine homes were built during the decade of the 1850’s, exhibiting confidence in the future of their city. These homes included the Porcher-Simonds House at 29 East Battery (1856), the Cleland Kinloch Huger House at 8 Legare Street (1857), the Louis Desaussure House at 1 East Battery (1858-60), the Nathaniel Russell Middleton

\textsuperscript{432} Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, \textit{The Architects of Charleston}, 11.
\textsuperscript{433} Charleston County Public Library (Meeting Street 100-173)
\textsuperscript{434} James Funk, \textit{Three Rivers Form an Ocean...Vignettes of Life in Charleston} (Bloomington IN: 1st Books, 2004), 281.
House at 22 South Battery (1857-58), and the James E. Spear House at 30 South Battery (1860), to name just a few (figs. 82, 83, 84, 85, 86).

During the latter part of the antebellum period, however, building—of fine mansions as well as ordinary homes—increasingly spread out to other areas of the city during the 1850’s. Joining the Aikens to the north of those densely built neighborhoods were what preservationist Jonathan Poston characterizes as “Villas of the Antebellum Elite” Among these was the J. Thomas Hamlin White House, constructed circa 1854-55 at 33 Charlotte Street (fig. 87). This Greek revival style house, built of brick arranged in a Flemish bond, featured a slate roof and a cast iron balustrade connecting the sidewalk to a landing at the entry. The William A. Hussey House at 43 Charlotte Street, likewise constructed in Greek Revival style, also incorporated Federal and Italianate aspects. The exterior of this house, which Poston characterizes as a “suburban villa,” is adorned with stucco quoins; its interior featuring mantles of black marble inset with gilded cast iron and dramatic plaster ceiling medallions (fig. 88).

The John Carburry House at 12 Elizabeth Street was a typical Charleston single house, altered after the war to incorporate Italianate influences. Sarah Rutledge Hort’s brick Greek Revival style house, built in 1860, featured corner quoins and the double-parlor plan that began to be fashionable in Charleston when the Aikens incorporated it into the first renovation of their house years earlier.

In Ansonborough, George Black built a two-and-a-half-story side hall house in 1853. In the Italianate style, this dwelling stood out among the neighboring single

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435 Walter J. Fraser, Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City, 229.
437 Ibid, 598, 600.
houses.\textsuperscript{438} On Wentworth Street, William C. Armstrong, manager of Bennett’s Rice Mill, built a house unusual for its central arch and front piazza in 1853-55.\textsuperscript{439}

In Harleston Village, at the corner of Ashley Avenue and Wentworth Street, rice planter, John Hume Simons built a large scale brick house in 1855 (fig. 89). The double-plan house featured a closed gable roof with lunette window above two smaller windows, with pedimented dormers on the north and south sides of the roof. The interior boasted Greek Revival marble mantels and fourteen foot ceilings.\textsuperscript{440} In 1850-52, the Wickliffe House was constructed at 178 Ashley Avenue by rice planter, John Hume Lucas. This house, a typical side hall with double parlors, was distinctive for the fact that it incorporated an oversized portico featuring Tower of the Winds capitals rather than the expected two level piazza (fig. 90). Like the Aiken-Rhett House, the Wickliffe House was entered via a sunken double staircase.\textsuperscript{441} Bees Row, constructed at 101-109 Bull Street is reputed to have been designed by a contractor from the North because these tall row houses are so similar to townhouses built in Philadelphia and Baltimore in the middle of the nineteenth century (fig. 91). Italianate terra cotta decorations adorn door surrounds which are said to have been ordered from New England. With interiors incorporating Italianate stone mantels, each of these townhouses was reached from the street via an octagonal foyer with niches intended for sculptures.\textsuperscript{442}

\textsuperscript{438} Ibid, 585-616.
\textsuperscript{439} Ibid, 472.
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid, 485.
\textsuperscript{441} Ibid, 622.
\textsuperscript{442} Jonathan Poston, \textit{The Buildings of Charleston}, 504.
The Aikens and their private gallery fit neatly into this milieu, accommodating themselves to its conventions while also setting a new standard for opulence and achievement.
We are fortunate that the Aiken-Rhett House still stands and has been preserved so that we may enter the gallery space and try to imagine how it might have looked when the William Aiken family enjoyed it (fig. 92). Unlike New York private galleries of the period, none of which has survived the wrecking ball or renovation rendering it unrecognizable, the Aikens’ gallery remains architecturally intact. The Aikens’ gallery, however, was never described in detail or immortalized in a picture; neither were exhaustive lists of its contents produced. So the image of the gallery in our mind’s eye must depend on extrapolations from what we do know about the structure, the contents of the space, the provenance of the art, the conventions of the era and the sensibilities of and influences on its owners.

**DESIGN AND ARCHITECT**

Like most other residential buildings of its era, the identity of the architect or builder of the art gallery addition is not known for certain. It is likely, however, that it was designed by William Aiken’s cousin Joseph Daniel Aiken (1817-1884) who sent the pencil drawing of the gallery floor plan which the Aikens received while they were in Paris in 1858. J.D. Aiken’s penchant for art and design lends further credence to the idea that he designed the gallery addition. His Travel Diary suggests that he thought of himself as an expert on art and architecture and he also created art, including the bust he
sculpted of his wife, Ellen Martin Aiken (fig. 93). The drawing of the gallery, labeled “Plan of New Room,” shows an octagonal space with semi-circles drawn at the corners to note the statuary niches, with additional notations for the doors and windows (figs. 94, 95, 96). Detailed dimensions are not provided in this drawing which was included in the envelope with a pencil drawing of a partial floor plan of the first floor of the Elizabeth Street house. The drawing of the first floor showed detailed room dimensions as well as noting the sites of the newly installed gas fittings and detail of the back entry to “the yard” from the main stair hall (fig. 41). These drawings—particularly the gallery sketch—appear to be the work of an amateur, not official drawings of an architect. The handwriting is the same on both drawings, suggesting they were completed by the same person. In all likelihood, although there is no conclusive proof, Joseph Daniel Aiken designed the gallery addition and was the author of these drawings.

**THE GALLERY EXTERIOR**

The work of Willie Graham, Carl Lounsbury, and Orlando Ridout V provides invaluable information on the construction of the Aikens’ gallery. In 1858, the art gallery was constructed north of the northern section of the west façade of the house. The structure consists of a ground story that holds a cistern and the main story comprising the gallery space. The design of this new wing follows the overall design scheme of the

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443 Travel Diary of Joseph Daniel Aiken, 1849. The South Carolina Historical Society.  
444 Aiken-Rhet Paper, the Charleston Museum, Box 90.  
445 No conclusive evidence was uncovered during the Historic Structures Report, but the preponderance of evidence suggests that the designer of the 1858 renovation and Gallery addition was JD Aiken.  
446 Willie Graham, Carl Lounsbury, and Orlando Ridout V. *Architectural Investigations of the Aiken-Rhett House.* Historic Charleston Foundation, 2005. All physical descriptions of the gallery derive from this source and from the personal observations of the author of this thesis.
existing house as it was remodeled in the 1830s. The Elizabeth Street, or west, side of the gallery wing is stuccoed with five rusticated ashlar courses on the cellar story. That side of the main story is stuccoed with penciled ashlaring, and quoins were added, tying this addition into the scheme of the main house (fig. 97).

The west façade of the gallery contains two windows with red sandstone sills and bead and butt shutters hung using strap hinges attached to hooks. The apertures of these windows measure 7’6” high by 3’8” wide, which corresponds to the size of the second story window openings in the main block of the house. The windows are single-hung six-over six sash that sit in 2” beaded frames. The window panes measure 12” by 20” and include 5/8” wide muntins. The lower sash employed cast iron weights as a counterweight. The gallery wing incorporates a full entablature on the main story. It was constructed out of brick and stuccoed to match the rest of the exterior. The architrave is undecorated beneath a dentilated brick frieze, crowned with a molded cornice.

The south façade of the gallery incorporates two bays of the north wall of the original house (fig. 98). The west façade of the gallery is located in the same plane as the original house, and projects 2’6” beyond the segment of the house containing the main entrance. The gallery wing construction balanced the west façade of the house centering the principal entrance between two larger structures. The east wall of the gallery was built abutting the northwest corner of the stair tower. The gallery wing footprint projects into the work yard, with the north wall of the gallery terminating 3’9” south of the southern wall of the stable and carriage house.
The north façade of the gallery addition is a blank veneer with a pedimented gable and brick modillion cornice (fig. 99). On the northwest elevation, flush corner quoins were placed from the level of the eaves to the top of the perimeter wall on the west, running from the gallery to the outbuilding.

The east façade of the gallery forms the western portion of the service yard (fig. 100). This façade is divided into two sections. A doorway located to the north just beyond the terminating step on the sandstone staircase provides access to the cistern located under the gallery. This ground level also incorporates two windows without sash, fronted instead with iron bars, set in a wooden frame. These windows afford light to the service area under the gallery space. On the main story there is a door on the southern end of the façade that leads from the sandstone staircase landing to the vestibule area of the gallery. This door has a 2″ beaded frame that sits on an unmolded wooden sill. The exterior portion of the door comprises two vertical recessed panels including quirked ovolo molding and a beveled edge. Two windows also punctuate the east wall on the main story. These window openings measure 7′6 ½ ″ high by 3′8″ wide. The window six-over-six sash is located in recessed beaded frames measuring 1¾ ″. The window panes measure 12″ by 20″. The windows also have shutters that are secured open by shutter hooks. This façade incorporates the bell system, newly installed in 1858, with the bell plate attached to the wall approximately 10” north of the northern cellar window, with arms for the bell system above.

Below the gallery addition is a cistern. The foundation walls of the gallery wing are exposed brick laid in a 5:1 bond with the joints unfinished. The ceiling of the cistern
and cellar show the floor joists for the gallery space. They were left exposed and were not whitewashed. The joists are sash-sawn pine that measured 3” by 12” spaced 16” on center. These are imbedded in the 1858 masonry walls, supported by 3” thick bonding timbers. Modern insulation was installed, covering most of the underside of the floorboards, however some areas of insulation are missing, revealing that the floorboards are 1 ¼ ” thick tongue and groove sash-sawn flooring.

The cistern is thought to have been built before the art gallery addition; most likely installed as the first step in the building of the new wing. The cistern was constructed out of brick and stuccoed; it measures 12’8” east to west and 28’2 ½ ” north to south. The cistern is 5’10” tall from the floor of the cellar. There is no clear evidence how the cistern received water, but it is likely it was collected via downspouts from the gallery roof. There is evidence that water from the cistern was delivered by 1 ½” diameter lead pipes to the main house. It is likely this cistern worked together with another wood cistern that was located in the attic of the house. The specifics of how this system worked remain a mystery, however, according to Willie Graham, Carl Lounsbury and Orlando Ridout V.

To reach the art gallery interior, one option is to enter the house through the main door on Elizabeth Street, proceed into the entry hall and up the marble steps to the left (fig. 101). Here, a door leads to the entry vestibule of the gallery. This door was added to the home at the time of the gallery addition. It measures 7’11” high by 3’5 ½” wide and was 1¾” thick, differing from the 2” thick doors installed in 1835. The new door features two vertical panels with a quirked cyma with beveled fillet on the vestibule side face, and
an applied quirked cyma moldings on the gallery face. The door was hung using a pair of cast-iron two-knuckle hinges measuring 4 ½”. The mortise lock is stamped “THOS…NEW YORK.” The door’s architrave matches the trim on the 1835 doors, consisting of symmetrically molded plinth blocks with ornamented corner blocks. The jambs and soffit include a narrow single panel surrounded by a beveled panel mold. Although the door opening was constructed during the 1858 addition, it is probable that trim from the 1835 triple sash window that was removed, was reused.\textsuperscript{447}

**The Gallery Interior**

The addition of the art gallery wing was the centerpiece of the 1858 renovation and expansion of the Aikens’ house (fig. 102). This wing was constructed on the west end of the northern elevation of the main house block, adjacent to the main entry of the house (as it was modified in the 1835 renovation). As noted above the gallery sits above a lower cellar story that houses a cistern. While the exterior of the gallery is rectangular, the interior space was built to be octagonal in shape (fig. 103). Arched, decorative niches form the corners of this octagonal space, with the “niche” on the southeast wall serving as the entry door. The room was clearly designed to showcase large sculptures. The gallery is entered through a small vestibule that served as a buffer space between the main entry of the house and the entry to the gallery, as well as access to a narrow storage room behind the south wall of the gallery. The space was built with a fireplace on the east wall

\textsuperscript{447} Architectural Investigations of the Aiken-Rhett House. Room by room inventory, 40.
and two windows on both the east and west walls. A glazed cupola, referred to as a skylight, rises from the center of the ceiling.

