Proprietary Museums in Antebellum Cincinnati: “Something to please you and something to learn”

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education, Department of Theory and Policy Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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0-612-50009-8
Abstract

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Judged by contemporary standards of museum practice and dismissed as "chance assemblages of objects" or as vulgar exploitations of the American public's eagerness for exotic novelties, the proprietary museums of antebellum America have received little attention in the historical literature. Few efforts have been made to examine the development of proprietary museums within their particular socio-historical contexts.

The current study re-examines the history of the Western Museum of Cincinnati, established in 1818. The Western Museum is considered as the product of a number of influences: the construct of a "museum" as interpreted in the most populous Eastern seaboard cities, the popular culture and religious values of the urban frontier and of antebellum America, as well as the vicissitudes of the local economy of Cincinnati. The Museum's exhibits were also influenced heavily by the interests, talents and expertise of its founders, proprietors, paid staff and their associates. Biographical information is provided about Daniel Drake, Joseph Dorfeuille, John James Audubon, Frances Trollope, and Hiram Powers.

The study relies upon paid advertisements, travellers' recollections, biographical accounts and the extensive correspondence of Hiram Powers, the Museum's resident artist, to trace the development of the Museum from a specialized scientific cabinet associated with the Cincinnati College to its establishment as a commercial, populist museum. The impact of
competing local institutions such as Letton's Museum as well as more ephemeral entertainments is considered upon the Western Museum's exhibits and entertainments. Although earlier historical accounts have attributed the development of the Western Museum's most enduring exhibit, the animated wax-work depiction of Dante's Inferno to the imagination of Frances Trollope, this study challenges this assumption and indicates that the influence of the ex-patriate British museum proprietor William Bullock must be considered.

Although the Western Museum survived as a commercial venture until 1867, this study concentrates on the first twenty years of its existence. The gradual move toward the development of a publicly-funded museum in Cincinnati is discussed.

The study calls for more contextualized research into these early proprietary museums in which the currently-contested museological issues of “scholarship versus entertainment” and “commerce versus education” are rooted.
Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my heart felt appreciation to my advisor Dr. Harold Troper for his lively engagement with this topic and his thoughtful reading of my paper. I would also like to thank Dr. David Levine for his encouragement and friendship over the past years and Dr. Lynne Teather for introducing me to the richness of museum history while I was a student in the Museum Studies department at the University of Toronto.

My gratitude is also extended to my colleagues, both former and current, at the Royal Ontario Museum for their support and encouragement throughout the years.

A special thank you is offered to the staff of the Cincinnati Historical Society Library - without their assistance and knowledge, this work would not have been completed. I am particularly grateful for the many kindnesses they showed me while I conducted the archival research.

But my greatest sense of gratitude is to my family. I am eternally indebted to my parents for their unflagging interest in my studies and in particular, to my husband Michael for his enthusiasm, humour, help and companionship in this long process.
I find that I am getting into a much greater field than I had first expected or intended, I find it very amusing, and I hope in the end it will be usseful [sic].

Charles Willson Peale
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Introduction and Historical Overview

"A chance assemblage of curiosities... rather [than] a series of objects selected with reference to their value to investigators, or their possibilities for public enlightenment."\(^1\)

George Brown Goode's assessment and dismissal of early American museums, presented at the third annual meeting of the American Historical Association on December 26, 1888, has exerted an enduring and seldom-questioned influence on the historiography of museums. As the assistant secretary to the Smithsonian Institution and the first formal historian of museums in North America, Goode laid the foundation for a critique of museums which has been echoed and re-echoed throughout the past century. He declared that pre-1870 American museums had consisted of either spectacular or bizarre objects with no scientific or educational value. These collections were merely sideshows which existed for the public's vulgar gratification.

Goode was also responsible for introducing a second contradictory but equally pervasive critique. He charged that early museums had been elitist enclaves serving the desires of the elite and had failed to take the necessary steps to attract the general populace. This line of criticism claimed that early museums had violated the egalitarian ethos of America. While Goode failed to reconcile these contradictory criticisms, his assertions formed the bedrock upon which the critique and analysis of the early American museum has

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been established. Echoes of his statements have been heard in the works of historians and museum workers over the next one hundred years.

Goode was firmly committed to the idea of the museum as an educator; it was established to increase and diffuse scientific knowledge. The museum was to achieve this goal by becoming a "collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen." In subsequent works, including his *Principles of Museum Administration* (1895), Goode further elaborated his beliefs that the museum was to function as a "passionless reformer". The museum, like the park, library and reading room, he argued, could influence men's behaviour and morality. It could help a man select a life characterized by moral restraint and could lead him to wisdom, gentleness, and ultimately, to heaven. The museum would serve as an uplifter of popular taste and design as well as an enforcer of sobriety and productivity. In elaborating this view of the role of the museum, Goode was influenced by Sir Henry Cole, the founder of the South Kensington Museum (1852) in London (later renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum). Goode acknowledged Cole as the undisputed leader and originator of the educational mission of the museum, dismissing earlier American museum keepers as merely mercenary proprietors. The American museum, as envisioned by Goode, would serve only an adult audience. Children were dismissed as potential museum visitors; Goode professed that he did not believe the museum to be a place for "people in their larval

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or school-going stage of existence.'

By the early twentieth century, Goode's views were deeply entrenched in the museological literature. John Cotton Dana, a former librarian and director of the Newark Museum, refined Goode's criticism and introduced the notion of the "corrupted European institution" into American museum historiography. Dana identified European museums as the models for all American institutions, charging that these aristocratic roots led to an overemphasis on collecting and preserving objects over exhibiting and educating. In his influential series of booklets, particularly *The Gloom of the Museum* (1917), Dana attributed the failure of American museums in attracting a large public to their lack of teaching and advertising. Both factors led to an isolated, insular institution which failed to develop the necessary linkages and associations with other institutions of learning. Highly critical of existing institutions, which he called "gazing museums," Dana claimed that typical museum collections were "as speechless as mummies and as instructive as telegraph poles". He was firmly committed to the museum as an interpretive and educational institution which could function as a powerful instrument of self-improvement. Instead, he charged. American museums had alienated art from everyday life by elevating the rare and exotic over the commonplace and accessible.

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4Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 247.

By the 1930s, early American museum history was presented in a linear, simplistic fashion. It was a history unquestioningly accepted and perpetuated. Paul Marshall Rea’s study, *The Museum and the Community*, was undertaken on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and its Advisory Group on Museum Education to appraise the problems and needs of American museums as social institutions. Rea, unlike some of his fellow historians of American museums, acknowledged that the museum had a long history in the United States. Indeed, he argued that the history of museums was longer than that of the nation as it pre-dated that of the formal organization of the republic. American museums had begun in 1773 with the founding of the Charles-Town Library Society. However, despite this long historic presence in the country, museums had not succeeded as social institutions as they had failed to identify their objectives, measure their results or analyse their experiences.⁶ For Rea, the real beginnings of a socially-responsive museum dated from that pivotal year of 1873. The turning point of the evolution of American museums was the result of the increase in wealth in the post-Civil War period and the interests in culture which accompanied the increase in personal wealth. Rea defined the essential role of the public museum as the enrichment of the lives of the people. Earlier museum efforts had failed in this mission as they had been directed at a more exclusive elite which was served by the collections of scientific societies or colleges. The vitality of the museum movement was due to the enthusiasms of the curatorial and education staffs who had continued to pursue their

own interests and were uninfluenced by the wants of the general public.7 Like Rea, Laurence Vail Coleman acknowledged the early beginnings of museums in America. However, the efforts of Charles Willson Peale and the Tammany Society were ephemeral. In The Museum in America, Coleman expressed the idea that it was only in the twentieth century that the educational ideal of museums could be backed up in actuality. The change in museum organization in the 1870s which transferred the administration of the institution from the control of scientific and historical societies to boards of trustees ensured that the goal of public service could be achieved. Coleman denied the existence of even an informal network of museum workers which shared or copied its most successful exhibits with one another. Rather, he perpetuated the belief that prior to the twentieth century, museum proprietors had operated in isolation. Parallel developments in exhibits were the result of the natural sifting of what was wise and useful from what was foolish or merely clever.8

T. R. Adam in his The Civic Value of Museums (1937) as well as The Museum and Popular Culture (1939) emphasized the potential of the museum as a valuable educational tool yet cited its failure in this arena. Using the cafeteria as a metaphor, Adam claimed that American museums offered a brilliant and bewildering miscellany of instructional objects from which members of the public were expected to serve themselves. Education was, and had been, incidental to the main work of the institution which Adam identified as the collecting, arranging and display of objects. Despite this failure of mission, Adam remained

7Ibid., 10.

optimistic that the museum could become an effective and crucial tool in the arsenal of educational institutions. If effectively organized, the American museum could offer "public enlightenment through the careful processes of continuous education [which was] the truest safeguard of popular liberties."

While Dana had projected then-contemporary conditions onto the past and called it history, in the 1940s, his disciple Theodore Low perfected the approach. Commissioned by the American Association of Museums to define the ideal educational mission of the museum and to measure it in actual practice, Low presented a blunt critique of museum practices. Deeply affected by the Depression as well as the rise of Fascism and Nazism, Low believed that the museum had to justify its existence by providing tangible benefits to society. Museums could serve to stem the rising tide of national and even international intolerance and violence. But first they had to democratize their approach. Low's *The Museum as a Social Instrument* (1942) charged that in the past museum directors had so closely imitated elitist European models that they had become little more than isolated segments of European culture set in a hostile environment. As a result, museums were run by the elite for the elite. Low went so far as to dismiss the early history of American museums by beginning his historical account of the institution with the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in

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10Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 248.

1870. The last third of the nineteenth century was of utmost importance for it witnessed the birth of some of the largest American museums - the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. To Low, the remarks made at the opening of the Metropolitan Museum Art which proclaimed that the new museum as "not a mere cabinet of curiosities which would serve to kill time for the idle," marked the dawn of a new age - one of the truly public, educational museum.\textsuperscript{12} Low believed that earlier museums had failed to function as educational institutions because their directors had been chosen from within the ranks of curators who were scholars not noted for their social consciousness. Their emulation of European models of museums led to a disengagement from societal concerns and a disdain for the general public.

With the complexities of the Cold War, the civil and womens' rights movements in the 1960s, interests in museums and museological practices took a new turn. Although as we have seen, the democratic criticism of museums had been articulated for almost one hundred years, it was now extended to include the failure of museums and other cultural institutions to reflect accurately the needs and cultural production of traditionally disenfranchised groups - blacks, Hispanics, women and indigenous peoples. Museums, perceived as powerful social institutions, were accused of catering to an elite element of society. Dominated by the wealthy and demonstrating a Euro- and phallocentric exclusivity, museums ignored or misinterpreted the heritage of large portions of the country's own populace. Prevailing exhibit policies and strategies were attacked; museums were under attack as bastions of male

\textsuperscript{12}Orosz, \textit{Curators and Culture}, 248.
domination and the instruments of the apparatus of power. Critical attention was diverted to contemporary exclusionary museological practices. Few were interested in exploring museums' past histories.

What was demanded were new methodologies which enabled more incisive readings of these and other classical exhibit practices. Informed by literary and anthropological theories, researchers began to analyze the unseen and unspoken systems of classification, the ordering and framing upon which museum displays depend. In this new light, museum collections and particularly exhibits were no longer seen as neutral or objective; rather these systems were now recognized as being deeply embedded in a particular sociohistorical moment. The taxidermy of the Akeley African Hall and the content of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial at the American Museum of Natural History in New York are now understood to reflect the early twentieth century's concern with eugenics and conservation.¹³

Throughout this period a number of pivotal issues emerged in the museological literature. Among them were how institutions could provide various constituencies with opportunities to exert control over the manner in which they were represented in museums. How exhibits could be designed to incorporate multiple perspectives in the reading of artifacts, as well as the complex issues of repatriation of cultural property. Again, this left little room for exploring the early history of the American museum.

Despite the often radical revisioning and questioning of the role of the contemporary museum, few historians were applying the same scrutiny or new methodologies to the history

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of the institutions. Alma Wittlin’s *Museums: In Search of a Usable Future* (1970) repeated many of the assertions of previous authors. She too characterized the early American museums as a disorganized and chaotic institution which offered “informative specimens of natural history or of historical souvenirs next to questionable paintings and undisguised entertainment for the less sophisticated, in the form of wax figures, exotic animals, stuffed and alive, ventriloquists and curious mirrors.”\(^{14}\) She made a serious but unsubstantiated claim that the motivation for learning was greater in America than in Europe. However, she charged that early American museums still failed to capitalize on this interest as their collections were poorly selected and presented. According to Wittlin, visitors to museums were alienated by the perpetuation of arrangements inherited from cabinets of curiosities as well as the galleries of private collectors - these often degenerated into incongruous combinations of storage room, palace and studio. What visitors saw had “little relevance to their lives. and the effect of intrinsically interesting, beautiful and rare objects effected but a brief outburst of excitement: in this respect, early museums could not compete with shallow entertainment.”\(^{15}\) The trend toward specialization of collections and the influence of a series of international expositions contributed to more effective presentation modes which could benefit a growing public. Wittlin concluded that it was the response to these diverse influences which finally changed the role of American museums to one of leadership and prominence within the international museum community.

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\(^{15}\) *Ibid.*, 118-119.
In the late 1980s, however, a handful of historians began to examine the early foundations of the American museums more critically. Their efforts suggested that the pre-1870 museum was neither the vulgar sideshow catering to the lowest common denominator nor the elitist enclave that previous historians had charged. Working with primary, archival evidence and questioning the image created by a century of historians, they argued that the formation of the early American museum was guided by the imperatives of American culture, the Enlightenment, the rise of the middle classes as well as the advent of professionalism in the sciences. In other words, these analysts attributed both serious educational motives and egalitarian aspirations to the early museums. Joël Orosz’s *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* explored the tensions between the conflicting demands for popular education and professionalism in the early museum and presented the first historically-grounded refutation of Goode’s statements. On the basis of primary documentation rather than the repetition of secondary sources, Orosz concluded that 1870 was indeed a pivotal year in the history of American museums. However, it was not, as Goode and others had claimed, the beginning of the historical account. Rather, it marked the culmination of more than a century of collecting and public display practices. According to Orosz, earlier institutions had struggled to develop a compromise between the rigours of professionalism and the demands of public access and education. These uniquely American directives attained a balance only with the founding of the great public museums in the 1870s.

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10 Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 1.
Orosz divides the evolution of American museums into six distinct periods. Influenced heavily by Henry May's *Enlightenment in America*, Orosz argues that during each of these periods significant changes in the intellectual climate led to changes in the development of the museum. During the first period, lasting from 1740 to 1780, the cabinet of curiosities was transplanted from Europe to America. Inaccessible to the public, these early collections were randomly formed. The next twenty years constitute what Orosz identifies as the Moderate Enlightenment. Museum owners established museums which would participate in the suppression of vice by providing the public with "rational amusements." But by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ideals of the Didactic Enlightenment took hold. Lasting twenty years, this period was characterized by a desire for museums to act as guardians of the social order. This ideal was replaced in 1820 by the goals of the Age of Egalitarianism. Museums became centres for self-education. Popular education was, however, eclipsed in the decade between 1840 and 1850 by the development of professional scientific societies and their increasing isolation from the general public. The Age of Professionalism gave way to the American Compromise in the years between 1850 and 1870. This model, which Orosz identifies as being as relevant today as it was when introduced more than a century ago, identifies the balance of popular education with scholarly research as the major aim and achievement of the American museum.

Orosz acknowledges that prior to 1870 there was a network of museum proprietors which was influenced by the same cultural factors. These museum owners were "doing the
same things at the same time for the same reasons". Although Orosz criticizes other historians for assuming that American museums developed independently of American culture, seemingly immune from the social, intellectual and political upheavals of their times, he chooses to situate his analysis within the narrow parameters set by the intellectual ideals of the Enlightenment and its interpretation in America. He fails to address the development of the museum within the broader context of the prevailing cultural landscape and neglects the powerful other forces which exerted influences on the development of the American museum. In particular, he neglects to address the dichotomy between intents and practice; between the intellectual ideals of the period and the practical realities of generating funds for the very survival of the institution. Nor is he interested in how audiences were engaged and what was offered to them in an effort to solicit visitation to the museums. These neglected aspects of the early American museum must be addressed if we are to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the institutions.

While American historians have been concerned with the role or function of the museum as an educational institution and with tracing the reasons for its success or failure, the historiography of the European museum shows a marked preoccupation with the search for origins and precursors of the modern museum. Like their American counterparts, European historians have accepted and repeated an often-told tale with little questioning. Their story typically begins with the displays of relics and treasures in medieval churches. By the mid-sixteenth century, private collectors had begun to amass vast displays of natural and

17Ibid., 3.
artificial curiosities in their 'closets of rarities,' 'cabinets of curiosity,' or 'Wunderkammer.' Inaccessible to all but a privileged few, these jumbled collections of 'irrational' objects such as carved cherry pits, unicorn’s horns, and stuffed crocodiles served as the underpinnings of the modern museum. In France, the changes brought about by the French Revolution are understood to be the foundation of the first truly public museum, the Louvre. But by the end of the eighteenth century, the rest of Europe was not far behind in emulating this French model. With the rise of Enlightenment ideals, nation-states opened the first great public museums, promising to usher in a new age of public participation in national patrimony. Although aristocratic fears of public disorder and rebellion prevented full participation in the museum, by the end of the nineteenth century, government funding of museums ensured that all members of the public could participate in their own patrimony.18

Most European historians contrast the modern museum’s achieved order and rationality with the jumbled incongruity of the cabinets of curiosity which the museum supplanted and surpassed. Inevitably, this development from chaos to order is also the story of the progress of science from confusion to system.19 For David Murray, the distinguishing features of the modern, that is, the late nineteenth century, museum were the principles of specialization and classification which made intelligible a scientific view of the world. The


pre-modern museum aspired to create awe and wonder; its emphasis on the rare and exceptional rather than on the typical encouraged sensational rather than rational or pedagogic displays.  

This whiggish account of European museum history has prevailed until the last decade when the institution came under increased scrutiny by postmodern theorists intent upon deconstructing the authority effect created in museums as well as its ideological consequences. Museums have come to be seen as cultural texts which, like their literary counterparts, can be read. This postmodern analysis has ushered in a more sophisticated and theoretically-grounded critique of museums and their practices. Among the new questions posed are: Do objects speak for themselves? If so, how? What constitutes the authenticity of an object? What has been collected and why? The history of collecting has received much attention as have the current legal, ethical and financial constraints on acquisition, custody and disposal of cultural property. It is increasingly acknowledged that the history of most European collections cannot be separated easily from the history of imperialism. Not only were the objects collected as part of the spoils of colonial conquest (presented as discovery and exploration) but their acquisition and retention has been legitimized by the institutionalization of an ideal of apolitical, detached objectivity and positivist commitment to science.  

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20. David Murray, *Museums: Their History and Their Use* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1904).

Perhaps the most interesting and controversial of the new museologies/histories has been presented by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill. Her powerful argument rests on questioning whether there is only one form of reality for museums, one fixed mode of operation. According to Hooper-Greenhill, the lack of examination and interrogation of the professional, cultural and ideological practices of museums by museum workers or historians, has resulted in a failure to construct a critical history of the museum field.²²

Hooper-Greenhill has identified in her fellow historians a marked tendency to claim that the conditions which exist in the present are immutable and are justified by a single undifferentiated history. In contrast to these historians, she has instead chosen to rely on the insights of Michel Foucault who believed that reason and truth are relative rather than absolute concepts. For Foucault, forms of rationality have a historical specificity; reason and truth have historical, social and cultural contexts. Foucault rejected the approach that history is continuous, smooth, and progressive, and proposed instead an “effective” history which emphasizes discontinuity, rupture, displacement and dispersion.²³ Those very things which appear to be an error - the most irrational, may reveal the identity of contemporary structures of knowledge and knowing. In The Order of Things (1970), Foucault identified three epistemes (the unconscious but positive and productive sets of relations within which knowledge is produced and rationality is defined): the Renaissance, the classical and the modern. The development of each episteme was characterized by a profound rupture or break


²³Ibid., 9-10.
in the understanding of what constituted knowing and knowledge, and necessitated the rewriting of knowledge. Relying on Foucault’s approach, Hooper-Greenhill has postulated that there is a long history of collecting, display and classification of material objects but that there have been radical shifts in why collections have been assembled and understood, what has been desirable, how classification has been constructed and understood, as well as how objects have been used. Effective history places the museum in constitutive contexts. In contrast with this approach, writers of traditional history have retained their dependence on absolutes and have traced the history of an essentialist museum. However, by examining each episteme, one can identify how an object would have been understood and enjoyed in its time. This approach forces us to acknowledge that what counted as knowing or pleasure has shifted and that material things have no essential identity.24

Hooper-Greenhill has re-analysed the collection in the Medici Palace of Francesco I as well as the Kunstkammer of Rudolf II. Her work indicates that traditional historians have been unable to grasp the form of organization of early cabinets. Deeply entrenched in the modern episteme, other historians have depicted the cabinets of curiosities as chaotic assemblages rather than efforts to create a microcosmic collection of the world or to serve as complex mnemonic structures. Historians’ inability to acknowledge the profound and immense epistemological rupture that exists between then and now has led to a judgment of early collecting and display practices as nonsensical or irrational.

In contrast to Hooper-Greenhill’s analysis of exhibit and collecting practices, Tony

Bennett has chosen to reread the history of the museum in relation to the development of a range of collateral cultural institutions, including the international fair and the exhibition, as well as other places of popular assembly such as department stores. Extending a theme first articulated by Neil Harris, Bennett is primarily concerned with the public museum as an example of the development of a governmental relation to culture. For Bennett, culture is understood to be an instrument enlisted in the social management of the public. Museums can thus be seen as part of the government's strategies of governing aimed at producing a citizenry which could monitor and regulate its own conduct. Informed not only by Foucault, but also by the theories of Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu, Bennett sheds new light on the contradictory dynamics of the modern museum.

In summary, it can be seen that until recently, there have been few challenges to the traditional, whiggish account of the development of the museum. However, theoretical outlooks as diverse as those of Foucault, Gramsci and Bourdieu, have led contemporary historians to provide accounts of the museum's past which will be more serviceable to present-day museum debates and practices. Their rejection of assumptions perpetuated throughout a century of writing has challenged our understanding of the shifting role of the museum. Their analyses enable us to situate the museum in all its incarnations, at the centre of a complex of shifting beliefs and values which we are just beginning to understand.

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26Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, 8.
This study explores the origins, principles of organization and eventual demise of the one of the earliest museums established on the American frontier - the Western Museum of Cincinnati. It situates the Western Museum within the context of then-contemporary museums in the young republic’s three largest cities - Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York. This examination of the exhibit practices and founding principles of these successful and emulated institutions enables a more comprehensive appraisal of the efforts to establish a museum in Cincinnati. As it is difficult to separate the museum from the economic forces which affect its existence and the everyday life of its intended audience, a historic overview of the development of Cincinnati is provided. Founded in 1818, the Western Museum was among the first to be established in the trans-Allegheny region. Priorities in collecting natural and artificial curiosities “particularly those of the western country.” were established with the understanding that increased knowledge of the area would result in greater prosperity and independence for the region. However, by 1823, due to financial difficulties, the Museum was turned over to the curator, Joseph Dorfeuille.

Under Dorfeuille, the Museum attained its fame/notoriety. It became the home of one of the most popular of all American museum displays, the Infernal Regions. Known locally as Dorfeuille’s Hell, the exhibit was a mechanized and electrified version of Dante’s Inferno - an assemblage of animated wax figures which shrieked and terrified the paying crowds every evening but Sunday. The success and content of this exhibit led historian Louis Leonard Tucker to describe the Museum as “a freak and horror show...one of the best-known
entertainment sites in the United States and the first Disneyland of the West."\textsuperscript{27}

Despite the scope of its collections and the popularity of its displays, the Western Museum has attracted little scholarly interest. Only two published articles have explored its early development in any detail. Unfortunately the credibility of both accounts are undermined by a plethora of errors and assumptions about the Museum, its history and its displays.

Tucker's "Ohio Show-Shop" has long stood as the definitive study of the Western Museum. Presented originally in December 1964 at the meeting of the American Historical Society, it was introduced as a reminder "of the perils of even a few oblations to bunkum and provide[d] convincing proof that waxworks constitute the beginnings of the descent into hell."\textsuperscript{28} Tucker attributed the decline of the Museum from a scientific and primarily educational institution to a "show-shop" to a number of factors: the expansion of the collections and their departure from an exclusivity on regional artifacts and the subsequent transition from education to a quest for novelties. Fluctuations in the water levels of the Ohio River which affected river traffic and travel are also cited as contributing factors to the eventual decline of visitors to the Museum. Tucker's tale is a cautionary one - of lofty ideals felled by commercial and populist aspirations.

M. H. Dunlop's "Curiosities Too Numerous to Mention: Early Regionalism and


\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 77.
Cincinnati's Western Museum" also depicts the Museum as an abject failure. Its decline is attributed to the fragility of regional sensitivity, to American indifference to landscape, and to the general difficulties faced by private institutions in the nineteenth century. But Dunlop also claims that catering to the popular fascination with violence and the grotesque was also a significant factor in its failure to survive.\textsuperscript{30} Dunlop attributes the financial difficulties encountered by the Museum in its first few years of existence to the public's lack of interest in education as well as to the high costs of maintaining and enlarging the collections. The Museum's original "regional programme" of collecting from the Western country had been compromised by the inclusion of Roman and Egyptian antiquities. This broadening of its collecting mandate led to an unfocused "randomness and mere enumeration of curiosities."\textsuperscript{30} Dunlop dismisses Joseph Dorfeuille's curatorial and scientific aspirations, claiming that they were not consistent with contemporary scientific endeavours. The special exhibit "The Invisible Girl" marks the downward reversal in "the Museum's attitude toward its audience. earlier imagined as culturally aware and interested, now seen as ignorant and easily fooled."\textsuperscript{31} Yet Dunlop does not believe that Dorfeuille had the talent to create the large scale "humbug" which was necessary to ensure the Museum's financial success in Cincinnati. It was the arrival of Frances Trollope in the city which enabled Dorfeuille to achieve his "pervasive" vision. Dunlop dismisses the artist Hiram Powers as a transplanted Yankee tinkerer and

\textsuperscript{30}M. H. Dunlop, "Curiosities Too Numerous to Mention: Early Regionalism and Cincinnati's Western Museum," \textit{American Quarterly} vol.36, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 525.

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, 529.
repairman who would "one day achieve notoriet as the sculptor of "The Greek Slave."

Powers' creation of the wax works for the Infernal Regions transformed the Museum from "detailed scientific realism to medieval grotesquerie, from an intellectual experience to an emotional adventure, and from a sunny enthusiasm for knowledge to a sadistic fascination with teratology."

For Powers' artistic gifts "were pressed into the service of Dorfeuille's obsession with the grotesque, ...the Regions simply demanded astonishment from the audience."

The story told by both Tucker and Dunlop is remarkably similar - a museum with educational goals and aims gradually devolving into a sensational sideshow which survives only by exploiting its gullible audience. How accurate are these interpretations? Both historians view the Western Museum as an isolated, singular institution and fail to relate it to developments in contemporary museums or venues of popular culture. Both historical accounts are informed by a modernist bias which evaluates the Western Museum on the basis of the role of the contemporary museum, a role which now stresses stewardship over collections and scholarly interpretation of research and artifacts to the public. Both historians have failed to understand that the early American museum played a much broader and very different role in American society. The museum was not only an educational institution but a place of entertainment, a centre of information, a menagerie, as well as a business venture which was to provide a significant return to its shareholders and proprietors. Early museums

32 Ibid., 547.
33 Ibid., 548.
aimed at amusing, instructing, indulging curiosity and stimulating a sense of wonder but they were at heart commercial ventures which relied on public attendance and attention for their very existence. Both Tucker and Dunlop have chosen to focus instead upon the Western Museum's educational role and their beliefs that it failed to achieve this role. Both are unable to see that the Western Museum was neither unique nor a failure in its own time. Much of what it offered to the public in its displays and entertainments was, in fact, highly derivative and based on successful, well-established ventures in eastern American cities as well as in England. The Western Museum must be understood as the product of a particular sociohistorical moment. Its history can serve to illuminate aspects of the complex relationship between education, entertainment and popular culture as well as the development of professionalism in the museum and scientific communities.

The acceptance of new theoretical frameworks and the radical reformulations they have wrought in the understanding of museum practices as well as the paucity of research into the early American museum are the chief factors which have influenced the direction of this study. It is a re-examination of the Western Museum through a theoretical framework informed by Michel Foucault's effective history. This approach enables a contextualized reading which is sensitive to the values and beliefs informing the Museum's development and exhibitions. Relying on the archival documents in the possession of the Cincinnati Historical Society, the study situates the Museum within the prevailing beliefs, educational philosophies as well as the popular entertainments of the nineteenth century. This represents

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34Orosz, Curators and Culture, 8.
a significantly broader look at the factors affecting the Museum’s development than has been offered by previous historical accounts. The study provides an overview of some of the most popular museums in the United States in the early nineteenth century. An examination of the goals and exhibits of the museums in Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore, then the three largest cities in America, provides a context within which the efforts and achievements of the Western Museum can be evaluated.

The numerous newspapers, gazettes and literary journals now available through the Cincinnati Historical Society enable a detailed portrait of Cincinnati to emerge. Daniel Aaron’s comprehensive and seminal work *Cincinnati: Queen City of the West, 1818-1838* remains a crucial source of information about the city, its aspirations and cultural achievements. More recent work by Stephen Ross provides detailed accounts of the growth of the labour force, the impact of industrialization as well as the opportunities for leisure activities among the working classes. Ross offers compelling first-person accounts of the severity of the Panic of 1837 and its impact on the city. This is of significance as both Tucker and Dunlop assume that the audience served by the Western Museum was primarily the working class. Robert Vitz’s *The Queen and the Arts*, a study of Cincinnati’s cultural life as manifested in travelling lecture series, the growth of choral and art groups as well as the documentation of other more transitory and ephemeral entertainments, provides critical information about the leisure activities with which the Western Museum competed. These works enable the contemporary historian to reconstruct a more comprehensive and vivid picture of Cincinnati in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Many of the individuals associated with the Museum were to achieve fame in other
endeavours. Daniel Drake, one of the founders of the Museum, has attracted significant attention as he was the first licensed physician in the trans-Allegheny area as well as the founding father of many of Cincinnati’s scientific and cultural societies. Known as the “Franklin of the West,” Drake was determined to recreate in Cincinnati many of the cultural, scientific and educational institutions he had encountered during his medical studies in Philadelphia. Frances Trollope, the author of *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*, played a role in the development of some of the most popular exhibits at the Museum. Although she has traditionally been considered the originator of the Infernal Regions, it is likely that the role she played in its development was more peripheral than assumed. This study proposes that the credit for this display must be shared among a number of individuals, including William Bullock. His involvement in the Museum has, to date, not been examined. But Bullock was one of the most influential and successful British museum proprietors in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Bullock’s presence in Cincinnati coincides with the arrival of Frances Trollope; indeed, as her travel accounts indicate, they were close friends. Bullock’s experience as a museum proprietor in London and his elaborate and dramatic exhibit designs which consisted of recreations of life-like environments, suggest that he was involved in the staging of the Infernal Regions. Together, Frances Trollope and William Bullock brought to Cincinnati a knowledge and great love for innovative museum practices and theatrical design. The popular culture with which they were most familiar must be considered as exerting a powerful influence on the Western Museum. Nor can the success of the Infernal Regions be discussed without a consideration of the talents of Hiram Powers. He was to achieve international acclaim as the sculptor of the *Greek Slave* which was displayed
at the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851. Powers' recollections and correspondence, consisting of some seven hundred letters and documents currently housed in the archives of the Cincinnati Historical Society, provide significant insights into the operation and exhibits of the Western Museum during its most successful years.

Previous studies of the Western Museum have ignored the other museum in Cincinnati - Letton's Museum. This study redresses this omission and traces the exhibits and life cycle of the competing institution long considered to have exerted an influence on Joseph Dorfeuille's decision to incorporate wax works into his Museum.

A significant area of investigation which has also been ignored is the religious content/context of the exhibit. Travellers to Cincinnati often commented upon the religious fervour of the preaching and the profound involvement of local women with church groups and church-related activities. Surprisingly, this aspect has attracted little attention by either Tucker or Dunlop. This study attempts to link the success of the Infernal Regions to its ability to capture and exploit these powerful, prevailing beliefs.

In summary, the study offers a contextualized interpretation of the Western Museum, situating it within the prevailing economic, cultural, and scientific concerns of its time. The specific history of the Western Museum must be understood as the product of a number of factors: the very concept of the museum in antebellum America; the socioeconomic, cultural and religious landscape of Cincinnati; and the powerful personalities of those who were responsible for its development and day-to-day operations, from Daniel Drake to Joseph Dorfeuille to Frances Trollope, William Bullock and Hiram Powers. Relying on archival sources such as paid advertisements in local papers, extensive correspondence and personal
papers as well as contemporary travel writings, this study is also informed by the theoretical insights of Michel Foucault. It benefits greatly from the research conducted within the past decade which explores the urban frontier, nineteenth-century scientific thought and the development of popular, public culture in antebellum America.
Chapter Two

The Early American Museum

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Western Museum in Cincinnati, one must first examine the very concept of a museum in antebellum America. Although derived from European antecedents, the American museum, from its most humble beginnings, arose as an institution which differed from its European counterparts and followed a different course of development. The establishment of the early American museum was guided by the imperatives of American culture and the ideals of the Enlightenment. It took place within a context of patriotism, political and religious controversy and a practical concern for the development of American industry.\(^1\) In addition to these complex factors, the American museum was also driven by the need to sustain its financial upkeep. For unlike the major public museums in Europe, American museums were privately run institutions intended to generate an income for their proprietors and their shareholders.

