

# This Day in History... February 22, 1778

## Birth of Rembrandt Peale

Artist Rembrandt Peale was born on February 22, 1778, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He completed more than 600 paintings during his lifetime, including dozens picturing George Washington.

Peale was the son of famed Revolutionary War painter Charles Willson Peale, and was named after the 17th century Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn. Peale's father taught him and his siblings to paint from an early age. Peale started drawing when he was eight and made his first self-portrait when he was 13.



Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860). 32 USA



Washington at Princeton 1777 by Peale  
US Bicentennial 13c

*Rembrandt's father, Charles was best known for his paintings of the American Revolution.*

Peale first met George Washington in 1787 when the future president came to be painted by his father. The younger Peale then got his chance to paint Washington in 1795, when he was 17 years old. Peale's painting was well-received and established him in the art community.

Following that first sitting, Peale went on to paint Washington at least 76 more times, using the original portrait as a guide. He had never been satisfied with that painting and wanted to improve on it. He studied other portraits by notable artists as well as his own in his attempts to find a masterpiece.

These portraits are known as the "porthole paintings," because the large, oval frames resemble the portholes of a ship.

These portraits were also available in a variety of different combinations. One could purchase Washington looking right or left, in military or civilian dress, at half-length or on horseback. Peale finally completed a version of the painting he liked in 1824 and called it *Patriae Pater* (father of the country). Some consider this painting to be the second-best portrait of Washington after Gilbert Stuart's *Athenaeum*. Peale's portrait now hangs in the Old Senate Chamber.

*Peale's most famous painting of his brother Rubens holding a geranium.*



*This stamp was based on a Peale portrait of Washington.*



*This stamp was based on a Peale portrait of Monroe.*

Peale studied art in Europe for a time. While there, he painted notable Europeans including explorer Alexander von Humboldt, scientist Joseph Louis Gay-Lussac and botanist François André Michaux. Returning to America, Peale lived in Philadelphia for a time but struggled to find success. He then moved to Baltimore and opened his first museum. It was the first building built in the US specifically to serve as a museum.

Over the course of his career, Peale made more than 600 paintings. He painted a number of notable figures including Napoleon Bonaparte, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, and John C. Calhoun. Peale died on June 12, 1860. Today his paintings hang in numerous museums around the country.

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