The entry vestibule is irregular in shape and measures 6’6” by 5’ at its largest points (fig. 104). There are four doors located off this space. One leads from the main entry to the gallery vestibule, one opens into the storage closet behind the gallery, another door leads to the exterior sandstone steps, and the main door connects the vestibule to the gallery (figs. 105, 106, 107). The door opening leading from the vestibule to the gallery consists of a pair of single panel doors that open inward to the gallery. These doors measure 7’11” high by 1’9 ¼” wide and are 1 ¾” thick; these are through-tenoned and pinned. The door panels are flat and recessed with a quirked Grecian ovolo with bevel fillet trim. Originally these doors were attached with 4 ½” butt hinges, but have since been replaced, leaving scars from the original hinges. The door features a brass mortise lock; early brass key escutcheons and one key survive, however the knobs are replacements. There is evidence that the original lock and fittings were silver on brass. One brass sliding bolt remains on the top of the southeastern door which is set flush with the stile. The opening for these doors is framed with an arched architrave that corresponds with the design of the recessed niches on the other three corners of the gallery. The door leading to the sandstone steps may originally have been glass.\footnote{Invoice, March 1874, Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.}

The walls of this room are plastered on circular sawn lath attached to vertical furring strips. The construction details of the south wall of the gallery were visible from
the crawl space above the storage closet. This wall was framed using mill-sawn studs and assembled with machine-made nails.

The ceiling of the gallery is now modern plaster, but this was applied to original circular-sawn lath. In the center of the ceiling is the rectangular glazed cupola, or skylight, defined at the edges by a cast-plaster rope molding, original to the construction of the gallery. At the center of the skylight is a diamond pattern medallion of acanthus leaves (fig. 108). There has been speculation that this served “as the accent for an electrified gas fixture of three branches with etched glass globes.” Indeed, at one time the conservators of the house installed a chandelier. We know that there was gas lighting in the house after 1858, and it is a fact that New York galleries were lighted by gas chandeliers so it is possible that a gas fixture hung from the center of the cupola. There is no conclusive evidence that this was the case in the Aikens’ gallery, however, so Historic Charleston Foundation removed the fixture.

The rectangular skylight has a rope molding to define its edges on the ceiling. The skylight features five lights on the east and west sides and three lights on the north and south sides. The interior of the cupola is decorated with flat panels and egg and dart moldings with a cast plaster cornice (figs. 109, 110).

The baseboard was created from southern yellow pine. It is 9 ½” high, which includes a 4” cap molding comprised of torus and scotia (fig. 111). The lower portion is circular sawn. The floors were constructed from long leaf yellow pine running north to south and measure 3 ¼” to 5 ¾” wide. They have tongue and groove edges with

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449 Architectural Investigations of the Aiken-Rhett House, III-103
staggered butt joints. The boards were nailed using both face and blind nails. Nine floorboards in the room are not original; they are located in the northeast corner of the gallery, running from the north side of the fireplace apron to the northeast niche. These floorboards have a grayish tone as opposed to the reddish wood of the original flooring. Additionally, these floorboards have fewer nail stains and do not show evidence of carpet tacks as do the rest of the boards. According to the Historic Structures Report, “ghost outlines on the gallery floor created by carpet tacks provide for two locations for the pedestal that supports the sculpture of Mary Magdalene.” This suggests that a portion of carpet was cut out so that the octagonal base of this large statue sat directly on the floor in front of the west wall (fig. 112). In recent years it was concluded that the piece should be located in the center of the room where it is now situated.

The ornamental cornice dates to 1858, and was rendered in cast plaster with three bands of decorative elements (fig. 113). The decorative scheme on this cornice differs from the Greek details in the rest of the house (mostly from the 1835 renovation). This cornice uses three-dimensional castings, which combine classical elements and floral motifs, together characterizing the Renaissance revival style of interior decoration. A portion of this had to be recast in recent years, as a result of deterioration from water damage.

The gallery has four windows in addition to the glazed cupola skylight. Two windows are located on the east wall and two are on the west wall (figs. 114, 115). These windows are all six-over-six single hung sash with 12” by 20” panes set into 9/16”

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450 Architectural Investigations of the Aiken-Rhett House, III-102
muntins. The lower sash is hung on sash pulleys. The window frames are 8 ¼” symmetrical architraves with corner blocks with decorative symmetrical floral cast motifs (fig. 116). The architraves continue down to molded plinth blocks which frame a flat panel under each window. These panels are trimmed with a quirked ovolo and bevel fillet with an 8” base including a ¾” bead that is carried along the opening underneath the panel. While a skylight was an iconic feature of mid-nineteenth century private galleries, inclusion of four windows in this space was unusual, distinguishing this gallery from those owned by New York collectors. The typical private gallery maximized wall space available for the hanging of paintings. It also sought to provide an optimal environment for viewing the art and preserving it. Bright light streaming in from four windows might negatively impact both of those concerns, although exterior shutters on the Aikens’ gallery windows might have served to block the light.

There is one fireplace in the gallery (fig. 117). It is located on the east wall and is original to the 1858 construction. The veined gray marble mantel has a molded plinth and a black shelf. The marble is arched in the center for an Italianate style opening, a design feature that became fashionable in the 1850s. Raised panels in the spandrels and a black marble keystone frame the arch with decorative stylized shell motif at the center. The hearth is made of marble and is cut around the mantel piece. The hearth measures 4’8 ½” by 1’4 ½”. The fireplace has its original cast-iron grate which includes a decorative cover and fender. In the center insert there is a marking “J L JACKSON NEW YORK #5.” A metal plate inside the firebox is labeled “CONOVER & WOOLLEY No. 368 CANAL ST NY”. The back of the firebox is lined with large fire bricks. On the chimney breast
above the fireplace are located two original gas sconces. Each fixture has two branches and etched glass globes (fig. 118).

Paint analysis was undertaken on the gallery by Susan Buck in 1998 and again in 2002 to reconfirm the findings. It was discovered that six generations of paint were on the plaster walls and niches in the areas with original plaster. There was no evidence of any wallpaper or faux finishes in this room. Paint analysis revealed that the original paint used on the walls and niches was a cream color emulsion. The baseboards and architraves, as well as the pilasters and arches of the niches were painted in a slightly lighter cream color oil based paint. A light gray-blue limewash was used on the skylight, including its walls and moldings, and may have also been used on the ceiling and cornice. This coloration would have caused the natural light entering the gallery through the skylight to take on a cool blue tone. The neutral tones of the gallery created a suitable backdrop for the Aikens’ collection of paintings, many of which were elaborately framed in gold. It also stood in contrast to the “dramatic and glittering redecoration” of other rooms in the house, particularly the double drawing room, which incorporated extensive gilding of woodwork and plaster, gilded and multihued flocked wallpaper panels, as well as several shades of pink paint on the cornice and ceiling.451

The second paint generation simply followed the first generation color scheme. In the third generation, which evidence suggests took place in 1876, major changes were made to the color scheme of the gallery. The walls were painted a medium green, with tan woodwork. This was followed in the fourth generation, dating to approximately 1891,

when the walls were a blue-green color and the woodwork was off-white. By the fifth and sixth generations, the walls were cream colored again, covered with a paint containing titanium white which indicates these layers were painted after the 1920s when titanium dioxide became available for use in house paint.  

Dramatic and extravagant paint and decorative treatments were added to the public rooms of the house during the 1857-58 redecoration and renovation period. Governor Aiken was at the pinnacle of wealth and success at this time and his house was meant to reflect that. William Aiken was retired from Government service and returned from his last European Grand Tour to enjoy the fruits of his success in his fashionable newly redecorated home. The addition of guest bedrooms in this renovation suggests that the Aikens planned to entertain frequently during this time as well. The art gallery would be a focal point for this activity, and its contents—sculpture and paintings—the essential element.

**ART IN THE GALLERY: “SOME ART WORKS IN CHARLESTON”**

One visitor’s impressions and description of the gallery have formed the basis for much that has been written about it over the years. Indeed, extrapolation from this article forms the basis for much of the scholarly writing about the Aikens’ art gallery, including the assertions of Maurie McInnis, on whose work much other research depends. So it is worth examining that commentary in some detail.

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452 Ibid.
In a newspaper column called “Some Art Works in Charleston” the writer, identified as “Eola W,” speaks glowingly of the art in the Aikens’ art gallery, authoritatively describing the pieces and their provenance, also commending the taste of its owners. The full name of this visitor to the Aiken house was Eola Willis. Miss Willis, who was born in 1856, was a native of Dalton, Georgia. She studied art in New York at the Art Students League, learning her craft from prominent artists, including William Merritt Chase. She came to be known as a talented painter in her own right, producing popular and well respected images of Charleston, the best known of which was *A Carolina Vista* (fig. 119). This painting is in the permanent collection of the Gibbes Museum. Miss Willis also worked as an illustrator and a writer, authoring books such as *Henrietta Johnson, First Woman Painter in America* and *The Charleston Stage in the 18th Century*, as well as newspaper articles and commentaries. An active member of the Carolina Art Association and the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings (now the Preservation Society of Charleston) for many years, Miss Willis lived to be ninety-six years old, passing away in Charleston in 1952. Her papers are in the archives of the South Carolina Historical Society.

The clipping of Eola Willis’ article was found among the papers of Claudia Rhett and is not dated, though it has been suggested by archivists that it was written at some point during the period between the 1890’s and 1910. The piece begins, however, with a

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statement that the commentary is based on “studying pictures owned by Mrs. Gov. Aiken,” which suggests that Mrs. Aiken was alive—and possibly in residence in the house—when Miss Willis visited. William Aiken died in 1887, his wife, Harriet in 1892. Had both of them been deceased at the time of Eola Willis’ visit, the article would more likely have noted the pictures were owned by the late Gov and Mrs. Aiken. The amount of detail about the provenance of the art also suggests that the writer had access to “inside information,” so it is entirely possible that this article was written before 1892, and that the source for the writer’s detailed information about where and how the art came to be acquired and exhibited in the private gallery on Elizabeth Street was Harriet Aiken.

Indeed, the tone of some of the reported information seems to match the style of Mrs. Aiken’s Travel Diary. If Eola Willis did, in fact, meet with Harriet Aiken on this visit, it might increase the value of the commentary as well as its reliability, at least insofar as Mrs. Aiken’s version of facts about the art was accurate. The commentary, viewed as a report based on the personal reminiscences of “Mrs. Gov. Aiken,” could also explain why Claudia Rhett considered this scrap of paper worth keeping.

Although much of the detail included in this piece is about the paintings’ provenance and the artists rather than the specifics of the Aikens’ gallery, Miss Willis’ impressions give a sense of what was displayed in the gallery, at least at this particular time, although the list is not exhaustive by any means. It is also apparent from a invoice found among the Aikens’ papers that significant changes in arrangement of items in the gallery were made in 1874. This means that what Eola Willis saw in the gallery was not what the Aikens originally designed and created.
The “diversity of taste” of the Aikens’ collection is richly praised by the writer who notes the inclusion of sculpture “ranged about in niches and corners of the handsomely constructed mansion.”455 One of these sculptures, Hiram Powers’ bust of Proserpine, is singled out for high praise, and described in some detail as having a “dainty head” and “sloping shoulders,” although the writer does not say where the piece was displayed in the room. Also noted in the gallery are “a life size reclining Magdalen, a fine reproduction of Canova’s Venus of the Bath, a Shepherd Boy, and The First Grief… in which a tearful child holds a dead bird.”456

Noting that some of the pictures in the gallery were hard to see because they were darkened with age, Miss Willis is able to describe in detail a painting of a Bandit scene which she says is an original Salvator Rosa, the provenance of which she traces to the gallery of Prince Buonacorsi in Rome. Described as a “wild rocky scene” in which bandits are about to set upon a passing coach, this painting is praised for the “diffused…misty, rosy light.” Rosa is introduced as a seventeenth century painter from Naples, whose canvases were associated with bold scenery and “spirited figures.”457

Luther Terry’s Romeo and Juliet, which the Aikens purchased when they were in Rome in 1858 is called “exquisite” by Miss Willis who then proceeds to retell the story of Shakespeare’s play before describing the positioning of figures in the painting. She notes that this painting, commissioned by the Aikens, was so popular with visitors to the artist’s

455 “Some Art Works in Charleston.”
456 Ibid.
457 Ibid.
studio while he was completing it, Terry asked to be allowed to keep the painting to display in Rome for a year and a half before shipping it to Charleston.\textsuperscript{458}

A painting, “supposed to be by David Teniers,” is noted as having come from the gallery of Prince Torlonio in Rome. Described as “very dark,” it is said to depict peasants transporting vegetables on the back of a donkey. Another canvas, this one of three “strolling musicians,” is said to have been “attributed to Michael Angelo.” This piece features an “old man with brown wrinkled face, wearing a large round black hat” who plays a violin walking between a “boyish” bass viol player in a red cap and a middle aged man with a huge smile on his face holding a “pipe or horn.”