American museums also differed from their European antecedents in the types of collections they formed or were able to form. Unlike their European counterparts, American museums had no reminders of a glorious historical past to be admired or emulated. Lack of artistic traditions further limited the scope of their collections. While many public museums in Europe were created from the collections of monarchs or prelates, early American museum owners had to establish their own collections. In a country which abounded with as-yet

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\(^1\)Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, ix.
scientifically undescribed flora and fauna, it is not surprising that natural history collections formed the foundation of the early American museum. Yet the classification and collection of the flora and fauna of America were undertaken for more than their scientific value. These tasks also served a patriotic purpose. Many American scientists were anxious to dispute the eighteenth-century European assertion that all forms of life in the New World could be characterized by their "weakness" or "immaturity". This notion of degeneracy had been popularized by the Comte de Buffon, one of the world's foremost naturalists, in his multi-volume *Histoire Naturelle*. Buffon had argued that the animal species of the New World differed from those of the Old World by their physical weakness and smallness in size. This weakness of nature was confirmed by the fate of the domestic animals introduced into the Americas from Europe. Many became smaller and thinner in successive generations. Only the pig seemed to flourish in this seemingly-hostile new environment. Nor did indigenous animals seem to fare any better according to Buffon. They were few in number and small in stature. From these observations of animals, Buffon extended his arguments to include the entire natural world.

There is thus, in the combination of the elements and other physical causes, something antagonistic to the increase of living nature in this new world; there are obstacles to the development and perhaps even to the formation of the great seeds; ...here are reduced, shrunken beneath this ungenerous sky and in this empty land,

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where man, scarce in number, was thinly spread, a wanderer, where far from making himself master of this territory as his own domain, he ruled over nothing;...  

Many American scientists were determined to refute this view of America. Thomas Jefferson responded to Buffon in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781) and in 1785, sent him the hide and skeleton of a moose in an effort to explode the fallacy of weakness and inferiority of size of American indigenous animals.  

Let us begin the examination of the early American museum in Philadelphia, then the nation’s capital and the centre of intellectual and cultural activity in the republic. Although it was not the first American museum, Charles Willson Peale’s museum in Philadelphia remains the best documented. Through the indefatigable efforts of Peale’s direct descendant, Charles Coleman Sellers, we have gained a comprehensive overview of Peale’s collections, the guiding principles which informed his display techniques and his hopes that the museum would participate in the definition, creation and promotion of a distinct American identity. To Peale, a patriotic supporter of republican ideology, the need to create a harmonious, peaceful and durable society in the young nation was both urgent and self-evident. The population of the early republic was diverse while the political state could be described as only tenuously stable. Although the Constitution had been adopted in 1781 and replaced in 1789, the possibility of disintegration threatened the viability of the republic. Threats of monarchical counter-revolutions, local insurrections like Shays’ Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion,  

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and incidents of mob violence were conspicuous features of life in the late eighteenth century. Peale believed that a museum could participate in the unifying the young nation by demonstrating the importance of harmony in the world of nature.

The Philadelphia Museum, more commonly known as Peale’s Museum, was opened to the public in 1766. It, and the museums subsequently operated by his children, served as the models for many of the nation’s museums and for this reason, must be examined in some detail. Born in 1741, Charles Willson Peale was apprenticed to a saddler at the age of thirteen. The skills he acquired during this apprenticeship - metal-working, clock and watch repair, leather tanning as well as furniture upholstery - would serve him throughout his life. A self-taught artist, Peale’s talents were soon recognized by his mentor. Local citizens raised sufficient funds to send Peale to study with the prominent American painter Benjamin West, then residing in London. After returning from London, Peale began exhibiting his own paintings in a studio attached to his home in Annapolis, Maryland. He continued this practice when he moved to Philadelphia in 1776. In November 1782, Peale opened his gallery to the public. It consisted of thirty portraits of eminent soldiers and statesmen, and was flanked at either end by full-length portraits of Gérard and Washington.

In 1784, Peale became aware of an immensely popular form of entertainment invented by the French painter Phillipe de Loutherberg which had just captured the imaginations of Londoners. De Loutherbourg, theatre painter at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, was an established and successful artist who had exhibited at the Paris Salon in

1763. A member of the prestigious Academie Royale, de Loutherbourg had won numerous commissions to portray landscapes, battles and sea scenes. Moving from France to England, he achieved success as a painter, exhibiting at the Royal Academy from 1772 and becoming an Academician in 1781. In the same year, de Loutherbourg revolutionized theatre design and popular entertainment by opening what he called the “Eidophusikon, or Representation of Nature,” also known as the “Various Imitations of Natural Phenomena, represented by Moving Pictures,” at his own home in Leicester Square. Using a stage 10 feet wide, 6 feet high and 8 feet deep, de Loutherbourg used transparencies, reflectors, realistic sound and clockwork to depict a series of changing and moving scenes. Among them was a depiction of dawn over London, noon at the port of Tangier in Africa, sunset near Naples, the moon over the Mediterranean and the most spectacular, a storm at sea and shipwreck. This last scene, with its dramatic impact, was to become a staple of the romantic repertoire of pictorial entertainments.7 With time, de Loutherbourg carefully replaced some of these scenes with more timely depictions of recent battles, providing Londoners with realistic almost newsreel-like portrayals of contemporary events. The lengthy intervals between the scene changes were filled with musical entertainments. In the Eidophusikon’s second London season, de Loutherbourg introduced the most spectacular of his images and one which would become another staple of the repertoire - “Satan arraying his Troops on the Banks of the Fiery Lake, with the Raising of Pandemonium. from Milton.”

Here, in the fore-ground of a vista, stretching an immeasurable length between mountains, ignited from their bases to their lofty summits, with many-coloured flame.

a chaotic mass rose in dark majesty, which gradually assumed form until it stood, the interior of a vast temple of gorgeous architecture, bright as molten brass, seemingly composed of unconsuming and unquenchable fire. 

Against a background of thunder and lightning, Beelzebub and Moloch advanced from the burning lake. Serpents were entwined around the pillars of their palace. The flames rising from the lake blazed from an intense red to a transparent white, suggesting the effect of burning metals. Auditory effects created off-stage enhanced the reality and horror of the spectacle by providing a variety of thunderous noises which were synchronized to the action on the stage. The Eidophusikon captivated the attention of many of the elite of its day - among its admirers were Sir Joshua Reynolds and Gainsborough. The entertainment was to exist for a number of years, displayed in a number of London locations and eventually it went on tour. Throughout its existence the spectacular Pandemonium remained the finale of the show. It impressed itself upon the popular imagination of its time, becoming a veritable legend in England.

Peale, a talented artist and already well known as the creator of transparencies, was ideally suited to replicating this experience on American shores. He spent eighteen months to create his own version of the popular entertainment. In an extension built behind his gallery, Peale created an area where “Perspective Views with Changeable Effects; of, Nature Delineated and in Motion” opened in May 1785. The title of the presentation was soon reduced to “Moving Pictures”. In its first season, the show consisted of five scenes which

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8Ibid., 123.

9Ibid., 126.
lasted a total of two hours. Peale opened the presentation with a depiction of night
descending upon a countryside. The dawn of a new day was announced by variety of bird
calls. This was followed by a street scene complete with moving carriages and pedestrians.
The third scene consisted of a storm accompanied by thunder, lightning and rain and
succeeded by a rainbow. Despite the technical and artistic prowess demonstrated in the
previous scenes, the fourth scene was the pinnacle of the entertainment. Borrowing from de
Loutherbourg’s success, Peale chose to depict an illustration of Pandaemonium based on
Milton’s “city and proud seat of Lucifer” from Paradise Lost. A printed program to the
picture included quotes from Milton as well as additional chants written by Peale which were
set to a musical accompaniment. Peale’s vision of Pandaemonium consisted of a mountain
range with a vast chasm in it. Rising through the smoke and flames, was the temple. Its door
opened to show the glowing and burning metals which changed from red to orange to yellow
and eventually into smokey greys. Lucifer was not depicted in the first version, but in
response to popular demand, was included in subsequent versions. Peale described it thus:

The flames were naturally represented in motion ascending with clouds of smoke and
repeated flashes of lightning, with Imps of various fancifùl forms flying through the
fire, and Satan appears with a staff passing through the flames, and musick is heard.10

Concerned that the audiences would leave this presentation in a state of profound agitation,
Peale concluded the evenings with a depiction of Vandering’s Mill, a picturesque spot near
the Falls of Schuylkill. The fifteen-minute intervals between scenes, required to prepare the
intricate set changes, were filled with musical entertainments or readings from Milton.

Shakespeare, as well as some popular humorous pieces. Despite their initial critical success, the Moving Pictures were not a lucrative endeavour for Peale. The cost of admission was prohibitive - at three shillings nine pence (the equivalent of eighty-five cents), the Moving Pictures appealed to a receptive but very small audience. In 1791, Peale sold the entire project to a travelling showman.\footnote{Sellers, 	extit{Charles Willson Peale}, 211.}

Peale's interest in establishing a comprehensive natural history museum is attributed to a comment made by his brother-in-law Colonel Nathaniel Ramsay. Peale had been engaged in painting gigantic bones, relics of either enormous animals or people who had inhabited America. The scientific mystery of their time, these bones were crucial in refuting Buffon's statements about the inferiority of America. Ramsay discouraged Peale from painting the relics and enthusiastically advised him to consider displaying them in his own home to a paying, curious public.\footnote{Charles Coleman Sellers, 	extit{Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1980), 9-11.} Encouraged by some of America's foremost scientists, including David Rittenhouse, astronomer and mathematician; Robert Patterson, professor of mathematics at the University of Pennsylvania as well as Benjamin Franklin, Peale opened his Museum to the public on July 7, 1786. Two weeks later, he was accepted as a member of the prestigious American Philosophical Society which had been founded in 1759 by Franklin.

Peale's motivations in opening the museum were not only to provide financially for his growing family. He was also driven by his beliefs in the natural rights of men, the dignity
of people and the sanctity of liberty.\textsuperscript{13} A soldier in the militia and a member of Philadelphia's political committees and societies, he promoted some of the most radical ideas and policies of the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{14} Dedicated to republican ideology and democratic ideology, Peale had served as a representative in the legislature for the session which enacted America's first law for the abolition of slavery.\textsuperscript{15} As heir to both the Enlightenment and the American Revolution, Peale was committed to knowledge as the foundation of republican virtues. In an address to the Pennsylvania legislature in 1795, he concluded that "In a country where institutions all depend upon the virtue of the people, which in its turn is secured only as they are well informed, the promotion of knowledge is the First of duties."\textsuperscript{16}

Peale's Museum was to teach virtue to the public by demonstrating the benevolence of the Creator and the order, harmony and beauty of His creation.\textsuperscript{17} Over the door of the new Museum, Peale inscribed the following verse which summarized the scientific beliefs of many of his contemporaries: The Book of Nature open/...Explore the wondrous work/...an Institute/Of laws eternal, whose unaltered page/No time can change, no copier corrupt.\textsuperscript{18} Peale believed the world was eternal and unaltered; its laws stable and unchanging; that all

\textsuperscript{13}Brigham. \textit{Public Culture}, 46.


\textsuperscript{15}Sellers, \textit{Mr. Peale's Museum}, 8.

\textsuperscript{16}Hart and Ward, "The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal," 396.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 396.

\textsuperscript{18}Sellers, \textit{Mr. Peale's Museum}, 15.
life was included in an orderly and indestructible chain of being. Although some links appeared to missing, these were as yet unexplored or undiscovered. The chain existed in its entirety. In this world view the concept of extinction did not exist.  

Peale aspired to create "a world in miniature" in his museum believing that this would diffuse a knowledge of the wonderful works of creation, not only of this country but of the whole world. Also to show the progress of arts and science, from the savage state of the civilized man; displaying the habits and customs of all nations; to show the progress of arts and manufactures from the raw materials to their finished fabrics. To form a school of useful knowledge, to diffuse its usefulness to every class in our country, to amuse and in the same moment to instruct the adult of each sex and age.

Paid advertisements in the local newspaper the Pennsylvania Packet and in other regional papers promoted the museum as a place where useful knowledge could be gained. This rhetoric was familiar to the public of Philadelphia as it was frequently exploited by other institutions of entertainment and education in the city. Benjamin Franklin had invoked this principle in 1743 in his Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America. The full name of the American Philosophical Society was The American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge. With this phrase, Peale also aligned himself with such well known educational reformers as Burgiss Allison, founder of the Bordentown Academy in New Jersey, who preached that "...it


must be evident to every person of the least reflection, that if we can contrive to amuse whilst we instruct, the progress will be more rapid and the impression much deeper."

This emphasis on the educational merit and moral value of public entertainments was also the product of the prevailing Quaker philosophy. The Continental Congress of 1774 had attempted to reduce wasteful consumption by outlawing such activities as theatrical performances, cock fighting and elaborate funerals. The extravagance and dissipation of theatre in particular concerned the local populace. In 1776 and in 1786, the Pennsylvania legislature passed further laws which limited the number of taverns and banned the profanation of the Sabbath, cursing, gambling, drunkenness, and duelling. In 1789, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania reversed this law and legalized theatre through the post-Revolutionary transfer of legislative power away from the Quakers. The authors of the 1789 law maintained that the theatre could uplift and elevate the audience rather than promote its moral downfall. The law stated that citizens had the right to any "rational and innocent amusement, which at the same time, that it affords a necessary relaxation of business is calculated to inform the mind and improve the heart" and permitted "such theatrical exhibitions as are capable of advancing morality and virtue, and polishing the manners and habits of society." While this marked the liberalization of public amusements in Philadelphia, morality remained an important term of justification. Peale's use of the term

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22 Quoted in Brigham, Public Culture, 19.

"rational amusement" identified the museum as not only a place of learning but one which could serve as an effective weapon in the arsenal against vice and extravagance.\textsuperscript{24}

Although Peale's financial status limited the number of objects and animal specimens he could acquire through purchase, the Museum collection nonetheless expanded rapidly. Natural history specimens were readily acquired through donation or hunting. Peale encouraged donations to the museum by displaying the donor's name on the descriptive label which accompanied the specimen. In 1788, he began to publish the annual accession list with the donors' names in local newspapers. The constant addition of specimens kept alive public interest and encouraged regular visits.

Peale was responsible for the development of a number of innovative exhibit techniques which continue to inform museum displays into the present. He was one of the first museum proprietors to present animal specimens in painted habitat environments (the precursors of the diorama). Visitors were enchanted with the romantic and amusing fashion in which the natural history specimens were mounted. One recalled that

There was a mound of earth, considerably raised and covered with green turf, from which a number of trees ascended and branched out in different directions. On the declivity of this mound was a small thicket, and just below it an artificial pond; on the other side a number of large and small rocks of different kinds, collected from different parts of the world and represented in the rude state in which they are generally found. At the foot of the mound were holes dug and earth thrown up, to show the different kinds of clay, ochre, coal, marl, etc. which he had collected from different parts; also, various ores and minerals. Around the pond was a beach, on which was exhibited an assortment of shells of different kinds, turtles, frogs, toads, lizards, water snakes, etc. In the pond was a collection of fish with their skins stuffed, water fowls, such as the different species of geese, ducks, cranes, herons, etc/: all having the appearance of life, for their skins were admirably preserved. On the mound

\textsuperscript{24}Brigham, "Social Class and Participation," 83.
were those birds which commonly walk the ground, as the partridge, quail, heath-hen, etc.; also, different kinds of animals,-bear, deer, leopard, tiger, wild-cat, fox, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, etc. In the thicket and among the rocks, land-snakes, rattle snakes of an enormous size, black, glass, stripe, and a number of other snakes. The boughs of the trees were loaded with birds, some of almost every species in America, and many exotics.\textsuperscript{25}

Peale’s background as one of America’s foremost visual artists ensured that the backgrounds to the displays were realistic and often dramatic. His interest in sculpture and saddle-making enabled him to experiment with various fixatives which ensured the longevity of his preserved specimens. Despite his commitment to dramatic and entertaining displays, Peale did not ignore or sacrifice educational standards. Inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s \textit{Emile} which urged teachers never to substitute reality for representation or substance for shadow, Peale inaugurated a series of public lectures illustrated by museum specimens.\textsuperscript{26}

Within the Museum, Peale addressed his audience primarily through images and displays of artifacts and natural history specimens rather than words. Consistent with contemporary scientific understanding, Peale’s arrangements conformed to the Linnaean hierarchical system. It presented humanity first, then “brutes,” followed by birds, reptiles, fishes, “the tribe of insects and worms,” as well as minerals and fossils.\textsuperscript{27} Rocks and minerals were organized on the basis of Parker Cleaveland’s classification which grouped minerals on the basis of their internal crystal structures while shells were arranged according to Lamarckian principles. Peale’s efforts at display were in step with contemporary trends in the

\textsuperscript{25}Quoted in Sellers, \textit{Charles Willson Peale}, 221-222.

\textsuperscript{26}Sellers, \textit{Mr. Peale’s Museum}, 101.

\textsuperscript{27}Brigham, \textit{Public Culture}, 58.
development of scientific thought and classification. Humanity was considered to represent the pinnacle of animal creation. Peale’s portraits depicted the highest class of natural beings and consisted of the images of some of the most eminent persons in American civil and military history. The heroes of the Revolution were represented here and in later years eminent scientists would join them. Because they portrayed the most superior and successful exemplars of the species already considered to be at the summit of the animal scale, the paintings were displayed in the uppermost portion of the exhibition space. At one time Peale had entertained the notion of obtaining and displaying the embalmed corpses of eminent men. Dissuaded from this, he resolved the dilemma by settling on the portrait representations.28

Committed as Peale was to education, he could not resist the temptation of surprising the public with playful examples of his artistic talents. The Reverend Manasseh Cutler recalled visiting the Peale Museum in July, 1787 only to be told by one of the children that their father would meet the party momentarily.

I observed, through a glass at my right hand, a gentleman close to me, standing with a pencil in one hand, and a small sheet of ivory in the other, and his eyes directed to the opposite side of the room, as though he was taking some object on his ivory sheet. Dr. Clarkson did not see this man until he stepped into the room, but instantly turned about and came back to say, “Mr. Peale is very busy, taking a picture of something with his pencil. We will step back into the other room and wait until he is at leisure.” We returned through the entry, but as we entered the room we came from, we met Mr. Peale coming to us. The Doctor started back in astonishment, and cried out, “Mr. Peale, how is it possible you should get out of the room to meet us here?” Mr. Peale smiled, “I have not been in the other room,” says he, “for some time.” “No!” says Clarkson, “Did I not see you there this moment, with your pencil and ivory?” “Why, do you think you did?” says Peale. “Do I think I did? Yes,” says the Doctor, “I saw

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you there if I ever saw you in my life.” “Well,” says Peale, “let us go and see.” When we returned, we found the man standing as before. My astonishment was now nearly equal to that of Dr. Clarkson; for, although I knew what I saw, yet I beheld two men, so perfectly alike that I could not discern the minutest difference. One of them, indeed, had no motion; but he appeared to me to be so absolutely alive as the other, and I could hardly help wondering that he did not smile or take part in the conversation. This was a piece of waxwork which Mr. Peale had just finished, in which he had taken himself. So admirable a performance must have done great honor to his genius if it had been of any other person, but I think it is much more extraordinary that he should be able so perfectly to take himself. To what perfection is this art capable of being carried! 29

The wax work was not the only deception Peale practised upon the public. One of the most famous was the trompe l’oeil portrait of his sons Raphael and Titian mounting the stairs.

Peale set the life-size painting into a doorframe in the Museum. To enhance the realism of the scene, Peale installed a wooden step as an extension of the painted stairwell into the room. The illusion was so successful that President Washington once bowed politely to the younger Peales. 30

In addition to regular advertisements promoting the collections in local papers, Peale cleverly made use of every opportunity to generate interest in the museum and to raise attendance revenues. When his Museum relocated from Third and Lombard to the Philosophical Hall at the corner of Fifth and Chestnut, Peale used the move to promote the Museum to the local audience. In his Autobiography, Peale described the move in the following manner:

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29 Quoted in Sellers, Charles Willson Peale, 220-221.

But to take advantage of public curiosity, he contrived to make a very considerable parade of the articles, especially of those which was large. As the Boys generally are fond of parade, he collected all the boys of the neighbourhood, & began a range of them at the head of which was carried on men’s shoulders the American Buffalo - then followed the Panthers, Tyger Catts and a long stream of Animals of smaller size carried by the boys. The parade from Lumbard to the Hall brought all the Inhabitants to their doors and windows to see the cavalcade. It was fine fun for the Boys. They were willing to work in such a novel removal, and Peale saved some of the expense of the removal of delicate articles. Yet he was obliged to use every means to prevent injury & loss with so numerous a medley, and yet with his care he lost only one article, a young alligator.31

In 1801, Peale acquired the most popular exhibit ever to be displayed in his Museum - the skeletal remains of the mastodon. In an expedition supported by the Museum, the federal government as well as the American Philosophical Society and the University of Pennsylvania, Peale had excavated the intact skeleton of a large animal known previously by bone segments. These had been the mysterious relics which had launched the very existence of Peale’s Museum. Known at the time as the mammoth, the animal was a crucial link in the chain of being. It was widely believed that these large creatures still inhabited parts of the unexplored North American continent. The skeleton was equally important in disputing Buffon’s claims of the inferiority of New World animals. The mammoth was considered a unique American species, associated with the land and its ancient Native American legends. In handbills printed to promote the display of the skeleton, Peale quoted the Shawnee legend of the enormous animal of “ten thousand moons ago”. In his initial promotional campaign Peale further exploited the association between Native Americans and the animal by having Moses Williams, a manumitted slave who had belonged to Peale, ride a white horse through

31Quoted in Sellers, Charles Willson Peale, 265.
the town. Dressed in a feathered headdress, Williams dramatized the warriors of the past who had (it was widely believed) co-existed with the mammoth. The skeleton, an object of national pride, was to remain one of the most popular exhibits in Peale’s museum; an additional admission charge of fifty cents (double the regular Museum admission) was necessary to view the reconstructed specimen. A second skeleton was also prepared. To exploit the interest in the creature abroad, it was sent on tour to Europe with Peale’s sons Rembrandt and Rubens. But not before the family had presented another event worthy of publicity. A dinner for thirteen was held within the thorax of the animal. The guests were seated at a round table under the skeleton’s ribs while the musical accompaniment for the evening was presented on a portable grand piano. The smallness of the instrument and the diners contrasted dramatically with the largeness of the mastodon.32

Visitors to the Peale Museum were not only edified. Peale knew that the paying public was also interested in being amused - some visitors were, as Peale acknowledged, unable or unwilling to learn from the displays. For these visitors, a variety of entertainments was provided. A set of distorting mirrors which magnified, diminished or provided the viewer with seven heads, and talking tubes installed in a lion’s head which enabled communication between two rooms created less challenging and more entertaining amusements. A physiognotrace, a device for tracing silhouette profiles, enabled visitors to take home a memento of their visit. At an additional charge of eight cents the sitter could have their profile traced by Moses Williams. The silhouette tracings soon became a fad in the

city and in the first year of operating the physiognotrace, Williams cut 8,880 profiles.\footnote{Ibid., 306.}

Intrigued by the success of another museum in Boston in providing music in its galleries, Peale decided that an organ would be appropriate in his Museum. It was neither an extravagant nor frivolous addition to the institution as Peale believed that nature and music represented the twin harmonies in life.

[Mr. Vaughan] says it is astonishing how much money Bowen makes by such acts at his trifling museum at Boston. I shall as soon as I conveniently can make the purchase, get a printing press with a view of having a greater number of handbills & c. Published than heretofore. This savors also of Bowen’s plans to make money - no matter, provided I do not degrade the character of the naturalist by too much puffing - a little seems absolutely necessary to call the attention of the public to such objects.\footnote{Quoted in Sellers, Charles Willson Peale, 305.}

In providing the musical programs, Peale clearly recognized that education and science alone could not bring in paying customers. It was also necessary to provide a pleasant atmosphere which was conducive to learning.

Peale’s belief that harmony, not conflict, was the natural state of being was also amplified by his live animal displays. In 1797, he exhibited an eagle and a chicken living together in a single enclosure. The newspaper advertisement announced:

\textbf{A Singular Association}

In the inclosure, made for living animals, adjoining Peale’s Museum, is a curious Cock, having a spur, growing on its head; - This fowl, since the death of its own species, has deserted its wonted cage, and regularly roosts, each night, with one of the Eagles; -This fact is astonishing- as, the Eagle is well known to be the greatest enemy to poultry.\footnote{Quoted in Brigham, Public Culture, 124.}
Among the other living animals in the Peale menagerie were a baboon, grizzly bears donated by Colonel Pike, parrots, monkeys and a large number of snakes, including rattlers. Upon their deaths, the animals would be preserved and displayed in the Museum. But one of the most popular of Peale’s animals was a five-legged cow with six feet and two tails. Throughout her lifetime, she provided milk for the Peale family and, due to the public interest in *lusus naturae*, contributed significantly to Museum admissions. In death, the cow would be stuffed and displayed suckling a two-headed calf.

Peale’s efforts toward promoting harmony and offering moral guidance were not restricted to the animal displays. They were evident throughout the museum and were consistent with his beliefs that longevity could be achieved through socially-acceptable behaviours and that criminal behaviour would inevitably lead to a premature death. In the exhibit which best exemplified this, Peale displayed the trigger finger of a Mr. Bruliman who had shot and killed a local citizen, Robert Scull. Bruliman, an officer in the British army, had lost his commission when it had been discovered that he was a counterfeiter. Disheartened by the loss of his commission, Bruliman decided to commit a murder and to be punished for this crime by death by hanging. Bruliman set out to kill the first person he encountered. However, on that bright morning, the beauty of the first young woman he saw disarmed him. Bruliman’s search for a victim continued. The politeness with which he was greeted by the next person also dissuaded him from shooting. Finally, in a public house, playing billiards, was the unfortunate Robert Scull. Bruliman killed him and surrendered. Peale’s label for the

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*Sellers, Charles Willson Peale,* 245.
disembodied finger read: “This little story offers a striking proof, that amiableness and Politeness of manners are not only pleasing, but useful, in our common with the world.”

But Peale did not limit his exhibits to the promotion of harmony and moral edification. He was equally concerned with more pragmatic matters which affected the political and economic status of the United States. He promoted links between the study of natural history and the advancement of the nation’s economic potential. Museum labels for mineral specimens indicated where the minerals were collected, the difficulty or ease of recovery as well as their plenitude in the area. Public interest in minerals was considerable as mining and refining were among the nation’s earliest industrial pursuits. Peale’s displays were linked to the need to develop American manufacturers and to ensure the nation’s long-term economic independence. This was crucial as in 1808 Jefferson’s administration responded to the British ship Leopard’s attack on the American frigate Chesapeake in the previous year by restricting and then halting trade with Europe. Manufacturing societies proliferated during the embargo and Peale took advantage of this opportunity to promote local production. Makers of ceramics, textiles, and artists’ supplies were invited to send raw materials and finished products to the museum for display. The displays enabled Peale to participate in decreasing American dependence on European products and trade with Europe.38

The Museum was very popular not only with local Philadelphians but also with

37 Brigham, Public Culture, 139.

38 Ibid., 111.
visitors to the city. In 1816, its peak year of operation, the Museum took in an income of $11,924.00. (This great public interest in the Museum may be attributed, at least in part, to the introduction of gas lighting in the facility.) Precise attendance figures cannot be derived from this figure as Peale offered numerous admission packages ranging from a single admission (priced at 25 cents per adult and children at half that price) to yearly tickets. As well, there were surcharges for special exhibits. Conservative estimates have suggested that in 1810, the total attendance consisted of upwards of 33,000 people. This number represented approximately one-third of the city's inhabitants.\textsuperscript{39} An inventory of the Museum's holdings, compiled in the second decade of the nineteenth century, indicates that during this period of peak attendance it contained over 100,000 objects. Among them were 269 paintings, 1,824 birds, 250 quadrupeds, 650 fishes, over 1,000 shells, and 313 books in the library. Although the eastern seaboard of the United States was most heavily represented in the natural history specimens, objects from around the world could be found in the collection.

Despite the popularity of the Museum, or perhaps because of it, Peale did not enjoy the support of the scientific community. In 1806, the American Philosophical Society permitted Peale to display its elephant skeleton beside that of the mastodon on the stipulation that he not advertise the elephant. Peale was dependent upon advertisements to inform and attract the public. The Society's decision suggests that they were uncomfortable with the commercial aspects of Peale's venture or that they were not interested in sharing their knowledge with a broader public. It was indicative of the gulf between scientists and the

\textsuperscript{39}Hart and Ward, "The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal," 401.
general public that would continue to grow throughout the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{40}

Nor is this the only suggestion of dissatisfaction with Peale which was registered by more rigorously-trained scientists. Peale's display techniques did not escape their attention. In 1824, the naturalist Charles Waterton visited the Museum. He objected vociferously to Peale's regular practice of depicting his stuffed animals with their mouths open. Peale defended the practice, indicating that tooth formation was characteristic of a species. Waterton believed that it gave the specimens an unnatural appearance, as if they were grinning or grimacing.\textsuperscript{41} But the approach also enabled Peale to present dramatic displays which captured the attention of the public. (Titian Peale had mounted a great grey wolf, his fangs dripping blood, in the act of devouring a lamb.)\textsuperscript{42}

In 1810, Charles Willson Peale turned over the operation of the Museum to his son Rubens, who was to pay him $1,000.00 each quarter. Rembrandt Peale attempted to acquire a share in the operation, but his efforts were rejected by both his father and brother. In 1814, he established his own museum in Baltimore, then the third-largest city in the United States. Under the direction of Rubens, the Peale Museum in Philadelphia was to become a "fashionable lounge," where a highly successful series of theatrical performances was launched and a magic lantern show was established. In Baltimore, the Peale Museum was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 401.
  \item \textsuperscript{41}Sellers, Charles Willson Peale, 413.
  \item \textsuperscript{42}Alexander, "Peale's Philadelphia Museum," 61.
\end{itemize}
opened as "an elegant rendezvous for taste, curiosity, and leisure." Rembrandt Peale was forced to emphasize popular exhibits and entertainments as in addition to his own salary, he was to provide the five stockholders of the Museum with an annual eight per cent return on their investments. If the new Museum was to survive, admission receipts would have to generate sufficient funds to cover the operating expenses, pay the Peales a salary and provide the stockholders with the expected dividends.

In Baltimore, as in Philadelphia, the introduction of gas lighting in the Museum was highly successful in drawing crowds and enabled the Museum to remain open during evenings. The Baltimore collection included a mastodon skeleton, historical paintings by Rembrandt Peale including his *Napoleon on Horseback* and *King Lear in the Tempest*, natural history specimens and Indian relics. The Museum also featured the popular physiognotrace. In an effort to recover from the disastrous national financial panic of 1819 as well as the yellow fever epidemic in Baltimore, Peale displayed John Vanderlyn's highly controversial nude painting *Ariadne*. Women were admitted to the display only on Mondays to ensure that propriety and modesty were not offended by this public presentation of nudity. By 1821, the Museum was featuring nightly musical performances by Signor Hellene. By


45Ibid., 41.
1822, when Rembrandt Peale left the operation of the Museum to his brother Rubens, it presented live music three nights weekly as well as performances of shadow puppets. But the Museum did not ignore natural history - its greatest success that year was the rare night-blooming cactus “Cereus” which drew more than a thousand people on the evening of July 25. Later that summer a menagerie was introduced featuring live wolves, fauns, elk, a grey eagle, an owl, as well as an alligator. Eventually they were joined by a baboon, black bear and a goffer turtle. An annual art exhibition which featured almost 300 works was introduced that fall. In 1824, Rubens Peale exhibited an Egyptian mummy, the first mummy to tour North America. He showed it along with a tattooed head from New Zealand and a copy of G. Belzoni’s illustrated book based on his Egyptian discoveries. A portion of the significant profits (gross income $2,502.02) derived from this exhibit came from the sale of mineral waters and fruits.46

The success of the Baltimore venture encouraged the Peale brothers to expand their operations into New York City. On October 26, 1825, the opening day of the Erie Canal, they opened Peale’s New York Museum. Here Rubens offered a rhinoceros, a two-headed calf, a two-headed turtle, and living boa constrictors in addition to the minerals and other specimens. Experiments and scientific shows were presented almost daily in the Lecture Room, but entertainment also featured heavily in the Museum with regular performances by Daddy Rice and Dr. Valentine’s comic recitals for youth.47

46Ibid., 44.

47Sellers, Charles Willson Peale, 423.
These second-generation Peale Museums differed from the original institution founded by Charles Willson Peale. They emphasized popular entertainments provided within the museum context. The Peale Museum in Philadelphia, under the leadership of Charles Willson Peale, had successfully combined a scientific, scholarly enterprise with genuine popular interest and support. The Museum's success was, however, unique. Like the new Peale ventures, many early American museum proprietors were unable to create or maintain this balance in their own museums. Peale's ability to combine these often contradictory forces was acknowledged during his lifetime. Thomas Jefferson, replying to a request for subscription to a new museum venture in Williamsburg, was not optimistic about the viability of any museum in the young republic. His comments suggest that Peale's efforts were recognized by his peers and were largely responsible for the success of the venture.

In the particular enterprises for museums, we have seen the populous and wealthy city of Boston and New York unable to found or maintain such an institution. The feeble condition of that in each of these places sufficiently proves this. In Philadelphia alone, has this attempt succeeded to a good degree. It has been owing there to a measure of zeal and perseverance in an individual rarely equalled; to a population, crowded, wealthy, and more than usually addicted to the pursuit of knowledge.48

Jefferson's comments suggest that other museums did not fare as well as Peale's. A closer look at the museums in New York City provides us with more information about the condition of perhaps more typical museum enterprises in the young republic.

In New York, the Tammany Society or Columbian Order founded a cabinet in 1790. Established as a private institution open by invitation only, the cabinet’s original goal was to

collect and display objects exclusively "related to the natural and political history of America." This exclusivity in collecting was not to last long. In the following year, the cabinet, now known as the Tammany American Museum, opened its doors to the general public. In a series of advertisements in local papers, its keeper, Gardiner Baker, informed the public that the institution had been established to collect and preserve the history of the country. But the Museum would not exclude American curiosities of nature or art from its collection. In its first few weeks of existence the Museum offered free admission to the public, perhaps as a promotional technique to lure the crowds. However this benefit would soon be extended only to Society members. General admission was set at two shillings per person or roughly twenty-five cents. A separate room served as a library. Baker made access to the five hundred historical texts in the collection available only to those twenty-one years of age and up.

Among these objects to be seen were "a perfect Horn, between 5 and 6 inches in length, which grew out of a woman's head in this city." a porcupine, an ant-bear, the American grey squirrel "in a machine in which he grinds pepper for his living," an American eagle, and doves from the Bahamas. An orang-outang was preserved in spirits along with his spouse and their perfect foetus, while an American buffalo, a number of monkeys, the head of a sea lion from the Faalkland islands, a South American sloth, a lamb with two perfect heads and necks but one body from New Jersey, the tooth of an American animal, the

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"Orosz, Curators and Culture, 59."
Mammoth. rounded out the collections.\textsuperscript{50} The Museum also displayed African objects and a full-sized guillotine with a beheaded wax figure. For an additional sixpence, visitors could try their hand at using an airgun. In 1794, the wax work figures which had been in the possession of Mr. Bowen, the proprietor of New York Museum and Wax Work at the Exchange, were added to the Tammany Museum. In the same year Baker established a small menagerie consisting of five animals and two birds. Despite the variety of displays, financial problems arose. The Tammany Society was unable to pay Baker, and in 1795, gave him the entire collection in lieu of a salary. Baker now exhibited the collection in two locations. Part of it was displayed in the New Panorama Building while the other, along with a recently purchased full-length portrait of Washington by Gilbert Stuart, could be seen at the New City Tavern. Admission to each venue was seventy-five cents; however, a discounted ticket for both venues could be purchased for one dollar.

The New York exhibit scene was highly competitive. A large number of itinerant museums rented temporary spaces in taverns and show rooms and offered remarkably similar experiences for the local citizens. One such display could be found at Mrs. M'Euen's on Broad Street. It consisted of paintings, wax works, and even included a descriptive catalogue of the collection.\textsuperscript{51} In the fall of the same year, a "New Museum, Contained in the Front Rooms of the Exchange, opposite the entrance of the Museum and Wax Work." advertised that for four shillings, the visitor could see a ten-inch glass Republican ship, complete with


\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Ibid.}, 365.
fourteen guns, a fine camera for viewing prints, and fifty-eight glass-enclosed cases housing specimens of birds, insects, butterflies, and insects.

Competition with such displays forced Baker to enlarge his collection even further. In late October, he advertised that the Museum had new wax figure groupings depicting the Sleeping Beauty of New York with two young children (based on the likenesses of two local children), and the "Lyon Hunt" which portrayed a lion pursued by "several ferocious dogs".\textsuperscript{52}

In a further attempt to draw crowds, Baker extended the Museum's public hours. Visitors were welcome from 10 am to 5 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, while on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays the Museum, illuminated by candlelight, was open until 9 pm in the evening. Baker had rearranged the displays and listed among his new additions wax figures representing the beauties of Annapolis, Salem and New Haven. Other wax works portrayed a sleeping figure of the late Benjamin Franklin. The wax figure of the venerable John S. Hutton of Philadelphia who had lived past one hundred and eight years of age was particularly lifelike. This effect was enhanced by the fact that figure was dressed in clothing Hutton had worn during his life. Baker had also acquired figures of "a celebrated Indian Chief of the Cherokee Nation (an excellent figure). The English Boxers, Mendoza and Humphries in their professional attitude."\textsuperscript{53} Thomas Twining, a traveller to New York from Philadelphia, noted that the collections were more extensive than those in his native city. He also observed that a machine, similar to one in Peale's Museum, demonstrating perpetual

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 366-367.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 418.
motion was also on view. (However, Peale displayed it as an example of fraudulent machinery.)

Peale's account of a visit to the Museum in 1798 indicates that Baker had an impressively large number of objects on display but that they lacked scientific arrangement. Peale complained that the works of art were jumbled together without order but he did admire the classical arrangement of the displayed insects. (He was so impressed with this exhibit that he offered its arranger Jotham Fenton a job in the Peale Museum in Philadelphia.)

Despite this, the Museum was not a popular success. At the time of Baker's death in 1798, the Museum was in dire financial trouble. Baker had acknowledged this himself, stating, "At the time that I am becoming better and better capacitated to render service to my fellow creatures, it seems that my unpleasant pecuniary circumstances will in some measure defeat [me]."\(^{54}\)

Baker's wife inherited the Museum upon his death but shortly thereafter she perished as well. As she died intestate, the Museum was put up for sale by the treasurer of New York City. It was purchased by William I. Waldron, a grocer, who immediately attempted to resell the collection. Unable to find a buyer, Waldron relocated the enterprise to Broadway Street and opened it to the public as Waldron's Museum. His continued efforts to sell the collection were finally successful, for in the summer of 1802 the contents were purchased by the painter Edward Savage for his "Columbian Gallery and City Museum". Savage advertised his newly

\(^{54}\)Quoted in Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 66.
enlarged collection as an "elegant place of genteel resort...replete with objects highly gratifying to Every rank of citizen." He promoted it as a place of amusement for everyone. But he left the operation to his assistants, one of whom was John Scudder. A talented taxidermist and avid collector of natural history, Scudder soon purchased almost the entire collection and combined it with his own extensive holdings. He opened his establishment as the New American Museum, located at 21 Chatham Street, in 1809. Advertisements placed in the Evening Post indicated that Scudder had enlarged the collections significantly and that new wax figures had been added, among them "a correct personal likeness" of the English giant, Daniel Lambert who had recently died in London. Several scripture groups had also been added including Saul Consulting the Witch of Endor, Samuel Raised from the Dead, etc. (At the same time, the Union Hotel advertised that it had on exhibit the wax figures by Gionella, which represented the history of Amelia, Princess de Setten, of Vienna, written by Kotzebue. Visitors were encouraged to view this remarkable series of scenes, particularly the elaborate banquet scene which included a table, assembled guests and servants.) That summer, Scudder's special Fourth of July display included a glass-enclosed, preserved tigress with three young, "an extraordinary snake," and a young crocodile.56

In December of 1810, Scudder introduced an act which was to become a mainstay of the Museum, the Pandaean Band of Italian Music. The musicians, each performing on two

55Ibid., 73.
56Odell, Annals of the New York Stage II: 345-346.
instruments at the same time, became the musical sensation of the 1811 season. Although their original performances were in theatres, they were soon appearing in a number of venues, including museums. In addition to the musical performances, visitors to Scudder's Museum could see "250 birds, 70 quadrupeds, 100 reptiles preserved in spirits, 20 fishes, 1200 submarine reproductions, 150 mineral specimens, 300 ancient coins, 4 rare and interesting paintings, an organ, an electrifying machine, 12 wax figures, 150 Indian weapons and utensils, as well as 8 curious works of art." 

Competing with Scudder's exhibits, were the Panharmonicon, a huge organ, and the surprising mathematical child prodigy, Zerah Coburn who astounded audiences with her ability to calculate large sums. Both could be seen at the City Hotel. Wax figures were also a popular exhibit in the city at the time. At the Commercial Building, P. Class was showing wax figures groupings of historical and Biblical scenes, including Washington receiving the sword of Cornwallis, Joseph disengaging himself for the arms of Potiphar's wife as well as likenesses of Napoleon and various other living European sovereigns. Scudder responded to this exhibit by promoting the Pandaean Band as well as the "White Bear of Greenland, the ferocious Tigress of Africa and the Mammoth Turtle."

The war years contributed to the growing interest in panoramas depicting recent battles or pivotal scenes in the conflict. In the absence of newspaper illustrations and print

57Ibid., 371-372.

58Ibid., 394.

59Ibid., 407.
photography, these newsreel-like productions brought the reality of the battle to the local populace and featured prominently in the entertainment venues of the city, including the Union Hotel. Scudder soon developed his own panorama depicting the victory of Oliver Hazard Perry over the British in the battle of Lake Erie. This popular attraction operated as Scudder’s Naval Panorama for a number of years. However, successful panoramas were not restricted to patriotic themes. A mechanical panorama depicting labourers at work could be viewed behind the jewellery store of the Stollenwerck brothers; it remained on view for most of 1816.

In 1816, New York City converted the former Almshouse in City Hall Park into a sort of civic centre. The building, renamed the New York Institution, provided rent-free space for a number of societies including the New-York Historical Society, the New York Society Library, the American Academy of Fine Arts, the Literary and Philosophical Society, and the Lyceum of Natural History as well as Scudder’s Museum. This association with some of the most prominent intellectual and cultural societies indicates that Scudder’s Museum was recognized by its contemporaries as a place worthy of civic support. It also indicates that its diverse holdings must have been typical of what early nineteenth century museums collected and were expected to display.

No longer worried about paying the rent, Scudder was now able to dedicate himself to increasing the collection and to rearranging it in a more dramatic fashion. The Museum was allocated a room which measured ninety-four feet by forty-one feet into which Scudder

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60Orosz, Curators and Culture, 76.
installed 164 cases housing more than 600 specimens. In his efforts to create a visually appealing arrangement, Scudder drew heavily on Peale’s established display techniques. Peale, in a visit to the newly relocated museum, noted that Scudder was indebted to him for a number of practices. Not only had Scudder imitated his display by recreating the tree-covered hill upon which preserved animals were arranged, he had even borrowed from Peale the phrase “World in Miniature” to describe the institution. However, Peale was scornful of Scudder’s methods of taxidermy claiming that he was more interested in the showy display of the beauty of bird feathers and the slickness of animal furs than in any realistic depiction of their habits or habitats. Peale’s sense of propriety was further offended by the prints in the case near the wax work of the Sleeping Beauty and he later complained that they exposed too much flesh.

Scudder illuminated the Museum in celebration of Washington’s birthday, advertising a special showing of the cosmorama depicting the Island of St. Helena (the current residence-in-exile of Napoleon), the Baths of Dioclesian, the inside of a prison in Pompeii, and the amphitheatre in Rome. Music was to remain a popular and almost constant feature of the museum. In 1818, Mr. Hanys, lately from Cork, presented a series of musical entertainments. In the following year, Scudder announced that an Italian musician, Signor Hellene, performing on five instruments at the same time, including the Arcadian pipes, Turkish

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61 Ibid., 77.


63 Odell, Annals of the New York Stage II: 486.
crescent, Turkish cymbals, "hurdagunda" (hurdy gurdy?), and a small brass drum, could be heard. But Scudder did not ignore the educational aspects of the museum; in the fall of 1818, he announced a twenty-five part lecture series on natural history by Dr. S. Akerly, illustrated with specimens from the collections.

In 1819, Scudder engaged the services of Caroline and Edward Clarke. Their successful stay at the City Hotel in New York no doubt encouraged him to show the diminutive siblings at his Museum. Caroline, aged twenty, and her brother Edward, aged sixteen, were both thirty-six inches tall but were capable of "elegant conversation". Scudder enlivened their presentation with performances by the popular Pandaean Band and Signor Hellene who was now imitating various bird calls. The Clarke siblings would return the following year, billed as the "Lilliputian Songsters," after their successful performances at Washington Hall. Elegant airs and music filled the Museum in the 1819 season. Performances on a pedal harp, a Carril harp, and the Apollino, a composite musical instrument, were presented at the museum between their respective engagements in a number of halls and hotels in the city.

A cosmorama created by Sir Robert Ker Porter depicting the storming of Seringapatam by the British and native troops under General Harris could be seen at Scudder's Museum in 1820. It included views of the island of Malta and Dublin's College

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64 Ibid., 506.
65 Ibid., 543.
66 Ibid., 566.
Green. In late December, a fish, fourteen feet long and seventeen feet in circumference, could also be viewed.  

Scudder’s untimely death in 1821, left the Museum in the care of five trustees. They reassured the public that “There has lately been added many rare and valuable articles pertaining to the book of Nature. The Museum, will continue to be conducted agreeable to the intentions of its late proprietor.”

In late November, the trustees announced that a recently-shot circus elephant was on display and that numerous scenes had been added to the cosmorama.

The yellow fever scare in 1822 forced the Museum to close for a time, but it reopened in November of 1822 with few new objects on display. In 1823, the trustees published a guide to the collection. However, troubles soon arose between them and Scudder’s son, John Scudder Jr. Following a quarrel, he opened a rival museum in 1825 which he called “Scudder’s New York Spectaculum”. In its first few months of existence, Scudder drew upon a tried and successful form of entertainment from other museums, most notably Peale’s in Philadelphia. The Spectaculum offered a “profile cutting department” where, for twenty-five cents, visitors could have their profiles created by a physiognotrace. Scudder knew that this had been a popular activity in Peale’s Museum, and advertised that it would outperform the paper-cutting skills currently displayed by Master Hubbard and his Gallery of Papyrotomania.

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67 Ibid., 600.

68 Odell, Annals of the New York Stage III: 38.
at the Hubbard Gallery at Washington Hall.\footnote{Ibid., 223.}

Several months later Rubens Peale opened his “Peale’s New York Museum”. It became the most popular of the New York museums for some time. New Yorkers flocked to Peale’s where an almost-daily series of demonstrations of chemical, physical and astronomical experiments was offered in the lecture room. The public was enthralled by the arrival of two Egyptian mummies which were displayed for a month. Even greater public interest was generated by the unwrapping of the mummies by two local physicians on March 3, 1826. Later that spring, the Museum presented public talks about ancient and modern history.\footnote{Ibid., 224.}

But the initial popularity of Peale’s New York Museum was deceptive. Although New York was now the largest city in America, it could not sustain three proprietary museums.\footnote{Orsz, Curators and Culture, 132.} For in addition to the proprietors’ appeals for public support, the city offered a large number of itinerant amusements. Maelzel’s internationally renowned automaton chess player, trumpeter and slack dancers could be seen at the National Hotel.\footnote{The chess player was considered by many in Europe and North America as the pre-eminent entertainer of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It inspired a number of plays and even a short story by E. T. A. Hoffman. In America, Edgar Allen Poe was one of its most famous chroniclers.} A “Mechanical and Picturesque Theater” was at Washington Hall featuring the Battle of New Orleans. while a
pantomime of Orpheus as well as a mermaid could be seen at Washington Hall.73

In 1826, the American Museum attempted to draw the crowds by taking advantage of topical interest in a theft which had taken place from the Museum. Patrons could see not only the recently recovered set of coins but also the handcuffs and fetters which the accused criminal had cut in his efforts to escape imprisonment. Peale’s Museum showed a rhinoceros. Later that fall, the American Museum displayed an anaconda fifteen feet seven inches in length but even this spectacular specimen was overshadowed by Peale’s almost-immediate success in obtaining an even larger anaconda! Scudder’s Spectaculum, now renamed The Chatham Museum, acquired a large black walnut tree from Lake Erie, New York, with a thirty-one foot trunk circumference. It had been carved into a room which could accommodate twelve seated or twenty-four standing visitors. Peale responded to this challenge with a “perfectly formed” calf with two heads, six legs, two tails, as well as two distinct hearts and backbones.74

In the summer of 1827, the American Museum advertised a Greek dog named Apollo. His numerical and card-playing skills were soon challenged by Peale’s engagement of two dogs. Toby “will tell any card... answer questions in Astronomy, Geography, Arithmetick and Mensuration” while the more traditionally talented Minetto “will leap through hoops, balloons, walk on his front feet, climb a perpendicular ladder, etc.”75 New Yorkers flocked to

73 Odell, Annals of the New York Stage III: 223-225.

74 Ibid., 293-294.

75 Ibid., 293-294.
see the dogs and Peale reported an income of $1,105.00 (The dogs cost Peale $370.00 for five weeks plus $1.00 to clean the lecture room.)

In their competition for the leisure dollar of New Yorkers, the three museums now relied almost exclusively on live entertainments to draw the support of the public. Many of the performers they engaged for appearances in their museums had already completed successful shows in hotels and exhibit halls around the city. The fall of 1827 was a season of ventriloquists - Nicholls who had previously been at the National Hotel now appeared at the American Museum. Peale engaged a group of Iroquois or Six Nations to present their dances and national customs at his Museum following their showing at the National Hotel.

In early 1828, Peale introduced a "Phantasmagoria," a dragon with rolling eyes which mysteriously receded and approached the viewer, and a street scene which depicted moving figures and vehicles. Later that year, the "Dance and Multiplication of Witches" could be seen - one dancing witch was soon multiplied into thousands! The learned dog Romeo was at Peale's in the new year and in March 1828, Lord Byron's sword could be seen. Peale continued his musical performances with a long engagement by the Canderbeecks. The musical couple performed on the violin and harp, performing in the lecture room which by day still hosted magic lantern shows or scientific talks. In the summer months, Martha Ann Honeywell, born without arms, displayed her considerable skills in writing, drawing, and paper cutting. The canine Apollo who played dominoes and chess continued to enthrall the

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public at the American Museum. In the spring of 1828, the American Museum announced that it was displaying an automaton chess player, superior to that of Maelzel's. It could be purchased by any interested party.\textsuperscript{77} In the fall of that year, the Spectaculum presented Mr. Mathers of the Surrey Theatre in London in the comic tragedy of Punch and Judy. Accompanying this was the spectacular "Invisible Girl," billed as "the curious deception just received from London." The advertisement in the \textit{Post} announced that "The whole exhibition consists in a horn hung from the ceiling by four silk threads - any question asked at this horn, will be correctly answered by a Girl, her voice coming out of the horn, though nothing touching the horn but these four threads before mentioned."\textsuperscript{78} Peale presented a series of lectures about astronomy and advertised demonstrations of scientific experiments. On March 27, he announced that Red Jacket, Chief of the Six Nations, was speaking at the Museum. Red Jacket's address would be delivered in his native tongue, translated by an interpreter. The evening would begin with airs performed on the Union Pipes. In the following year, Red Jacket repeated this presentation twice at the American Museum, recounting his historic meeting with Andrew Jackson in the nation's capital. Peale showed the extremely large Tripp children in the summer of 1829 and followed this success by engaging the ventriloquist Nichols who had just completed a successful run at the American Museum. Later, canaries which could feign death and play dominoes could be seen at Peale's.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{77}Odell, \textit{Annals of the New York Stage III}: 367-368.

\textsuperscript{78}Quoted in Odell, \textit{Annals of the New York Stage III}: 425.

\textsuperscript{79}Odell, \textit{Annals of the New York Stage III}: 427-427.
In 1830, the American Museum along with the other institutions was evicted from the New York Institution. Forced to pay the rent, the Museum's competitive advantage was gone. The trustees leased a five-storey building at Broadway and made John Scudder Jr. the manager. Under his leadership the American Museum displayed live animals such as anacondas and boa constrictors; mammoth bones and other fossil remains could also be viewed. In June of 1831, machinery which produced woollen cloth was promoted. This miniature model replicated the real machines now in use in industry, but was propelled completely by dogs. The young Scudder's astute entrepreneurial senses enabled the Museum to show a profit but he was soon fired by the trustees. A short-lived New York Museum, also located on Broadway, provided a large succession of entertainments from dancing, to storytelling, to lectures on life and morals. Here Arab singers appeared with fire eaters, child prodigies, automaton circuses, dancing dwarves, and ventriloquists. The Museum of Wax Figures was still in business - its displays of Biblical groups remained popular for a number of years. J. Cops's Menagerie promised an extraordinary feeding of anacondas and boas, while the Erie Canal Museum floated into the harbour on December 30, 1830 offering a cosmorama, curiosities as well as "good music". 

The 1831 season was characterized by great variety at Peale's Museum - it featured two live cannibals from the South Pacific Islands, the Canderbeecks, the anaconda, Nichols the ventriloquist, and tame snakes from India. Master S. K. G. Nellis, of Johnston, New York, born without arms, demonstrated his ability to draw, write, shoot with the bow and

\[\text{ibid.}, 534-537.\]
arrow, as well as dance (with great cheerfulness and taste) in the month of January. In March, the Canadian giant Monsieur M. Mailhiot, weighing 619 pounds, appeared at the Museum. Every Tuesday and Thursday, a magic lantern show enthralled the public while fancy glass blowing was demonstrated nightly. In December, the eponymous Siamese twins Cheng and Eng and an Italian band of musicians could be seen at Peale’s. An Egyptian mummy, competing with one on view at the same time at the American Museum, graced its halls as did Calvin Edson, known as the living skeleton. In the summer Fletcher, a living model of ancient sculpture, whose poses were accompanied by Kendall on the harp was engaged by Peale. (Fletcher had previously appeared on the New York stage.)

The New York Museum announced that a female orangutan, “a living child of the forest,” could be viewed; as she was clothed in “a becoming manner,” ladies and children could attend without fear of having their sensibilities offended. The orangutan would be the last display engaged by the New York Museum.

The cholera outbreak which struck in the summer of 1832 was disastrous for all of the museums. In fact, the New York Museum was forced to close its doors forever. Peale, taking advantage of the summer long closure, announced in the fall that New York’s “favorite fashionable resort” had undergone improvements and renovations. No expense had been spared to render it more attractive. In addition to musical performances, Peale advertised a mermaid from Java in the summer of 1833. A recently-deceased kangaroo (newly-preserved and stuffed) from the Bowery menagerie could now be seen at the American Museum.

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81 Ibid., 591.
Another well-preserved mermaid could be seen at 94 Chatham Street. By 1834, Peale presented the young Polish acrobat and weight lifter, Zaionczek, who juggled and performed other daring feats of strength. A large man from Kentucky weighing between five and six hundred pounds, could also be seen.

The museums struggled in a similar fashion until 1837. But the depression which followed the Panic of 1837 caused even further financial damage. In 1841, the Scudder family was forced to offer their Museum for sale to the highest bidder. The purchaser was Phineas T. Barnum who paid fifteen thousand dollars for a collection which he later claimed had cost Scudder fifty thousand to amass.\(^2\) The Peale Museums continued to struggle financially. In 1842, Barnum acquired the contents of Peale’s New York Museum, and in 1852, purchased the Peale collection in Philadelphia.\(^3\)

As this brief overview has demonstrated, early American museums were neither elitist in their approach nor uninstructive in their displays. They responded to a public which was curious and eager to see the objects and peoples encountered in a period of ever expanding travel, exploration and settlement. In the vast collections of paintings celebrating the heroes of the Revolution, wax works commemorating famous historical events or personages and exalting Biblical subjects, philosophical apparati, ethnographic materials, technological inventions, as well as human and animal oddities, museum proprietors sought to re-create a

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\(^2\)Phineas T. Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs or Sixty Years’ Recollection of P. T. Barnum, including his Golden Rules for Money-Making (Buffalo: The Courier Company, Printers, 1889), 56.

\(^3\)Ibid., 56.
world in miniature. Museums were repositories for every art and science - they revealed the boundlessness of nature and of God's creation and celebrated human achievements in taming or conquering the natural world. Early American museums were the products of Enlightenment thinking which proclaimed the unity and utility of knowledge. Their cosmoramas and panoramas enabled the public to view contemporary events or famous landscapes in a period when print lithography was too costly to mass produce pictorial images and when national and international travel was dangerous and too expensive for the average citizen to consider. Museum wax-works displays participated in the consolidation of a developing sense of American identity by representing pivotal moments or Revolutionary heroes who had participated in the struggle for the nation's independence. They created a common American audience as well as a shared American past in much the same way that such popular cultural phenomena as films and videos do in the present.

But in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the role of popularisers of science had diminished. This role increasingly came under the mandate of the growing lyceum and other popular education movements. Reputable and respected museums in the three largest American cities recognized that a reliance on science and edification were insufficient to maintain their appeal or ensure their longevity. In the absence of philanthropic or government support, and as proprietary institutions, museums relied upon ticket receipts to survive. Special presentations were critical if they were to succeed financially. As a result, a market-driven philosophy of display prevailed. Competing with itinerant amusements, the museums turned to live entertainment as a way of attracting visitors. Amidst these popular animal and human entertainments, the "fashionable lounges" would still display objects or
specimens which roused scientific interest. But museum proprietors had long realized that to succeed financially they would have to respond to public interest and mirror what their competitors in theatres, taverns, and hotels were providing - live entertainment. Early American museums were neither elitist nor exclusionary. Rather, they attempted to devise or present exhibits and entertainments which would appeal to the broadest audience base to ensure their own economic viability. Early American museums were not temples, but rather could be considered centres of information and collections of unusual objects which competed in the market place. They reflected American popular culture in most of its manifestations.

As we turn to the western frontier and examine the founding of the Western Museum of Cincinnati, we shall see that cultural life in the Queen City was not unique. Settlers from the Eastern seaboard sought to recreate a lifestyle to which they were accustomed. As a result, culture in most of its manifestations on the urban frontier was derivative and based upon well-established, recognizable Eastern practices and models.
Chapter Three

Cincinnati and the Western Museum

The establishment of the Western Museum was closely linked to the phenomenal economic growth the city of Cincinnati experienced at the beginning of the nineteenth century.\(^1\) Cincinnati was the first great metropolis of the West. When founded in 1788 as the settlement Losantville, it consisted of merely three log cabins with dirt floors. By year end, the small community sheltered eleven families as well as twenty-four single men in twenty cabins and one frame house.\(^2\) With the establishment of Fort Washington across the river in Kentucky by General Harmar in 1789, the population of Losantville grew to about 500. General Arthur St. Clair, the first governor of the Northwest Territory, renamed the town Cincinnati in January 1790 to honour the organization of Revolutionary War officers, the Society of Cincinnati, to which he had belonged.\(^3\)

Although the first few years of the settlement were precarious, the population of Cincinnati grew prosperous from raising corn, distilling it into whiskey, and selling it to the taverns which served the nearby military fort.\(^4\) By 1792, with a population now approaching 900, Cincinnati opened its first school and saw the opening of two new general stores. The

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\(^1\)Tucker, “Ohio Show-Shop,” 74.


arrival of General Wayne with one thousand men in the spring of 1793 acted as a further stimulus to the settlement. Not only did the garrison offer much-needed security, it bolstered the local economy by creating jobs for those who provided services to the military. Despite a smallpox epidemic which killed one-third of the populace in 1793, Cincinnati continued to prosper and soon boasted one newspaper, The Centinel of the Northwestern Territory, a post office, as well as a jail. Within the next year, regular keelboat services were established between Cincinnati and Marietta; soon the first lawyer, a French pastry shop and a hairdresser were advertising their services in the local press.

By 1795 the town was able to report the opening of a new butcher shop, a brewery, a pottery, a Windsor chair and spinning wheel manufacturer as well as a parchment maker. In 1803, when the army abandoned Fort Washington, Cincinnati had only 1000 residents but the settlement continued to prosper. Settlers were drawn by the low land prices, the fertility of the soil, as well as the high wages workers could command. The rich soil, abundant forests, and mines met the basic needs of these early settlers, while the valleys and waterways which surrounded the town provided a natural transportation network connecting it to regional and national markets. Due to Cincinnati's strategic location at the northern bend of the Ohio

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5 Hostilities between the townspeople and the military arose regularly; ensign William Henry Harrison reported that he "...saw more drunken men in forty-eight hours succeeding my arrival at Cincinnati than I had in all my previous life." Quoted in Rufus King, Ohio, First Fruits of the Ordinance of 1787 (Boston, 1888), 214-215.

6 Hurt, The Ohio Frontier, 189.

River, the local merchants served not only the residents but also the many immigrants heading for the interior who disembarked here. The high costs of transporting many of the fundamentals required in their new homes meant that food, household goods and even tools were purchased in Cincinnati in anticipation of the journey inland.  

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Cincinnati evolved from a frontier community to become the reigning commercial and manufacturing centre of the West. Pork, bacon, and lard ranked second only to flour as an export from Cincinnati. The city soon developed the facilities for an important by-products industry such as the manufacturing of soap, lard, glue, candles, buttons, shoe polish, fertilizer and brushes. Inhabited by 750 people in 1800, the town attained status as a city in 1819 when the local population approached 10,000.  

From its beginnings, Cincinnati was built by and predominantly inhabited by artisans. A local survey, taken in 1805, reported that artisans and labourers constituted 60.9 per cent of the working population, merchants 18.1 per cent, professionals 12.7 per cent and innkeepers 8.3 per cent. Daniel Drake, writing in 1810, indicated that "the greatest number [of inhabitants] are mechanics. The rest are chiefly merchants, professional men, and teachers." The need for labour guaranteed higher wages than could be found in the east; advertisements in local papers offering cash bonuses and other financial incentives for journeymen and

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8Wade, The Urban Frontier, 26.

9Hurt, The Ohio Frontier, 353-354.

10Ibid., 189.

11Ross, Workers on the Edge, 6.
apprentices were not unusual. The War of 1812 and the development of the steamboat further enhanced the prosperity of the area. Prior to the invention of the steamboat, traffic had been restricted to down-river export trade with the South. While the low cost of river transportation maintained low prices for exported goods, products imported from eastern merchants reflected the expenses incurred by costly overland travel through the transmontane routes. By 1817, the development of steamboat shipping enabled relatively inexpensive and rapid travel upstream as well as downstream and provided Cincinnati with new opportunities for economic expansion. Between 1815 and 1817, local exports rose from $545,680 to $1,619,000.\(^{12}\) By the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, Cincinnati proudly called itself the "Queen City of the West".

Nor was the cultural sector neglected in the young community. The rapid development of the town led its citizenry to believe that Cincinnati would soon take her place alongside the older cities of the East and even Europe.\(^{13}\) It was clear that the settlers aspired to create a distinctly-urban culture on the frontier, a culture which was based for the most part on the society of their eastern origins. By 1820, Cincinnati boasted of having five printing offices, four book and stationary stores, ten churches as well as seventeen taverns.\(^{14}\) Art and music were found early in the settlement. At about 1800, General Wilkinson was said to have

\(^{12}\text{Ross, }\text{Workers on the Edge}, 12.\)

\(^{13}\text{Henry D. Shapiro, }\text{"Daniel Drake's Sensorium Commune and the Organization of the Second American Enlightenment," }\text{Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin vol. 27 (Spring 1969): 43.}\)

\(^{14}\text{Daniel Drake, }\text{"Notes Concerning Cincinnati (1810)"}\)
imported eastern musicians to perform the works of Gluck and Haydn; and although he soon left the town, music continued to be heard. A dancing school opened (dismissed as a "nursery of dalliance, frippery and folly" by the editor of the *Cincinnati Western Spy*) and was followed by the town's first singing school and first opera production. The Harmonical Society, which rehearsed at Burt's Tavern each Saturday evening, gave its first public concert in 1814 and provided the music for the amateur theatrical group the Thespian Corps. Theatre also enjoyed some early success in Cincinnati; at the end of one season, the editor of the *Liberty Hall* complained that they were now left with "no other source of amusement and instruction than about twenty sermons a week - private Assemblies - state cotillion parties - Saturday night Clubs, and chemical lectures, which like the ague, return every third day with distressing regularity."

Several theatrical productions were launched with the assistance of visiting groups such as the Pittsburgh Comedians. Their farces and comedies were popular with the local populace, but were the subject of vitriolic attacks by the outspoken Reverend Joshua Wilson. A pastor with the First Presbyterian Church, Reverend Wilson led the crusade from both the pulpit and the press against the immoral influence of the theatre. Despite his concerns, theatre continued to develop in the city and in 1820, the Columbia Street Theatre, seating seven hundred, opened with the performance of *Wives As They Were and Maids As They*

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15 Vitz, *The Queen and the Arts*, 8.

16 Ibid., 9.
Later that year, theatre audiences were able to see *The Battle of New Orleans*, a production which ended with a large transparent eagle, emblazoned with the motto "The Hero of New Orleans," descending on the head of General Jackson.

The decade of the twenties bought a growing cultural maturity to the young city. The population now exceeded ten thousand, and the city was on the path to being the major commercial centre of the western region. Three and four-storey buildings lined Front Street and steamboats could be seen along the river. The city stretched to the surrounding hills; European travellers included it on their itineraries. A local poet could proudly proclaim:

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Here, where so late the appalling sound
Of savage yells, the woods resound-
Now, smiling Ceres waves her sheaf,
And cities rise in proud relief.
Where late the owl’s hoarse murmurs rung,
And wolves and panthers fiercely sprung
Now taste, and social virtues blend,
Our infant science to befriend.
Where late the vilest savage trod
And bowed to some revengeful God-
Now Christian temples nobly rise,
And pious anthems swell the skies.
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**Daniel Drake and the Founding of the Western Museum**

Although Cincinnati merchant William Steele was the first to suggest that a museum society be established in the Queen City, the real credit for its founding belongs to Dr. Daniel

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20 *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette*, January 11, 1815.
Drake. A physician whose accomplishments were so remarkable and diverse that he was referred to as “the Benjamin Franklin of the West.” Drake’s hopes, ambitions and beliefs were inextricably linked with the formation and early years of existence of the museum.

The son of settlers from New Jersey who claimed to trace their ancestry to Sir Francis Drake, Daniel Drake was born near Bound Brook, New Jersey in 1785. The family, hoping to better its fortunes, migrated west to Mays Lick, south of Limestone (now Maysville) on the Ohio River in 1788. Drake’s reminiscences of his childhood were published posthumously by his son as Pioneer Life in Kentucky in 1870. They enable us to glimpse some of the childhood experiences which were to inform Drake’s adult beliefs about nature, science and education. Daniel’s early formal schooling was sporadic, delivered by itinerant and often unqualified teachers. The family lived frugally, sharing its earliest home with farm animals. When Daniel was nine years old his father purchased 200 acres of uncleared land. For the next two years the young boy did not attend school but assisted his parents in clearing the land and preparing lodgings for the family. The only books he had access to were owned by the family: a Bible, Aesop’s Fables and The Life of Franklin. For entertainment and amusement the young Drake turned to nature, seeing “tongues in trees” and “books in running brooks”.

He was to recall later:

The very loneliness of our situation led me to seek for new society & amusement in the woods, as often as opportunity offered. But they were, in themselves, attractive.