A painting by Carlo Maratti, \textit{The Flight into Egypt}, is described as painted on copper, by this time “cracked and crumbled away very badly, but still the main figures as well as the cherubs above the heads of the Holy Family can be seen quite distinctly.” Miss Willis notes that seventeenth century painter Maratti was a disciple of Andrea Sacchi, having previously studied the works of Raphael.

Noting George Whiting Flagg’s life sized portrait of Harriet Aiken in the gallery, Eola Willis describes the pose as well as the positioning of the canvas behind a “heavy crimson curtain” that is pulled back to expose the portrait to the viewer. Given this description, one imagines that the portrait was exhibited in the gallery, although it currently resides in the parlor. Evidence of brackets on the wall—removed during

\textsuperscript{458} Ibid.
successive renovations and refinishing—suggests that the portrait may indeed have been displayed in the gallery.\textsuperscript{459}

Miss Willis notes the presence in the gallery of a table described as “Florentine mosaic set in carved olive wood.” This, presumably, was the same “mosaic table” noted in Mrs. Aiken’s diary as having been purchased in Florence.\textsuperscript{460} Eola Willis also mentions in passing a “magnificent specimen of buhl work,” whose provenance she notes as having “originally [been] the property of King Louis Philippe…purchased after his escape from Paris during the Revolution of 1848.” The story of this table’s prior ownership by royalty matches in sensibility entries in Mrs. Aiken’s Travel Diary that reveal how pleased she was to encounter members of the European aristocracy and how impressed she was with their treasures. Miss Willis’ “specimen of buhl work” refers to the red boulle-work table with ormolu mounts that the Aikens purchased in Paris in 1857 and is today located in the gallery at the Aiken-Rhett House (fig. 120). Miss Willis’s account seems to place both the Florentine mosaic table and the “buhl” in the gallery. The Florentine mosaic table, however, is not in the house, though it survives in a private collection elsewhere. It is curious that Eola Willis calls this a “centre table,” seeming to suggest that it was situated in the middle of the gallery space at the time of her visit. This table, mosaic set in carved olive wood as Miss Willis reported, was only 24” in diameter, making it a very unlikely centerpiece of the gallery space, in spite of its shape and the artistic quality of its

\textsuperscript{459} Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
\textsuperscript{460} Travel Diary of Harriet Aiken, 1857-58, 13.
workmanship.⁴⁶¹ It is possible that the reference to this item as a “centre” table was a reference to it being set on a central pedestal (fig. 121).

Eola Willis’ commentary provides a glimpse of what was in the Aikens’ gallery at the end of the nineteenth century. Because it is the only extant account of the room and its contents, its reportage has been accepted and used as the “factual” basis for ongoing research and commentary. Miss Willis’ account, however, when compared with information available from other sources, appears to contain some less than completely accurate information. This is the case with her commentary on the works of art as well, as a close look at what is known about the Aikens’ collection and the artists represented in it reveals.

**EXAMINING THE ART**

The Gallery was composed of a collection of works of art, comprising original paintings, copies of old master religious scenes, landscapes, and portraits—including copies of self-portraits of old masters painters—along with contemporary sculptures, both originals and copies. While much of the art, particularly the sculpture, was purchased during the Aikens’ 1857-58 Grand Tour, earlier acquisitions may also have been displayed. Many pieces from the Aikens’ collection are still in the house; others survive in private collections elsewhere. Lists of painting the Aikens loaned to the Carolina Art Association for their exhibits aid in putting together a coherent picture of what they owned and may have displayed in their own gallery (Appendix C). The comments of

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Eola Willis, considered critically, likewise serve this endeavor. Miss Willis described several pieces about which there is no record; no mention in lists of paintings loaned to the Carolina Art Association. Among those is a painting attributed to David Teniers said to depict peasants pushing a cart, and Carlo Maratti’s *The Flight into Egypt*, described as having been painted on copper. There can be no reliable, comprehensive report on either the art owned by the Aikens or how they displayed it. For purposes of this paper, however, there is sufficient information to foster an understanding of how and why selections were made for their collection and how they conceived their gallery.

**Sculpture**

The sculpture that the Aikens displayed in their gallery was, for the most part, original work, distinguishing the statuary from most of their paintings. The most significant of the Aikens’ statues was the bust of *Proserpine* by American expatriate sculptor Hiram Powers that they purchased while in Florence in 1857 (Appendix A, fig. A1). The bust of *Proserpine* was based on the ancient Roman bust of Clytie. Powers’ work was praised by American sculptor, Joel Tanner Hart, who preferred Powers’ version to its prototype: “I defy Antiquity to surpass—I doubt its ability to rival—Powers’s *Proserpine*” (fig. 122). By the time of the Aikens’ purchase, Hiram Powers’ reputation was established, having been lionized for his *Greek Slave* (fig. 61). His work was coveted by and in great demand among elite American collectors.

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Powers’ *Proserpine*, the goddess of spring, was a popular sculpture, the original of which he had created in 1844. By 1873, Powers had carved 147 of the bust in five different versions, each one progressively simpler in its details than its predecessor. The first version of the bust portrayed Proserpine with her hair held in a ring of wheat sheaves, her bust emerging from a wicker basket filled with spring flowers including tuberoses and narcissi. This rendition was too labor-intensive to be produced commercially, so the basket and plant arrangement was repeatedly changed.\(^{463}\) A second, simpler version is the one the Aikens acquired. This bust, sculpted from white marble, measuring approximately two feet tall, portrayed Proserpine emerging from a basket overfilled with acanthus leaves, a symbol of immortality.\(^{464}\) This impressive and valuable bust was clearly a centerpiece of the Aikens’ collection. Its presence in their gallery identified them as sophisticated individuals of fashion, education and taste, with the wherewithal to know what art was the latest and most popular, and the means to acquire it.

The sculpture *First Grief*, circa 1857, attributed to Thomas Crawford, would likely have been displayed in one of the sculptural niches in the gallery (Appendix A, fig. A2). This piece measured 3’3½” tall by 1’2” wide, the base measuring 12” in diameter. It was placed on a pedestal that measured 3’9” high by 19 ¾” wide and deep. This statue depicts a young boy leaning against a tree stump holding a dead bird, with a bird’s nest, eggs and a serpent by his feet. The sculpture rests on a marble column base. Thomas Crawford was an American sculptor, born in New York, who had expatriated to Rome in

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1835 and remained there working until his death in 1857. Crawford is well known for his neoclassical sculptural groups created for the U.S. Capitol building. These well known works include the Statue of Freedom which surmounts the dome of the Capitol and the colossal Progress of Civilization which fills the pediment above the Senate wing. Crawford was working on these sculptures immediately before his death in 1857.465

Having become extremely popular during the 1840s and 1850’s Crawford at one time employed fifty assistants in his Rome studio. Although the Aikens’ sculpture, First Grief, has been attributed to Thomas Crawford, it is curious that when the piece was loaned by the Aikens to the 1859 Carolina Art Association Exhibition it was referred to as “The Child’s first grief” with the artist listed as unknown. It is extremely unlikely that the Aikens would have failed to identify their statue as the work of a sculptor as revered and famous as Crawford, and equally unlikely that the Association neglected to identify the piece in a way that would attract more attention. In her commentary on the gallery Eola Willis, an artist herself and likely basing her remarks on information from Harriet Aiken, likewise did not name Crawford as the creator of this piece about which she wrote in some detail. It is possible that the piece purchased by the Aikens was the work of one of the assistants in Crawford’s studio, making it more readily available and significantly less expensive. It is also possible that it was the work of an anonymous Roman sculptor.

An original contemporary sculpture that would have been displayed in one of the niches in the gallery was Shepherd Boy by Edward Sheffield (E.S.) Bartholomew (Appendix A, fig. A3). This sculpture, executed in white marble, stands 55” tall and

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features a standing boy dressed in a toga-like garment, holding a shepherd’s flute. The sculpture sits atop a veined marble pedestal with “Bartholomew” carved into it. The Aikens purchased this piece in Rome in 1858.

Originally from Connecticut, Bartholomew studied at the National Academy of Design in New York, moving from there to Rome by 1850. About Bartholomew it was said he was in “the front rank of the American Sculptors.”\(^\text{466}\) Bartholomew was best known for his statues of *Washington* and *Eve*, as well as for his copies of the sculptures of antiquity, *Demosthenes* and *Sophocles*, commissioned for the Linonian Literary Society at Yale College.\(^\text{467}\) Bartholomew sculpted multiple copies of various renditions of the *Shepherd Boy*, including the *Campagna Shepherd Boy* which is now housed at the Peabody Art Collection in Maryland.\(^\text{468}\)

The largest sculpture in the Aiken gallery was the statue of *Mary Magdalene at the Tomb*, marked “D. Menconi esegui dall Originale de PAMPALONI, Firenze 1858” (Appendix A, fig. A4). This work was a copy after the original carved by Luigi Pampaloni (1791-1847). Pampaloni is best known for his sculpture of Leonardo Da Vinci, completed in 1842, which is one of the twenty-eight statues of famous Italian cultural icons housed in the niches below the porticoes of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.\(^\text{469}\) The Aikens’ *Magdalene* measured 64” high by 48” wide and was 29” in diameter. The sculpture portrays Mary Magdalene reclining on a rock near an urn with


\(^{467}\) “Yale College: Death of E.S. Bartholomew—Art Exhibition—Union Regatta—Poem by Willis. Correspondence of the New-York Times.” May 29, 1858.


the Old and New Testaments by her side. It is a large sculpture and its location has been changed in the gallery over the years. This piece may have occupied the center of the room, although the outline of its base surrounded by carpet tacks visible on the floor suggests it was at one time placed along the west wall opposite the fireplace. Little is known of D. Menconi, the sculptor of the copy owned by the Aikens, though there is a record of a piece attributed to him entitled Franklin Aspiring to Moral Perfection, which was listed for sale for £32 in 1865.470

Another piece of sculpture acquired by the Aikens during their 1857-58 Grand Tour and likely displayed in a niche in the gallery was their copy of Canova’s Venus Italica, circa 1858 (Appendix A, fig. A5). The maker of this copy is unknown. This statue, carved in white marble, stood 42” tall, 14” wide and was 14” in diameter. It rested on a marble column pedestal that measured 40 ¾” tall and was 17” in diameter. The original by Antonio Canova was itself a copy of the Venus de Medici of antiquity which was housed in the Tribune of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The Venus de Medici was said to have been a highlight of the Grand Tour in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and figured prominently in Johann Zoffany’s rendition of the Tribune in his pictorial paean to the Grand Tour (fig. 66). Also in Zoffany’s picture of the Tribune is an inlaid mosaic table that occupies the center of the space, which is likely to have inspired the Aikens’ purchase—and possibly placement—of their Florentine inlaid mosaic table.471

When France invaded Italy in 1802, Napoleon's army raided the Uffizi and took the *Venus* to Paris. The President of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, Baron Giovanni degli Alessandri, commissioned Canova to sculpt a copy of the statue to be housed in Florence, which task he completed in 1808.\footnote{Roderick Conway Morris, “Canova’s ‘Venus Victorious’ is centerpiece of Rome exhibit,” *The New York Times*, Arts Section, November 7, 2007, accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/06/arts/06iht-conway.1.8616583.html (accessed February 8, 2011).} He sculpted three differing versions of that piece, one of which was held for more than a century in the collection of Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, the 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne at Lansdowne House in London, about which Harriet Aiken read in her book about private art galleries in Great Britain.\footnote{Mrs. Anna Jameson, *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London. Containing Accurate Catalogues, Arranged Alphabetically, for Immediate Reference. Each Preceded by an Historical & Critical Introduction. With a Prefatory Essay on Art, Artists, Collectors, & Connoisseurs; Russian Art Media*: http://www.russianartmedia.com/articles.do?cmd=view&id=18 (accessed February 10, 2011).} It is not known who executed the Aiken’s copy of Canova’s *Venus Italica*, but it is clear from the provenance of the original why it was essential to them to have a version of it in their gallery.