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22William H. Venable, Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley, Historical and Biographical Sketches (Cincinnati, 1891), 300.
To my young mind there was in them a kind of mystery. They excited my imagination. They awakened my curiosity. They were exhaustless in variety. There was always something ahead. Some new or queer object might be expected, and thus anticipation was sustained.²³

Daniel Drake's prosperous uncle, Cornelius Drake had settled nearby sending his son John to study medicine with Dr. William Goforth in Washington, Kentucky. Despite Daniel's lack of formal schooling, his parents hoped that eventually he too would study medicine under the tutelage of his cousin. Unfortunately, John Drake died at the time of his graduation.²⁴ As a result of his cousin's unexpected death, Daniel, then aged fifteen, was apprenticed to Dr. William Goforth. He later recalled that Goforth had

the most winning manners of any physician I ever knew. and the most of them...The pains taking and respectful courtesy with which he treated the poorest and humblest people of the village, seemed to secure their gratitude; and the more especially as he dressed with precision, and never left his house in the morning till his hair was powdered by our itinerant barber, John Arthurs, and his gold-headed cane was grasped by his gloved hand.²⁵

But the well-known and successful physician had interests which extended well beyond medical services. In 1803 at Bigbone Lick, Kentucky, Goforth excavated one of the largest and most diversified fossil bones ever found in America. Hoping to profit from European interest in this find, Goforth sold the entire collection to Thomas Ashe (alias Arville) of England, who took the fossils to Europe and embezzled the funds. Goforth's find had been so


²⁵Daniel Drake: Discourses ...before the Cincinnati Medical Library Association (Cincinnati: Moore & Anderson, 1852), 39.
extraordinary and extensive that it had attracted the interest of the American Philosophical Society, then under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson. Goforth also assisted local residents in the identification of minerals and precious metals found in the area, in the hope that these natural resources could be commercially exploited. Among his other entrepreneurial ventures was participation in the commercial preparation of both ginseng as well as the East India Columbo root.

The Drakes paid $400 for their son's four year apprenticeship. Daniel was to board with the Goforths; as well, he was to attend two semesters of school during which he would acquire some knowledge of Latin. Over the next few years, Daniel read Dr. Goforth's meagre collection of medical books, assisted in the preparation of medications, delivered them to ailing patients, and collected unpaid accounts. As well, he was expected to perform any duties assigned by his preceptor - these tasks ranged from caring for the horses to the routine maintenance of the "shop". In 1802, Goforth enlarged his medical practice by engaging John Stites, Jr. as his partner. Stites, who had studied medicine in Philadelphia, became one of Drake's teachers and introduced him to the works of such contemporary scientists as Benjamin Rush (whose works had been forbidden to Drake by Goforth).

When Stites left Cincinnati in 1803, Goforth made Drake his partner. During the four-year apprenticeship Drake had acquired the essentials of physic, midwifery and surgery.

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36 Horine, Daniel Drake, 90

37 Juettner, Daniel Drake and his followers, 18.

38 Ibid., 54.
Goforth presented him with a diploma in 1805. It was the first diploma awarded to a physician in the trans-Allegheny region. In November of that year, with the financial assistance of his father and Dr. Goforth, Drake went on to study at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, then the most prestigious of the three colleges offering degrees in medicine in America.

In Philadelphia Drake met Benjamin Rush whose successful application of the principles of Newtonian mechanics and the nominalism of Hobbes, Locke and Montesquieu to medical theory had earned him the title of “the American Sydenham”. In Philadelphia, Drake met Benjamin Rush whose successful application of the principles of Newtonian mechanics and the nominalism of Hobbes, Locke and Montesquieu to medical theory had earned him the title of “the American Sydenham”.29 Drake attended Rush’s lectures and continued to correspond with him upon completion of his studies. Impressed by Rush’s presence and prestige as both a moral and intellectual leader of the profession, Drake took him as a model to be emulated in life.30 It was at the University of Pennsylvania that Drake also fell under the influence of Benjamin Smith Barton, professor of materia medica, natural history and botany. Barton was an exponent of the need for careful and systematic observation as the first step in understanding a knowable universe. Impatient with the current vogue of classification and system-building a priori which dominated American science, Barton urged his colleagues and students to adopt the methods of Baconian or descriptive science.31 It was to Barton’s publication, the Philadelphia Medical


30Ibid., xiii.

31Ibid., xiv.
and Physical Journal, that Drake submitted his first medical essay entitled "Some Accounts of the Epidemic Diseases which Prevail at Mays Lick in Kentucky".\textsuperscript{32} Drake is also known to have presented Barton with a piece of copper excavated from an Indian mound near Mays Lick; it is generally presumed that Barton encouraged him to take an active interest in the antiquities of the Ohio Valley.

Upon completion of his studies in the spring of 1806, Drake returned to Mays Lick, Kentucky where he established his own medical practice. He followed Barton's advice and excavated a number of sites with the intention of testing Barton's hypothesis concerning the early inhabitants of Ohio. (Barton believed that these mysterious mounds or tumuli which dotted the landscape of the Ohio Valley were the work of a nation of people who were not completely extinct but who had under the influence of war and pestilence had degenerated into the present aboriginal tribes.)\textsuperscript{33} In 1807, with the departure of Goforth to Louisiana, Drake moved to Cincinnati and soon established a large and successful practice.

Drake's experiences in Philadelphia led him to participate actively in the social and economic life of the community. In particular, he became interested in the development of public institutions which could foster and promote a unified identity. Drake believed that the construction of institutions of social control was the essential mechanism for the fulfilment of America's promise as the heir to Enlightenment liberalism.\textsuperscript{34} If mankind were to achieve its

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., xv.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., xvi.

\textsuperscript{34}Shapiro, "Daniel Drake's Sensorium Commune," 43.
spiritual freedom, an understanding of humanity's relationship with the physical, social and physiological environments was crucial. Education was the key to the establishment of freedom. The proper content of education, however, was science or the knowledge of the natural universe. Implicit in Baconian philosophy was the belief that orderliness existed in nature and that nature alone could reveal this order to the careful observer. Drake's own efforts as a scientist and as an educator were infused with this desire to improve the understanding of man's situation in the world. He was committed to democratizing this knowledge, believing that:

Hitherto, the philosophers have formed a distinct caste from the people; and like kings have been supposed to possess a divine right of superiority. But this delusion should be dispelled, is indeed fast disappearing, and the distinctions between scientific and unscientific dissolved. Philosophers, like kings, are but men; and all men to a certain extent may become philosophers. Our Faculties are the same and if exercised in the same manner we should at length differ only in degree.

These beliefs were to inform Drake's activities in Cincinnati throughout his life. His involvement in civic, entrepreneurial and professional ventures escalated. It is difficult to identify any major cultural or academic developments in Cincinnati which did not bear Drake's imprint. Shortly after settling in Cincinnati, Drake and a group of young men formed a theatrical group as well as the Cincinnati Debating Society. By 1808, he became a subscriber to a proposed circulating library; by the following year he became the chairman of

\[35\] Ibid., 45.

\[36\] Daniel Drake, "Address to the Louisville Medical Society, November 27, 1840." MS in Cincinnati General Hospital Library.

\[37\] Horine, Daniel Drake, 91.
the subscribers. In 1810, Drake and his younger brother Benjamin, opened a drug store. They soon owned two stores which sold groceries, paints, surgical instruments, stationery and books. In lieu of cash payment, it was possible to barter for the goods with "whiskey, tallow, beeswax, lard, black or Virginia Snakeroot, Seneca Snakeroat, country linen and sugar."  

Drake’s first major publication was the sixty-page *Notices concerning Cincinnati. Its Topography, Climate and Diseases* in 1810. The pamphlet was an outgrowth of the development of a "calendarium flora" which had been published in a medical journal. The volume, consistent with Drake’s Baconian belief in the importance of observation, provides a portrait of the young community and is divided into five chapters dealing with topography, geology, climate, the conditions of the town as well as common diseases which affected the populace. On the basis of systematically collected data, Drake challenged the widespread assumption among Cincinnatians that their own climate had changed as a result of fifteen years of sustained urban development. His observations of meteorological data enabled him to refute the prevailing belief that the interior of the continent was warmer than Philadelphia as well as the idea that great cities were always several degrees warmer than their surrounding countryside. Drake also included a section on the condition of the town as he believed "that customs, manners and habits exert a decided modifying influence on disease." He concluded that Cincinnati’s inhabitants bathed too infrequently, that tobacco was much

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39 *LHCG*, October 2, 1811, p 3, col. 4.
used by males over the age of ten years. and that drinking posed a significant threat to the populace.

Drake argued that the recently-arrived population, drawn from every state in the United States and from almost every country in Western Europe “must necessarily exhibit much *physical* as well as moral diversity. The climate and the soil have not yet introduced an uniform constitution of body; nor customs, manners and laws an uniform moral character.”

Drake believed that it was the responsibility of man-made institutions to facilitate this development.

Believing that Cincinnati was destined to become the site of a magnificent and prosperous city, in 1813 Drake became a member of a group of entrepreneurs who established the Cincinnati Manufacturing Company. It was an enterprise housed in a nine-storey building containing machinery for the production of flour, wool, cotton, and flax seed oil. But commercial ventures were not his only interest - Drake remained concerned with the cultural development of Cincinnati. Although he believed that an old city with a homogeneous population offered the most conducive environment for an urbane civilization, Drake remained optimistic about the west. New settlements offered unique aids to the development of understanding. It was to these issues that he eventually devoted himself. As early as 1810, Drake had noted the difficulties which accompanied the pursuit of science in the west:

Any work that is purely physical, however preeminent its merits be will have in this country a limited number of readers; and it is only by connecting it with theology.

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ethics, politics, or belles lettres, that its general celebrity can be insured. This connection is sometimes so natural and convenient; but in a country so new, so interesting, and intrinsically so little known as ours, inquiries into the productions, the laws and the operations of nature are of the first importance, and should have popular sanction, without the aid of connection with popular and fashionable topics.\textsuperscript{41}

The organization of the School of Literature and the Arts by Drake and others in 1813 was an attempt to resolve these difficulties by combining the activities of a scientific society with those of a lyceum or debating club. The School was the first scientific society in Cincinnati, perhaps in the entire West, and served as a foundation for other scientific institutions. Although the group stressed the acquisition of scientific knowledge, it did provide opportunities for poetry recitations by a different member of the society each month.

In his \textit{Anniversary Address to the School of Literature and the Arts} in November of 1814, Drake praised the efforts of the institution over its first year of existence. More than twenty meetings had been held and the president of the school had delivered a number of public lectures. "Thus, from his labors have resulted both instruction of the understanding, and improvement of the heart." Lectures had been delivered on a number of topics, including the earthquakes of 1811, 1812, and 1813; on light; on carbon; on the mind; on gravitation; on enthusiasm, as well as the geology of the city and vicinity, illustrated with mineral specimens and a map. Poetical recitations had also been performed. Drake noted that:

Our lot, gentlemen, is cast in a region abundant in but few things, except the products of a rich and unexhausted soil. Learning, philosophy and taste, are yet in their early infancy, and the standard of excellence in literature and science is proportionately low. Hence, acquirements which in older and more enlightened countries would scarcely raise an individual to mediocrity, will here place him in a

\textsuperscript{41}Orosz, \textit{Curators and Culture}, 106.
commanding station.

But it will, perhaps be asserted, that in a state so young as this, no literary distinction is attainable, that would outvalue its cost; that academies and colleges are as yet scarcely instituted; that libraries, philosophical apparatus, and scientific teachers are equally rare and imperfect; that association for improvement, animated and impelled by a persevering spirit, can find no habitation in these rude and chequered settlements; and lastly, that our countrymen are accustomed to look with frigid indifference on every species of literary ambition: but that noble passion is not to be thus extinguished; and if a single spark remain, it will enable us to perceive, through the Gothic darkness which envelopes our literature and science the certain thn narrow paths to a brighter region.\(^{42}\)

Once again, Drake articulated his belief that living in a newly-settled region could be advantageous. Although the population was diverse and lacked the refinements of an established culture, it could be compared to the waters of a deep canal. While waters in older countries pursued a uniform course, the new waters of Cincinnati had "a current, alternately swift and slow, frequently shallow: but always free, diversified and natural." In newly-settled regions the mind was "not depressed by the dogmas of licensed authority, nor fettered by the chains of inexorable custom. [but] is left free to expand, according to its original constitution."\(^{43}\)

Drake was not only instrumental in establishing associations which provided opportunities for recreational cultural and scientific explorations, he was also involved in the establishment of institutions which offered formal academic training. In 1812, the Presbyterian clergyman and friend of Drake, the Reverend Joshua Lacy Wilson, had attempted to establish a school in Cincinnati based on the principles of Joseph Lancaster.

\(^{42}\)Daniel Drake, "Anniversary Address to the School of Literature and the Arts (1814)." reprinted in *Physician to the West*, 57-59.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., 61.
This method of education (based on the monitory plan conceived by the Reverend Andrew Bell and used successfully in Madras, India) has come to be associated with its major proponent and promoter Joseph Lancaster. It refers to a system of instruction in which groups of younger students are taught by older students. The use of student monitors enables large numbers of students to be taught at a relatively low cost with few trained teachers. The monitory method was widely believed to increase motivation, maintain order and inculcate discipline. Mastery over the curriculum could be ensured through constant testings; while prizes and competitive spirit would replace the need for corporal punishment. This approach appeared to be the ideal form of education in the newly settled regions, where difficulties existed in attracting and keeping qualified teachers. The ease of implementation, low cost and efficiency made the monitory method equally popular with urban reformers. Elaborate manuals were provided which virtually guaranteed teacher competence in an age when teacher qualifications and reputations were low.44 In 1814, Drake together with Reverend Wilson and Edmund Harrison, secured pledges in the sum of $9000 for the Cincinnati Lancaster Seminary. The school opened in April 1815 with an enrolment of 420 students.45

The critical acclaim and success which greeted Drake’s Notices Concerning Cincinnati led him to publish the publication of an expanded book titled Natural and Statistical View, or Picture of Cincinnati and the Miami Country. Illustrated by maps. With

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45Daniel Drake, Natural and Statistical View, or Picture of Cincinnati (Cincinnati: Locker and Wallace, 1815), 157.
an appendix Containing Observations on the late Earthquakes, the Aurora Borealis and the South-west Wind in 1815. Patterned after similar accounts of Atlantic cities, the book was intended to provide potential settlers with information about the region. It was widely acclaimed in the east as well as locally. In particular, the book was complimented on the importance of the facts it contained. “derived from the personal observation of the author”.

The Natural and Statistical View was based on Drake’s commitment to the inductive methods of Baconian science. If the natural world was to be understood, observation and systematic presentation of data were crucial.

Buoyed by the success of this book, Drake and his wife returned to Philadelphia to complete his degree in medicine in the fall of 1815. While in Philadelphia, Drake made use of the cultural resources at his disposal. He was a frequent guest at parties held by Caspar Wistar, Jr., a graduate in medicine of the University of Edinburgh. Wistar had succeeded Thomas Jefferson to the presidency of the American Philosophical Society, a position he held until his death. As a result of Drake’s association with Wistar, he was invited to attend meetings of the American Philosophical Society. Drake was awarded a degree as Doctor of Medicine in May, 1816. It is probable that his Picture of Cincinnati was submitted as his thesis for the granting of the degree. Although Drake left no written records indicating that he

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46Quoted in Horine, Daniel Drake, 114.

47In the 1820s, Drake would recreate these intellectual gatherings in Cincinnati where they were known as the Buckeye Club. Here literature, science, civic concerns and topical social issues were discussed in the company of the city’s most accomplished men and women.

48Horine, Daniel Drake, 118.
visited Peale's Museum in Philadelphia, there is no doubt that he would have been familiar with it. For 1816 was the most successful year ever recorded by Peale. Over 33,000 visitors had been admitted. It is most likely that Drake with his strong sense of civic responsibility and commitment to public education would have been drawn to recreate this phenomenon in Cincinnati. The opportunity to participate in a Museum as financially successful as Peale's operation would have also appealed to Drake's entrepreneurial spirit.

In 1817, Drake accepted a position as professor of materia medica and medical botany at the Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky becoming a member of the first accredited medical faculty west of the Alleghenies. In 1818, Drake's efforts at promoting scientific knowledge were recognized with his election to corresponding membership in both the prestigious American Philosophical and American Antiquarian Societies.

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49*ibid.*, 123.

50*ibid.*, 134.
Chapter Four

The Western Museum Society

The Western Museum Society was organized in the spring of 1818. In a public meeting organized to promote the fledgling institution, Drake announced that “A Society has been formed, and I confidently expect to see from $5000 to $6000 contributed to that object next week. I have drawn up the constitution in such a manner as to make the institution a complete school for natural history, and I hope to see concentrated, in this place, the choicest natural and artificial curiosities in the Western County.” In accordance with the constitution, memberships were to be sold for $50 entitling the subscriber and his family to free admission to the museum at all times. Five “managers” were appointed to take care of the collections and to solicit contributions. They were the Reverend Elijah Slack, president of Cincinnati College; James Findlay, lawyer and editor of the weekly newspaper Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette; Jesse Embree, land agent; William Steele; and Daniel Drake. The museum’s goals were articulated in a circular produced by the managers; it was subsequently reprinted in the first volume of the prestigious American Journal of Science published in Philadelphia by Benjamin Silliman.

The Western Museum Society was to be established for the “collection, preservation, exhibition and illustration of natural and artificial curiosities, particularly those of the western country.” Although the organizers aimed eventually to create a comprehensive collection, the following priorities in collecting were identified. The initial emphasis of the museum was the

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acquisition of the following objects:

1. Our metals and minerals generally, including petrifications.
2. Our indigenous animals, embracing the remains of those which are now extinct.
3. The relics of the unknown people who constructed the ancient works of the western country.
4. The various articles manufactured, for ornament or use, by the present savage tribes.²

From this first printed notice about the Society, we are able to detect a pragmatic approach to its usefulness to the local populace. Collecting metals and minerals was identified as the most important priority as these resources were currently imported at great expense. Greater knowledge would result in decreased dependence on both foreign and domestic, albeit distant, suppliers. Applied correctly, this knowledge could contribute to greater prosperity and independence for the region. To facilitate the acquisition of this knowledge, donors were requested to provide exact information as to the location of the finds as well as the type of substrate from which each donation had been extracted.

The museum also sought out specimens of native animals as many of these creatures had retreated into the hinterlands after the arrival of the settlers. Many once-commonly-sighted animals were no longer evident in the vicinity. The Western Museum Society hoped to collect not only larger quadrupeds but also specimens of indigenous (and more easily acquired) birds, fishes and reptiles of the Ohio, the Mississippi and the Great Lakes. Nor was "the obscure and neglected race of insects" to be neglected. The "gigantic and curious remains of land animals which have yet been discovered" was to be one of the earliest objects

of study by the Society. Relics of the past, although acknowledged to be "of very little utility," were also to be collected. All too many had already been sent abroad, leaving few artifacts available for contemplation and examination by the local scholar. These relics, although generating little local interest, appeared to "excite in a higher degree the curiosity of strangers". The managers hastened to point out that the "curiosities of this country are the primary, but not the exclusive objects of the Society." The museum promised "in due time to open a gallery of paintings, and thus offer to lovers and cultivators of fine arts, a few of those models which are absolutely necessary to the gratification and improvement of their taste."³

Donors were encouraged to contribute objects to the museum gratis, but payment for "articles of worth" was negotiable. The Society promised to acknowledge "all the more valuable donations" publicly by publishing an annual listing of new acquisitions. The public was reassured that this was not transient phenomenon. Rooms to house the collections and its library had been secured in the Cincinnati Lancaster Seminary (rechartered as Cincinnati College in 1819) on Walnut Street just above Fourth Street. The managers had also elected prominent scientists from the East to honorary corresponding membership in the Society. These individuals not only enhanced the status and legitimized the authority of the Society, they were also to contribute to the continued growth of the collections. Each honorary member was encouraged to send duplicates from his own collection to complete the Society's Museum.

In promoting the fledgling Museum Society, the managers were careful to be as

³Ibid., 205-206.
broadly inclusive as possible. The Society was designed to be of public benefit to many potential supporters - from local citizens seeking economic security and prosperity to travellers who were interested in the indigenous peoples to scholars interested in pursuing academic studies of rapidly-disappearing local artifacts. By stressing a pragmatic approach to education which emphasized the economic returns of enquiry, the Museum promised be of value to everyone. This pragmatic approach was also evident in the local school curricula which stressed the acquisition of functional skills. Special emphasis was placed on navigation, arithmetic, bookkeeping and surveying. Arithmetic problems in texts provided real-life rather than abstract problems and presented such challenges as problems in calculating import duties and taxation as well as the discounting of Louisiana bank notes in Cincinnati banks. This emphasis on practical skills was typical of a mercantile local community.

The Western Museum's claim to be broadly inclusive and of value to all Cincinnati citizens has traditionally been taken at face value by historians. But was it of equal value to everyone? Although the Western Museum Society promised to serve a wide range of audiences, consistent with the republican form of government, it was also organized as a joint stock company which was expected to earn profits for its shareholders. Moreover, by forging such an intimate relationship with Cincinnati College, an institution of higher learning with restricted access to only the most prosperous citizens of the city, the Western Museum Society also signalled its very distinctive and elitist identity to the local populace. It was an

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4Aaron, Cincinnati: Queen City of the West, 217-218.
identity which was associated from its inception as the exclusive reserve of the most affluent. Nor was the Western Museum consistent with trends in contemporary, proprietary American museums. Those museums which were able to sustain themselves in competitive environments and report profits had long abandoned this exclusivity on scientific arrangements and collecting. In the largest American cities, museums operated as "fashionable lounges," where more populist, live entertainments were presented along with more traditional scientific arrangements of artifacts.

Although the contractual relationship between the Western Museum and Cincinnati College was not formally established until 1819, and the Museum had yet to open officially, Drake was already offering a series of introductory lectures "at candlelight" at the Seminary in November, 1818. Daytime lectures, open to the public, were offered by Mr. Slack and were advertised in the *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette.*

The relationship between the Museum and the College was formalized in a contract dated March 25, 1819. Under the terms of the agreement, Cincinnati College was ensured free use of the facilities of the Museum and its collection by the faculty and students for their benefit. In exchange, the College agreed to provide the Society with a proper room (or rooms) rent-free. Although the managers of the Society were to direct all the Museum's concerns, the professors of the college were to have free access to collections for use "in the illustration of their lectures". Donations which were intended exclusively for the cabinet of the college were to be labelled as such "when placed in the museum, but were to be displayed

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*LHCG*, November 18, 1818, p 3 col 1.
together." Six months' notice was to be provided by either party should a relocation become necessary. Members of the society were to retain their admission privileges at the times specified by the managers.\(^6\) This relationship, which provided unrestricted admission for the faculty and students of Cincinnati College, was promoted in local papers as part of the benefit to be derived from enrolling in the College. (Annual tuition was $32.00)\(^7\) The College generated additional funds by leasing rooms to various organizations. The rental fees enabled the board of trustees to pay the interest on their debts and to discharge annually several hundred dollars of the principal.\(^8\) Traditional accounts of the Western Museum have claimed that there was widespread support for the fledgling organization and that shares to the value of $4,500.00 had been raised by the public. However, this interpretation appears to be erroneous. Contemporary accounts indicate that this was the total amount of money raised for the entire Cincinnati College venture. According to the description of the project in the City Directory for 1819, prospects for the College were promising:

[Cincinnati] is a healthy populous city, and can afford the wealth and talents necessary to endow and foster an institution of this kind. Its funds already amount to about $50,000; and if care be taken in selecting learned and liberal minded professors, and in establishing a proper discipline, this infant institution bids fair, at a period not far distant, to rival the colleges of the East.\(^9\)

Despite the ambitious goals and hopes for the longevity of the association between

\(^6\)Venable, _Beginnings of Literary Culture_. 310-311.

\(^7\)_LHCG_. April 6, 1819, p 3 col 3.

\(^8\)Benjamin Drake and Edward Deering Mansfield, _Cincinnati in 1826_ (Cincinnati, 1827), 41.

\(^9\)Quoted in Aaron, _Cincinnati: Queen City of the West_, 207.
the Western Museum Society and Cincinnati College, it was not to last. Nor was there much local support for the College. It collapsed in 1826, leaving only the monitory school on its premises.\(^\text{10}\)

Although the museum was not yet open to the general public, the Cincinnati Directory of 1819 advised that “decent strangers will be cheerfully admitted if they apply to any member of the Society or to Messrs. Slack, Steele, Findlay, Embree, or Drake, the managers.”\(^\text{11}\) This advertisement further supports the contention that the Museum served an exclusive and limited clientele rather than the entire Cincinnati community.

**Letton’s Museum**

For all its educational promise, the Western Museum would not be the only museum in town. On July 6, 1819, an advertisement in the *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette* indicated that the Cincinnati Museum, located at the corner of Main and Upper Market Street, had opened to the public. From its inception, the Cincinnati Museum had no elite or narrow scholarly pretensions. It presented itself as a populist and popular, commercial attraction. It undertook an active advertising campaign, often promoting itself twice in the same issue of the newspaper. The collections consisting of “Natural and Artificial curiosities.” had “BIRDS, BEASTS, and FISH, common to the western country, as well as WAX FIGURES, PETRIFACTIONS, ANTIQUITIES &c.” The museum boasted that it “had a number of men engaged in selecting the curiosities of various descriptions; and as they [were] well skilled in

\(^{10}\)Ibid., 208.

the art of preserving and setting the skins of birds and animals; they [were] in hopes of few years they will be enabled to exhibit to the citizens a great school of nature". The proprietors. Letton and Willet, solicited the patronage and support of the citizenry by offering either cash for any donated curiosities or tickets of admission as well as a listing of the donor's name in the display. Admission to the museum was twenty-five cents per single visit. Quarterly tickets could be purchased at $1.00 while annual tickets cost $3.00. The museum was to be open from Monday to Saturday from “9 in the morning till 9 in the evening: illuminated every night. Sundays excepted.” In return, the proprietors merely requested the orderly behaviour of the public; “no smoking of segars” was permitted on the premises. A second ad placed in the same edition promoted the large quantity of “LARGE BONES. ...supposed to be of the Mammoth SPECIES” which could be viewed at the museum.

These first advertisements generated an anonymous letter to the editor in the subsequent edition of the Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette. An individual who had attended the lively inaugural meeting of the Western Museum Society, wrote to say that this gathering had confirmed the importance of the Society. This organization would “awaken a spirit of enquiry [and] infuse knowledge into every department of nature and art. Such an institution as this deserves and will receive the exclusive support of ever good citizen.” The disgruntled writer complained that it was “preposterous...to call upon those very people to patronize a number of showmen [Letton and Willet] who delight in the invention of new

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12LHCG, July 6, 1819.

13LHCG, July 6, 1819.
forms of ghastliness, and whose daily occupation is to caricature the solemn visage of the dead... How graceless it is to recommend the neglect of a scientific Cabinet arranged in the beautiful edifice of the Cincinnati College. for the vulgar diversion of a fiddler's requiem to a row of wax figures, and these too, headed by the likeness of huge negro who they call "Othello"..." To discredit the new museum even further, the author of the letter asked "Is it pretended that his employees are men or science or learning? It is not, nor ever will be..."¹⁴

This letter suggests that the scholarly arrangement of the Western Museum was not successful in drawing the support of the local populace which instead sought diversion and entertainment in the form of the wax-figure displays. The correspondence was typical of the pattern of exchange that emerged in the succeeding years - an advertisement or editorial dealing with one institution was followed by an advertisement or comment from the other institution or its supporters. Clearly the local citizenry and press responded favourably to Letton and Willet's Museum. But even with this support, financial success was not guaranteed. For the two resident museums were not the only attractions competing for public attention or support. Many itinerant exhibits, consisting of live animals or contemporary paintings, passed through Cincinnati. These similarly-priced attractions vied with each other to offer ever-more unique experiences for the frontier settlers. In particular, exhibitions of live, exotic animals met with great success. Many of these animals had never been seen in Cincinnati before; many had never been seen in America.¹⁵ Live animal displays were a

¹⁴*LHCG*, July 9, 1819.

¹⁵For even by the late nineteenth century, an average of more than one thousand genera of animals of all kinds were being described each year. Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the
popular entertainment in the nineteenth century. They served as a tangible, living evidence of largely mysterious parts of the globe. Much of their value as attractions derived from their size and rarity; their mysterious qualities were further enhanced by the romantic descriptions which the advertisements presented.16 An African lion was displayed in January 1819 on Water Street between Main and Walnut Streets for two weeks. Contained in a "substantial iron cage," the lion, despite his considerable size (the largest in America!), posed no threat to the viewers. Tickets were available at the principal taverns and at the door.17 Later that year, Columbus the elephant, weighing between 4 and 5,000 pounds, a large dromedary and a South American jaguar were on display on Fifth Street near the museum from 9 am to 9 pm and at a competitive cost to museum admission - fifty cents for adults while children were admitted at half price.18

It is interesting to compare these admission prices to the income earned by the workers who laboured on the Ohio River, often in a work day exceeding fifteen hours. After deducting room and board, there was approximately $3.50 remaining as a weekly wage. Apprentices worked from 5 am to 7 pm, and sometimes from 4 am to 9 pm.19 Furthermore, in

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17*LHCG*, January 19, 1819.

18*LHCG*, November 23, 1819, p 3, col 4. The display of exotic and then unknown animals was lucrative - the first Indian elephant was brought to America in 1796. For a historical account of displays of animals in America, refer to George L. Chindahl, *A History of the Circus in America* (Caldweel, Ohio: The Caxton Printers Ltd., 1959).

19Aaron, *Cincinnati: Queen City of the West*, 71.
comparison to food prices, admission to the amusements and museums was expensive. Mutton, veal and beef could be purchased for four cents a pound, while a full-sized chicken, already slaughtered, cost twelve cents. Turkeys and geese cost fifty cents per fowl. A quarter of a bear could be purchased for twenty-seven cents, while twenty-five cents paid for a similar amount of deer. European visitors were astounded that even the poorest of Cincinnati’s citizens could eat meat several times a week.

For his part, Drake continued to offer a series of lectures at the Seminary throughout the winter and early spring of 1820. His series dealt with such diverse topics as mineralogy, the indigenous huge fossils, argillaceous minerals, roof and writing slate, potter’s clay, and kaolin among other materials, copper, lead, antimony, tin and mercury. Francis Mason, a journeyman shoemaker, attended some of Drake’s lectures and recalled that they were illustrated by specimens from the collections. “But the audience was small, owing to there being an entrance fee of twenty-five cents.” Drake would seem to have lost out to Columbus the elephant who continued to enthral the public until the end of March, 1820.

The Western Museum was formally dedicated on June 10, 1820, the eve of the public opening of the institution. Drake outlined the objectives and aspirations of the newly

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Frances Trollope, \textit{Domestic Manners of the Americans}, ed. J. L. Larson (St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 1993), 37.}

\footnote{Ross, \textit{Workers on the Edge}, 9.}

\footnote{Francis Mason, \textit{The Story of a Working Mans Life} (New York: Oakley, Maon & Co.), 100.}

\footnote{In a gesture of gratitude for proposing the establishment of a museum, Drake dedicated his opening address to William Steele. Daniel Drake, \textit{An Anniversary Discourse, on the State and Prospects of the Western Museum Society} (Cincinnati: The Society, 1820), 3.}
\end{footnotes}
founded institution in his *Anniversary Discourse on the State and Prospects of The Western Museum Society*. He acknowledged that the arts and sciences had not yet been cultivated in the southern Ohio region and because the rewards of their cultivation were not perceived generally, these activities had "but few friends and admirers." The Western Museum was to embrace nearly the whole of those parts of the great circle of knowledge which could be illustrated by natural or artificial objects and by its comprehensiveness would "afford instruction and delight to persons of very opposite tastes." Although local residents might consider the establishment of so ambitious a project as premature and impracticable for the young community, Drake argued that it was in a new country that such a "multifarious assemblage is most proper." Older, more established communities were the only communities which could "successfully establish cabinets and museums for particular classes of objects, and destined for the benefit and amusement of particular orders of men." A recent settlement in a new region was best served by a comprehensive collection which served all interests.

Drake expected a sort of "intuitive acquiescence" from the public in asserting that the illustration of natural history was the "most curious" object. Indeed, the museum could assist in furthering scientific knowledge by participating in the very important task of enumeration and description of the quadrupeds of the area. Drake suspected that many of these animals were not merely varieties but possibly distinct species. He was pleased to report that the prospects for the Museum's success in this area seemed bright - the natural history
collections were growing; the hired staff were capable and enthusiastic. He was also pleased
to note that although the Museum was not yet open, the labors of the staff had already
succeeded in promoting the cause of science. They had already made significant
contributions to the advancement of knowledge. While Drake praised the efforts of
ornithologist Alexander Wilson in depicting the birds of the middle Atlantic states, he
proudly indicated that “Mr. Audubon, one of the excellent artists attached to the Museum.
who has drawn, from nature, in colored crayons, several hundred species of American birds.
[and] has in his port folio, a large number that are not figured in Mr. Wilson’s work, and
many which do not seem to have been recognized by any naturalist.”