**Paintings**

A major focal point of the gallery surely would have been the life-size, circa 1858 portrait of Mrs. Harriet Lowndes Aiken by George Whiting Flagg (Appendix B, fig. B1). This was the larger, more impressive of two portraits done by Flagg of Harriet Aiken circa 1858 (Appendix B, fig. B2). There is evidence that this large painting, now housed in the east drawing room on the east wall, was originally displayed on the north wall of the gallery. Brackets corresponding to the width of the portrait were embedded on the...
lower portion of the north wall. This portrait would have dominated the side of the gallery where it was situated, and would have been directly in the line of sight of a visitor entering the gallery. The painting measured 10’3” high and 7’3” wide, and showcased Mrs. Aiken in an off the shoulder gold satin dress with a lace collar adorned with a gold and pearl brooch. Her dark hair is pulled back and ornamented with plumes. Mrs. Aiken stands on a patterned carpet alongside a rococo revival shell back chair upholstered in red velvet. Behind the chair hangs green drapery and a landscape scene is visible to the left behind Mrs. Aiken.

This portrait presented a powerful statement about Mrs. Aiken and her wealth and sophistication. The fact that she chose to have her portrait done by Charleston artist, George Whiting Flagg, is also significant. Flagg painted over one hundred and fifty subject paintings and portraits, and among these about forty were of Charlestonians. Notably, he painted the portrait of James Shoolbred Gibbes, for whom the Gibbes Art Gallery is named, and his wife. Flagg also painted portraits of men such as Bishop England, Alfred Huger, James Louis Petgru, and William Bull Pringle. The lifesize portrait of Mrs. Aiken was among his most notable, as was mentioned in his obituary.

Flagg was born in New Haven, CT in 1816, but spent most of his childhood in Charleston. He studied painting with his uncle, Washington Allston, and the artist James Bowman. When Flagg was fifteen Bowman brought him to the Boston area where Washington Allston had established a studio in Cambridge. Flagg began creating history paintings, and his work, Murder of the Princes from Richard III, attracted the attention of

474 Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
Luman Reed of New York who became his patron. Reed underwrote an extended trip to Europe for Flagg to study art when he was eighteen. Flagg spent two years painting pictures for Reed. By the time of Reed’s death in 1836, Flagg had produced eleven paintings which hung in Reed’s gallery on the third floor of his Greenwich Street house in New York. In Reed’s gallery, Flagg’s paintings shared the walls with works by Asher B. Durand, William S. Mount, and Thomas Cole, among others.

Flagg resided and worked primarily in New York and New Haven during the 1840s, however he continued to paint for Charlestonians. In 1840 he painted a copy of a portrait originally by Jeremiah Theus for Mrs. Daniel Heyward, and created an enlargement of a miniature for Charles Izard Manigault. In 1843, he contributed two portraits of Charlestonians to an art exhibit at the Apprentices Library Society. During the 1850s Flagg lived and worked in Charleston. In 1857, he painted a portrait of Charlestonian miniaturist painter, Charles Fraser, which was exhibited in 1857 at the South Carolina Society, and again in 1858 at the Carolina Art Association’s inaugural exhibit at the Apprentices Library Society. Flagg primarily painted portraits of Charlestonians in the 1850s, including the two of Mrs. Aiken. During this time, Flagg was also painting “ideal” and history paintings, which were exhibited and auctioned in May of 1859 at his studio at the northeast corner of Broad and King Streets. These paintings by Flagg were praised by the Courier which wrote that the works were “equally

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distinguished by variety of subject and pliability of genius." After this time Flagg moved to England and then back to New York in 1866, finally settling in Nantucket in 1879 where he remained until his death in 1897.

Flagg was an esteemed portraitist among Charlestonians during the 1850s. Mr. and Mrs. Aiken’s choice to employ him to paint two portraits of Harriet Aiken demonstrates their desire to be *au courant* among their social peers in both style and substance. The gravitas of the artist, along with the towering size of the larger portrait, is in keeping with the Aiken’s ambition to be at the top of their social set; to be—and have—the best of everything.

A portrait of William Aiken may have been located in the gallery as well. There exists today a circa 1858 portrait of Mr. Aiken (Appendix B, fig. B3). This oil on canvas portrait measured 2’6” high by 2’1” wide; the artist is unknown. The painting depicts Mr. Aiken from the middle torso upwards, wearing a black suit with white shirt and black tie. Shown with white hair and beard, his head is turned to show a three-quarter profile of his right side. It is not clear whether this portrait of William Aiken was ever exhibited in the art gallery. It is not mentioned by Eola Willis, suggesting that it may have been displayed in a private area of the house, possibly with Flagg’s smaller portrait of Mrs. Aiken, since it is unlikely that two portraits of Harriet Aiken hung in the gallery.

The majority of the paintings in the Aiken gallery were copies of Old Master paintings done by contemporary and unknown Italian artists. This is in keeping with the fact that such items were considered worthy and important in antebellum Charleston.

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479 Charleston *Courier* May 21, 1859.
where the collector’s education and refinement was reflected as much by the subject matter and the moral lesson inherent in the art as in its aesthetic presentation. As collectors the Aikens sought representation of the glorious paintings housed in European museums; they brought back renditions of the masterpieces they had the privilege of viewing during their travels abroad. As philanthropists, engaged in contributing to the cultural life of their city, they would have taken pleasure in being able to share these edifying images with people who had never had means or opportunity to see the originals.

An example of such a morally enlightening rendered masterpiece was the Aiken’s copy of Bartolome Murillo’s *Madonna and Child* (Appendix B, fig. B4). This painting was oil on canvas, 26 ½” high by 19 ½” wide, with frame dimensions 37” by 29 ½” by 2 ½ ” deep. Murillo, who lived and worked in Seville, was the most famous artist in Spain in the late seventeenth century. *Madonna and Child*, painted circa 1670-72, was held in a private collection in Spain before being sold to a succession of English and Scottish collectors. The original canvas was among the works exhibited at Manchester in 1857 during the "Art Treasures of the United Kingdom" which the Aikens visited during their Grand Tour. Although it is not known where—or when—they acquired their copy of this painting, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the Aikens saw the Murillo at Manchester and were inspired to own a copy of it. It is said that this painting inspired American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote of it: "But in this picture the Virgin

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had a look as if she were loving the infant as her own child, and at the same time rendering him an awful worship, as to her Creator.\textsuperscript{482}

Interestingly, the Aikens owned two nineteenth century copies of the \textit{Penitent Magdalen}, after a circa 1660-70 original by Carlo Dolci (Appendix B, figs. B6, B7). The two copies are clearly different from one another; one more closely resembling the original than the other. There is no definitive information on why the Aikens had two copies of this picture, however the framing of the painting may offer a clue. The less professional-looking copy of \textit{Pentitent Magdalen} is framed identically to a copy of Sassoferato’s \textit{Madonna of the Blue Hood}, suggesting that these two pictures were purchased together (Appendix B, fig. B5). At a later time, discovering a better copy of the popular Dolci painting, they purchased this as well.\textsuperscript{483}

The original \textit{Magdalen} by Dolci was housed in the Uffizi in Florence, although there are references to it having been displayed in the Pitti Palace. Dolci’s \textit{Magdalen} was not one of his most critically acclaimed works, but it was among the most popular. This painting is referred to in an early twentieth century book about Florence as “the Magdalen—well known from copies.”\textsuperscript{484} As is the case with other paintings, the Aikens showed a predilection for owning copies of popular, widely recognizable works of art that would be immediately impressive, even to a less-than-erudite viewer.

The Aikens’ copy of Andrea del Sarto’s \textit{Madonna of the Harpies}, painted circa 1857, measured 54” high by 41 5/6” wide, with frame dimensions of 67 ¼” by 55 ½”

\textsuperscript{483} Conversation with Valerie Perry, Associate Director of Museums, Historic Charleston Foundation.
\textsuperscript{484} Augustus J.C. Hare, \textit{Florence}, 7th edition (London: George Allen & Sons, 1907), 41.
(Appendix B, fig. B8). In all likelihood, they purchased this piece while in Florence, where they would also have had the opportunity to see the original. Known as “Madonna delle Arpie” or *Madonna of the Harpies*, this piece was painted by Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530) in 1517. It is one of del Sarto’s best known paintings. Painted as the altarpiece for the nuns of San Francesco dei Macci, the painting depicts St Francis and St John the Evangelist surrounding the Madonna and Child. The Madonna stands on a pedestal carved with grotesque figures referred to as “harpies”. This painting was not a traditional “Madonna and Child Enthroned between Two Saints.”

*Madonna of the Harpies* is considered a milestone in the painting of del Sarto, and is thought to bring together all of the significant artistic styles and renderings of the great masters of the early sixteenth century. Among these styles were “the ‘atmospheric’ painting of Leonardo, the meditation recently infused with a new freshness in the ‘grandiose’ manner of Michelangelo, the elegant and solemn classicism of Fra Bartolomeo endowed with a new intensity of colour after his stay in Venice, the experience of Raphael's work in Rome.”

Del Sarto’s *Madonna* was greatly admired throughout the centuries in Florence and beyond; coveted by collectors, one of whom went to great lengths to own it. In the eighteenth century, the painting was acquired by Prince Ferdinando de’ Medici for his collection at the Pitti Palace from the nuns of San Francesco dei Macci, who agreed to give it to the Prince in exchanged for a complete remodeling of their church and a copy of the painting by Francesco Petrucci. Since 1785, however, the painting has been located

486 Ibid.
in the Uffizi Gallery where, significantly, it was displayed in the Tribune, which served as inspiration for the Aikens’ gallery.\textsuperscript{487} The original \textit{Madonna of the Harpies} is still housed in the Uffizi Gallery, but has been relocated to room 26.\textsuperscript{488} Mr. and Mrs. Aiken enjoyed the work of del Sarto enough to also acquire a small (approximately 7” by 8”), oval copy of the artist’s self portrait, the original of which likewise hangs in the Uffizi (Appendix B, fig. B20).\textsuperscript{489} This painting seems to represent a prototype for copies of artist’s self portraits sold in Italy in the 1850’s. A copy of a self-portrait of the Flemish artist, Van Dyck, owned by the Aikens is almost identical in size, shape and frame style to their copy of del Sarto’s self portrait (Appendix B, fig. B21). The back of the copy of Van Dyck is inscribed, “Honorable Wm. Aiken.”

The Aikens’ collection, in keeping with the prevailing Charleston sensibility that looked to art for its edifying moral message, favored works of religious significance, both copies of famous paintings and generic items acquired in Italy. Among this genre of paintings that likely hung in their gallery was a piece, \textit{The Virgin Mary with the Child and St. Elizabeth with St. John the Baptist, in a Landscape}, signed “V. Morani, fecit in Roma 1858” (Appendix B, fig. B9). Also in the Aikens’ possession was an anonymous oil on canvas painting, \textit{Crucifixion of Christ} (Appendix B, fig. B10). This piece depicts the head and chest of Christ in a thick gold frame. Two other religious themed works by unknown artists are a pair of identically sized paintings, the first entitled \textit{Saint John} or \textit{Saint John in the Wilderness}; the second entitled \textit{Paul the Hermit} (Appendix B, fig. B11,

\textsuperscript{488} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{489} Gloria Fossi, ed. Uffizi: \textit{Art History Collections}, 588.
Both of these paintings, acquired by the Aikens prior to their 1857-58 Grand Tour, are oil on canvas and measure 17 1/8” tall by 30” wide. Although no longer extant, another religious painting in the Aikens’ collection was *St. Catherine with the wheel and palm-branch* by an unknown artist which was displayed at the 1859 Carolina Art Association exhibition. This painting measured 2’3” by 1’8”. Like the other items loaned by the Aikens for this exhibit, this painting was probably one of the pictures they acquired on their 1857-58 Grand Tour specifically for their gallery.

Another piece of which no evidence remains and was also loaned to the Carolina Art Association in 1859 is a copy of Raphael’s *Madonna della Sedia*, painted by a Florentine artist identified as Doglio (Agostino) (fig. 123). This copy was round and measured 2’4” in diameter. The original Raphael, painted in 1516, is one of the Old Masters paintings featured prominently in Johann Zoffany’s *Tribune of the Uffizi 1772-78*, although the actual canvas is in the collection at the Pitti Palace. Its representation in the Zoffany painting links it with the ideals of the Grand Tour, which would have added to its appeal to the Aikens. This association of the painting would have been an inspiration for their gallery; possession of it, albeit a replica, was an emblem of their connoisseurship which they were pleased to share via the Carolina Art Association exhibit.

The painting of peasants with a cart of vegetables noted by Eola Willis as “supposedly by David Teniers,” does not appear on any list of the Aikens’ paintings, but two paintings, characterized as “Tavern scenes” are listed among their possessions. These are identical framed painted panels, one an inside tavern scene, the other an outside
tavern scene, measuring 12” high by 15 ½” wide. Both are marked on the back with the
name “Zorg” (Appendix B, figs. B13, B14). It is likely that these pieces were copies of
pictures by Teniers. David Teniers II ("the younger") was a prolific seventeenth century
Flemish artist known particularly for his landscapes and tavern scenes, populated with
peasants. He was also known for the speed with which he could produce a fine, detailed
painting and for his prodigious output: estimated at more than 900 original paintings.
Teniers was reputed to have been able to produce a painting in just a few hours, a talent
which inspired a nickname for such paintings as “afternoons,” reflecting the time he took
creating them. His work was also widely and prolifically copied by artists including his
own son, making them ubiquitous in European cities, including Vienna, Munich,
Dresden, Paris, London, and Brussels, at the time of the Aiken’s Grand Tour.490

The painting of the “bandit scene” in the Aiken’s gallery referred to by Miss
Willis was certainly a copy of Bandits on a Rocky Coast, after seventeenth century Italian
artist, Salvator Rosa (Appendix B, fig. B15). The original was owned by a succession of
English Earls of Jersey. Miss Willis’ remarks about the piece being an original and
coming from the gallery of “Prince Buonacorsi in Rome,” are not borne out by current
scholarly research which traces the successive ownership of the painting and does not
indicate that the Aikens owned it at any point.491 Rosa was considered a bit of a maverick

in his time; an artist who “lived his life on the edge and painted in the same manner,” appearing to cause controversy wherever he went. Born in Naples in 1615, Salvator Rosa began his art career there, moving in the 1630’s to Rome, where his work attracted the attention of the local nobility, royalty and princes of the Church. The attention also brought enemies, causing him to flee to Florence and the patronage of the Medici family. After nearly a decade of allegiance to the Medicis, during which time he painted most of the works for which he is most revered, Rosa returned to Rome to resume his career as an independent painter. Rosa’s works, desirable for their unique, unconventional qualities, were sponsored by the Medici family and coveted by English nobility. This would likely have made them irresistible to the Aikens whose ambitions drew them to items with provenance related to all three of the above mentioned qualifiers.

A notable exception to the religious theme and copies of old master paintings in the Aiken’s gallery was Romeo and Juliet, painted for them by Luther Terry circa 1858 (Appendix B, fig. B16). This painting measured 83 ¾” tall by 63” wide. It states on the back “Please do not touch for 24 hours, still wet.” Luther Terry was a painter born in Enfield CT in 1813. By 1838 he had moved to Italy to attend the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence, thereafter settling in Rome. During the beginning of his career he primarily made copies of the works of Raphael, but subsequently advanced to painting original works. Most of these were inspired by subjects from Byron and Shakespeare, such as the Aiken’s Romeo and Juliet. As noted by Eola Willis, this painting attracted so much positive attention while it was in process in Terry’s Rome studio, the artist asked

493 “Salvator Rosa: Bandits on a Rocky Coast” Metropolitan Museum of Art Database.
permission of the Aikens to keep the finished product for a year to exhibit it himself before sending it to them for their gallery. Such positive attention would likely have pleased the Aikens a great deal and, presumably, they acceded to Terry’s request.

Another non-religious themed painting owned by the Aikens that survives today is *The Three Musicians*, identified by Eola Willis as being an original “Michael Angelo” (Appendix B, fig. B17). This piece, an oil on canvas measuring 48 ¾” high by 57 ½” wide, is degraded today so it is not possible to determine its artistic quality, but it is doubtful that it was painted by Michelangelo, especially since it was not among the pictures loaned to the Carolina Art Association, to which the Aikens lent their most important pieces.

Some of the art in the gallery seems to have been acquired on the Aiken’s earlier Grand Tours of the 1820’s, 30’s and 40’s. Several landscape scenes owned by the Aikens display earlier dates, including a *Scene of Venice*, an oil on canvas by an unknown artist, which is inscribed on its back: “Do Not Rub the Surface, Rome 1839;’ attached to this is a paper label that reads: “W _ OODSPEDES BO- /7 Ashburton Place 8 Milk Street/Books, Autographs,” suggesting that the painting was not obtained in Italy (Appendix B, fig. B18). For the most part, however, paintings in their gallery were those obtained specifically for the space during their 1857-58 Grand Tour.

**THE GALLERY TODAY: IN SEARCH OF YESTERDAY**

The first task of the preservationist examining a space that has evolved over time is to determine which period, or periods, of its evolution should be preserved. In doing
so, the significance, and purpose of the space, as well as what it reveals about its owners must be considered. For the Aiken-Rhett House, the greatest significance may be found in its evolution, not in any single phase of that evolution. Unlike the gallery which has been restored, the house has been preserved in various stages of development and decay, and to unify it would be a violation. This judgment differs markedly from an assessment of the significance of the gallery, however. This room is noteworthy for what it has to teach us about the period in which it was conceived, designed and installed. Other generations of design are important for what they tell us about how things changed after the inaugural period of the gallery, more so than in and of themselves. An investigation of the gallery needs to be most intensively focused on the art chosen for and installed in the room, how it was displayed and arranged. The interior design accoutrements of the period, while interesting, are necessarily secondary to the interior architecture and the works of art themselves which were the focal point of the Aiken’s private art gallery.

As we stand in the gallery trying to recreate in our mind how it was furnished and arranged, it is striking to realize how little we know for certain. There are clues, however, in the physical evidence, the testimony of Eola Willis, lists of paintings and sculpture loaned to the Carolina Art Association, and in documentary evidence discovered indicating what was changed years after the initial design and installation. To make an educated guess about the look of the gallery in its earliest days, these sources need to be examined and cross referenced with one another. Yet even this leaves us without a reliably coherent image. So the task of imagining the space involves examining the
conventions of the time and investigating the way rooms that served as inspiration for this one were furnished and arranged.

**PLAN OF THE GALLERY**

The configuration of the gallery itself is the same today as it was when it was built. The original drawing shows the elongated octagonal room within the rectangular structure, with designated niches for sculpture (fig. 40). The pairs of windows on the east and west walls were original, as was the fireplace located on the east wall. The sketch illustrates the entrance door to the gallery connecting it to the vestibule where it indicates the “platform door” leading from the vestibule to the landing of the sandstone back steps. Also noted in the plan is the door connecting the gallery vestibule to the vestibule of the main entry hall of the house. The skylight is delineated in the floor plan, noted as being twenty-six feet long. Although not noted in the original drawing, the doors leading into the vestibule, opening out to the back steps may initially have been glass, since glass doors were removed from this location in 1874.494

**WINDOWS AND FLOORS**

There is no evidence of what covered the gallery’s windows though it is fair to assume that they were, in fact, covered. It is highly unlikely that in Charleston with its intense sunlight, that any room with four large windows would not have had a means of blocking the light; a gallery with paintings subject to sun damage would certainly require

it. So it is odd that even close inspection of the room has yielded no indication of how the windows were covered. There are no interior shutters on the windows and no evidence that any were ever installed; neither are there any marks indicating shades or blinds. The Historic Structures Report makes no mention of window coverings or evidence for them, although they note marks on the floor suggesting other installations. Other galleries, private and public, for which we have information and images, had no such windows so we have no means of extrapolating from those. We know from an invoice for work performed in the house in 1874 that drapes were installed between the gallery door and the vestibule and to cover what was, presumably the Flagg portrait of Mrs. Aiken, a drape we know from Eola Willis’ description, was red (fig. 124). About the drapery on the windows, however, we find no definitive information and only the most obscure clues. The same invoice, for example, includes charges for repair and cleaning of lace drapery. It is possible that some of this lace may—or may not—have come from the windows of the gallery. The windows in the Aikens’ gallery were almost certainly covered, however, so if we wish to imagine the room’s antebellum appearance, it is necessary to examine the style of drapery being used in homes at that time.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Americans had an array of window covering types and styles to choose from. Exterior shutters were often used to exclude light and the heat of the sun. On the interior, window shades were recommended by arbiters of interior style of the period, and were often preferred over Venetian blinds. Window shades or fabric roller blinds were useful to soften the sun’s glare without completely excluding

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495 Architectural Investigations of the Aiken-Rhett House.
light. Fabric window shades were sometimes the only window treatment in certain rooms such as the hall or library; they could be used in addition as a layer under curtains in other rooms such as the parlor. By the 1850’s windows shades were commercially available for purchase. In 1858, the Philadelphia shop of Mr. W.H. Carryl which sold *au courant* French imports, stocked “gold-border window-shades, so indispensible for excluding the sun…The gold leaf is tastefully arranged on fine cambric, of plain colors, to combine durability with elegance.” Based on this information, the windows in the Aiken’s gallery might have been covered with shades.

The Victorian period, however, is well known for its fully dressed windows in rooms such as the parlor. Although most Americans could not afford heavy drape outfitting, wealthy families such as the Aikens certainly could. It is unclear whether a window treatment that would be impressively fashionable in the parlor would have been used in the gallery, which was clearly much more understated in its paint color scheme. “By 1850, a fully equipped parlor window might include a shade, a valence or lambrequin, an “undercurtain” next to the glass, and a pair of heavier curtains. For pairs of windows, fashion dictated a large mirror be placed on the pier between them and finished with a cornice of stamped brass or gilded wood matching the cornices over the windows” (fig. 127). This was described as recommended by the “Parisian taste.” Ornately patterned cornices were popular during this time. Material for curtains ranged from silk for the finest, most formal applications, to wool and cotton. These materials

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497 Ibid, 100.
were used in a range of fabrics, including satins, brocatelles, damasks, velvets, brocades and plain weaves.499

Lace curtains used as undercurtains or “glass curtains” were typically installed in addition to heavy outer curtains. In some applications, however, and during the summer, lace curtains were used alone to filter the light while ensuring privacy.500 In the parlor, “a fully draped and curtained parlor window—complete with cornice, rich fabrics for lambrequin, curtains, undercurtains, shades and cords, tassels, and drapery pins—might easily cost hundreds of dollars during the nineteenth century.”501 Given the cost, such ensembles were only installed in the finest and most formal rooms in the wealthiest homes. While the Aikens could have afforded this set-up it is unclear whether it would have been appropriate or ideal for the gallery space.

The floor of the gallery would surely have been covered by some type of rug or carpet when the Aikens built and furnished it. Evidence of carpet tacks is not helpful to determine what the floor covering was originally since these could easily have come from subsequent redecorating efforts. There is no definitive record of how many generations of carpet were installed or when they were changed. In the rest of the house, floor coverings were changed based on the season, with straw matting replacing heavy carpets during the spring and summer. The presence of the large Magdalene sculpture in the gallery mitigates against the idea of changing carpet that would require repeatedly moving this piece. The purposefully neutral color scheme of the room likewise fails to inform since a

colorful patterned carpet, typical of the era in America and in Europe, would not detract from the art work on the walls as elaborate paint schemes would.

Little information is available on the specifics of carpeting in European galleries that might have inspired the Aikens, or the New York galleries investigated for this paper. In all cases, the focus of description tends to be on the art, rather than the minutiae of interior décor. When floor coverings are mentioned, they are denoted as carpets, either elaborately patterned or “warm toned,” as was the case for William Aspinwall’s gallery, which provides no help in determining what type or design of carpet covered the floor in the Aikens’ gallery.502

During the period between 1850 and 1860 production of carpeting greatly increased, the greater supply making it more affordable for Americans. This meant that more homes were carpeted and that carpeting was no longer viewed as a luxury for the wealthy but rather as a basic household necessity. At that time the majority of carpeting used in America was of the three-ply or ingrain variety, however wealthy Americans had access to other types of carpeting including Wilton, Brussels and tapestry carpets. In some applications, these pile carpets were installed wall-to-wall, woven in strips that were attached to one another for a custom fit to the size of the room. In others, a two foot wide margin around the perimeter of the room was left.503 Brussels carpets began to be made in Belgium in the early 18th century and were being produced in Kidderminster England by 1740. This type of carpet was woven by inserting wires over which the face

of the wool passed such that when these wires were removed the result was a “level-looped pile”. Variation in pile was achieved by varying the size of the wires; the more loops the higher the quality of the carpet. Brussels carpets were usually woven with up to six colors. In the mid-nineteenth century, the invention of power looms led to a reduction in cost of the Brussels carpet. Similar to the Brussels carpet was the Wilton, which was made using a method similar to that of the Brussels, but the Wilton’s pile was cut, making it more luxurious and expensive. The tapestry carpet was either a cut pile known as a “velvet,” a “tapestry Wilton,” or a looped pile version known as a “Tapestry Brussels.” This type of carpet was invented in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1831-32 by Richard Whytock, and was being produced in America by the 1840s. Tapestry carpets were made using preprinted warp threads, a method enabling an unlimited number of colors to be used. This method allowed for naturalistic design elements to be portrayed on the carpets, which were less expensive than the Brussels and Wiltons. During the middle of the nineteenth century, homes typically installed the most expensive carpeting in the parlor and less expensive carpeting in the dining room and library.