The study and collection of Indian artifacts was of importance for the entire
community and Drake reminded the listeners that these were the

memorials of a people, who were lately the highminded proprietors and sovereigns of
the country which we now inhabit... That our hills were once vocal with their songs
and orisons, re-echoed their fiery and figurative war-speeches, and resounded the
tumult of their dance and chase: that these hills and valleys were the land of their
fathers, and those scenes their hereditary devotions, pastimes and pursuits:-but that a
succession of wars and treaties have dispossessed them of their domain, and driven
them, with the elk and bison, to remoter solitudes in the Northwest. Until we are
prepared to deny, or can cease to remember, these simple and affecting truths, we
must commend the curiosity that would seek to preserve from oblivion some

24The Western Museum’s paid staff consisted of Dr. Robert Best, curator and John James
Audubon, taxidermist. Best, a skilled watch and instrument repairer, had been appointed in
August, 1819. Horine, Daniel Drake, 137. Audubon had been offered a position stuffing and
mounting birds as well as fish at a salary of $125.00 per annum. Shirley Streshinsky, Audubon:

25Daniel Drake, “Anniversary Discourse on the State and Prospects of the Western
Museum Society,” reprinted in Physician to the West, 135.
memento of a people that seem to be doomed to inevitable extinction.\textsuperscript{26}

The monuments of the Ohio Valley, unlike the classical ruins of Asia and Europe, failed to “awaken inspiration” and did not “infuse melancholy” in the local citizens bent upon expanding their city limits. Nonetheless, Drake proclaimed that these monuments were worthy of admiration and preservation.\textsuperscript{27}

Drake argued for the importance of the new Museum in developing and promoting the useful and ornamental arts. Drawings, models, and products of the former, whether mechanical or chemical, would eventually find a conspicuous place in the Museum’s collections. He admonished the audience that

a love for the chaste and elegant labors of the painter, the architect and the sculptor, should not be ranked with a relish for the pleasures of the table, an admiration for personal ornaments, and a passion for public shows, and dissolute amusements. The former originates in sentiment, and its gratification imparts dignity and elevation; the latter are rooted in sensuality, vanity and vice, and their indulgence leads to ruin and disgrace.\textsuperscript{28}

Drake’s efforts to justify the inclusion of art objects in the collections are indicative of then commonly held attitudes toward art. These attitudes were informed by a lack of knowledge of

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, 140.

\textsuperscript{27}Drake’s views of Native Americans were typical of many of his era. Although the removal of Indian tribes from their territorial lands did not become official government policy until 1828, the practice was commonplace in the early nineteenth century. The debate over removal was accompanied by the growing acceptance that the Native Americans would disappear naturally. Their fates were conflated with the fate of the natural habitat which increasingly fell victim to the advance of settlement. The idea of the “vanishing Indian” took centre stage in the American imagination. In literature and in oration, the theme that Americans were building a civilization on the ruins of another people became increasingly prominent. Matthews, \textit{Toward a New Society}, 90.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, 143.
artistic treasures as well as an indifference to the importance of art to the life of a community. For many Americans the enjoyment of art was tinged with guilt. Such an enjoyment was also considered dangerous and irrelevant. Art itself was considered dangerous; its production and appreciation were conflated with European luxury and aristocracy. Luxury was considered to be a great corruptor while a love of material possessions unleashed sensual appetites. It was widely feared that a republican form of government would be endangered if men were dominated by these appetites. The links between art, luxury and national decay were deeply felt - most Americans associated the production of art with a mature, if not decaying, society. History seemed to indicate that the arts were attainments which occurred immediately before national and imperial decline. This belief was reinforced by the appearance of many classical objects. Broken and damaged, they were like the shattered societies which had produced them.  

Drake's presentation also addressed the relationship between the Museum and the College. It was his sincerest hope that this relationship would become permanent for he believed that the two institutions were each necessary to the success of the other; each would suffer by a separation. Together, they could provide the essential aids to a liberal education.

“The College is principally a school of literature, the Museum of science, and the arts. The knowledge inspired by one is elementary, by the other practical. Without the former, our sons would be illiterate; without the latter, they would be scholars merely - with the help of both,  

they may become scholars and philosophers.” Drake concluded his address by reaffirming the importance of the study of science. “Let the architects of our national greatness conform to the dictates of science; and the monuments they construct will arise beautiful as our hills, imperishable as our mountains which tower sublimely above the clouds.”

In short, the Museum was to fulfill both the educational and practical needs of the local populace. It was to be a means of education for the people. The study of science and literature in the new republic would provide the nation with “refinement and elegance” and would facilitate “progress in mechanical and chemical arts.”

Despite these goals, financial success eluded the Western Museum. The Panic of 1819 had created unemployment and uncertainty even among those “who have hitherto been considered in easy circumstances.” While the financial repercussions where not as long lasting or as severe as they were in other parts of the country, Cincinnati bank notes never worth their face value as far east as Pittsburgh, depreciated thirty to forty percent and were utterly worthless beyond the city limits.

The Panic also made clear the tenuous position of Cincinnati manufacturers - the city served as a distributing point of agricultural produce, supplying raw materials to the eastern states. In a time of unfavourable trade balances, this made the local economy vulnerable. In the wake of the Panic, demands arose for greater economic autonomy.

Land values collapsed; hundreds of labourers lost their jobs.

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31Aaron, Cincinnati. Queen City of the West, 29.

32Ibid., 31.

33Ibid., 40.
"Building was entirely stopped... All business was brought to a sudden end. The mechanics lately so blithe and cheerful had gone in different directions in search of work, at any price, to keep themselves and families from starving. Almost any mechanic could be hired for fifty cents a day, working, as was the custom, from sunrise to sunset: few could get employment at that." 34 Drake, like many of the most successful businessmen in Cincinnati, suffered significant financial losses. Personally, and as security for his relatives, Drake owed $50,000.00. 35 Public support for the Western Museum Society faltered. The primary concern of most local residents was financial security, not the pursuit of scientific endeavours.

Even prior to the Panic, leisure activities had been considered frivolous: the little free time that existed was spent with family and friends or in church-related activities. This heavy emphasis on work was still evident in 1831 when de Tocqueville observed that:

In Ohio everyone has come to make money. ... not a single, absolutely not a single man of leisure... Everyone has his work, to which he devotes himself ardently. As yet people don’t know what upper classes are; the pell mell is complete. The whole society is an industry... Work is honored and leads to all else."

In 1820, wages still remained depressed and as merchants were reluctant to bring in merchandise, prices skyrocketed. Although farm produce was available, farmers had little success in selling it as there was little money in the community. 36 Well before the public opening of the Museum in June 1820, the deteriorating economic situation in Cincinnati had

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35 Horine, *Daniel Drake*, 149-150.

36 Aaron, *Cincinnati: Queen City of the West*, 41.
made it impossible for staff salaries to be paid. Audubon continued to work at the Museum but was forced to supplement his income by offering private lessons in drawing and the French language. Two months prior to the Museum's formal opening, Audubon left its employment claiming that he had not been paid the promised salary. "...I found, sadly too late, that the members of the College museum were splendid promisers and very bad paymasters."  

By January of 1821, the Western Museum began to advertise in the local newspaper, the Western Spy and Literary Cadet, indicating that its collections were open to the public. The hours of admission were from sunrise to sunset every day of the week except Sundays. Some effort was made to accommodate the working classes of the city as the Museum was illuminated and kept open until 10 pm on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Although members were admitted free, the general public (adults) could gain admission for twenty-five cents while children were admitted at half-price. Throughout the spring, lectures dealing with sympathetic inks (fluids with which writings or engravings may be made) as well as phosphorated hydrogen and gas light were offered. Each presentation was followed by the inhalation of nitrous oxide by "a number of Gentlemen". Despite Dunlop's claim, this aspect of the museum lecture program was neither new nor invented by the staff - it was a well-


38 Maria R. Audubon, Audubon and his Journals (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), I: 37.

39 Western Spy and Literary Cadet, January 20, 1821.
established and regular component of scientific demonstrations in both Europe and America. Its origins can be traced to Humphrey Davy's lectures at the Royal Institution in London as far back as 1801. Davy typically ended his lectures on "pneumatical chemistry" by inviting members of the audience to inhale the "laughing gas". In New York, John Griscom's very popular public lectures which regularly attracted hundreds of listeners ended with a similar demonstration.

But even with these promotional efforts, the financial status of the Museum continued to falter. Its difficulties were compounded by administrative problems. The organization of Cincinnati College, with its set of interlocking boards of trustees or managers, meant that disruptions or intrigues on one board could affect the entire institution. During the 1819 academic year, disputes over teaching appointments of physicians to the faculty of the Medical College of Ohio led to the resignation of Drake and Elijah Slack from the Cincinnati Medical Society. They organized a competing Medico-Chirurgical Society of Cincinnati. However, disagreements between Drake and his partner in medical practice Colman Rogers, led to Rogers challenging Drake to a duel. Drake refused to respond to the challenge but he and Slack were responsible for denying Rogers the chair in anatomy and surgery that had been offered. Two years later Slack voted Drake out of his chair at the Medical College on the grounds that Drake was ambitious, quarrelsome, and "cultivated other branches of science [than] his profession." Drake resigned and departed for Lexington, Kentucky. In Cincinnati,


41 Henry D. Shapiro, "Western Academy of Natural Sciences," in *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the early American Republic: American scientific and learned societies from*
the debts of the Western Museum began to accumulate and no one was willing or able to pay the money that was owed by the Museum. Attendance at the Museum remained low. Throughout the next few years, signs of the depression remained in evidence: a kind of lethargy descended over the city.42 One traveller reported that Cincinnati did not "present anything like the stir that animated it a year and a half ago... The city which was lately overcrowded with people, had now a considerable number of empty houses... Many mechanics and labourers find it impossible to procure employment."43

Cincinnatians may have turned their backs on the didactic approach of the Western Museum, but that did not mean that they were not ready to be entertained. Even in hard times, Letton's Museum drew crowds. In the spring of 1822, in a large advertisement, Letton's Museum announced that new additions to its collections had arrived from New York. The thirty-two new wax figures, executed by the most eminent artists in the United States, brought the total collection of life-sized wax figures to forty-two. A variety of locally, nationally and internationally recognizable figures was available for the enjoyment of the local populace. The new shipment included depictions of Commodores Baron and Decatur and their seconds engaged in a duel; Charlotte Temple and her seducer Montraville as well as her father holding her beautiful child;44 a representation of Mrs. Smith, who had drowned at

42 Aaron, Cincinnati: Queen City of the West, 41.

43 James Flint, Letters from America (Edinburgh: W. And C. Tait, 1822), 238.

44 Charlotte Temple was the main character in Susanna Rowson's sentimental novel Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth. Published in England in 1791, the novel became popular in
Albany in December 1813 crossing the Ferry, holding her twins (who had been saved from
the drowning); Othello in the act of murdering his wife Desdemona; Alexander the Great;
Blue Beard attending to the murder of his wife while her lover Selim ran to her aid: King
Saul and the Witch of Endor raising Samuel the Prophet from the tomb; the Indian Chief
Black Streak in the act of scalping a son of Mr. Kreshen, a Georgian merchant; General
Jackson shooting Blue Streak; Captain James Riley on a camel while enslaved by the Arabs:
as well as the remarkable Daniel Lambert, one of the wonders of the early nineteenth century.
who weighed 739 pounds and Patrick O’Brian, the Irish giant who stood eight feet five
inches in height and was "well proportioned". In addition to the wax figures, several
thousands of natural and artificial curiosities could also be viewed. Mechanical panoramas
completed the exhibits - these depicted elegant views of the Paris, Prague, and New York, the
much discussed Sea Serpent, Philadelphia during the funeral procession of General
Washington, and the execution of Marshal Ney. "Music on a good organ" was promised. The
museum was open from 9 am to 9 pm, Sundays excepted. Admittance for adults was twenty-
five cents; children were admitted at half-price.

America as the plot was set in New York City. A particular grave in New York was associated
with the heroine and received more visitors than the nearby graves of Alexander Hamilton or
Robert Fulton. Jean V. Matthews, Toward a New Society: American Thought and Culture, 1800-

45 As Harriet Ritvo has shown, it was generally assumed that a giant would be ill-
proportioned and unattractive. The contrary always generated positive notice and was sufficient
to ensure a significant audience. Ritvo, The Platypus and the Mermaid, 148-150.

46 Throughout the past few weeks the local newspapers had reprinted numerous articles
about reported sightings of the sea serpent on the eastern seaboard. The creature's appearance
and probable taxonomic status was a popular topic of discussion throughout America.
Facing stiff competition and a sluggish economy in the summer of 1822, announcements in the local press suggested that troubled times had befallen the Western Museum. The election of five managers of the Society was scheduled to take place on June 10th. Subscribers who were unable to attend this meeting were urged to send a proxy, "as other business of great importance is to be transacted at the same meeting." The matter to be discussed was how to deal with the financial difficulties the Museum had encountered - for the Museum had accumulated debts amounting to $1500.00. This debt was further complicated by delinquent subscribers who were unable to make good their pledges. One of the proposed solutions to this problem was the sale of the collections.

Despite these difficulties, the Museum celebrated its second anniversary on June 10, 1822 with a poetic offering proclaiming the importance of science. The "Ode to Science" ended with these two stanzas:

Great Genius of Science! We ask thy direction
In guiding our footsteps in every pursuit:
Man is raised to an angel beneath thy protection.
And, without it, is sunk to a savage or brute.

And whilst we acknowledge, with heartfelt emotion,
That praise to thy throne should for ever rise,
Press this truth on our minds, in the midst of devotion-
The pathway of Science conducts to the Skies.\(^\text{49}\)

Somehow, the Museum continued to exist. That summer, the Western Museum kept

\(^{47}\text{LHCG, May 20, 1822.}\)

\(^{48}\text{Horine, Daniel Drake, 150.}\)

\(^{49}\text{Pamphlet, anonymous, Cincinnati Historical Society.}\)
itself in the public eye through a series of prominently-placed advertisements which appeared on the front page of the *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette*. From July 21st to August 17th, Robert Best, the curator of the Western Museum, informed the public that he would repair "all kinds of Philosophical and Mathematical instruments, time keepers as well as other types of delicate and complicated machinery" at his work place in the Western Museum, at Cincinnati College, or at his home across the street. The existence and location of the museum was thus prominently displayed. It is possible that Best (like Audubon) found it necessary to supplement whatever meagre income he received from the managers with other work. The advertisements also served a dual function. They promoted the existence of the Museum to the local populace and to travellers in the region. But if the Western Museum was to do more than just survive, it had to attract paying visitors.

50 *LHCG*, July 21, 1821 through August 17, 1822.
Chapter Five

The Western Museum under Joseph Dorfeuille

By September 1822, the Western Museum began the process of reinventing itself as a commercially-viable and populist museum. It relocated to a more prominent and publicly-accessible spot at the corner of Main and Columbia streets and launched a new advertising campaign which stressed the diversity and magnificence of its collections. By now the Museum’s holdings consisted of several hundred birds and quadrupeds (mostly foreign), a large number of reptiles, shells, coins, medals, Egyptian and Roman antiquities, including the head of an Egyptian mummy from Thebes, an number of manuscripts on “sapyrus” (sic), household gods, coins as well as sepulchral lamps from Herculaneum and Pompeii. The advertisement stressed the age of the antiquities which made them “peculiarly interesting to the reflecting mind”. The new curator, Joseph Dorfeuille, introduced what were to become familiar words in the years to come, that “neither pains nor expense have been spared to render [the Museum] worthy of the patronage of the Citizens”.

The Museum was fortunate that its membership could provide unpaid promotional articles and editorial coverage. John P. Foote, a founding member of the Western Museum Society and editor of the recently-established *The Western Quarterly Reporter of Medical, Surgical, and Natural Science*, did his best to promote the institution. In the second issue of his new journal, Foote printed a lengthy essay devoted to “Observations on the Study of Natural History”. His article, a rebuttal to the prevailing attitude that the study of natural

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1 *CCLG*, September 28, October 2, 9, 16, 19, 23, 26, 30 and November 2, 6, 9, 16, 1822.
history was of no value to the general public, argued that this belief was misguided.

However, it could well account for the public’s limited interest in the Western Museum. Foote wrote that “those who devote themselves with ardour and perseverance to the task of acquiring a knowledge of the different kingdoms of nature, are generally considered as mere collectors of plants, insects and minerals for the gratification of a childish curiosity; as wasters of time, who confer no benefit on society...The opinion is too common, (and acted upon if not avowed) that it is a waste of time and talents to devote much attention to any pursuit that will not bring in an immediate, return of profit...”² In the next issue of the journal, Foote indicated that the newly-relocated Western Museum was about to assume its proper rank as a scientific institution. He further informed the public that:

Mr Robert Best, already so favorably known in this quarter as an ingenious and scientific chemist, and Mr J Dorfouille, who has long been exclusively devoted to the study of natural Science, are the gentlemen who are employed in re-arranging the specimens from the different kingdoms of Nature... The zoological specimens are arranged according to the Linnaean system; the minerals will be displayed in the order laid down in Cleaveland’s Mineralogy. The Greek and Roman coins and medals will be arranged in chronological order, and be accompanied by brief historical notes. It cannot fail to strike the observer, that these arrangements will be of the highest value to persons who engage in such studies. In point of extent the Western museum will be the fourth - in scientific arrangement, it will be the second, in the United States.³

However, advertisements placed in the November newspapers did not stress the scientific arrangement of the collections. Instead they took a more populist approach to

²*The Western Quarterly Reporter of Medical, Surgical and Natural Science*, vol. II (1822): 148.

³*The Western Quarterly Reporter of Medical, Surgical and Natural Science*, vol. III (1822): 263.
promoting the Western Museum, stressing its appealing displays and accessibility to the public. The curators emphasized that they were “anxious to afford every gratification in their power to visitors of this institution.” Many efforts had been made to provide for the comfort and entertainment of those seeking scientific knowledge. The electrical apparatus had been moved to the lower floors to enable those waiting for the lectures to amuse themselves. As well, a number of microscopes had been made available with a “great variety of microscopic objects, which cannot fail of according an agreeable entertainment to every rational mind.”

The visitors’ enjoyment of the Museum would be enhanced by the newly-acquired optic views, completed by Italian artists, representing scenes of Italy. For those interested in astronomy, the Museum now provided a large reflecting telescope through which the satellites of Jupiter as well as the ring of Saturn could be seen.

These curatorial efforts at creating a more-accessible, entertaining and hands-on museum were well rewarded by local press coverage. On November 30, 1822 the Western Spy and Literary Cadet called the attention of local residents to the newly-relocated Western Museum. The anonymous author proclaimed that he was “surprised at their extent [the collections] and delighted with the style in which they have been arranged for exhibition”.

The collection had been recently enhanced by substantial additions from Dorfeuille’s private holdings. These objects were “extensive and peculiarly interesting; consisting principally of foreign articles, and such as are rarely to be seen in this country.” At the time, there the collection consisted of approximately:

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4CCLG, November 16, 1822.
350 beautifully preserved Birds; 40 or 50 Quadrupeds, upwards 1000 specimens of Minerals, 700 or 800 Coins and medals, many of which are of great antiquity; 2 or 300 Marine Shells, together with a collection of Indian remains, Mammoth Bones, Insects, Fishes, Reptiles, Paintings, Egyptian Antiquities, and Miscellaneous Curiosities. Among the Egyptian articles are the head of a Mummy, and its linen envelope; some finely preserved specimens of hieroglyphal manuscripts, on papyrus, and many images used as household gods. Everything about the institution is in perfect neatness, and the artifacts are tastefully arranged and systematically labelled. ...In short, the attractions are without number, and there is no class in community who would not be pleased and benefitted by frequent visits to this valuable establishment. ...We are surprised it has not already become to Cincinnati what Peale’s museum has to Philadelphia - a fashionable resort, where the lovers of science may pursue their studies, and the gay one’s [sic] of the city assemble for the gratification of a laudable curiosity, the enjoyment of company, conversation and music.”

It is clear from this article that contemporary expectations of a museum extended well beyond serving those with scientific or academic interests. The museum was to be a “fashionable resort,” a meeting place where entertainments could be found and where one could spend time in the company of others.

Throughout December, Dorfeuille and Best continued to offer lectures on the various collections under their care. Often these were illustrated by “amusing and instructing experiments,” including the inhalation of nitrous oxide.6 Yet, despite these favourable reviews and lively demonstrations, financial success continued to elude the Western Museum. In March 1823, the trustees were forced to put the collections up for sale but found no acceptable takers.7 Best’s offer to purchase the objects was declined. Eventually the

5Western Spy and Literary Cadet. November 30, 1822.

6WSLC, December 14, 17, 21, 25, 27, 1822.

7Liberty Hall, March 18, 1823.
Society decided to give the collections to the newly-appointed curator of the Museum, Joseph Dorfeuille.

Little is known of Joseph Dorfeuille’s background or previous achievements. The place and date of his birth remain unknown and even contemporary reports provide contradictory information about his identity and education. It is possible that he was one of the many itinerant museum keepers who travelled throughout the country. John P. Foote, a founding member of the Western Museum, long-time secretary of the Western Academy of Natural Sciences and later author of *The Schools of Cincinnati* (1855), described him as a “zealous naturalist from Louisiana, who made some collections and was seeking a suitable place for the establishment of a museum.” Dorfeuille was soon working in the Western Museum as a curator along with Robert Best. By 1822, Dorfeuille was already an active participant in the life of the community, offering lectures as well as organ recitals to benefit the Greek cause. A capable musician, on December 27, 1822 he performed at a concert of the Haydn Society.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the extent and diversity of Dorfeuille’s scientific interests may be derived from a notebook which he compiled throughout his career. Now in the archives of the Cincinnati Historical Society Library, the 259-page notebook/scrapbook includes not only prints from some of the most respected contemporary scientific books, but

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8The most extravagant claim about his ancestry was that he was a nephew of the Duchesse de Richelieu, and that he bore the title of Count. Kellogg, “Joseph Dorfeuille and the Western Museum,” 3.

chemical and numerical charts, Dorfeuille's own pencil drawings as well as personal notations made in both French and English. The numerous prints and drawings depict human and animal anatomy, the facial structures of various indigenous peoples from around the world, mastodon bones, diluvial graves, fossils, coins and medals, Greek vases, type faces and alphabets, snowflake formations, a plan of Cincinnati from Daniel Drake's *Statistical View of 1815*, a statistical chart of the United States which notes the distances between cities and the populations of the principal towns, a plan of the Bastille, as well as a colour print of Cherbourg Harbour from 1786. Also included are engravings completed in 1812 of crabs, scorpions, ant pyramids, as well as a Hercules beetle all from William Bullock's London Museum. However the prints which have attracted the most attention from contemporary historians are the numerous depictions of human and animal malformations or, as they were known at the time, *lusus naturae* or teratological studies. M. H. Dunlop has described them in the following manner: "by sheer quantity and sickening force, page after page, the scrapbook's major concern is revealed: headless, legless, and armless humans, bodies burdened by strange humanoid growths, varieties of tumours, and every imaginable variation on Siamese twinning." Dunlop has incorrectly dismissed Dorfeuille's interest in science by claiming that such images are unconnected to science.\(^\text{10}\)

Dorfeuille's interest in teratology was typical of many scientists of his day. It was widely believed that a knowledge of such anomalies provided opportunities to understand the natural order more fully and to define it with greater precision. Many scientists laboured to

\(^{10}\)Dunlop, "Curiosities too Numerous to Mention," 529-530.
explain and classify the anomalies, and to incorporate them into a newly-elaborate and therefore more powerful classification system. In this manner, they hoped to remove the understanding of these *lusus naturae* from the realm of the superstitious and curious to the rational and ordered world of science. The effort to classify both human and animal anomalies reached its apogee in the work of Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire - who ushered in a new scientific era with the publication of his *Treatise on Teratology* in 1832. The book offered a systematic classification of *lusus naturae* into fifty genera, consisting of twenty-three natural families and five orders. Dorieuille's collection of engravings came from some of the most acclaimed and respectable texts dealing with teratology, including the *Philosophie Anatomique* of Geoffroy Sainte-Hilaire as well as Mitchells' *Account of a Monster*. As we have also seen, *lusus naturae* were regularly featured in early American museums as well as other venues such as taverns and fairs. The formally organized exhibition of people with physical, mental or behavioural anomalies, both alleged and real, was an accepted part of American life. Known as “rarities,” wonders, marvels and even as nature’s mistakes, the display of these individuals was a lucrative activity for museum proprietors and others as they appealed to both the scientific community eager to develop a broader understanding of God’s creation as well as to the general public seeking novelty and excitement.

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Dorfeuille, despite Dunlop's modern, ahistoric assessments of his skills and interests, was a respected member of scientific community of his time. Benjamin Drake and Edward Mansfield's *Cincinnati in 1826*, a guide to the city and its inhabitants, indicates that "the exertions of Mr. Dorfeuille to render it [the Museum] worthy of the Society by which it was founded have been zealous, directed by good taste and successful. A multitude of persons have contributed by sale, donation and deposits." The Museum, which was described as "one of the greatest ornaments of our city," now included Drake's own cabinet of minerals.\(^{13}\) organic remains, fossil bones as well as Western antiquities. The collection also consisted of the remains of the mammoth and "arctic elephant" obtained through expeditions launched at the request of the Museum managers to Big Bone Lick in Kentucky: quadrupeds, birds, reptiles, and fishes collected by previous employees such as James Griffiths, J.J. Audubon, and Dr. Best; several hundred natural history specimens donated from Rio Janeiro by the Counsel General Condy Raquet, Esq.; as well as Dorfeuille's own extensive collection of Egyptian antiquities, foreign and domestic birds and Western amphibians. The collections had been further enhanced through the purchase of American antiquities, extraneous fossils as well as minerals from the cabinet of the late Mr. John D. Clifford, of Lexington. Although it is uncertain how Dorfeuille acquired the funds to expand the collection, it is possible that he obtained some money from the sale of the "arctic elephant bones" which had been

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\(^{13}\)The minerals were arranged according to Parker Cleaveland's system. Drake and Mansfield's contemporary reports indicate that each specimen was labelled and supplied with its appropriate description cut from the pages of that distinguished mineralogist. Drake and Mansfield, *Cincinnati in 1826*, 45.
acquired in Kentucky by the Museum’s excavating trip. It is also possible that Dorfeuille simply decided to acquire objects in the hopes that these artifacts would generate great interest from the public. Rather than curtailing the operating expenses, Dorfeuille may have decided that generating additional revenue was the preferred solution to the Museum’s financial problems. New objects in the Museum’s collections might provide new paying customers to the institution.

An inventory of the Western Museum’s holdings, completed in 1826, indicates that its collection was comprised of 100 mammoth and Arctic elephant bones, 50 megalonyx bones, 33 quadrupeds, 500 birds, 200 fishes, 5000 invertebrates, 1000 fossils, 3500 minerals, 325 botanical specimens, 3125 medals, coins and tokens, 150 Egyptian and 215 American antiquities, 112 colored microscopical designs, cosmographic, optic and prismoramic views of American scenery and buildings, the tattooed head of a New Zealand chief and about 500 specimens of miscellaneous (and unspecified) curiosities. “The Museum also contain[ed] several specimens of the fine arts. Among them, a fine transparency, representing the Battle of New Orleans, executed by a lady of this city. It also has an elegant organ. The whole neatly and scientifically arranged, in an extensive suite of rooms, on the corner of Main and Second Streets.”

It is clear from this description that despite the inclusion of some “curiosities,” the Museum was valued by its contemporaries for its scientific arrangements and scholarly content.

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14 Dunlop, “Curiosities too Numerous to Mention,” 532.

Drake and Mansfield's description of the holdings of the Museum may be contrasted with a very different and more amusing account of its collections. The following poetic offering was published in the *Cincinnati Literary Gazette* in 1824. Signed only by the letter "P" and set to the then-popular tune *Songs of Shepherds in Rustical Roundelay*, the poem bears reprinting in its entirety as it presents a comprehensive picture of both the contents and methods of presentation in the Museum. Dorfeuille himself proudly used parts of the poem in many of the later paid advertisements for the institution.

Wend hither, ye members of polished society—
   Ye who the bright phantoms of pleasure pursue—
To see of strange objects the endless variety,
   Monsieur Dorfeuille will expose to your view.
For this fine collection, which courts your inspection,
   Was brought to perfection by his skill and lore.
When those who projected and should have protected
   Its interests, neglected to care for it more.

Here are pictures, I doubt not, as old as Methusalem.
   But done in what place I can't say, nor by whom;
Some of which represent certain saints of Jerusalem,
   And others, again, monks of Venice and Rome;
Old Black Letter pages of far-distant ages,
   Which puzzled the sages to read and translate,
And manuscripts musty, coins clumsy and rusty,
   Of which time, untrustly, has not kept the date.

Lo, here is a cabinet of great curiosities,
   Procured from the Redmen, who once were our foes:
Unperished tokens of dire animosities,
   Darts, tomahawks, war-cudgels, arrows and bows,
And bone-hooks for fishes and old earthen dishes,
   To please him who wishes o'er such things to pore.
Superb wampum sashes, and mica-slate glasses,
   Which doubtless the lasses much valued of Yore.

Lo, here are true mummies of antiquity,
   Disentombed from the shores of the Red Sea or Nile:
But now they look disconsolate, ghastly and ricketty.
And grin at the visitors more than they smile:
And true Pompey-head too, brought from its clay to
This country, is said to be here `mong the rest;
And scrawls hieroglyphic, of learning prolific,
Which men scientific may con till they’re blest.

Here panthers, wolves, catamounts, glare on you spitefully-
You scarce can admit even now they are dead;
While deer, foxes, squirrels, all look at you frightfully.
And seem to fly from you, as once they had fled:
The sly hare and rabbit, and mink cross and crabbed,
And porcupine jagged, with quills pointing out;
And seen through glass-cases, while mice with blithe faces,
Half hid in by places, are peeping about.

Lo, here are large teeth of the gigantic Mastodon
Which were dug from the earth with much labour and cost;
And a mighty great tusk, with small pieces plastered on
To fill up the places of those which were lost:
And hung up above all, are fishes round and oval.
With snouts like a shovel, or handsaw, or spade;
And seem t’have a notion, to try the same motion
Which once in the ocean or rivers they made.

As thick and as bright as the stars in the firmament,
Here birds of all sizes and sorts catch the eye;
And tho’ on the stumps, limbs, and trees they are permanent,
They still seem to warble, to look, and to fly.
Here `mong the thick bushes sit mock-birds and thrushes,
As above the hawk rushes to seize on his prey:
Here the lark and the swallow, and birds red and yellow,
In notes shrill or mellow, seem piping away.

Here in a bottle of spirits, you see things unnatural-
Young pigs with two heads, and young lambs with eight feet;
Here too you see snakes that seem to run at you all,
To dart their sharp fangs in the first one they meet;
Here lizards seem crawling, and centipedes sprawling,
And things I can’t haul in this crampt sort of rhyme;
While down on the floor there, of turtles a score there
Are creeping, and roar there the bull-frogs sublime.
Lo, here are glass-boxes with strange, funny things in 'em—
Wasps, grasshoppers, spiders, cockroaches, and flies,
Which, tho' dead and moveless, with many brass pins in 'em,
Seem to watch all your motions with sharp twinkling eyes;
And smooth glossy moths too, that nibble your cloths too,
And which appear loth to be coop't up so tight;
And crickets that spring so, and locusts that sing so,
And fire-flies that fling so their stars to the night.

But here I must stop, without naming a fourth of 'em,
And request you to come, and observe for yourselves
The number, variety, neatness and worth of 'em—
All which make a fairyland peopled with elves:
While the mighty Magician of these scenes Elysian
Is plain to your vision the moment you come:
And if you have leisure, and taste for true pleasure,
You'll find him a treasure - nor care to go home.¹⁶

From the beginning of the poem, Dorfeuille is presented as both the saviour of the collection and the magician who has animated the previously-neglected Museum. It is clear from the lyrics that the collections, enhanced by Dorfeuille, contained many objects of unspecified age and unknown provenance. The state of the "manuscripts musty" and the "coins, clumsy and rusty," suggest that the sheer age, and not the condition, of the objects was of interest to the public. The Museum proudly displayed its collection of Egyptian mummies; these held significant interest to the public as the first mummy to tour America had just recently arrived on the continent. The extensive natural history collection appears to have been displayed in traditional glass cases to protect the specimens from the touches of the visitors. No doubt, the cases served to protect the visitors as well for the specimens were stuffed with arsenic! The animal poses were sufficiently life-like that they could frighten the

unsuspecting viewer. However, the realism of the bird mounts attracts the most attention of “P”. The reality of the poses was enhanced by the use of branches and tree limbs to create the sense of a natural habitat. This exhibit technique appears to be derivative of Peale’s well-established efforts in Philadelphia. Preserved teratological specimens, in contrast with the other specimens, are set apart in a setting as unnatural as their appearances - in alcohol-filled bottles. Then, as now, the natural history specimens were out-numbered by the sheer total of insects on view. These were presented in glass cases and held in place with brass pins. The song, which identifies the Museum as a place for leisure activities, does not stress the educational opportunities of a visit. Rather, it begins and ends with a call to sophisticated citizens. “ye phantoms of polished society” and those who possess a “taste for true pleasure” to visit the neatly arranged, valuable and extensive collection assembled by the “mighty Magician of these scenes Elysian.”

Although a city ordinance of 1824 had banned marbles, quoit pitching, kite flying, football, hoop rolling, and shinney on Sundays, numerous leisure and learning activities were available to the residents of Cincinnati throughout the week. Both Letton’s Museum and the Western Museum provided regular lectures illustrated by their own collections, but they were by no means alone. Other itinerant lecturers advertised in the local newspapers. Among them was a Mr. Goodacre, who in the spring of 1824, offered an eight-part lecture on astronomy in the Cincinnati Theatre. Illustrated with auxiliary diagrams, the cost of the series was $5.00 in the lower boxes, and $3.00 for seating in the pit or lower tier. Individual

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17Aaron, *Cincinnati: Queen City of the West*, 103.
lectures were priced at $1.00 for higher quality seating while general admission could be purchased for twenty-five cents. The program was offered on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. In the late spring and early summer, Letton’s Museum offered a course of lectures by the Reverend Samuel Robinson exploring ancient history, including the founding of the Assyrian Empire, the Phoenician kingdom, the history of Egypt (a popular lecture which was repeated), as well as the Medo-Persian Empire. Evening lectures were offered on Wednesday, Thursday as well as Saturday. By the end of June, Reverend Robinson had completed a lecture series which explored the astronomical arguments in support of Natural Theology. His lectures appear to have been especially appreciated, as they inspired the following verse printed in the *National Republican and Ohio Political Register*:

> Yes, Robinson, before thy mighty mind,<br>  In grand review the world seems passing on:<br> Thy memory excels all human kind.<br>  And Clio hails thee her adopted son.<br> Her ample pages once before thee spread,<br> Are in that iron memory enchained;<br> Thou seem’st familiar with the ages fled,<br>  And all the monarchs that have ever reigned.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{19}}\)

Museum subscriptions at the Western Museum lapsed on September 1st. and in the first week of September, 1826. Dorfeuille placed a large advertisement to encourage renewals. He informed the public that his attention "has been constantly directed to the enlargement and improvement of the establishment; his endeavours have been unremitted to render it an honor to our city and country, and subservient to the cause of science; - It may be

\(^{\text{18}}\text{LHCG, April 28, 1826.}\\

\(^{\text{19}}\text{Quoted in Aaron, Cincinnati, 132-133.}
unnecessary to add, that those exertions will be continued.” The collection had been greatly increased by the addition of the cabinet of Mr. Clifford of Lexington, Kentucky whose extensive cabinet of shells, minerals, fossils and Indian antiquities had been offered for sale upon his death and had been acquired by the Museum. Dorfeuille proudly noted that “with this addition the Mineralogical Cabinet of the Museum will be rendered nearly complete, and inferior to one only in the UNITED STATES; the collection of FOSSILS INFERIOR TO NO OTHER: and here the lovers of those delightful branches of Natural History, will be enabled to gratify their taste and curiosity. The Indian Antiquities, together with those already in the Museum, will render this collection more complete and interesting than any extant.” The approaching winter lecture series which would cover not only natural history but also various historical and literary subjects was promoted. Dorfeuille announced that he would “fain assure his subscribers and the public at large, that he will use every opportunity to render the Museum more and more interesting to the lover of nature and science, and amusing to those who are gratified by the sight of numerous and various curiosities. The establishment is a permanent one - The Proprietor's only objects are to promote the cause of learning and science, and render the Western Museum an ORNAMENT to our flourishing city, and an HONOR to the state in which it is located.”