*Godey’s Lady’s Book*, a popular magazine for women in the mid-nineteenth century, described appropriate floor coverings for specific rooms of the home in 1855. Although the picture gallery was not among the rooms they catalogued, it did make recommendations for libraries which have often been subsumed in the same interior design category. For the library, *Godey’s* recommended Brussels or tapestry carpeting so

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it would be reasonable to extrapolate from this to suggest that a picture gallery might be carpeted in this way. 505

Design critics of the mid-nineteenth century condemned the trend to overly naturalistic effects such as realistic flowers or tromp l’oeuil. Godey’s Lady’s Book informed its readers that, “A carpet should always be chosen as a background, upon which the other articles or furniture are to be placed…. It should vie with nothing, but rather give value to all objects coming in contact with it. Composed of somber shades and tones, and treated essentially as a flat surface, it exerts a most valuable, though subordinate influence upon all the other decorations of the day.” 506 These rules seem particularly appropriate for a gallery in which the art should be the focal point, but we have no way of knowing if the Aikens followed these rules.

Design aficionados of the mid-nineteenth century also endorsed the idea that fewer colors in a carpet were to be preferred. Two colors in a carpet, it was suggested, made for a “very handsome carpet.” 507 At this time even a single color carpet was desirable, creating “the most truly chaste, rich, and elegant carpets…where the pattern is formed by one color only, but arranged in every variety of shade.” 508 The conventional wisdom of interior design critics of the era was that for carpets, the pattern should be scaled to fit the room size; the larger the room the larger the pattern. Among the other rules of floor coverings at the time was that the carpet’s dominant color should be carefully considered to fit with other elements in the room. The leading idea at the time

506 Godey’s Lady’s Book, August 1855, 182.
508 Ibid, 93.
was that rooms should incorporate multiple colors, but the various tones should incorporate elements of one another so as to create harmony.\textsuperscript{509} In the words of 	extit{Godey’s Lady’s Book}, “a very brilliant color, such as crimson, in a carpet, may have a drab or other subdued color in the curtains and paper; but then there should be a portion of the brilliant color introduced in both, as bordering or ornaments.”\textsuperscript{510} Considering how this advice might have been interpreted in the Aikens’ gallery, there are many possibilities since the colors of the paintings might have been incorporated into the floor covering. There are many Wilton or Brussels carpet patterns from the 1850’s which the Aikens might have chosen for the gallery. J.R. Burrows & Company, which produces reproductions of archival carpet patterns, offers several of these, including a floral trellis from the mid-1850’s, a Gothic jewel rondels pattern from 1854, and a Woodward Grosvenor pattern from circa 1860 (figs. 128, 129, 130).

Color trends in this same general time period are instructive as well. In an article entitled, “Color in Dress, Furniture, and Gardening,” 	extit{Godey’s Lady Book} discusses color harmony suited to different rooms in the house: “The paper, the curtains, the carpet, the sofa, and the tablecover, etc., should not ‘fight’, but either harmonize or contrast…There must be no contrast, of course, in a library or picture gallery.”\textsuperscript{511} It is also mentioned that pale colors should be used in rooms which receive a lot of sunshine.\textsuperscript{512} This advice, which the Aikens appeared to have followed to some extent in choosing the neutral cream tone of their gallery, supports the notion that they might also have chosen a neutral tone

\textsuperscript{509} Christopher Dresser, 	extit{Principles of Victorian Decorative Design} (Mineola NY: Dover Publications, 1996), 100.
\textsuperscript{511} \textit{Godey’s Lady’s Book}, Volume 65, December, 1862, 574.
for a window shade, as Godey’s had recommended for libraries, which were often grouped as a category with picture galleries for the purposes of interior design recommendations.  

LIGHTING

The speculation in the Historic Structures Report that an “electrified gas chandelier” hung from the space decorated with a diamond pattern of acanthus leaves in the center of the rectangular skylight has not been conclusively substantiated. Given that electricity was not available when the gallery was installed, it is clear that such a fixture would have been part of a later version of the gallery, if it existed at all. It is possible that a gas powered chandelier hung in this accented space, since the home did have gas lighting elsewhere, including the sconces in the gallery, after the 1857-58 renovation. It is reasonable to think that the Aikens would have wanted the gallery to have sufficient light for viewing at night, which would require more light than the sconces could provide. Also, the configuration of the closed central portion of the skylight, in which the diamond pattern medallion approximates the look of a flower, appears to anticipate a light fixture of some kind being installed in its center (fig. 108). The contemporaneous gallery of William Aspinwall is known to have incorporated a gas chandelier into a similar skylight arrangement, this one in a circular ring design with multiple lights along its rim (fig. 131).

513 *Godey’s Lady’s Book, Volume 65, December, 1862, 574.*
514 *Architectural Investigations of the Aiken-Rhett House, III-103.*
ARRANGEMENT OF THE ART: SCULPTURE

From the paint analysis we know that the original gallery was painted in neutral tones of cream, distinguishing it from the exuberant coloration of the rest of the public areas of the house. The reason for this would surely have been to put the focus on the art, rather than on the interior design of the room. The paintings, brought back from Europe in their ornate gold frames, were the design inspiration; the sculptures set in their niches or placed around the room accentuating the overall aesthetic.

It is clear that any of the smaller sculptures could have been displayed on their pedestals in niches. There was, however, one more small statue than there were niches, so one of them must have been placed elsewhere. Eola Willis noted only that, sculptures were “ranged about in niches and corners” and by the time a photograph was made of the parlor in 1918, all of the smaller sculptures, except the bust of Proserpine, were located in that room (fig. 125). The bust of Proserpine differs from the others in size and was also the most distinguished piece of statuary the Aikens owned. It is likely therefore, that it was always kept in a prominent position, possibly differentiated thereby from the other pieces, though there is no evidence suggesting the specifics of where this piece was displayed.

The larger statue, Mary Magdalene at the Tomb that the Aikens bought in Florence in 1858, was always located somewhere in the open space of the gallery. There is evidence that at various times this statue had been located in two different spots. One of these was between the windows on the west wall of the gallery where the floor has an octagonal discoloration matching the outline of the base of the Magdalene. This statue
was positioned here for a long period of time, as documented by numerous pictures from the twentieth century (figs. 150, 152). The Historic Structures Report states that a configuration of carpet tacks in the center of the floor also matches the shape of the base of this statue, denoting that it was at one time also placed there.

Considering that this piece, while large and imposing, was not one of the Aikens’ premier works of art, one might think that it was not installed in the center of the gallery during its inaugural period. The central position would have made the piece a focal point and the first thing a visitor would see upon entering. As the work of a named but unknown artist, one wonders if this was a piece that the Aikens would have wanted to showcase so dramatically in the center of their gallery. On the other hand, the fact that the Aikens had such a large piece of sculpture shipped back to Charleston suggests that they were very fond of it and may, in fact, have chosen to showcase it in the center. The octagonal shape of the statue’s base further supports its placement in the center of the gallery. The invoice from 1874 includes a disproportionately high charge for “shifting marble statues in the picture gallery,” suggesting that the Magdalene was moved at that time. This was during the same general period that the gallery was re-imagined, painted dark green accented with brown wood tone trim. Given the move to make the space darker and more “masculine” in appearance, it is possible that the statue was moved to accommodate the new design of the space. It is also possible that it was moved into a space vacated by a piece no longer in keeping with the décor.

A circular settee, known as a borne or divan de milieu, is today situated in the upstairs withdrawing room. This piece, 57½” in diameter and 38” tall at the highest point
of its central pillar, is upholstered in what appears to have originally been a rose or red with yellow cotton damask, trimmed in matching fringe (fig. 132). The borne is estimated to have been produced as early as the 1850’s, though it could also have been made decades later. The borne was a form of circular or oval sofa with a pillar of some sort in the center. There are various design variations that would fit this general description, however. The borne is thought to have been introduced to the French and European furniture market circa 1850. However there are examples of similar seating furniture with a central pillar as early as circa 1830 (fig. 133). The early example is square with a central pillar that displays an urn with flowers. Other examples of the borne, one from 1840 depicted in a watercolor by Haase, is identified as being in a “room at Werki.” This borne is square with a square central column on which flowers are shown (fig. 134). Another example, this one from 1842 most likely originating in Germany, is circular and incorporates pillows around the central column (fig. 135).

It is possible that the Aikens’ borne was placed in the center of the gallery when it was first furnished. Such an item would be appropriate and useful in an art gallery; providing a fashionable and sensible seat enabling a visitor to sit and gaze at the room’s treasures from any vantage point. A form of borne is seen in the Harper’s Weekly drawing of William Aspinwall’s New York gallery. This version, located in the center of the rectangular gallery space, was itself rectangular with rounded corners and a central back (fig. 136).

It is a plausible scenario, therefore, that when the gallery was new and painted in neutral beige tones, the Aikens selected this rose colored borne to occupy the center of the room, with the *Magdalene* situated between the windows on the west wall. When, a decade later, the room was transformed from light and neutral to dark green and distinctively “masculine,” the “feminine” borne may have been moved out of the gallery, at which point the *Magdalene* took its place in the center of the floor. This presumes that the borne was produced in the earlier years of its estimated production time, and that the rose hued upholstery was original. If, in fact, it was a later piece, it may well never have been located in the gallery.

The center of the gallery may also at some point have been occupied by a table, though most likely not the mosaic one noted by Harriet Aiken when it was purchased in Florence and described by Eola Willis (fig. 121). The size of this piece made it unsuitable for anchoring a room, even one as small as the Aikens’ gallery, although the presumed artistic quality of the piece may well have earned it a place somewhere in the room. It is likely that the mosaic table was micromosaic, a technique popular with nineteenth century Grand Tourists. Micromosaic was an art form developed in the eighteenth century at the Vatican whereby small pieces of an opaque, glass-like substance, sometimes referred to as “enamel” were used to create mosaic designs. The pieces were so tiny that a design could use up to 4,000 pieces per square inch. Very popular among the Grand Tour set, micromosaic designs were created at a variety of price points—the larger the piece, the higher the price. Average travelers purchased small pieces of jewelry created with the technique, while the most affluent members of European nobility bought
substantial furniture items decorated with micromosaic designs as finely detailed as museum quality paintings, often incorporating Italian landscapes or religious themes.\footnote{Sonia King, \textit{Mosaic Techniques and Traditions: Projects and Designs from Around the World} (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 2003), 46-48; Laura Hiserote, “Roman Micromosaic” http://www.micromosaic.org/roman_micromosaic.htm (accessed February 22, 2011).} The Aikens’ table appears to be moderate in terms of both size and intricacy, placing them above the level of the average traveler, but below that of European aristocracy. The table’s design and provenance qualifies it as a work of art, intended for the gallery, albeit probably not placed at its center.

The other table known to have been located in the gallery, and still present, is the Boulle-work piece mentioned by Eola Willis as a “curio” with royal provenance (fig. 120). This table would have been created by an \textit{ébéniste} using the process originated by Andre-Charles Boulle in which brass was inlaid in tortoise shell to create intricate designs. This table, with its Boulle marquetry and ormolu mounts would itself have been considered a work of art worthy of its place in the gallery.\footnote{Michael Huntley, \textit{History of Furniture, Ancient to 19th Century} (Lewes, East Sussex: Guild of Master Craftsmen Publications, 2004), 40; John Gloag, \textit{A Social History of Furniture Design from B.C. 1300 to A.D. 1960} (New York: Bonanza Books, 1976), 32.}

\textbf{ARRANGEMENT OF THE ART: PAINTINGS}

The most essential design element in the gallery in its inaugural period was the collection of paintings it was built to showcase. An examination of how those paintings might have been mounted on the walls will require considering the various ways in which pictures were hung on walls in European museums and other applications during the preceding years of the nineteenth century. It is clear that the Aikens admired the Tribune
of the Uffizi and may have modeled their gallery insofar as was possible on that design. In particular, the Zoffany painting offered inspiration. In this rendition of the Tribune, the pictures, all framed in gold, hung on the wall in tight formation, in three rows. Smaller paintings were positioned mainly at the bottom, underneath rows of paintings in no particular size order. Looking closely at the painting reveals that there is a picture rail at the bottom of the cornice from which cords are visible supporting the paintings. This is most clearly visible on the left side of the picture in the portion of the painting where the *Madonna della Sedia* is positioned. The large pictures are supported on two cords, while the smaller ones are shown hanging by a single cord running down the center (fig. 137).

Several of the museums, galleries and exhibits the Aikens visited during their Grand Tour may have served as inspiration for the arrangement of paintings on the walls of their own gallery. For example, at Manchester, paintings were hung closely together in the exhibit hall which also had sculptures in both central and corner positions. The Aikens would have seen *au courant* methods of displaying art to greatest advantage also at the Belvedere in Vienna and the Bologna Picture Gallery, as well as at the *Palais de l’Industrie* in Paris which, like their own gallery, had windows, as well as a skylight.

Styles of picture hanging evolved over time, differing from place to place as well. Paintings of galleries showing the progression are instructive in trying to determine what might have influenced the Aikens’ plan. In a painting, *Gallery of the Louvre, 1831-33*, by American painter Samuel F.B. Morse, a gallery space is shown with sculptures punctuating the corners and paintings, many of them Old Masters, hung on the wall in close formation, from close to the floor up almost all the way to the ceiling (fig. 138).
They appear to be fastened directly to the wall and several of the paintings on the top row are angled down toward the viewer. Shown in the gallery also are several artists busily painting copies of the Old Master works in the room.

A painting by Hubert Robert, a French rococo era artist, depicts a museum gallery, identified as “before 1800,” in which gold framed paintings hang in multiple rows, with the top row pictures tilting slightly forward (fig. 139). It appears in this image that the paintings are secured to the wall, with no visible cords. An 1808 hand colored engraving from Ackermann’s “Microcosm of London,” shows a gallery with pictures hung in profusion on the walls, with no cords visible and all pictures appearing to be anchored directly to the wall from behind (fig. 140). A piece entitled, “An English Country-house Drawing Room” from the same year likewise depicts paintings attached directly to the wall, in this case spaced more widely and beginning higher on the wall above the level of furniture in the room (fig. 141).

As the nineteenth century progressed, a variety of picture hanging techniques were employed; sometimes combined within the same room. An example of a room in which paintings were hung in more than one style is shown in an image of “The Duchesse de Barry’s Private Dressing-Room at the Tuileries,” identified as dating to the early 1820’s (fig. 142). In this image pictures on the left side of the room appear to be hung on gold decorative hooks placed just above the top of the frames. Paintings on the right side and through to the adjoining room are hung on broad ribbons or tapes suspended from a picture rail. \(^{518}\) In “A Roman Palazzo 1825” the paintings are evenly

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and generously spaced on the walls to which they are fastened on gold hooks that are visible above the frames (fig. 143). The “Sitting Room of Princess Augusta in the Palace of Prince Wilhelm,” said to be from Berlin, 1829, shows pictures in even vertical columns suspended on thick cords or tapes which are attached to the picture rail by decorative medallions (fig. 144). In a work by William Henry Hunt called *Interior of a Drawing Room with a Lady at her Writing Desk*, c. 1840, the large paintings in the room are suspended on cords while the smaller pictures are attached to the wall with no visible hardware (fig. 145). Robert Huskisson’s image of *Lord Northwick’s Picture Gallery at Thirlestaine House*, c. 1846-47 shows paintings with significant space between them, fastened directly and invisibly to the wall (fig. 146). This image is of particular interest for interpreting the Aiken’s gallery because of its date as well as its provenance as the gallery of an English aristocrat. Knowing that Mrs. Aiken studied the galleries of people like Lord Northwick (though as far as we know his gallery was not included in her book), it is reasonable to assume that the style of their homes, including how they furnished and installed their paintings inspired her and informed the Aikens’ own decisions. Another English example, this one “A Palatial English Country House” c. 1845, likewise has no visible hanging hardware attached to pictures arranged on the wall (fig. 147).

In William Henry Aspinwall’s New York house, paintings in both his small and large galleries appear to have been fastened directly to the wall with no visible hardware. Arranged in rows around the room, beginning above the elaborate wainscoting, the art

519 Ibid, 238.
work rises to just below the cornice (fig. 148). This gallery was installed in 1859, by which point hanging pictures on visible cords was a well established practice, particularly in Continental Europe. Aspinwall’s choice of method, the same one chosen by Lord Northwick, may be instructive for the Aikens’ hanging plan. This suggests that the Aikens’ paintings may well have originally been fastened to the wall as were Aspinwall’s and Northwick’s. This theory is further supported by the fact that in 1874, when changes were being made to the gallery, including rearrangement of the sculpture, a quantity of “picture nails and cord” was purchased. The acquisition of these items suggests that the method for hanging paintings in the gallery was being changed to one employing decorative visible support. Further supporting this hypothesis is the presence elsewhere in the house today of porcelain and brass picture nails (fig. 149).

Given the small size of the Aikens’ gallery and the large size of many of their paintings, it is likely that the works of art were placed close to one another. The overall effect, however, might not have been as crowded as some others because of the interruption of wall space by niches and windows. If we consider the arrangement of Aspinwall’s gallery, and assume that the Aikens took a similar approach, it is likely that the largest pictures were attached to the short walls of the gallery. We know that Flagg’s life size portrait of Mrs. Aiken was fastened to the north wall, making it reasonable to suggest that Terry’s Romeo and Juliet might have been on the opposite side of the room, hung on the south wall.

It is impossible to speculate with any degree of authority how the paintings were arranged in the gallery. Not only are there many possible configurations, there is no
exhaustive list of items owned by the Aikens, much less a definitive one noting which of
their many works of art were hung in the gallery. The best we can do is imagine what it
may have looked like, basing this on what we do know about the paintings and about the
Aikens’ instincts and predilection for emulating the grandeur of Europe and the styles of
English aristocrats.
Conclusion

The built environment derives out of material culture which is itself a reflection of the life and lifestyle of a society and its values. Faithfully preserving it depends on our ability to know and understand its historical context; to engage with the society, with the people whose ideas and values forged its priorities and drove its progression. The years immediately preceding the Civil War were a time of transition. During this time, New York began to assert its cultural ascendancy, forging a new path; while in Charleston, the unyielding embrace of the past drew the city inexorably toward war and ruin. At the crossroads of these two paths stood men with great ambitions, men who strove to ascend to the top of their professions and their social sets. Art collecting was the common ground on which these men met; their private galleries the vehicle conveying them to membership in a small, select group. The varying sensibilities and priorities among these gallery owners is instructive; providing a window into the socio-political differences between Charleston and New York.

We owe a debt of gratitude to generations of preservationists, both professional and accidental, whose decisions and actions allowed the Aiken art gallery to remain essentially intact. The fact that no major structural changes were made to the room enables extrapolations and interpretations that would be impossible under other circumstances. Likewise, we are appreciative of the efforts of conservationists who have ferreted out details about the room and its generations of paint and installations that give a partial picture of what it might have looked like at different times over the years. The details are incomplete, however; the facts may never be known about how the gallery was
originally furnished and arranged. So the only way to apprehend the room as the Aikens conceived and enjoyed it is to get to know them; to look at every aspect of who they were and of the milieu in which they lived their lives. By examining background, context, and inspiration, along with the available physical evidence we gain confidence in making educated guesses about the design, furnishing and arrangement of the Aiken’s private gallery.

This thesis has been an attempt to imagine, understand, and contextualize the private art gallery of William and Harriet Lowndes Aiken. By examining available information about the gallery, delving deeply into the lives and ambitions of its owners, and comparing it to contemporary counterparts in New York, I set out to provide a better picture of why and how the gallery was conceived and furnished. The goal was to create a clearer understanding of its provenance, and a cogent sense of what it represented in its own epoch. What we have learned about the Aikens informs our apprehension of the gallery; the gallery, in turn, provides insight into our understanding of the Aikens and into the vanished world they occupied in the years before the Civil War.
Images

**Figure 1**


**Figure 2**

Phase 1: Robinson House, West Façade, 1820. Image Courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 3

Phase 1: Robinson House, South Façade, 1820.
Image Courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 4

Phase 2: Aiken House, West Façade, 1835.
Image Courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Phase 2: Aiken House, South Façade, 1835.
Image Courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Phase 3: Aiken House, West Façade, 1858.
Image Courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 7

Phase 3: Aiken House, South Façade, 1858.
Image Courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 8

Advertisement from the Charleston Courier, September 21, 1825.
Figure 9

The entry hall.
Photograph by author; courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
FIGURE 10


FIGURE 11

Governor William Aiken. Courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 13

Figure 14

Drawing of door in Reed's Gallery. Image from *Mr Luman Reed’s Picture Gallery*, 39.
The “Luman Reed Gallery” at the New York Historical Society. Images courtesy of Allan Greenberg Architect.
FIGURE 18

Photograph of William Aspinwall. Image courtesy of The Panama Railroad.

FIGURE 19

**Figure 20**


**Figure 21**


**Figure 24**


**Figure 25**

Figure 26


Figure 27

**Figure 28**


**Figure 29**

FIGURE 30


FIGURE 31

Portrait of Caroline Perry Belmont by George P.A. Healy, c. 1860. Image from Gilded Mansions, 46.
Belmont Residence, remodeled with gallery addition, c. 1857, Fifth Avenue and 18th Street, New York, NY. Image Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.

A.T. Stewart House, 1869. Image from Gilded Mansions, 46.
FIGURE 34

A.T. Stewart’s Art Gallery. Image from *Gilded Mansions*, 72.

FIGURE 35

John Taylor Johnston Residence, 8 Fifth Avenue. Image courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.

Act of Incorporation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 13, 1870.
Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Front of envelope sent to Governor Aiken while in Paris, which contained the plans for the gallery. Postmarked “Charleston, October 2, 1858.”
Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.

Back of envelope sent to the Aikens while in Paris.
Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
Floorplan of first floor sent to the Aikens in Paris 1858.
Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
Figure 42

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at The Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom in Manchester, 1857. Image Courtesy of BBC “Art Treasures of Great Britain.”

Figure 43

Interior View of The Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom in Manchester, 1857. Image Courtesy of BBC “Art Treasures of Great Britain.”
FIGURE 44

Interior View of the Picture Gallery at The Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom in Manchester, 1857. Image Courtesy of BBC “Art Treasures of Great Britain.”

FIGURE 45

Interior View of the Sculpture Gallery at The Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom in Manchester, 1857. Image Courtesy of BBC “Art Treasures of Great Britain.”
Figure 46


Figure 47

Portion of Lansdowne House Floorplan showing the sculpture gallery, featuring two octagonal rooms with niches for sculpture. Image from *Vitruvius Britannicus*. 
Figure 48

Portion of the floorplan of Nuthall in Nottinghamshire. Image from *Vitruvius Britannicus*.

Figure 49

Portion of Holkham Hall Norfolk Floorplan showing the sculpture gallery, featuring two octagonal rooms with niches for sculpture. Image from *Vitruvius Britannicus*.

Figure 50

Photograph of Holkham Hall Statue Gallery with octagonal ends. Image courtesy of Holkham Hall and Estate.
Portion of Newnham Oxfordshire floorplan showing the sculpture gallery, featuring octagonal room. Image from *Vitruvius Britannicus*.

The Salon of Painting and Sculpture main room at the Palais de l’Industrie gallery, 1857. Image by A. Provost.

Figure 55


Figure 56

George Stillman Hillard’s *Six Months in Italy*. Signed Henrietta A. Aiken, Venice October 26th, 1857. Collection of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 59


Figure 60

(left) R. Thew engraving of Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave on Display at the Dusseldorf Gallery in New York City, 1848. Image from *Marble Queens and Captives*, 71.


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**Figure 62**

Figure 63

Tribune Gallery at the Uffizi, Florence Italy. The Uffizi: The Official Guide, 10.

Figure 64

Floorplan of the Uffizi, John Murray *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy, Part II.*

Diagram of the Zoffany Painting of the Tribune Gallery.

Courtesy of Professor Alan Farber SUNY Oneonta.

**Figure 70**


**Figure 71**

**Figure 72**

Roper Hospital Queen Street, designed by Edward C. Jones. Image from Harper’s Weekly June, 1857.

**Figure 73**

Zion Presbyterian Church, designed by Edward C. Jones, 1859. Image from *Architects of Charleston.*
Figure 74

College of Charleston Library, designed by Edward C. Walker, 1856. Image from *Architects of Charleston*.

Figure 75

Farmers and Exchange Bank. Image from *Architects of Charleston*.
**Figure 76**

Vanderhorst Tomb, Magnolia Cemetery. Designed in the Egyptian style by Francis D. Lee, 1856. Image from *Architects of Charleston*.

**Figure 77**

Unitarian Church, 6 Archdale Street, “Gothicized” by Francis D. Lee, 1852-53. Image from *Harpers Weekly*, June, 1857.
Figure 78

St Luke’s Church, Charlotte and Elizabeth Street, designed by Francis D. Lee, 1859. Image from *Architects of Charleston*.