For its part, Letton's Museum continued an exploration of history throughout the fall of 1826 offering courses on the Macedonian Empire, Greece, and the Roman Empire. At that time, the Museum occupied two spacious halls in the second and third stories of the brick

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20 *LHCG*, September 1 and September 5, 1826.
building at Fourth and Main streets. The entire upper hall consisted of displays of wax figures while 200 birds, 40 animals, 2,000 minerals, 50 mammoth bones, as well as Indian antiquities and shells were exhibited on the lower level. Contemporary records indicate that Letton’s Museum was popular with the local citizens and boasted a membership of 300.\textsuperscript{21}

Throughout the winter of 1827, Dorfeuille offered lectures on historical subjects which were supplemented with “COSMORAMA” presentations based on the antiquities of Rome. While both the Western and Letton’s Museums addressed the past in their lecture series, they were careful not to fragment the local audience any more than necessary. Their events were offered on different nights of the week, enabling the devotees of history to spend two evenings savouring the past. In February, Dorfeuille advertised that the last and tenth exhibition of the “COSMORAMA” would take place - these depictions would include the waterworks of Philadelphia, an interior view of Cincinnati and its local attractions, the principal square of New Orleans, as well as the “glorious” battle of New Orleans. On Saturday evening, a special viewing of a prospective of New York made by female artist of the city would be exhibited.\textsuperscript{22}

Throughout the spring, Letton’s Museum offered a series of lectures dealing with the Crusades, the Empire of Charlemagne, and phrenology. The renowned Caleb Atwater lectured on the general character as well as the present and future prospects of the people of Ohio. Atwater, one of the most respected scientists of his generation, was to write later that in

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Greve, Centennial History of Cincinnati I}: 538.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Saturday Evening Chronicle}, February 17, 1827.
Cincinnati "there are two museums, in either of which more knowledge of the natural history of the Western States can be obtained in a day than can be obtained in any other place in a year. These collections are very well arranged, and kept by persons of taste, science and politeness. No traveler of learning should ever pass through the city without calling to see them both, and having once seen them, he will never neglect to see them as often as he visits the place." While Dunlop has dismissed Letton's Museum as "a token collection of birds and bones enlivened by a sizeable array of wax figures of popular heroes," contemporary accounts of it were more consistent with Atwater's assessment.

In March of 1827, Dorfeuille informed the public and "the lovers of the Fine Arts in particular," that he was preparing a number of wax figures which would be put up "in such a manner as not to disgrace even a scientific establishment." Among the important personages to be depicted were John Quincey Adams, Commodore Porter, Lorenzo Dow, the celebrated John Porter, Miss Patterson (commonly known as the American beauty who was the wife of Jerome Buonaparte), Charlotte Corday in the act of murdering the tyrant Marat, as well as Jeffrey Hudson, the English dwarf. The lengthy advertisement, which makes a number of now-incomprehensible references, appears to be a critique of existing modes of representation in wax figures and a proclamation of the superiority of Dorfeuille's groupings.

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23 Quoted in Greve, *Centennial History*, 555.

24 Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834) was the tall and lanky Methodist evangelist who travelled and preached throughout the Mississippi valley. His distinctive, unkempt appearance and renowned four-hour sermons which left listeners exhausted, made him a particularly appealing model for a wax figure. In 1804, at a Methodist camp meeting, Dow had made the startling claim that he had the latest authentic news from Hell. Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 103.
Dorfeuille was not interested in describing how the figures would be presented. Rather, through a series of quotes from unacknowledged sources, Dorfeuille described how they would *not* appear. In particular, our President “shall not be seated in a chair, with his head thrown back, as in the attitude of presenting his chin to the barber. Neither shall there be found an illiberal distance between his eye brows and chin.” These references, now obscure, must have been readily recognizable to their contemporary audience, possibly even as critiques printed by the local press of the figures in Letton’s Museum. Dorfeuille concluded the advertisement with this provocative review of the state of the art of waxworks in the city.

Indeed, should a committee of our best artists be appointed to report on the present state of the fine arts in Cincinnati, I venture to assert part of it would stand thus: “Elbows within three inches of the wrist - knees skulking behind the legs - calves hanging upon shins - hips dislocated - thighs crooked - shoulders fore and aft. Oh, ‘tis horrible! most horrible!!”

On April 10, Dorfeuille announced that the Museum had expanded to include an additional room which housed the newly completed wax figures. Among them were Charlotte Corday, Zera Colburn (the astonishing American youth), Catherine, the Empress of Russia, the American Beauty, and Charlotte Temple with her infant.

The critical response to these new additions was positive. An editorial in the *Cincinnati Chronicle and Literary Gazette*, dated a few days after the opening of the exhibit,

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25*CCLG*, March 2, 1827.

26Zera Colburn was a child prodigy who had toured America demonstrating her uncanny ability to calculate mathematical sums. A wax figure depicting the young child was a popular feature of many contemporary American museums.

27*CCLG*, April 10, 1827.
extolled its virtues, indicating that the figures were “executed in superior style, and dressed with great taste and elegance.” Although several figures were yet to be added (the groupings would be completed when the appropriately sumptuous costumes and decorations were finished), the populace at large was urged to “not fail to remunerate Mr. Dorfeuille for the exertions made and expenses incurred in contributing to their instruction and amusement. The small sum of 25 cents only, is demanded, for a complete view of the whole museum, including more than fourteen thousand curiosities specific of nature and of art.”

In late June of that month, Cincinnati residents were able to view a three-thousand-year-old Egyptian sarcophagus at the corner of Main and Upper Market Streets, as well as two life-size paintings, one depicting a “MANIAC,” and the other, an Anaconda. In addition to these compelling sights, “Miller’s celebrated ‘Wax Venus,’ as large as life and pronounced by gentlemen connoisseurs to be the handsomest one ever executed in wax,” could be viewed along with a grouping depicting the death of General Moreau at the battle of Dresden. “The wound on his leg, together with the head of a Russian soldier, are exposed to view.” Admittance was twenty-five cents for adults, children half price. (It is perhaps not surprising that the more gruesome aspects of the wax figures were emphasized in the advertisements. In September, an editorial in the Saturday Chronicle chastised the public for the large numbers in attendance at the public hanging of the Albany killer Strang. A crowd of upwards of thirty thousand witnessed the event. In particular, the editors were appalled that

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28 CCLG, April 13, 1827.

29 CCLG, June 22, 1827.
"a large population of this gaping crowd were female" and raised their "feeble voice against future manifestations of such lamentably bad taste."\(^{30}\)

In July, Letton's was promoting its own "COSMORAMA" which depicted the battle of New Orleans, a view of Jerusalem, the ancient ruins on Mount Calvary, and the Holy Sepulchre, Kind David's Palace, in addition to a number of other religious scenes.

Although the paid advertisements for both Letton's and the Western Museum emphasized the wax figures and additions to their collections, the permanent science exhibits received little public promotion in the newspapers. These specimens did, however, continue to impress the local scientific community. Timothy Flint complimented both museums in the first volume of his *The Western Monthly Review* published in the summer of 1827.

In Letton's are shown nearly 150 species of the class 'aves' in fine presentations, which are, as they ought to be, chiefly taken from the splendid families of the woods and waters of the Mississippi Valley...

Dorfeuille's Museum is a rich study for the naturalist... The number of specimens of minerals, fossils, and quartzes is very great...

The case of remains from the Indian mounds is to a thoughtful mind by far the most striking part of the show of this museum. There are skulls of different individuals of different tribes... Among the variety of implements, trinkets, vases and urns, large and splendid sea shells were dug from the mounds... There are, we should suppose, at least one hundred remains of this kind, that are sufficiently striking to arrest attention, and a stranger, passing through this city, could nowhere find more food for solemn musing and intelligent conversations with the past, than here.\(^{31}\)

\(^{30}\) *Saturday Chronicle*, September 22, 1827.

Chapter Six

The Invisible Girl

In March 1828, Dorfeuille began to advertise a forthcoming attraction - "The Invisible Girl". This presentation marked a new stage in the commercial development of the Western Museum - a giant step into the world of live, popular entertainment. "The Invisible Girl" was neither a display nor a theatrical presentation but what one would now call a multimedia performance. It was not, as some have claimed, Dorfeuille’s invention, nor was it "like everything that would follow it at the Museum, a sham and a hoax. As such, it signalled a permanent reversal in the Museum’s attitude toward its audience, earlier imagined as culturally aware and interested, now seen as ignorant and easily fooled."¹ For "The Invisible Girl" had been a staple of the English entertainment world since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Wordsworth mentions an "Invisible Girl" in his poem Bartholomew Fair and a detailed description of a similar presentation can be found in the English artist Joseph Farington’s diary of 1803.²

It is clear from the advertisements that "The Invisible Girl" also marked a change in Dorfeuille’s promotional style. Although poetry had been used in promoting the Museum in the past, it had been composed specifically for the Museum or about it. Now Dorfeuille had turned to one of the beloved English romantic poets, Thomas Moore. It is ironic that this particular poem was selected as it was composed by Moore in defence of the illusion created

¹Dunlop, “Curiosities too Numerous to Mention,” 532.
²Altick, Shows of London. 352.
by "The Invisible Girl" and as a rejection of the scientific revelation of how the illusion was sustained. It may well have reflected Dorfeuille's own thoughts about the continued difficulties in maintaining a successful enterprise devoted to scientific endeavours and his admission that visitors responded with more enthusiasm to illusion and fiction than to science and the rational world. (Moore's poem ends with these lines: "-no, Science, to you/I have long bid a last and a careless adieu:/Still flying from Nature to study her laws./And dulling delight by exploring its cause./You forget how superior, for mortals below./Is the fiction they dream to the truth that they know.")

Dorfeuille's first advertisement introduced the forthcoming exhibit and enticed the public with the following stanza from Moore:

Try to persuade me, thou dear little sprite,
That you are not a daughter of Ether and light,
Nor have any concerns, with those fanciful forms,
That dance upon Rainbows, or ride upon storms;
That in short you're a woman; your lip and your breast
As mortal as ever were parted or press'd.

Dorfeuille promoted "The Invisible Girl" as an "amusing philosophical wonder". At no time did he claim that she was his invention; in fact, he capitalized on the fact that one such exhibit had "a few years since excited the admiration of every portion of Society, attracted crowds of fashion and taste to the audience of this mysterious." The oracle was to be available only two hours every day, from three to five o'clock in the afternoon. Although the spectral vision was not yet ready to receive visitors, Dorfeuille's advertisement insisted that children would not be admitted.³

³CCLG, March 28, 1828.
The exhibit opened to great public acclaim on the 12th of April. Dorfeuille triumphantly proclaimed that “science and taste have been equally consulted” in the development and presentation of “The Invisible Girl.” Groups of twelve people were admitted into a darkened room which had been decorated and painted by Mr. Hervieu, one of the “the most accomplished artists who has ever visited our country.” The decor of the room capitalized upon the current interest in all things Egyptian and was painted to simulate the room in which “the candidate for initiation in the Egyptian Mysteries was subjected to his incipient trials.” Adding to the sense of foreboding and mystery in the chamber was a wax figure grouping of Shakespeare’s weird sisters returning to the cauldron of Hecate with the various ingredients for their horrible incantation. Each visitor was permitted to pose three questions to the unseen oracle or “Invisible Girl”. Her responses, offered in one of several foreign languages, appeared to emanate from every part of the room. Cincinnatians were delighted with the show and it continued at the Western Museum for two months.

Dorfeuille’s advertisements exploited the mysterious appearance of the room and the curious ability of the oracle to respond to the visitors’ queries. “In the centre of the room is a cloud, perfectly pervious to the sight, from which a female arm projects, holding gracefully a small glass trumpet; the whole is entirely unconnected with any part of the wall or ceiling.”

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4CCLG. April 12, 1828.

5It is probable that the trumpet was part of the mechanism which conveyed the sound to the hidden oracle. In England, india-rubber tubes, threaded through hollow standing frames served to convey the questions to the hidden “Invisible Girl” in the next room; the answer was returned by the same tube. A concealed hole in decorated partitions enabled the individual to see the audience. Altick, Shows of London, 352.
In much smaller font, Dorfeuille indicated that due to the huge costs of preparing the space, even Museum subscribers would be charged admission. Only parties consisting of twelve people were to be admitted at a time. Three questions could be posed by each visitor. If no one else was waiting for a consultation, the number of questions posed would increase to six per person. The replies, offered in French, Italian, Latin, Greek or English astounded the local populace and made it the sensation of Cincinnati. The success of the exhibit prompted Dorfeuille to rethink the exclusion of children: in subsequent advertisements it was noted that children would be admitted - not at the reduced rate commonly in place but for the same price of admission as adults. Due to the nature of the presentation, Dorfeuille's advertisements stressed that the "profoundest silence" was to be observed by visitors.

Subsequent advertisements relied on other stanzas from Moore's poem:

Sweet spirit of mystery! How could I love,
In the wearisome ways I am fated to rove.
To have you forever invisibly nigh,
Inhaling forever your song and your sigh:
Mid the crowds of the world and the murmurs of care,
I might sometimes converse with my nymph of the air,
And turn with disgust from the clamorous crew.
To steal in the pause, one whisper from you.ª

"The Invisible Girl" was the beginning of Dorfeuille's fruitful and highly successful collaboration with a number of newcomers to Cincinnati - Frances Trollope, her son Henry, their companion the French artist Auguste Hervieu, and most likely, the recently transplanted English museum proprietor, William Bullock. As dramatic and successful as "The Invisible Girl" was, she would not rival the popularity of the exhibit which this group would offer

ªCCLG, April 12, 1828.
next. It was an exhibit which would remain the definitive expression of the Western Museum for the next thirty-seven years of its existence - the Infernal Regions. The story of how this popular and widely imitated exhibit came into being has been of interest to historians for some time. Indeed the story of the Western Museum is, in the historical literature, forever intertwined with the spectacular Infernal Regions or Dorfeuille's Hell as it was known locally. But in order to understand why it was created and what ensured its appeal, we must briefly consider Cincinnati in the late 1820s.

Following the recession of the 1820s, Cincinnati had continued to grow at a remarkable pace; by 1830, its population stood at 24,831. This sizable population swelled even further when the river was navigable - immigrants travelling to the interior of the continent disembarked here to purchase the necessary supplies for their arduous trek west. Cincinnati was also the stopping place for affluent New Englanders wintering in the southern states as well as the West Indies. The city's rapid rate of expansion and the extensive river traffic created "an aspect of activity, enterprise, and substantial prosperity". Both Letton's and the Western Museum competed for attention in this crowded milieu but they vied with not only one another but with a large number of itinerant amusements.

In addition to the travelling displays of live animals and human anomalies as well as the panoramas, there were by the late 1820s, several permanently-organized local societies which presented similar programs of edification and entertainment for the public. These other

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7Aaron, *Cincinnati: Queen City of the West*, 195.

institutions, often short-lived, challenged the abilities of Dorfeuille and Letton to attract an audience. The boundaries between these institutions were blurred and permeable; they too presented lecture series, scientific presentations as well as instruction, often by the same presenters. Indeed, by 1826, classical academies, female seminaries, evening and technical schools, music and art academies as well as other kinds of private educational institutions numbered about fifty.\(^9\)

The museum's role in providing a unique didactic experience had been usurped by the growing movements in popular education which were provided by lyceums, mechanical institutes and various more specialized societies. The Franklin Society, a debating association, was founded in 1825 and claimed approximately 100 members who met regularly to debate the critical issues of the day. A Society for Mutual Instruction in Natural Science was established in 1827. Its aim was to extend public knowledge of nature through the exploration of natural history specimens and thereby improve the economic lot of mankind. But the greatest efforts at public education were those of the Lyceum and the Ohio Mechanics Institute. These associations offered an encyclopaedic range of lectures and courses. They developed displays of "philosophical apparatus" and would soon host annual exhibitions of local manufactures.

The Mechanics Institute, established in 1828, was divided into five departments: fine arts; history, literature and moral sciences; languages; mathematics and physical sciences; and operative mechanics. The Institute operated a library and reading room which were open

\(^9\)Ibid., 210.
to its members, and provided courses as well as individual lectures several nights a week. Its lecture series, like the presentations offered under the auspices of Letton's and the Western Museums, explored the life of Mohammed, the French Revolution, phrenology, electromagnetism, the history of sculpture, the English language, optics, as well as the properties of steel, to name but a few topics. The Cincinnati Lyceum, established in 1830, offered an equally comprehensive lecture series examining civil history, the conquest of Mexico, geology, Samothracian mysteries, and popular superstitions. An annual membership cost $2.00 and entitled the individual to free access to the lectures. Membership was divided into committees which dealt with natural history; antiquities; botany, geology, and manufactures; the library; and ways and means. Most of the committees were entrusted with forming their own cabinets of instructive objects. In its first year of organization the Lyceum attracted a membership base of seventy-five. During the 1831 season between seventy and eighty members attended the classes and lectures, and by 1833, membership had tripled to 270. Two-thirds were practical mechanics. The wide range of courses available to them enabled members to take advantage of educational opportunities denied to their class. In contrast, the Cincinnati Lyceum appeared to attract the upper levels of local society although its annual fee was similar to that of the Institute. The Lyceum was presented as a "genteel society for the diffusion of knowledge."  

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10 Ibid., 135.

11 Ibid., 133.

12 CCLG, November 9, 1833.
Nor could the Museums lay claim to being the only places where art works could be viewed in the city. In 1828, Frederick Franks opened a gallery of fine arts on the southwest corner of Main and Upper Market Streets above Allen & Sonntag’s Drug Store. Here enormous, original paintings such as *Napoleon and His Army Crossing the Alps*, depicted on a canvas 336 square feet in size, the *Battle of Bunker Hill and the Death of General Warren* and Trumball’s *Declaration of Independence* which on a 252 square foot canvas offered a full length portrait of each of the signers of document were installed. Franks also featured cosmoramic tableaux and a crystallogamy representing the businesses and activities of Cincinnati’s downtown.\(^\text{13}\) Perhaps the most fascinating of the depictions was a “curious Metamorphoses of WASHINGTON, LAFAYETTE and BOLIVAR, who change from one to the other, as you change your point of sight.”\(^\text{14}\)

In September 1828, the inaugural exhibit of the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, founded by Frederick Eckstein, was opened. The European-born Eckstein was the son of Johann Eckstein, court painter to Frederick the Great and his successor, Frederick William. The younger Eckstein had been trained in lithography, sculpture and painting by his father. For the first public exhibit of the Cincinnati Academy, Eckstein had selected more than one hundred paintings by foreign and local artists for display. In addition to the paintings, there were engravings, miniatures, sculptures, models of inventions as well as improvements of inventions made by local mechanics. Among those displaying their works were the local

\(^{13}\)Greve. *Centennial History* I: 643-644.

artists Hiram Powers, Samuel Lee, and the recently-arrived Auguste Hervieu. The much anticipated Academy had been planned for a number of years. As early as 1826, Drake and Mansfield had written about its formation and its need to find apartments suitable for this venture. The Academy’s eighteen member board of trustees included some of the most prominent men in the city - John P. Foote, John Locke, and Luman Watson. The board hoped to establish an annual art exhibit featuring the works of local and foreign artists. Eventually this program would be expanded to a lecture series and courses. However, despite the illustrious board and the scope of the first exhibit, the Academy’s work was short-lived. It was forced to close its first exhibition after six weeks. Only 150 people had attended the show; their admission fees failed to cover the expenses of the doorkeeper or the candles which illuminated the rooms. The fate of the Academy was described in a letter to the editor of the Cincinnati Chronicle:

It is well known that some enterprising but deluded persons have been for the last year, laboring to establish in this city an Academy of Fine Arts, and that the first exhibition has just ended. ...and yet such is the commendable taste of our worthy citizens, that the Academy has been closed for the want of sufficient patronage to pay the door keeper, and furnish tallow candles to light it up in the evenings. After having been open six weeks, it is computed that not more than one hundred and fifty of the 20,000 inhabitants of Cincinnati, have visited it, and perhaps one half of that number were induced to do so, because they were, in one way and another, admitted without the payment of their twenty-five cents. On the other hand, hundreds and hundreds of persons, night after night, for months past, have visited the Circus to witness the feats of a clown riding at full speed with his head on the saddle and his heels in the air.

Eckstein fumed that Cincinnatians would rather attend a circus than view the art works he

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15Aaron, Cincinnati: Queen City of the West, 254.

16CCLG, December 20, 1828.
had selected. The promise of a gallery devoted to only art would remain unfulfilled for a number of years due to the lack of public interest and financial support.

The inability of this undertaking to survive underscores some of the difficulties Letton and Dorfueille also encountered. Not only did their Museums exist in a competitive cultural environment, the local citizens had very definite ideas about the types of artistic endeavours which were worthy of support. In general, Cincinnatians preferred exact representations over landscapes. Panoramas and paintings were judged by their newsreel or moral values rather than on the basis of artistic merits. Accuracy of delineation was a critical criterion of the success of an art work; Cincinnatians were a literal-minded audience.

Frederick Marryat, visiting in the 1830s, noted that Americans were pragmatic people who placed little value on the quality of artistic production. Instead, they were interested and evaluated art on the basis of the amount of time it took to create it.¹⁷ In conversation with a German painter residing in America, Marryat learned that

...Americans in general do not estimate genius. They come to me and ask what I want for my pictures, and I tell them. Then they say: "How long did it take you to paint it? I answer: "So many days." Well, then they calculate and say: "If it took you only so many days, you ask so many dollars a day for your work; you ask a great deal too much; you ought to be content with so much per day, and I will give you that." So that, thought I, invention and years of study account for nothing with these people.¹⁸

Although the local press celebrated Cincinnati’s urbane environment and

¹⁷No doubt Dorfeuille’s advertisements with their frequent reference to the length of time it took to create many of the exhibits and spectacles offered at the Western Museum were an attempt to exploit this prevailing attitude.

sophistication, visitors from Europe were shocked to find a marked absence of amusements in the city. Accustomed to the diverse and sophisticated entertainments offered in London.

Frances Trollope commented on the cultural void within which she found herself:

I never saw any people who appeared to live so much without amusement as the Cincinnatians. Billiards are forbidden by law, so are cards. To sell a pack of cards in Ohio subjects the seller to a penalty of fifty dollars. They have no public balls, excepting, I think, six, during the Christmas holidays. They have no concerts... They have a theatre, which is, in fact, the only public amusement of this triste little town; but they seem to care little about it...19

Nor was her evaluation new or exaggerated. As early as 1815, Daniel Drake had proudly written that:

...wealth is moreover pretty equally distributed, and the prohibition of slavery diffuses labor - while the disproportionate immigration of young men, with the facility of obtaining sustenance, leads to frequent and hasty marriages, and places many females in the situation of matrons, who would of necessity be servants in older countries. The rich being thus compelled to labor, find but little time for indulgence in luxury and extravagance; their ostentation is restricted, and industry is made to become a characteristic value.

It need scarcely be added, that we have as yet no epidemic amusements among us. cards were fashionable in town for several years after the Indian war that succeeded its settlement; but it seems that they have been since banished from the gentler circles, and are harbored only in the vulgar grog-shop or the nocturnal gaming room. Dancing is not infrequent among the wealthier classes; but it is never carried to excess. Theatrical exhibitions, both by amateurs and itinerants, have occurred at intervals for a dozen years...20

Even in the mid 1830s, similar attitudes to leisure and work struck the foreign visitor as unusual and worthy of commentary. Michel Chevalier, visiting America between 1833 and 1835 on behalf of the French government, noted that:

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19Trollope. Domestic Manners of the Americans ed. Larson, 43.

20Daniel Drake. “Natural and Statistical View, or Picture of Cincinnati and the Miami County (1815),” reprinted in Physician to the West, 100.
...those who people this panorama live in the midst of plenty; they are industrious, sober, frugal, thirsting after knowledge, and if, with a very few exceptions, they are entirely strangers to the delicate pleasures and elegant manners of the refined society of our European capitals, they are equally ignorant of its vices, dissipation, and follies.21

In particular, Chevalier was struck by the prevailing attitudes to work and industry.

The moral aspect of Cincinnati is delightful in the eyes of him who prefers work to everything else, with whom work can take the place of everything else. But whoever has a taste for pleasure and display, whoever needs occasional relaxation from business in gaiety and amusement, would find this beautiful city with its picturesque surroundings an impossible place to stay. It would be still more so for a man of leisure, desirous of devoting a large part of his time to the cultivation of the fine arts and the rest to pleasure. For such a man, indeed, it would not be possible to live here. He would find himself denounced on political grounds, because men of leisure are looked upon in the United States as so many steppingstones to aristocracy, and anathematized by religion, for the various sects, however much they differ on other points, all agree in condemning pleasure, luxury, gallantry, the fine arts themselves.22

As critical as Chevalier was of these attitudes, he recognized that they were necessary in a young, emerging nation. Although the typical citizen appeared to lack the capacity for pleasure and preferred "that which pays to that which costs," Chevalier praised the Americans for

Without this devotion to business, without this constant direction of the energies of the mind to useful enterprise, without this indifference to pleasure, without those political and religious notions which imperiously repress all passions but those whose objects are business, production, and gain, can anyone suppose that the Americans would ever achieved their great industrial power?23

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22Ibid., 199-200.

23Ibid., 201-202.
Disdainful and mistrusting of art, and devoid of the pleasures of the imagination, the local populace prided itself on the importance of its religious beliefs. The trenchant Mrs. Trollope was surprised to determine the extent to which religious thought and activity filled the city. "It is in the churches and chapels of the town that the ladies are to be seen in full costume; and I am tempted to believe that a stranger from the continent of Europe would be inclined, on first reconnoitring the city, to suppose that the places of worship were the theatres and cafés of the place."  

But what captivated her attention even more was the style of preaching which appeared to dominate the city, regardless of denomination. At a revival meeting held in the city, she observed the Presbyterian service, and noted that:

The priest who stood in the middle was praying; the prayer was extravagantly vehement, and offensively familiar in the expression: when this ended, a hymn was sung, and then another priest took the centre place, and preached. The sermon had considerable eloquence, but of a frightful kind. The preacher described, with ghastly minuteness, the last feeble fainting moments of human life, and then the gradual progress of decay after death, which he followed through every process up to the last loathsome stage of decomposition. Suddenly changing his tone, which had been that of sober accurate description, into the shrill voice of horror, he bent forward his head, as if to gaze on some object beneath the pulpit....The device was certainly a happy one for giving effect to his description of hell. No image that fire, flame, brimstone, molten lead, or red-hot pincers could supply; with flesh, nerves, and sinews quivering under them, was omitted. The perspiration ran in streams from the face of the preacher; his eyes rolled, his lips were covered with foam, and every feature had the deep expression of horror it would have borne, had he, in truth, been gazing at the scene he described. The acting was excellent.

These observations were not unique to Frances Trollope's critical pen. Other visitors

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to America were often overwhelmed by the role and importance of religion in the lives of its citizens. America was at that time in the throes of the so-called Second Great Awakening which is often dated from the revival at Cane Ridge on the Kentucky frontier in 1801. Revivalism, with its apocalyptic imagery, intensity of worship, and religious zeal became a permanent feature of religion in the West. This strenuous form of evangelism reached its climax between 1825 and 1837. Harriet Martineau noted that:

> the way in which religion is made an occupation by women, testifies not only to the vacuity which must exist when a mistake is fallen into, but to the vigour with which the religious sentiment would probably be carried into the great objects and occupations of life, is such permitted. I was perpetually struck by this when I saw women braving hurricanes, frost, and snow, to flit from preaching to preaching; and laying out the whole day among visits for prayer and religious excitement, among the poor and sick.

Timothy Flint, writing in 1826, was surprised to find that Cincinnatians had

> the same desire for cultivating psalmody, for settling ministers, and attending upon religious worship; and unfortunately the same disposition to dogmatize, to settle, not only their own faith, but that of their neighbour, and to stand resolutely, and dispute fiercely, for the slightest shade of difference of religious opinion....The people of Cincinnati evince a laudable desire to belong to some religious society....The ministers... were uniformly in the habit of extemporaneous preaching, a custom which, in my judgment, gives a certain degree of effect even to ordinary matter. Their manner...had taken its colouring from the preponderance of Methodists, and the more sensitive character of the people of the south. They did not much affect discussion, but ran at once into the declamatory....There are many institutions that had commenced, and many that were contemplated, whose object was the diffusion of

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religious knowledge, instruction and charity.\textsuperscript{28}

In general, Flint was surprised to find that the settlers of the region

are eager to attend public worship, especially when performed by strangers. This insatiable curiosity, this eagerness for novelty, which is so discouraging to the settled clergy, and which so strongly marks the American people generally, is a passion in this state. The people have an excitability and vivacity, like the French. Unhappily enthusiasm is likely to be fickle.\textsuperscript{29}

Maryatt attended a camp meeting held seven miles away from Cincinnati and was

overwhelmed by the experience. As the praying began, he noted that:

\begin{quote}
As the din increased so did their enthusiasm... It became a scene of Babel: more than twenty men and women were crying out at the highest pitch of their voices and trying apparently to be heard above the others. Every minute the excitement increased; some wrung their hands and called for mercy; some tore their hair; boys laid down crying bitterly, with their heads buried in the straw; there was sobbing almost to suffocation, and hysterics and deep agony. One young man clung to the form, crying: “Satan tears at me, but I would hold fast. Help-help, he drags me down!” It was a scene of horrible agony and despair; and, when it was at its height, one of the preachers came in, and raising his voice high above the tumult, entreated the Lord to receive into his fold those who now repented and would fain return. ...I quitted the spot and hastened away into the forest, for the sight was too painful, too melancholy. Its sincerity could not be doubted, but it was the effect of overexcitement, not of sober reasoning.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Maryatt expressed concern that there was little or no “healthy” religion in America. To him,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28}Timothy Flint, \textit{Recollections of the Last Ten Years. Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeys in the Valley of the Mississippi} (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826), 45-47.
  \item \textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 75-76.
  \item \textsuperscript{30}Maryatt, \textit{A Diary in America}, 242-243. These contemporary accounts did not exaggerate the spirit of the sermons. Clergy were advised to emphasize the more emotional aspects of redemption and salvation as “Mild homilies had no effect, but vivid pictures of hell-fire and damnation contrasted with the happiness and peace of salvation, if used with sufficient dramatic force, would bring the strong man to his knees.” Quoted by Charles A. Johnson, \textit{The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion’s Harvest Time} (Dallas: Southern Methodist Press, 1955), 173.
\end{itemize}
it appeared to be “all excitement.”

I believe it to be more or less the case in all religion in America: for the Americans are a people prone to excitement, not only in their climate, but constitutionally, and it is the caviare of their existence. If it were not so, why is it necessary that revivals should be so continually called forth?...It is not only the ignorant or the foolish, but the enlightened and the educated also, who support and encourage them, either from a consideration of their utility or from that fear, so universal in the United States, of expressing an opinion contrary to the majority. How otherwise could they be introduced once or twice a year into all the colleges - the professors of which are surely most of them men of education and strong mind? Yet such is the fact.31

Even in 1834, long after Fanny Trollope had left Cincinnati, advertisements for a panorama depicting the life of Napoleon reassured the populace that “no religious scruples need prevent anyone from visiting it”.32

Religion in Cincinnati was not only evident in these flamboyant manifestations. The majority of its residents were church-going; many of the principal Christian faiths were represented in the city. Visitors frequently commented upon the number and beauty of the local churches. The importance of the church in everyday life could not be underestimated - religious lectures and debates attracted large numbers of citizens. The radical Robert Owen’s debate with Alexander Campbell lasted nine consecutive days and was attended by thousands.33 Some historians have claimed that religion had a greater and more universal effect on the frontier people of Ohio than education. It served as a unifying element which helped create a sense of community and shared experience. It brought the settlers together. It

31Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, 294-295.

32Cincinnati Chronicle, October 4, 1834.

33Aaron, Cincinnati: Queen City of the West, 173.
enforced moral and social standards, eased the burdens of resettlement, and broke down the isolation of the highly mobile population.\textsuperscript{34} It has been estimated that one in eight Americans belonged to a church in 1835. A much wider circle of people, estimated at seventy-five percent of the American population, attended church regularly. Religious concerns and language were at the forefront of public consciousness, permeating the culture and setting their stamp on the nation.\textsuperscript{35}

Cincinnati, with its religious fervour and beliefs, its demand and appreciation for accuracy and verisimilitude in its artistic production, and its emphasis on moral values, would provide the ideal environment for the exhibit planned by Dorfeuille and his friends. For the Infernal Regions would capitalize upon these prevailing beliefs in a vivid, theatrical, and dramatic fashion.

\textsuperscript{34}Hurt, \textit{The Ohio Frontier}, 313.

\textsuperscript{35}Matthews, \textit{Toward a New Society}, 43.
Chapter Seven

The Creators of The Infernal Regions

It has traditionally been accepted that the Infernal Regions was the product of the fertile imagination of Frances Trollope. This view has prevailed since the publication of Donald Smalley’s 1949 edition of her Domestic Manners of the Americans. But was she really responsible for the exhibit? There is no doubt that Frances Trollope was involved in the operations and exhibits of the Western Museum. It was her multilingual son Henry who performed the role of “The Invisible Girl”. But in her writings, Frances Trollope failed to mention any personal involvement in the Western Museum, preferring instead to disengage herself from both “The Invisible Girl” and the Infernal Regions. She did, however, praise the efforts of Joseph Dorfeuille:

Cincinnati has not many lions to boast, but among them are two museums of natural history; both of these contain many respectable specimens, particularly those of Mr. Dorfeuille, who has, moreover, some highly interesting Indian antiquities. He is a man of taste and science, but a collection formed strictly according to their dictates, would by no means satisfy the western metropolis. The people have a passion for wax figures, and the two museums vie with each other in displaying specimens of this barbarous branch of art. As Mr. Dorfeuille cannot trust to his science for attracting the citizens, he has put his ingenuity into requisition, and this has proved to him the surer aid of the two. He has constructed a pandemonium in an upper story of his museum, in which he has congregated all the images of horror that his fertile fancy could devise. ...terror, astonishment, curiosity, are set in action, and all contribute to make “Dorfeuille’s Hell” one of the most amusing exhibitions imaginable.¹

Although Frances Trollope had an enduring interest and passion for theatre and literature, it is unlikely that she was capable of creating the immensely-successful Infernal Regions

independently. A more likely candidate for this incredible exhibit was another British citizen, who like Frances Trollope, found himself in the vicinity of Cincinnati. Largely ignored by historians and even considered a failure on American shores. William Bullock was one of the most successful showmen in the history of proprietary British museum keepers. His involvement in the Infernal Regions has remained largely unacknowledged. However, an account published in 1921 confirms that he, along with a number of highly talented individuals, was involved in the planning and execution of the Infernal Regions.

Mr. Bullock, the well-known Mexican archaeologist and author, then living in his elegant mansion on the river below Covington, gave a dinner party to this distinguished newcomer, Mrs. Trollope. ...amongst other literati, were Mr. D’Orfeuille, M. Hervieu... and a Mr. Watson from Hartford, Connecticut, the new manufacturer of wood clocks.

Mrs Trollope inquired of Mr Bullock (somewhat of a museum man as well as a scholar) why no one had ever thought of converting Dante’s great picture of ‘Hell’ into a great and successful exhibit. D’Orfeuille bethought himself of the mechanical, not merely the aesthetic, difficulties. This brought Mr. Watson, the mechanic of the party, to the fore. He said that he had a youngster of such rare talents for mechanism that he believed he could do it if anybody could.²

Thus, the remarkable success of the exhibit must be reconsidered as the collaborative effort of a number of now largely-forgotten individuals: Frances Trollope, Auguste Hervieu, William Bullock and Hiram Powers. D’Orfeuille would benefit from the knowledge and understanding of the importance of theatrical presentation of both Frances Trollope and William Bullock. Both brought to Cincinnati the experience based on years of participation in the popular culture of London, then one of the largest cities in the world. From Powers and Hervieu would come the artistic skills which would create the realistic and terrifying

²Charles Anderson described the event to General Durbin Ward in 1835. The letter was printed in the Cincinnati Enquirer August 7, 1921, Sunday Magazine, 14.
environment. Without these individuals, the Western Museum would have passed from view as yet another American museum. With their skills, however, the Museum was ensured a longevity and success that would have surprised all of them. These talented individuals who fortuitously found themselves in Cincinnati at a time when Dorfueille was struggling to survive, require closer examination. As these brief biographical sketches suggest, each brought unique and fascinating experiences and expertise which would culminate in the creation of the Infernal Regions.

**Frances Trollope**

Frances Trollope, if remembered at all, is known as the author of the acerbic *Domestic Manners of the Americans* and as the mother of the successful Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope. She was, however, during her own lifetime, one of the most successful and popular female authors in England. Her writing career began at the age of 53 years, just after her arrival in England from Cincinnati, and was, in fact, stimulated by her experiences in the frontier community. Frances Trollope went on to publish forty-five popular and critically acclaimed novels and four travel books prior to her death in 1857. Born in Bristol in 1779, Frances Milton was the daughter the Reverend William Milton and Mary Gresley. The death of Mary Milton shortly after the birth of their youngest son Henry in 1784, left four young children in their father’s care. It is unlikely that Frances attended school; it is believed that she was tutored by her father who was a graduate of New College, Oxford. Reverend Milton’s interests were far-ranging - he was an amateur scientist and inventor who patented

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improvements in the design of coaches, and was interested in developing techniques to manage the tides of Bristol Harbour.\textsuperscript{4} By early adulthood Frances was proficient in Latin, Italian and French, knew contemporary literature and poetry, and had some knowledge of the plastic arts.\textsuperscript{5} When Reverend Milton remarried in 1801, the family moved to the Heckfield vicarage in the Hampshire deanery of Basingstoke. The twenty-two year old Frances took an active part in the community’s social life. However, she remained aloof from her stepmother (always calling her Mrs Milton). When her younger brother Henry completed his education at Oxford and accepted a position at the War Office in London, Frances and her sister welcomed the opportunity to move with him. For the next five years the young women enjoyed the cultural richness of London. They attended museums, theatres, and read voraciously. Just after her twenty-ninth birthday in 1808, Frances was introduced to their neighbour on Keppel Street, the thirty-four year old barrister, Thomas Anthony Trollope. Their courtship was conducted through correspondence; discussions of the difficulties of translating Latin odes into English and recommendations about current novels soon gave way to jokes and invitations to dinner. By August of the same year Thomas proposed marriage in a letter. The couple married the following May and took up residence in his home on Keppel Street. Dissimilar by nature, they were described by their son Anthony thus:

She [Frances] could dance with other people’s legs, eat and drink with other people’s palates, be proud with the lustre of other people’s finery. ...Even when she was at work, the laughter of those she loved was a pleasure to her. She had much, very much

\textsuperscript{4}Teresa Ransom, \textit{Fanny Trollope: a remarkable life} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 4-5.

\textsuperscript{5}Heineman, \textit{Mrs. Trollope}, 5.
to suffer. ...but of all the people I have known she was the most joyous, or, at any rate, the most capable of joy.  

His father, a brooding, solitary man, elicited the following description:

Happiness, mirth, contentment, pleasant conversation, seemed to fly from before him as if a malevolent spirit emanated from him. And all the time no human being was more innocent of all malevolence towards his fellow creatures; and he was a man who would fain have been loved, and who knew that he was not loved, but knew neither how to manifest his desire for affection nor how to conciliate it.  

The Trollope’s first son Thomas Adolphus was born in April, 1810. The family lived more than comfortably, and perhaps, even lavishly by then-contemporary standards. They had a nurse, several servants, as well as a liveried footman. They entertained extensively.  

Among their close friends were Dr. Nott, the Italian scholar who had served as tutor to Princess Charlotte, and General Guglielmo Pepe, who had defended Venice against the Austrians. Family friend Mary Russell Mitford recalled that Frances “used to be such a Radical that her house in London was perfect emporium of escaped state criminals. I remember asking her at one of her parties who many of her guests would have been shot or guillotined if they had remained in their own country.” Francs’ love of the theatre was instilled in her children from an early age. They attended the theatre often and the children later recalled queuing for six hours to see the legendary actress Mrs. Siddons perform as

6Quoted in Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 6.


8Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 17.

9Quoted in Pamela Neville-Sington, Fanny Trollope (London: Viking, 1997), 56.
Lady Macbeth.\textsuperscript{10}

To accommodate the large family, now consisting of six children, the Trollopes purchased 160 acres near Harrow and built a large four-storey mansion on the property. The boys were enrolled at Harrow where they studied under Lord Byron's old schoolmasters.\textsuperscript{11} But financial difficulties arose. Thomas had hoped to inherit from his widowed and childless uncle Adolphus Meetkerke. When the elderly uncle suddenly remarried a young woman and began his own family, all hopes for an inheritance were lost. Despite this financial disappointment, the Trollopes completed their home and entertained lavishly. They appeared frequently on the London social scene, where Frances was remembered as a vivacious, entertaining woman. Thomas began to suffer debilitating headaches and his law practice began to deteriorate. His declining health, anxiety over declining finances and lack of knowledge at farming contributed to the family's monetary difficulties. Undaunted, Frances continued to dedicate herself to the children's education taking them to London museums, theatres, and inviting playwrights, writers and artists to the Trollope home. She even insisted that the children be taught Italian so that they could read her beloved Dante in the original.\textsuperscript{12}

In the summer of 1823, Fanny convinced her husband to take her on a trip to France. There, at the home of family friends, they met the visionary reformer Frances Wright. Orphaned in early childhood, Frances Wright had left for America at the age of twenty-three.

\textsuperscript{10}Heineman, \textit{Mrs. Trollope}, 18.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, 23.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, 26.
where she became enamoured with the possibilities the American republic offered. However, this potential was marred by the existence of slavery. Her sense of injustice developed into plans to help free the slaves. In 1821, Frances Wright’s status as a minor celebrity was established with the publication and critical acclaim for her book *Views of Society and Manners in America*.

In addition to meeting with Miss Wright, the Trollopes took advantage of their trip to visit the cultural sights of Paris. They went to the Louvre five times, saw Count Denon’s collection of Egyptian and Japanese art, and travelled to Versailles. They were also introduced to such luminaries as Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper, Prosper Merimée, the Swiss historian Sismondi, Madame de Récamier, as well as Henri Beyle (Stendhal). Through their association with Frances Wright, the Trollopes were also invited to *La Grange*, the country estate of General Lafayette, located just outside of Paris.

Returning to Harrow, Frances Trollope resumed her domestic responsibilities. It is possible that life in London, although full of activity, seemed tame compared to these experiences. In 1824, her frail son Arthur died suddenly. His untimely death was followed by the unexpected loss of her father several months later. In the face of these losses, Frances dedicated herself to her children and friends. She befriended a young French artist, Auguste Hervieu. His romantic past must have appealed to Frances as she soon engaged him as the

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13 Ibid., 31.
14 Ibid., 32.
15 Ibid., 37.
children's art tutor. Although Hervieu had demonstrated artistic ability as a young child, his father had preferred that Auguste follow in his footsteps and prepare for a military career. Upon the senior Hervieu's death during the retreat from Moscow, Auguste left school and began his training as an artist, studying with Girodet. But with the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, Hervieu was drawn into the antimonarchist movement. He soon was forced to flee from France to England, escaping imprisonment. Hervieu supported himself by working for a short time at the Royal Academy in addition to the private tutoring he offered to affluent families. He was soon a part of the Trollope household. Frances Trollope, anxious to assist his career, wrote to her friends:

... he has now a few pupils, and this has enabled him (by sometimes going without his dinner to buy colours) to paint a picture, which has been received by the committee at Somerset House. It is not my judgement alone that I give you, when I say that this picture is *most admirable*; but I well know its merits will never be felt without the aid of the public press. I know you have influence enough with Mr. Walter to get it spoken of in the *Times*, and perhaps in some other publications. All I would ask is to direct attention to it: for I am *quite* sure that, if it is hung where it can be seen, it cannot be looked at without admirations. The picture will be called in the catalogue, 'Love and Folly,' by A. J. Hervieu...¹⁷

In 1826 the Trollopes again visited Paris, renewing their friendship with General Lafayette. He had just returned from his triumphant, thirteen-month tour of America at the invitation of President James Monroe and the United States Congress to celebrate the approaching fiftieth anniversary of the American Revolution. Lafayette and the Trollopes spoke of Frances Wright who had visited New Harmony, Indiana, and had decided to recreate

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¹⁷*Quoted in* Heineman, *Mrs. Trollope*, 40.
the experimental community of Robert Owen and his son Robert Dale. Miss Wright had
remained in Tennessee where she had purchased twenty slaves to work several hundred acres
of land, believing that they would produce enough income from cotton crops to support the
community. The proceeds from these sales would eventually pay for the resettlement of the
slaves in another country. At Nashoba, they would receive an education which would
empower them to become enlightened citizens. In an idyllic account of her settlement,
Frances Wright wrote: “Thus far I am amazed at our success - We were told of difficulties
and apprehended many - Truly as yet we have found none worthy of name.”

At home in Harrow, the Trollopes’ financial difficulties continued to multiply.
Thomas’ law practice dwindled (his unpredictable and often violent temper contributed to a
decline in clientele) and by 1827, the Trollopes were forced to give up their home and move
to a small cottage. Thomas’ health was deteriorating - his headaches seemed constant and the
drug of choice, calomel, seemed to exacerbate his irritability. His son later recalled that the
extended use of calomel had the effect of

making intercourse with him so sure to issue in something unpleasant that,
unconsciously, we sought to avoid his presence, and to consider as hours of
enjoyment only those that could be passed away from it.

The children were aware of the strained relationship between their parents. Yet Frances
continued her domestic amusements. She encouraged the children to perform French plays in

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18 Ibid., 40.

19 Quoted in Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 41.

20 Quoted in Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 41.
order to improve their knowledge of the language. In these efforts, the children were assisted by their new friend Hervieu. Frances cleverly staged these productions using props from her own home to maximize the dramatic impact on the audience. She described one such production to her friend Mary Russell Mitford:

In the *Femmes Savantes* we fitted up the stage with every kind of thing you can imagine fit to fill the drawing room of a blue lady - books, maps, plans of the moon, telescopes, rolls of paper, MSS., etc. Upon the white curtain opposite the windows were fixed engravings, and two little tables loaded with quartos were placed under them. All this, well shewn by the light of the lamps, had a very good effect, and we let the audience several minutes to admire it after the curtain drew up, before we made our entree. The clapping was *prodigious*.  

That summer Frances Wright sent the Trollopes an account of Nashoba which elaborated her beliefs about the principles of free love and free thinking about religion, principles which informed the Nashoba settlement. The publication enraged her own family and deeply offended Thomas Trollope’s sensibilities.

The Trollope’s son Henry had done poorly at school and his parents had withdrawn him from Winchester. Hoping that he would cope better in a work environment, they arranged for an apprenticeship in a Parisian accounting house. Henry’s continued unhappiness even at this placement forced Frances to travel to France in 1827. She was soon invited to Lafayette’s estate *La Grange* to meet with Frances Wright. Distraught by their financial difficulties and Henry’s unhappiness, she confided in Frances Wright who suggested a solution to all of their problems - a move to Nashoba. There Henry could become a teacher while Frances Trollope could become Miss Wright’s female companion and

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21 Quoted in Frances E. T. Trollope, *Frances Trollope: her life and literary work from George III to Victoria* (London: R. Bentley, 1895), 89-90.
confidante." It appeared to be the ideal solution, and the two women returned to England together hoping to convince Thomas Trollope of their plan. Fanny wrote to Harriet Garnett:

The more I see of her [Frances Wright], the more I listen to her, the more I feel convinced that all her notions are right—she is pointing to man a short road to that goal which for ages he has been in vain endeavouring to reach. Under her system I believe it possible that man may be happy - and we have had proof enough that he can not be so under any of those already tried. Does poor dear Henry still continue to dream of Fanny Wright and Nashoba? More improbable things have happened than that his wish should be listened to... He [Thomas Trollope] proposes one or two plans of retirement - at which my heart sickened- and I used all my power to persuade him that a year or two passed at Nashoba would repair our affairs more completely than any other... He is a good, honourable man - but his temper is dreadful - every year increases his irritability - and also its lamentable effect upon the children.  

Frances Trollope’s departure for America was a well-guarded secret. She said goodbye to only her immediate family, presenting her voyage as an opportunity to see Niagara Falls and as an effort to provide new schooling for her children. Harriet Garnett later wrote:

I can scarcely yet believe that Mrs. T. is actually on her way and Trollope alone in his old age in London. How can he bear the reports that must at last reach him of Nashoba. The horror that community will excite in each country, and most in America. What things will be said and written on such a field for slander and ill nature. And we must bear all in silence - for we cannot defend such a system. Principle and propriety both equally oppose our defending it... But the step once take there is no return, at least for a woman.

Their sympathies clearly lay with Thomas Trollope; "nothing can be said in extenuation of her conduct..." That Hervieu accompanied the party at the last minute was

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22 Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 45.

23 Quoted in Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 47.

24 Quoted in Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 48.
also kept secret. The exact nature of the relationship between Hervieu and Frances Trollope has been the subject of some speculation. Whatever its nature, it was clear to Hervieu that his employment as the Trollope children’s art tutor would have come to an end with the departure of the family. Life in America offered the possibility of employment.

The party left London on November 4th aboard the steamboat Edward. Accompanying Frances were three of her children - Emily, aged nine, Cecilia, eleven and Henry, sixteen. In addition to Hervieu, then thirty-three years old, the Trollope family travelled with two of their household servants. They arrived in New Orleans on Christmas Day.

Despite their hopes and optimism for a new life, fears and disappointments set in early. Frances was already suspicious of Frances Wright’s behaviour during the voyage - she found her behaviours eccentric and feared that she was “not in her right senses”.25 Nor were her first impressions of America favourable - “I never beheld a scene so utterly desolate as this entrance of the Mississippi. Had Dante seen it, he might have drawn images of another Bolgia from its horrors.”26 Despite this, in a letter dated Christmas Day 1827, she wrote to Julia Garnett:

had I time and paper I would explain to you at large all the motives that have led me to wish, and Mr Trollope to consent to this expedition - but I can now only tell you th[at] some pecuniary claims which came upon us quite unexpectedly, made it very necessary that we should leave our pretty place and large establishment for a year or two at least... Henry’s very earnest wish to visit Nashoba was another strong reason for my going thither - I have left the people making great eyes at me - but I care but

25Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 50.

26Quoted in Ransom, Fanny Trollope, 41.
little for this. I expect to be very happy, and very free from care at Nashoba- and this will more than repay me for being the object of a few 'dear me's!'\textsuperscript{27}

Her arrival at Nashoba was equally disappointing. Frances' expectations of a rustic retreat were dashed. She was to later recall that:

one glance sufficed to convince me that every idea I had formed of the place was as far as possible from the truth. Desolation was the only feeling - the only word that presented itself; but it was not spoken. I think, however, that Miss Wright was aware of the painful impression the sight of her forest home produced on me.\textsuperscript{28}

For in the midst of swampy land Frances Trollope found not a comfortable, well-established community but several crudely assembled log cabins, a few slaves and their children, as well as an overseer. Nothing appeared as it had been imagined. Nor was Frances Wright the same woman in these surroundings. "The Frances Wright of Nashoba in dress, looks, and manner, bore no resemblance to the Miss Wright I had known and admired in London and Paris than did her log cabin to the Tuileries or Buckingham Palace. ...all her other faculties were in a manner suspended," wrote the disenchanted and dismayed Frances Trollope.\textsuperscript{29}

The two women shared a room. Rain dripped through the roof while a roughly-made chimney caught fire "at least a dozen times in a day." Nor was the food any more pleasing to Frances Trollope. The settlement was "without milk, without beverage of any kind except rain water...Wheat bread they used but sparingly, and to us the Indian corn bread was uneatable. They had no vegetables but rice, and some potatoes we brought with us. no meat

\textsuperscript{27}Quoted in Heineman, \textit{Mrs. Trollope}, 49.


\textsuperscript{29}Quoted in F. E. T. Trollope, \textit{Frances Trollope}, 105.
but pork, no cheese, no butter..." These obstacles did not appear to disturb Frances Wright who "stood in the midst of all this desolation with the air of a conqueror".  

Frances Trollope was not alone in her disappointment. Hervieu, believing that he was to tutor school children, was appalled to find that construction of the school had not yet begun. In reality, there were only three children to tutor in the entire community of Nashoba. He too had imagined a sophisticated settlement complete with all the cultural pursuits available in a European urban centre. The scientific lectures, concerts and theatricals he had envisioned were not here. Frances Trollope's fears for her children's health in this remote setting spurred her desire to leave the colony sooner than anticipated. Lacking funds, however, she was forced to turn to the trustees of Nashoba for financial assistance to leave the community. She requested and was granted a loan of $300.00. Although Frances Trollope's biographers have traditionally reported that Hervieu left Nashoba for St. Louis to pursue career opportunities as a portrait painter well before Frances and her party departed, it appears highly unlikely that the group ever parted paths. For on January 27th, four days after the loan had been approved, Nashoba records indicate that "Frances Trollope and family with their manservant William Abbot and Esther Rust, her maid, and Auguste Hervieu, left us for Memphis." On February 10, after a thousand-mile river voyage, the party arrived in Cincinnati. Why they chose to travel to Cincinnati remains uncertain. Some have suggested

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30Quoted in F. E. T. Trollope, Frances Trollope, 105-106.

31Heineman, Mrs. Trollope, 50.

32Quoted in Ransom. Fanny Trollope, 45.
that Frances Trollope may have been influenced by an early version of William Bullock’s *Sketch of a Journey through the Western States of North America* with its favourable impression of the city and the opportunities for financial prosperity it offered. It is more likely that their decision had been influenced by General Lafayette. His impression of Cincinnati as the eighth wonder of the world was well documented and it is probable that he shared these favourable views with Frances during one of her visits to *La Grange*. (She was later to write: “Though I do not quite sympathize with those who consider Cincinnati as one of the wonders of the earth...”) Here the Trollope family and Hervieu were to spend the next twenty-five months.

Once again, Frances Trollope’s expectations of a prosperous and beautiful metropolis were dashed. “But, alas! The flatness of reality after the imagination has been busy!” Anticipating a European city, she found only “an uninteresting mass of buildings.” lacking domes, steeples, or towers. Wandering pigs foraged for garbage tossed onto the streets, and it was impossible to cross a street without “brushing by a snout”. New problems soon arose for Frances. Her son Henry had been sent to the school founded by William Maclure at New Harmony, Indiana, but she had to find suitable accommodations for the impecunious family in Cincinnati. Nor was Henry coping well in his new school. Tuition was paid through the student’s manual labour on behalf of the school. Henry, a sickly adolescent, was unable to withstand the rigorous demands of labouring in the fields and performing academic duties. Fearing that her son would become ill under these arduous conditions, Frances soon needed

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*Trollope, Domestic Manners, ed. Larson, 26.*
Hervieu's financial assistance to bring Henry back to Cincinnati.

The family now made every possible effort to achieve financial independence. Believing that Henry's multilingual skills could benefit the family income, Frances was quick to promote his services in the *Cincinnati Gazetteer* of March 28th. The advertisement indicated that a recent graduate of classical education in the Royal College of Winchester (England):

would be happy to give lessons in the Latin language to gentlemen in their own homes. By an improved method of teaching, now getting into general use in Europe. Mr. H. Trollope flatters himself he shall be able to give a competent knowledge of the Latin tongue in a much shorter space of time than has hitherto been considered necessary. Terms; Fifty cents for lessons of one hour.34

The advertisement seems to have generated little interest. On May 4th, Frances Trollope desperately wrote to her husband complaining that she had yet to receive a single reply to any of the eight previous letters she had sent him. The family, she claimed, was now destitute. They were completely dependent upon Auguste Hervieu.35 In a letter addressed to her son Tom on the same day, she indicated that the family had relied upon Hervieu's resources for the past month. Without his generosity, the family would have been without food. She pleaded with Tom to reply.

Is your father ill? Is he dead? Have his affairs fallen into such confusion that he has not been able to procure the money necessary to send us a remittance? ...I entreat you to write to me immediately. Our situation here would be dreadful, were it not for M. Hervieu's grateful, and generous kindness.36

34*Cincinnati Gazette*, March 28, 1828.

35*Ransom, Fanny Trollope*, 49.

Mail delivery was slow and unreliable, but it is improbable that all eight letters had gone missing. It is possible that Hervieu’s continued presence in Frances’ life had so angered Trollope that he disregarded her letters with their desperate pleas for funds. Her frequent references to Hervieu’s generosity in providing for the family may have been an effort to justify the French artist’s involvement with her to Thomas Trollope.

Hervieu soon found work opportunities in Cincinnati. Within weeks of the group’s arrival in Cincinnati, he joined the teaching staff of Frederick Eckstein’s Academy of Fine Arts. Eckstein, a recent arrival to Cincinnati himself, had assisted in the establishment of the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts. It was Eckstein’s hope to found an academy in Cincinnati which would not only provide instruction in the arts, but would arrange exhibits of local and foreign artists, organize lectures and eventually function as an institute which could direct the artistic production of local artisans. Eckstein was delighted to announce Hervieu’s appointment, taking out advertisements that the Academy now boasted the talents of an artist of the first order, familiar with even the higher branches of the art. With the European-trained Hervieu on staff, Eckstein believed that the Academy school could compete with any in the United States. He proudly announced that Hervieu was already at work on a historical canvas *The Landing of Lafayette at Cincinnati*. Within three weeks, however, Hervieu’s relationship with Eckstein had deteriorated so significantly that he severed his association with the Academy and announced the opening of his own school of drawing. The fees were identical to those set by Eckstein’s Academy. The school was located near the Western Museum and
here the Frenchman Hervieu met the French-speaking Joseph Dorfeuille.37

"The Invisible Girl" was their first successful collaboration. But they were to return triumphantly in a far more spectacular show. But before we turn to the Infernal Regions, it is critical to consider another recent newcomer to Cincinnati who had befriended Hervieu and Frances Trollope - William Bullock. His involvement in the Western Museum has not been considered previously. Yet Bullock’s success as a museum proprietor and his unique sense of dynamic and immersive exhibit design suggest that he played a critical role in the development and staging of the Infernal Regions.

William Bullock

Although he too is almost unknown today, William Bullock was one of the most prominent and financially successful of the early nineteenth-century British museum proprietors. The avid collector, showman as well as educator, was renowned in early nineteenth-century England. His exhibits regularly drew huge crowds and were acclaimed by the press:

No persons possessing the least desire of improving their knowledge of nature should refrain from visiting this attractive exhibition: juvenile minds will there be taught a lesson beyond calculation valuable; they will read in the great volume of creation the work of an all-wise Providence, and the lesson will be indelibly impressed on their memories. Indeed, no one can be disappointed, even should they form the most sanguine expectation of experiencing a pleasure... in the contemplation of objects rare

37A census conducted by a Mr. Rice in 1818 indicated that there were 125 French families in Cincinnati. It is likely that this small number of residents was in communication with one another and that the association between Hervieu and Dorfeuille would have been established independently of Mrs. Trollope.
and sights unseen before.\textsuperscript{38}

Bullock began his career as a jeweller-silversmith in Liverpool. His interest in natural history may have been stimulated by the opportunities to purchase rare and unusual specimens from the seafarers arriving in the port city. By 1795 he had accumulated a collection so significant in size that it was opened to the public. Among the objects on display were objects he claimed had returned from Captain Cook’s South Sea voyages as well as arms and armour from the Lichfield museum of Dr. Richard Greene. The 1799 publication of the first of many Companions to the museum listed a collection of three hundred curiosities.\textsuperscript{39} The fifty-two-page guidebook described such diverse objects as an automaton which had gold and jewelled figures and curious movements, including a “Cascade of Artificial Water in Constant Motion.” It is probable that Bullock himself created a number of the objects on display as in 1801 he was promoting himself as a silversmith, jeweller, toyman, and statue figure manufacturer. But Bullock also continued to acquire objects through purchases from the public. In the 1801 Companion Bullock reminded his visitors that he paid “full value for rare and uncommon Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Reptiles, Shells, old Paintings, Carvings on Wood or ivory, Stained Glass, ancient and foreign Arms and Armour, or any uncommon Production in Art or Nature.”

By 1806, Bullock’s collection, significantly enlarged by the purchase of objects from

\textsuperscript{38}Rudolph Ackermann, \textit{Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions and Politics} vol. 3 (1810): 387-388.

the Leverian Museum, numbered almost 4,000 objects. Among them were a kangaroo, a 6-foot-long horn of a narwhal, or sea unicorn, as well as a 2,000 year old Egyptian mummy. Individual admission to the entire collection was one shilling but an annual ticket was also available at 10s. 6d.\(^\text{40}\)

In 1809, Bullock moved to London and opened his collections at 22 Piccadilly under the name “Liverpool Museum”. In the next year, the museum was acclaimed by *Bell’s Weekly Messenger* as “the most fashionable place of amusement in London: more than 22,000 have already visited it during the month it has opened.” The success of this exhibit led to the construction of a much larger museum on the south side of Piccadilly. Although it was officially named the London Museum, throughout its long life it would be known as the Egyptian Hall. The new building, designed by Peter Frederick Robinson, the Prince of Wale’s superintendent of works, capitalized on the current vogue for things Egyptian. Inspired by details from prints from Dominique Vivant Denon’s 1802 *Voyage...dans Egypte*. In his interpretation of the Egyptian style Robinson used considerable artistic license - the facade of the building was decorated with sphinxes as well as two colossal nude statues of Isis and Osiris. Hieroglyphs covered the surface decoration. These mysterious symbols enhanced the sense of mystery and awe of the Museum. What they meant would remain unknown until the Rosetta Stone was deciphered in 1822.\(^\text{41}\)

When the Egyptian Hall opened for business in 1812, Bullock offered a printed guide


\(^{41}\)Altick, *Shows of London*, 236.
to his collections which now consisted of "upwards Fifteen Thousand Natural and Foreign Curiosities. Antiquities, and Productions of Fine Arts." Bullock's scientific interests and keen sense of showmanship were evident in the organization of the collections. He was the first English museum proprietor to organize his specimens in what could be called habitat groupings. Nor was the dramatic effect all that he attempted to create. Bullock invited "the attention and patronage of the Nobility. Gentry. and the Public to an Establishment for the advancement of the Science of Natural History." The 15,000 specimens were arranged according to the Linnaean system and were available for the "study of the Naturalist. the Instruction of the Curious. and the Amusement of those who are delighted in viewing the Beauties of Nature. or the Curiosities of Art." According to contemporary reviews. the collections were "admirably preserved and scientifically arranged". The Pantherion. the central display. was intended to present "the whole of the known Quadrupeds. in a manner that will convey a more perfect idea of their haunts and mode of life." The visitor passed through a basaltic cavern. a recreation of Fingal's cave on the Isle of Staffa. and entered a room resembling a tropical rain forest. In its midst stood an Indian hut set against a panoramic background. surrounded by "exact Models. both in figure and colour. of the rarest and most luxuriant Plants from every clime". Bullock's Companion described the effect as one "which makes the illusion produced so strong. that the surprised visitor finds himself transported from a crowded metropolis to the depth of an Indian forest. every part of which is occupied by its various savage inhabitants." Among the animal specimens depicted in life-

like poses were an African elephant, a giraffe, a rhinoceros as well as anteaters, termites and sloths. The larger felines - lions, jaguars and panthers - were presented in dens or overlooking their prey from caverns, while seals were posed on rocks overlooking a panoramic sea view.

The other rooms were arranged with equally dramatic impact.

3,000 birds were set up with similar accuracy, and attended by well-selected accessories, so as to afford sufficient ideas of their motions, food, and mode of feeding, and peculiarities of every description - from eagles to humming-birds (of the latter of which there were ninety distinct species); and, including the collection made by Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks, the whole were so perfect in plumage and disposition, that the aviary, if it might be so called, presented a scene of wonderful beauty to the eye. Unwilling the spectator turned away from it, to inspect the numerous amphibious creatures in a third spacious room; but these, again were found to be so remarkable that the attractions of the fishes, the insects, the marine productions, could scarcely write the visitor away to contemplate their various structure [sic], clearly indicated action, and striking life-like appearance.43

Bullock did not hesitate to sacrifice accuracy for the theatrical or dramatic effects he wished to create. Species from different continents were often grouped together to elicit a sense of wonder, terror and awe in the visitors. A “sublimely terrible” python was depicted in the act of “locking its terrible body round an expiring deer and crushing it in his fatal fold.”

Admission to the Pantherion was one shilling: an additional one shilling was required to visit the other exhibits in the Museum. In a suite of rooms, housed in glass cases, were ethnographic materials from the Sandwich Islands, North and South America, Africa, New Zealand, Australia as well as Asia. These included an extensive collection of footwear, weapons, and musical instruments. In the portion of the building designated as an art gallery were such objects as a mother-of-pearl Chinese pagoda, ivory objects, flowers made of

43Quoted in Altick, Shows of London, 237.
butterfly wings, as well as wool pictures of the Holy Family. Rice-paste likenesses depicting Mrs. Sarah Siddons as Queen Catherine and John Philip Kemble as Cato (created by Bullock's brother William) as well as a rice-paste model of the death of Voltaire by Monsieur Oudon (Houdon?) of Paris completed the collections. These diverse objects had been acquired by purchase or donation. Among the donors, Bullock proudly listed the Duke and Duchess of York, Princess Charlotte of Wales, as well as Admiral Bligh. 44

It is important to remember that Bullock was not merely a showman. He was a respected fellow of the Linnean Society as well as an honourary member of the Dublin Society, a Fellow of the Wernerian Natural History Society of Edinburgh, the Royal Horticultural Society of London, and the Geological Society of London. An ardent collector of natural history specimens, Bullock undertook collecting trips in 1807 and 1812. These enabled him to obtain not only various floral and faunal specimens but to purchase shells and other curiosities from local collectors. On one of his trips to the Orkneys, Bullock unsuccessfully pursued the sole-surviving male Great Auk. He later acquired the specimen when it was killed in 1813. He presented papers before the Linnean Society, describing four rare species of British Birds in November, 1812. Eager to share his methods of preserving specimens "in all ll the beauty and freshness of life," Bullock published a thirty-six-page pamphlet entitled A Concise and Easy Method of Preserving Objects of Natural History Intended, for the Use of Sportsmen, Travellers, and Other, to Enable Them to Prepare and Preserve Such Curious and Rare Articles They May Wish to Transmit to Safety to Any Part of

44Altick, Shows of London, 237-238.
the World in 1817. Bullock claimed the widely-used booklet provided

...the means of procuring many new and valuable subjects of Zoology; and thus adding to our stock of knowledge in the production of nature, and of contributing materially to one of the grandest sources of rational amusement, in the examination of the wonderful works of the Creator.45

Bullock’s text provided concise information about the removal of the skins of bird and animal specimens, the creation of armatures, as well as how to preserve fishes, amphibians, insects, shells, plants and seeds. The comprehensive text recommended the use of arsenic in preventing the destruction of preserved specimens by insect infestations.46

By 1816, Bullock’s collections were further diversified by the acquisition of a large number of antiquities. Purchased in France and Italy, the antique marbles, jaspers, agates as well as vases and tablets (including the mosaic floors from the Baths of Nero), were displayed in Bullock’s newly developed Roman Gallery of Antiquities and Works of Art. Gouaches by Alexandre Isidore Leroy depicting natural history specimens were displayed along with G. F. Lethière’s twenty-six-foot-long historical painting The Judgment of Brutus on his Sons which had previously adorned the walls of the Louvre.