Figure 79

House on Rutledge Avenue at Doughty Street designed by architect, Francis D. Lee, 1857. Image from *Architects of Charleston*.
Colonel John Algernon Sydney Ashe House, designed by Edward C. Jones in 1853. Image from *Architects of Charleston*.

Isaac Jenkins Mikell House, 94 Rutledge Avenue, 1853-54. Image from *Harper’s Weekly* June 1857.
Porcher-Simonds House 29 East Battery, 1856. Courtesy of Charleston County Public Library.

Cleland Kinloch Huger House, 8 Legare Street, 1857. Image from This is Charleston.
**Figure 84**

Louis Desaussure House, 1 East Battery, 1850. Image from *This is Charleston*.

**Figure 85**


**Figure 86**

James E. Spear House, 30 South Battery, 1860. Courtesy of Charleston County Public Library.
FIGURE 87

J. Thomas Hamlin White House, 33 Charlotte Street, c.1854-55. Courtesy Charleston County Public Library.

FIGURE 88

John Hume Simons House, Ashley Avenue at Wentworth Street, 1855. Image from The Buildings of Charleston.

Wickliffe House 178 Ashley Avenue, 1850-52. Courtesy of Charleston County Public Library.

Bees Row 101-109 Bull Street, c.1849. Image from The Buildings of Charleston.
Figure 92

The art gallery, 2011. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 93

Bust of Ellen Martin Aiken by Joseph Daniel Aiken. Photo by author, courtesy of the Historic Charleston Foundation.
**Figure 94**

Detail from drawing of niche for statuary. Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum

**Figure 95**

Detail from drawing of stairs, vestibule. Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum

**Figure 96**

Detail from drawing of skylight. Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
Figure 97

West façade of the gallery. Photo by author.

Figure 98

South façade, projecting 2’6” from the original house structure. Photo by author.
FIGURE 99

North façade. Photo by author.

FIGURE 100

East façade showing door to cistern below. Photo by author.
Figure 101

Door leading from the main entry hall to the gallery vestibule. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 102

Close-up of gallery floor plan.
Art Gallery Vestibule. Image taken through door leading to sandstone steps. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Door leading from the main entry stair hall to the gallery vestibule. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Main doors of the Gallery. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Door leading from back lot steps to the gallery vestibule. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 108

Glazed Cupola or Skylight, at center of gallery. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 109

Detail of Skylight. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 110

Exterior view of skylight.
Image from Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.

Figure 111

Baseboard and Niche Baseboard Detail.
Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 112

*Mary Magdalene* sculpture pedestal mark on the floor in front of west wall. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 113

Ornamental Cornice Detail. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
**Figure 114**

East wall of the gallery. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

**Figure 115**

West wall of the gallery. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 116

Window floral cast motif detail.
Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Figure 117

Fireplace, located on East wall.
Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
**Figure 118**

Gas sconces with etched glass globes above fireplace. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

**Figure 119**

Red Boulle-work table with ormolu mounts the Aikens purchased in Paris in 1857. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
Mosaic Table purchased by the Aikens in Florence. Olive wood, mosaic stones. Label reads: “Baebetti / Atelier de Sculpture / Florence / Place S. Croce No. 7695.” Height: 32” Diameter of top: 24”
Private Collection. Images courtesy of Elizabeth Garrett Ryan.
FIGURE 122

Hiram Powers with his sculpture bust of *Proserpine*, 1861.

FIGURE 123

Invoice for work done in the house and gallery, 1874.
Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.
Photograph of the parlor, east view, 1918. Showing sculptures and paintings moved from the gallery by this date. Aiken-Rhett Papers, The Charleston Museum.

Figure 127

Window treatment from *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 1858.
Image from *Victorian Interior Decoration*, 102.

Figure 128

Image Courtesy of J.R. Burrows & Company.
**Figure 129**


**Figure 130**

Figure 131


Figure 132

Borne owned by the Aikens, c.1858. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.
“Project for the Decoration of a Room,” watercolor, c. 1830. Image from *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration*, 323.

*Figure 133*

*Room at Werki*, watercolor by Haase, April 1840. Image from *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration*, 308.

*Figure 134*
**Figure 135**

*Living Room* watercolor P.F. Peters, 1842. Showing borne with pillows. Image from *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration*, 322.

**Figure 136**

Figure 137

Detail of Zoffany painting of the Tribune Gallery, showing hanging cords.

Figure 138

Figure 139

A Museum Gallery with Ancient Roman Art, before 1800 by Hubert Robert. Courtesy of Bridgeman Art Library.

Figure 140

Exhibition of Water Coloured Drawings, Old Bond Street, plate 34, from Ackermann's 'Microcosm of London, published by Rudolph Ackermann. Courtesy of Bridgeman Art Library.
Figure 141


Figure 142

Showing different hanging techniques were used in the same room. Visible cord on the right side and no cord on the left side.

FIGURE 143

“A Roman Palazzo 1825” Jagiellonian University, Cracow. Image from Authentic Décor: The Domestic Interior 1620-1920, 238.

FIGURE 144

Sitting Room of Princess Augusta in the Palace of Prince Wilhelm, Berlin, 1829 by E. Biermann. Image from An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration.
Figure 145

*Interior of a Drawing Room with a Lady at her Writing Desk* by William Henry Hunt c. 1840. Image from *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art*, 38.

Figure 146

*Lord Northwick's Picture Gallery at Thirlestaine House*, by Robert Huskisson, c.1846-47

Image courtesy of Bridgeman Art Library.
Figure 147

“A Palatial English country house” c. 1845.
Image from Authentic Décor: The Domestic Interior 1620-1920, 272.
Showing no visible wire or cords.

Figure 148

Close-up view of William Aspinwall’s gallery showing hanging technique--no visible wires or cords. Image from Harper’s Weekly, 1859.
**Figure 149**

Porcelain and brass picture hook, circa 1874. Located on third floor of the Aiken-Rhett House. Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation.

**Figure 150**

**Figure 151**


**Figure 152**

Figure 153


Figure 154


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FIGURE 155

Photograph of parlor looking east.
Note *Romeo and Juliet* painting over the fireplace and the absence of the Flagg portrait of Harriet Aiken. 1979. Photograph by Charles N. Bayless.
Appendices
Hiram Powers
Bust of Proserpine, Florence, Italy, c. 1857
White marble
Height 24-1/2”

Powers’ second version of Proserpine
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Thomas Crawford, attributed

*First Grief*, c. 1857

White marble

Statue Dimensions: Height 39-1/2” width 14”, diameter: 12”

Pedestal Dimensions: height: 45”, width: 19 ¾” x 19 ¾”

(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
E.S. Bartholomew
*The Shepherd Boy*, Rome, 1858
White marble
Carved on pedestal: “Bartholomew”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
D. Menconi

*Mary Magdalene at the Tomb*, Florence, Italy, 1858

White marble

Dimensions: Height 64”, width 48”, diameter: 29”

Marked: D. Menconi esegui dall Originale de PAMPALONI, Firenze 1858. Copy of the original carved by Luigi Pamploni, Italian sculptor (1791-1847).

(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Antonio Canova’s *Venus Italica* known also as “Venus of the Bath” c. 1857
White marble, rests on a marble column pedestal.
Statue Dimensions: Height 42”, width 14”, diameter: 14”
Marble Pedestal Dimensions: height: 41”, width: 17” x 17”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Appendix B
Extant Paintings from the Aiken Collection

Figure B1

George Whiting Flagg
*Portrait of Harriet Lowndes Aiken*, 1858
Oil on canvas
Dimensions with frame: Height overall 123”, width overall 87”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
George Whiting Flagg
*Portrait of Harriet Lowndes Aiken*

c. 1858

Oil on canvas. Private collection.
FIGURE B3

Portrait of William Aiken
Artist Unknown
Oil on canvas
Dimensions: Height 30”, width 25”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Bartolome Murillo’s *Madonna and Child*, c. 1858
Oil on canvas
Painting Dimensions: Height 26-1/2”, width 19-1/2”
Frame Dimensions: height: 37”, width: 29.5”, depth: 2.5”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Sassoferrato’s *Madonna of the Blue Hood*

c. 1857

Oil on canvas

Dimensions: Height 2’ 4”, width 1’-11”

(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Carlo Dolci’s *Penitent Magdalen*,
c. 1857
Oil on canvas
Dimensions: Height 2’ 4”, width 1’-11”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Carlo Dolci’s *Penitent Magdalen* (finer copy).

c. 1857

Oil on canvas

Dimensions: Height 2’ 4”, width 1’-11”

(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Andrea del Sarto’s *Madonna of the Harpies*,
c. 1857
Oil on canvas.
Original hangs in Uffizi Gallery (room 26) Florence, Italy
Painting Dimensions: Height 54”, width 41-5/6”
Frame Dimensions: height: 67.25, width: 55.5”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Figure B9

Morani (V.) in Rome
The Virgin Mary with the Child and St. Elizabeth with St. John the Baptist, in a landscape
2’3 ½ x 2’ Round above.
“Signed V. Morani, fecit in Roma 1858.”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Artist Unknown
*Crucifixion of Christ*
19th century
Oil on canvas
Dimensions: Height 12-1/4", width 9-1/2"
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
(Untitled) Saint John or Saint John in the Wilderness, 19th century
Artist Unknown
Oil on canvas
Height 17-1/8, width 30”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).

(Untitled) Paul the Hermit, 19th century
Artist Unknown
Oil on Canvas
Height 17-1/8”, width 30”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
**FIGURE B13**

Oil on panel
Dimensions: Height 12”, width 15-1/2”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).

**FIGURE B14**

*Outdoor Tavern Scene*, 19th century. Painted on back: “Zorg N 101”
Oil on panel
Dimensions: Height 12”, width 15-1/2”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Figure B15

Bandit Scene, after Salvator Rosa,
19th century
Oil on canvas
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Luther Terry

*Romeo and Juliet*, painted in Rome, 1858
Oil on canvas

Painting Dimensions: height: 70”, width: 49.5”, depth: 1.25”
Frame Dimensions: height: 84”, width: 63”, depth: 3.75”

Back is written: “Please do not touch for 24 hours, still wet”

(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Figure B17

_The Three Musicians_, after Michelangelo
Dimensions: Height 48 ¼”, width 57 ½”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Scene of Venice, 1839
Oil on canvas.
Written on back: “Do Not Rub the Surface, Rome 1839”, attached paper label reads:
“W OODSPEEDS BO- /7 Ashburton Place 8 Milk Street/Books, Autographs”
Height 22-1/2”, width 36-1/2”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
(Untitled) Painting of Lake Como, Italy, c. 1839
Artist Unknown
Oil on canvas
Height overall 31-1/2”, width 45”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Self Portrait of Andrea del Sarto, 19th century
Oil on Canvas: original hangs in Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy
Painting dimensions: height 8-3/4”, width 7-1/4”
Oval
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Copy of Self Portrait of Anthony Van Dyck, 19th Century
Oil on Canvas
Inscribed on back: “Honorable Wm. Aiken”
Painting dimensions: height 8-3/4”, width 7-1/4”
Frame Dimensions: height: 15”, width: 13”, depth: 1.375”
Oval
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
**Figure B22**

(Untitled) Landscape scene with aqueduct, 19th century
Artist Unknown
Oil on canvas
Height 28-3/4, width 38”
(Photo by author, courtesy of Historic Charleston Foundation).
Appendix C
Art from the Aiken Collection Loaned to the Carolina Art Association Exhibition of 1859

Unknown
Statue in white marble; *The Child’s first grief.*
3’5” high

Unknown
*A female in an attitude of prayer:* 2’ x 2’-3”

Unknown
*Magdalen* after Carlo Dolce 1’-11” x 2’ 4”

Doglio (Agostino) in Florence
Copy of Raphael Sanzio’s *Madonna della Sedia* Circular 2’4” in diameter
Marked Agostino Doglio

Unknown
*St. Catherine with the wheel and palm-branch*
2’3” x 1’-8”

Unknown
*Madonna and Child:* 2’3” x 1’8”

Unknown
Copy of Andrea Del Sarto’s Madonna in the Pitti Palace at Florence. The Madonna with the Child stands on a low altar supported by two boy angels, with St. Francis on her right, and St. John Evangelist on the left; 4’5” x 8’6”

Powers (Hiram) In Rome
Bust of *Proserpine*, in Carrara Marble; 2’1” high

Unknown
Copy of Canova’s *Venus*, in Carrara Marble, 3’4” high

Morani (V.) in Rome
*The Virgin Mary with the Child and St. Elizabeth with St. John the Baptist, in a landscape.* 2’3 ½ x 2’ Round above. Signed V. Morani, fecit in Roma 1858.
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