But in England Bullock’s most lucrative and popular exhibit was the Emperor Napoleon’s carriage and accessories, captured on the eve of Waterloo. Acquired from the Prince Regent for the sum of £2500, the carriage had served as kitchen, dining room, bed chamber, and office. It went on display in 1816 along with two of Napoleon’s horses, his

45William Bullock, A Concise and Easy Method of Preserving Objects of Natural History... (London: William Bullock, 1817), 1-2.

folding bed, and the contents of his travelling case. Bullock was able to locate Jean Hornn, the Emperor's coachman, and invited him to the exhibit's opening. The success of the event was unprecedented - it attracted 10,000 visitors each day. By the time Bullock took the carriage on tour, an estimated quarter of a million visitors had seen it. Bullock won a return of £35,000 on his investment.⁴⁷

By 1818 Bullock attempted to sell his collections, offering 2,485 birds, 429 amphibians, and 232 quadrupeds to the University of Edinburgh for £9,000. Rejected by the university, he subsequently approached the British Museum which also rejected him. Bullock then decided to sell all of his collections, including the London Museum, the Roman Gallery of Antiquities as well as the Museum Napoleon at public auction. The sale, which lasted twenty-six days, attracted a variety of bidders, including representatives of the leading European museums. Most of the ethnographic material was sold to the Berlin Museum, while the antiquary Sir Samuel Meyrick bought the arms. Even the glazed rustic inclosure at the centre of the Pantherion was sold; possibly to become a "handsome summer house or greenhouse." At the end of the sale, Bullock had realized £9,974 13s.⁴⁸

In 1822, Bullock presented one of the "most novel and interesting exhibitions ever offered to the notice of this or any other Capital". It was a display of a family of Laplanders with their herd of eight living reindeer. Jannes Holm, his wife and young son sang, danced and played the fiddle. Behind them was a panorama that included snow-covered mountains.


⁴⁸Ibid., 241.
the ice pinnacles of the North Cape, as well as tent-like huts. The walls were decorated with reindeer antlers, fur garments, leggings, boots, skis, a cradle, and an ornamented reindeer harness. An interpreter was provided so that visitors could communicate with the family from Lapland, and, for an additional fee, parents could seat their children on a reindeer's back. In the first six weeks of the exhibit, 58,000 visitors saw the family; Bullock took in £100 daily.49

Although Bullock had disposed of his collections, he redeveloped the Egyptian Hall into "Bullock's Egyptian Sales Rooms" where he created 1,600 linear feet of wall space for the display of a wide array of articles "of rarity and general use" - all of the objects were for sale. He also rented space within the building as showrooms for artists. In 1820, Théodore Géricault displayed his Raft of the Medusa (now in the Louvre) for six months. Admission was one shilling. For an additional sixpence, the visitor could purchase a description of the catastrophe along with a lithograph of the painting. Although Bullock subsequently arranged for the painting to tour Dublin, the painting could not compete financially with Marshall's "Marine Peristrophic Panorama of the Wreck of the Medusa French Frigate." The panorama depicted six scenes from the catastrophe on 10,000 square feet of canvas and was accompanied by orchestral music.50 The experience must have reconfirmed to Bullock the public's preference for moving, animated depictions of events.

By the end of 1822, Bullock and his son departed for Mexico, returning to Piccadilly

50 Ibid., 129.
in November of 1823 with antiquities, ethnographic materials and natural history specimens (both live and preserved). His new exhibit *Ancient and Modern Mexico* opened in May of 1824. In his travels throughout Mexico, then a relatively unknown country, Bullock had acquired casts of the twelve-foot in diameter Montezuma’s calendar stone, carvings, models of tombs, manuscripts, as well as hieroglyphic texts. To these he had added representations of modern Mexico, including life-size and miniature fruit and vegetables, over two hundred species of birds, previously undescribed, several hundred fish specimens, a large collection of minerals as well as sketches completed by his son. The publication of Bullock’s *Six Months’ Residence and Travels in Mexico*, which preceded the April 1824 public opening of the exhibit, served to generate preliminary interest in the exhibit. In the preface, Bullock noted that “since the period of Charles I, I am acquainted with no book of travels by an Englishman in that country.” Once again, the exhibit combined showmanship with specimens in a unique and beguiling fashion. The visitor first encountered a Mexican hut thatched with palm leaves. During public hours, the hut was inhabited by a young Mexican. A panoramic drawing of Mexico City provided the context for the hut. While forty-five cases of display materials enabled visitors to view the vegetation, miniature wax models of the inhabitants, preserved animal specimens (including a puma and an ocelot), toys and furniture. The fifty-two items which depicted Ancient Mexico were housed on the floor above. These included casts of the Calendar Stone, the Grand Altar or Sacrificial Stone, and a model of the Pyramid of the Sun from Teotihuacan. Smaller sculptures and hieroglyphs completed the display.51

Bullock disposed of these artifacts some time later (the carvings form the foundation of the British Museum’s Mexican collections), and returned to Mexico. On his subsequent return to Britain, he travelled overland via North America, stopping in Cincinnati. The city’s beautiful landscape, its low cost of living and abundant food supply fired his imagination. In Kentucky, across the river from Cincinnati, he purchased Elmwood, a Palladian mansion situated on a one-thousand acre estate stocked with wild turkeys, pheasant, deer, bison and elk. Here he decided to found Hygeia, a model community named after the goddess of health. Unlike other contemporary utopian settlements, Hygeia stressed neither political ideologies nor social reforms. Instead, it was predicated upon the romantic notion of a home set in the midst of an uncorrupted wilderness.

Upon his return to England, Bullock published his *Sketch of a Journey through the Western States of North America*. Hoping to attract potential settlers to his visionary community, Bullock emphasized Cincinnati’s balmy climate, its prospects for prosperity, its low cost of living and the low tax rate. Included in the book was a reprint of Drake and Mansfield’s *Cincinnati in 1826*. A plan of his proposed retirement community, designed by John B. Papworth, architect to the King of Württemberg, concluded the text. The 300-home village was to provide its inhabitants with all the amenities of an urban centre - large gardens, a town hall, a museum, a library, inns, schools, a public bath, four churches, a chapel and cemetery patterned after Père Lachaise in Paris, as well as a brewery were included in the plans. Despite its cosmopolitan European roots, Hygeia’s public squares and streets were to reflect their American heritage with names such as Washington, Jefferson, Adams and Franklin.
In 1828, Bullock relocated to Elmwood with his family. Shortly after his arrival, he hosted a dinner for another recent arrival, Frances Trollope. In her *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, Frances portrayed the oddly-misplaced Bullocks as good friends and *confidantes*.

He and his amiable wife are devoting themselves to the embellishment of the house and grounds; and certainly there is more taste and art lavished on one of their beautiful saloons, than all Western America can shew elsewhere. It is impossible to help feeling that Mr. Bullock is rather out of his element in this remote spot, and the gems of art he has brought with him, shew as strangely there, as would a bower of roses in Siberia, or a Cincinnati fashionable at Almack's. The exquisite beauty of the spot, commanding one of the finest reaches of the Ohio, the extensive gardens, and the large and handsome mansion, have tempted Mr. Bullock to spend a large sum in the purchase of this place, and if any one who has passed his life in London could endure such a change, the active mind and sanguine spirit of Mr. Bullock might enable him to do it; but his frank, and truly English hospitality, and his enlightened and enquiring mind, seemed sadly wasted there.52

Frances Trollope became a regular visitor to Elmwood. As their friendship deepened, Frances Trollope was included on short trips - the Bullocks took Mrs. Trollope to witness a camp meeting in the Indiana wilderness. Their common interests and knowledge of London popular culture drew them together and were to manifest themselves in their contributions to the Western Museum. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to suggest that William Bullock’s elaborate and extensive use of theatrical settings in his own museum displays was influential in the development of the Infernal Regions. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that he would have remained uninvolved in the fortunes of the local museum. It is highly unlikely that the Infernal Regions was the product of Frances Trollope alone. Although she was aware of the cultural void in Cincinnati, Frances Trollope had little professional experience in creating public entertainments. Her actual experiences in developing theatrical performances/events

52Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, ed. Smalley, 50-51.
was restricted to those she and her children presented at their home to friends. These events would hardly qualify her for the large-scale Infernal Regions. It is most likely that her involvement with the venture was restricted to posing the question of why this highly popular theme had not yet been explored in Cincinnati. She was, according to her son, also responsible for writing the text of the promotional material for the Infernal Regions.

However, the scale, scope and style of the Infernal Regions suggests that William Bullock was consulted on its production. His own interest in museums, his knowledge of what was popular and successful with audiences, and his proven record in creating and recreating environments would have been critical to the development of the Regions. Indeed, it is odd that his influence on this venture has not been considered as historians credit Bullock with influencing Frances Trollope's best known, yet unsuccessful, venture in Cincinnati - the building of Trollope's Bazaar. Known locally as Trollope’s Folly, the Bazaar was intended to be a shoppers’ paradise where the local populace could purchase unusual and artistic objects.

The success of “The Invisible Girl” and the Infernal Regions, probably encouraged Frances Trollope’s belief that the city would benefit from a cultural centre, one which resembled Bullock’s Egyptian Hall. She hoped to run the Bazaar for a number of years until her son Henry was mature enough to take over the management. The building was to house

53Although the Bazaar was never successful in Cincinnati, the New York Times recently praised Frances Trollope’s vision of the shopping experience. “...but its creator was onto something. She knew that retailing could do more, that a store could offer a connection to a broader culture, and that if it did those things well, it would surround itself with a powerful allure that would sell all the more goods.” Paul Goldberger, “The Store Strikes Back,” The New York Times Magazine, April 6, 1997, 46.
an Exchange Coffee House, a bar and an elegant saloon where ices could be purchased. an exhibition gallery, a ballroom, retail spaces and would include a circular structure where panoramas could be displayed. All of the interior decor was to be painted by Hervieu; a spot was also reserved for the display of his commemorative painting *Lafayette Landing in Cincinnati*.

The structure was to be funded by the money Frances Trollope had inherited from her father. In November 1829, the building was progressing toward completion. The unusual edifice attracted local attention and editorial coverage in the newspapers. Contemporary descriptions indicate that the lower level was divided into a coffee shop as well as commercial venues. The main floor compartments were to be dedicated to the sale of "every useful and useless article, in dress, in stationery, in light and ornamental household furniture, chinas and more pellucid porcelain, with every gew-gaw that can contribute to the splendor and attractiveness of the exhibition". Refreshments were to be available in a room behind the Bazaar, and from here visitors could enter the exhibition gallery housed in an adjacent building. Two ballrooms were located above the Bazaar. The ornamentation of the building struck contemporaries the most: it was fashioned after the Alhambra, the Moorish palace in Granada. The architecture itself suggested a combination of Gothic and Saracenic, with faux mosaic designs painted onto the surfaces. The rotunda which crowned the building was to be topped with an ornament of a large Turkish crescent.

The principal facade of the building was "formed of three large Arabesque windows

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54 Quoted in Heineman, *Mrs. Trollope*, 64.
with arches, supported by four Moorish stone pilasters with capitals, over which are inserted large and beautifully wrought free stone ornaments; the whole surmounted by a wall, terminating in gothic battlements, each of which supports a stone sphere." The pilasters of the facade were modelled on those "in the temple of Apollinopolis at Etofu, as exhibited in Denon's *Egypt.*" Thomas Trollope sent his wife and son $4,000.00 worth of goods to be sold in the store. However the tariff on the European-made articles made their purchase prices prohibitive in Cincinnati. Frances Trollope contracted malaria when the building was under construction. Unable to oversee the work, she left her son Henry to sell or auction what he could to pay for the construction of the building. When these costs could not be covered, everything was seized by the creditors and the building was eventually turned over to a group of trustees. Disheartened and broke, Frances Trollope and Hervieu left Cincinnati in March of 1830. Her experiences in Cincinnati were to become the foundation of the bestselling *Domestic Manners of the Americans.* Frances Trollope's departure from America was not lamented by the citizens of Cincinnati. Throughout her stay, she had not been accepted by the more prominent members of local society. Frances Trollope had not arrived with the required letters of introduction from her influential European friends. This had seriously compromised her entry into social circles. Her acceptance was further compromised by the reputed "liaison with a big-whiskered Frenchman" as well as by her alleged "vulgarity". The publication of her *Domestic Manners* and the book's success abroad provoked the following venomous

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56*CCLG*, June 24, 1832.
recollections from the Cincinnati press:

Some of the citizens of Cincinnati know a little of one Mrs. Trollope, who came amongst us a literary pretender, and who undertook to play Turk, and erect a Bazaar, for which she had not the means enough to pay those that furnished the materials and performed the labor. She had a young Frenchman in her train whose relation to her was exceedingly equivocal. She did not succeed amongst us. Her whole appearance and conduct corresponded to her name. She was an impudent kind of man-woman, of vulgar exterior both in person and dress, of forward manners, and altogether just such a woman as no man would choose as the mentor of either daughters or sons. She speculated unfortunately, failed to make her way into society, got largely in debt, and left us as she staid [sic] with us in discredit.

...The truth is that Mrs. Trollope was excluded from genteel society by the vulgarity of her manners, and a very generally received opinion that she was a profligate woman. 57

Bullock's own vision of Hygeia remained an unfulfilled dream. In 1831, he sold 710 acres of his property and Elmwood Hall for $21,000.00 and retired to a more modest cottage on what remained of his estate. 58 By 1836, with no immigrants appearing to inhabit Hygeia, Bullock sold his property for $30,000.00 and moved to Cincinnati. 59 It is interesting to note that Bullock never gave up his interest in collecting and displaying objects. Charles Daubeney, Oxford professor of chemistry and botany, called on Bullock in Cincinnati in May, 1838. He recalled that:

I called on Mr. Bullock, formerly the proprietor of the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, whom I found in declining health, but still lively and conversable. He had got together an immense assemblage of fossil bones from Big Bone Lick, but, lamentable to relate, they were all destroyed by a fire that broke out in his museum. The loss is irreparable, as he had in a manner ransacked the contents of the entire locality. He had

57 CCLG. October 26, 1833.

58 Altick, Shows of London, 249.

also made a collection which no one certainly would have expected to be acquired in the West; it was one of paintings by old Italian masters. How they got to those remote parts is to me a mystery.\textsuperscript{60}

Bullock had clearly never abandoned his love for collecting objects and developing museums. This reminiscence adds further support to the idea that Bullock would have been interested and involved in the endeavours of the local museum keepers. Bullock returned to England some time in the 1840s. He died in Chelsea in 1849, at the age of 76 years.\textsuperscript{61}

**Hiram Powers**

While Bullock's influence on the Infernal Regions must be acknowledged, it was the considerable talent of local artist Hiram Powers which brought to life the terrors and horrors of the afterworld. Hiram Powers is now remembered as the sculptor of the *Greek Slave*, a sculpture which won him the second place award at the Great Exhibition of All Nations held in London in 1851. Born in 1805 in Vermont, Hiram Powers was the eighth of nine children. Following the great Woodstock famine of 1816, the family abandoned its farm and embarked upon a westward journey to Cincinnati where Hiram's older brother Benjamin had opened a law practice. Within weeks of arriving in Cincinnati, Hiram's father died forcing the thirteen-year old Hiram to move in with Benjamin who was now the joint-editor of the Cincinnati *Inquisitor* newspaper.\textsuperscript{62} Under his brother's tutelage Hiram began to read law and

\textsuperscript{60}Charles Daubeney, *Journal of a Tour Through the United States and in Canada... 1837-1838* (Oxford, England: T. Combe, 1843), 189.

\textsuperscript{61}Altick, *Shows of London*, 142.

acquired a rudimentary knowledge of Latin. Disenchanted with his studies, Hiram soon found employment at the Cincinnati Hotel, where he was put in charge of the hotel's reading room. Open to men only, the reading and smoking room was stocked with newspapers from around the country. Although Hiram's only payment for this position was the provision of his board, it did enable him to pursue his great love of reading. However, he soon found that he required some funds to pay for clothing and shoes, and began to cut out and sell silhouettes of patrons frequenting the adjoining barroom. Following the death of his mother, Powers went to work in at Keating and Ball's local produce store. Here his creative impulses found a new medium of expression - he opened firkins of butter and sculpted the forms into "gasping loggerheads" and "irate rattlesnakes," and then replaced the covers.

But with the death of Keating, the business dissolved and Hiram was once again forced to find a job. As he was now eighteen years of age, Hiram was eligible for an apprenticeship plan enacted by the state legislature and directed at the poor. He was apprenticed with Luman Watson, a clock manufacturer whose business included the manufacture and repair of pipe and reed organs. Many years later, Powers was to write to Nicholas Longworth about these early days at Watson's: "You know my love of mechanics....Some of my happiest days were spent in Watson's clock Factory." Powers lived with the Watsons above their shop on Seventh Street and part of the cost of his room and

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63 Ibid., 40.

board may well have been offset by municipal funding.\textsuperscript{65} Although his earliest tasks included collecting unpaid bills, Hiram was soon engaged in the actual work in the factory. Watson initially assigned him duties which required no training and could be performed by unskilled hands. But when asked to perform a more complex task, Powers' accomplished performance so surprised and delighted Watson that he took the adolescent into his confidence and soon gave him "superintendence of all his machinery". Powers' creation of a new machine that would cut twice the number of clock-wheels in a day, and cut them twice as well, established his reputation and led to his appointment as the first machinist.

At about this time, Letton's Museum ordered an elaborate organ. The Western Museum had recently purchased a thousand-dollar organ from Watson, and Letton, wishing to outdo his rival, requested an instrument which could run automatically. Based on popular European models which featured automata, Letton's organ was to feature six male trumpeters and six female bell ringers. These wax figures were graduated in size with the largest figure being life-sized. Powers along with Letton was responsible for completing the instrument and figures. The flesh parts of the figures were modelled in wax. Powers' correspondence indicates that Letton himself was adept and accomplished at this task.\textsuperscript{66} Letton's organ, named the Panregal, became the talk of the town. It is said that Dorfeuille visited the museum; upon seeing and hearing the new organ, he was determined to become acquainted

\textsuperscript{65}\textit{Wunder, Hiram Powers}, 41.

\textsuperscript{66}Sam Smith to Hiram Powers, March 27, 1866, Powers Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society. "Can you remember the angelic expressions of the faces of those wax figures - moulded by the immortal artist Letton?"
with Hiram Powers.\textsuperscript{67}

Powers, despite his natural talents, had no formal artistic training. He claimed later that the sight of a plaster cast by Houdon at one of the Cincinnati museums had inspired his interest in sculpture. Curiosity about its production led him to enroll as a student with Frederick Eckstein. From Eckstein he would acquire the rudiments of casting as well as modelling in wax, clay and plaster.

I was afraid to begin with clay, which was liable to harden or freeze, and I made my first bust in bees’ wax... and so far as the flesh and likeness are concerned, I don’t believe I have done better since. The hair and drapery I could better. I found I had a correct eye, and a hand which steadily improved in its obedience to my eye. I saw the likeness, and I knew it depended on the features, and that, if I could copy the features exactly, the likeness would follow, just as surely as blood follows the knife. I found early that all the talk about catching the expression was mere twaddle; that the expression would take care of itself, if I took care to copy exactly the features. He that can copy a potato precisely can copy a face precisely. I found that I could copy accurately, and was encouraged.\textsuperscript{68}

Powers enrolled as a student in Eckstein’s Academy; when Hervieu left in 1828, Powers was put in charge of the class. In return, he received free instruction.

Powers’ involvement in creating waxworks for the Western Museum began when Dorfeuille received a number of wax figures which had broken or been destroyed in transit; Powers was to later recollect that Dorfeuille had been advised to apply to me to restore them. I went to the room and Lorenzo Dow, John Quincey Adams, Miss Temple, and Charlotte Corday, with sundry other people’s images, in a very promiscuous condition - some with arms, and some with noses, and some without either. We concluded that something entirely new, to be made from the old materials, was easier than any repairs; and I proposed to take

\textsuperscript{67}Wunder, Hiram Powers, 43.

\textsuperscript{68}Quoted in Wunder, Hiram Powers, 45.
Lorenzo Dow’s head home, and convert him into the king of the Cannibal islands. The Frenchman was meanwhile to make his body - “fit body to fit head.” I took the head home, and, thrusting my hand into the hollow, bulged out the lanky cheeks, put two alligator’s tusks into the place of the eye-teeth, and soon finished my part of the work. A day or two after I was horrified to see large placards upon the city walls, announcing the arrival of a great curiosity, the actual embalmed head of a South-Sea man-eater, secured at immense expense, etc. I told my employer that his audience would certainly tear down his museum, when they came to find out how badly they were sold, and I resolved myself not to go near the place. But a few nights showed the public to be very easy pleased. The figure drew immensely, and I was soon, with my employer’s full consent, installed as inventor, wax-figure make, and general mechanical contriver in the museum.69

Powers would remain with the Western Museum for seven years.

69Henry W. Bellows, ‘Seven Sittings with Powers, the Sculptor,” Appleton’s Journal of Popular Literature. Science and Art (June 12-September 11, 1869), #3, PP, CHS.
Chapter Eight

The Infernal Regions

In the late spring of 1828, Dorfeuille began to distribute handbills throughout the city proclaiming the opening on the Fourth of July of an elaborate exhibit of "The world to come, as described by Dante, and comprising Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise." Many American museums participated in the extensive celebrations of the Fourth of July. Independence Day was an occasion of great celebration in the young Republic - it was a day when all members of the community paid tribute to their patriotic spirit and revolutionary traditions. The entire town often gathered for parades, orations, readings of the Declaration of Independence as well as evening dinners.¹ Many museums throughout the nation took advantage of this work-free day to introduce exhibits.

Dorfeuille’s newest exhibit was inspired by Dante’s Divina Commedia. The subject matter was neither new nor unique - Charles Willson Peale had displayed in his Philadelphia Museum transparencies based on Milton’s Paradise Lost as didactic messages about the effects of immorality and sin. However, Dorfeuille’s exhibit was unlike any other that had preceded it. In the foreground were wax figures depicting the agonies of the damned while the scenes of purgatory and paradise were painted on transparencies which could be seen in the distance.² In the future, the exhibit would be known as The Infernal Regions, The Regions or simply Dorfeuille’s Hell. The handbill, its current whereabouts or existence unknown, was

¹Ross, Workers on the Edge, 23.

²Created by artist Auguste Hervieu, the transparencies would eventually darken from the exposure to lamp smoke and would be eliminated from the display.
once in the possession of the Trollope family. It described the exhibit thus:

In the centre is seen a grand colossal figure of Minos, the Judge of Hell. He is seated at the entrance of the INFERNAL REGIONS. His right hand is raised as in the act to pronounce sentence, his left holding a two-pronged sceptre. Above his head is a scroll on which are written the concluding words of Dante's celebrated inscription, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!" To the right of this figure the foreground presents a frozen lake, on the surface of which are seen the heads of those who have been doomed to this species of punishment. Among these is the head of Ugolino, whom Dante describes as eternally gnawing the head of his enemy, who, after placing him and his three sons in the upper chamber of a strong tower near Florence, threw the keys of it into the moat and left them to perish with hunger. Grinning in mockery of the ice-bound sufferers. A BLACK IMP is seated on a rock, dangling a young monster. On the edge of the opposite side of the frozen lake stands a spirit, who is just about to endure the frozen torment; and his attitude and countenance express the agony of extreme cold. Behind him opens the fiery gulf, the reflection of whose lurid glare is seen on his half-frozen body. At his feet a female head, fixed on the ice, looks up to the flames, as longing for their warmth; while a little way within the lake another head is seen gazing with longing eyes upon the ice. A brilliant fountain of flame is in the midst of the lake, and around it crowds of condemned spirits in all varieties of suffering. In one corner a fiend is proclaiming their infamy by the aid of a trumpet through all the depths of Hell. Birds and animals of hideous form and evil omen are fluttering over the heads and tormenting the sufferers. Large icicles hang from the rocks that form the Gate of Hell, and reflect on their bright surface the red glare of the fires within. On the left of Minos is seen as Skeleton ascending a column of icicles and holding a standard bearing these lines:

To this grim form our cherished limbs have come,
and thus lie mouldering in their earthly home.
In turf-bound hillock or in sculptured shrine
The worms alike their cold caresses twine.
So are we all equal: but once left
Our mortal weeds, of vital spark bereft,
Asunder farther than the poles we're driven-
Some sunk to deepest Hell, some raised to highest Heaven.

Still farther on the left of Minos, and melting into distance behind him is seen the shadowy region of Purgatory. Four bright stars - the Cardinal Virtues - give a delicate and cheering light amid the gloom. A group of figures loaded with the burthen of their sins are about to plunge into the lake of purgatorial waters, in the hope of depositing them there. A boat wafted by the wings of an Angel is bearing departed souls toward Heaven; and near it is a column of pale light to direct its course. In the distance is the mountain that divides Purgatory from Heaven; and Beatrice, the departed mistress of Dante, is standing on its summit, encouraging him to proceed with her to Heaven, where his former guide, Virgil, cannot be admitted (being a
Pagan). Groups of Pilgrims who have passed through Purgatory are ascending the mountain. Still farther to the left, and opening in unbroken splendor above the head of Beatrice is seen the Heaven of Heavens. The golden light pours down on the heads of the Pilgrims, and angels are seen floating in the air and encouraging their efforts. The foreground of this part of the scene presents various objects to cheer the spirit of the Pilgrims in their passage through Purgatory. The entrance indeed is rocky, but shrubs and flowers adorn it, and the Dove, the bird of Hope, is bearing the olive-branch before them.\(^3\)

The earliest presentations of the Infernal Regions were separately-ticketed events, priced at an additional twenty-five cents per adult. Over the ensuing years, Powers continued to expand and refine the content of the Infernal Regions with the addition of other figures, enhancing its appeal and adding to its power to terrify the viewers.

The idea once set going, on it went; and every week beheld some new horror. The new Pandemonium soon crowded out the picture [Hervieu's transparency of Hell]; and soon the whole upper loft of a large building was filled with such an assemblage of figures, machines and contrivances to startle, shock and terrify that it was every evening crammed by people who like to be frightened and feel bad on purpose. It was the most profitable curiosity in the museum.\(^4\)

Powers later animated the display, creating a series of life-like automatons which continued to enthrall the public.

\[B\]ehind a grating I made certain dark grottoes, full of stalactites, and stalagmites, all calculated to work on the easily-excited imaginations of a Western audience, as the West then was. I found it very popular and attractive; but occasionally some countryman would suggest to his fellow-spectator that a little motion in figures would add much to the reality of the show. After much reflection, I concluded to go in among the figures dressed like the Evil One, in a dark robe, with a death's head and cross-bones wrought upon it, and with a lobster's claw for a nose. I had bought and fixed up an old electrical machine, and connected it with a wire, so that, from a wand in my hand, I would discharge quite a serious shock upon anybody venturing too near

\(^3\)Quoted in Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, 51.

the grating. The plan worked admirably, and excited great interest but I found acting the part of wax-figure two hours every evening in the cold no sinecure, and was put to my wits to devise a figure that could be moved by strings, and fill my place. I succeeded so well, that it ended by inventing a whole series of automata, for which the old wax-figures furnished the materials, in part, and which became so popular and rewarding, that I was kept seven years at the business...

Powers was to recall that "those unearthly sounds were there... until such modifications as experience would add. I even have felt my own flesh creep when working in the dark near the three big trumpets by the door. But then there was the ...clanking of the chains, the shrieking of the d--d souls, sheet iron thunder in addition."

Few visitors who saw the exhibit refrained from writing about it. The Bostonian Linus S. Everett gave the following description:

It is located - for the reader must understand that it has "a local habitation and a name" - in the attic story of the lower Museum in Cincinnati. The whole length of this infernal place is about twenty feet - its breadth ten or twelve. In the centre is seated his Infernal Highness as large as life. This diabolical personage sits on a throne of darkness of sufficient elevation to give him a commanding view of the abyss on either side. His body is clad in a sable robe which, however, discloses that all-essential appendage - a cloven foot. In his left hand he holds a pitchfork, like a weaver’s beam: while his right is pointed to an inscription directly in front, *Whoever enters here leaves hope behind!* His head is adorned with a huge crown, and his face (which by the way is not the most pleasant) is woefully ornamented with a hoary beard, made of horses’ tails! To give the importance to this King of Hell, his neck is so constructed as to admit of his giving a mod of recognition to the spectator; and his glaring eyeballs are made to roll most horribly by means of some machinery in the room below... On the right hand of the devil above described, and on the left of the spectator, is seen one department of this hell, which is denominated the *hell of ice*, a most heretical place, where the damned, instead of being burned in hell and brimstone, are frozen in eternal death! This department is filled with wax figures representing persons of all ages and conditions - and among others, I observed a beautiful child, represented as in the greatest agony, frozen fast to the foot of the eternal throne. But what added much

5Bellows, "Seven Sittings with Powers," Sitting #III, PP, CHS.

6HP to Sam Smith, August 7, 1866, PP, CHS.
to the effect, was the condition of a poor old negro just entering upon a state of perpetual freezing; a sad predicament, truly, for one so constitutionally fond of warm climate! In the corners of this part of hell, were to be seen several imps waiting the orders of his Majesty... On the left of the devil, which is to the right of the beholder, is the hell of fire. In this department, are seen the skeletons of persons, thrown into various positions, the sockets of their eyes, their nostrils, &c., filled with some bright substance resembling fire; presenting to the eye one of the most loathsome and disgusting scenes that imagination can portray! While the heart is pained with beholding these representatives of misery, the ear is saluted with a subterranean noise, produced by some instruments of discord in the apartment below, resembling the imaginary groans of the damned.7

The Infernal Regions continued to exert its powerful influence for many years. An unsigned editorial in *Hall’s Western Monthly Magazine* of 1835, discussing the artistic output of Powers stated:

But perhaps, he is best known here, as the inventor of the “Infernal Regions,” a most diabolical exhibit, which the curious in horrible conceptions, may visit any night of the year, Sundays excepted, at the corner of Main and Pearl Streets. There, in a darkened room, into which a dim light is partially thrown, is seen an exhibit of the burning lake - a terrific gigantic figure representing Beelzebub, stands fearfully conspicuous, and is so organized by machinery, as to nod its head, way its long ears, roll its great eyes, and gnash its teeth at the beholders - a serpent, some 20 feet or more in length, issues from a cavern, extends its loathsome body over the stage, opens its mouth, and gloats with malignant eyes upon the spectators, who congratulate themselves that an iron railing separates them from the monster - two tremendous quadrupeds distend their immense jaws, with hideous yells, and spring towards the audience - the toll of a distant bell is heard- thunder rolls and lightning flashes - a corse [sic] is seen hanging from a gallows - groans are heard - horrors accumulate, and fearful associations are presented to the mind, until the flesh of the spectator begins to feel the crawling of terror. Perhaps some one, who is bolder or more curious than the rest, advances to the iron railing, and carelessly drops his hand upon it, as he endeavors to make a close reconnaissance - the metal is charged with electric fluid, and the horror stricken wight recoils with a shock and a scream, which electrifies the whole assembly, sets the children to crying, the women to wailing, and the men to wishing themselves - out of the infernal regions. We know not what may be the moral effect of such a representation: it does not strike us as objectionable; but it is a repulsive spectacle, to which we should not carry a sensitive child, and which we

7Quoted in Heineman, *Mrs. Trollope*, 56-57.
have no desire to visit second time. As a specimen, however, of mechanical ingenuity, and as evidence of Mr. Powers' genius, it is worthy of attention.\textsuperscript{8}

Chapter Nine

The Western Museum After the Infernal Regions

By August of 1828, Dorfeuille proudly announced in the *Cincinnati Chronicle and Literary Gazette* that the annual subscription’s list was open as of the first of that month, and that admission to “the splendid scenic exhibition of Dante’s hell, purgatory and paradise” would be offered without additional charge. The public was encouraged to subscribe to the Museum as in addition to this display, membership would enable them to enjoy access to a collection which held “ten times more objects of curiosity than any similar establishment in the west”. The advertisement ended with Dorfeuille’s sincerest hopes that “a corresponding patronage will be extended to his Institution by a liberal and discerning public.”

In March of 1829, Dorfeuille advised the public that he had acquired, for “only a few days.” a “Wonderful Curiosity”: the Bencoolen Mermaid. Direct from her successful tour in England, the Mermaid was to remain in the Museum not for a short duration but for a number of years. She was still on view in 1838 when Harriet Martineau saw her and noted that she was not very cleverly constructed. The mermaid became a staple of the Museum in its subsequent advertising. An undated handbill, probably from the 1830s, invites the public to view the wonderful curiosity “Which was first procured at Bencoolen, and afterwards exhibited in England at a GUINEA a HEAD; and from hence in every state of our Union, to the eager curiosity of thousands who flocked to see and judge for themselves of this wonder of the deep.” It was not a statement of the authenticity of the object; rather the handbill issues

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1*CCLG, August 5, 1828.*
an invitation and challenge to the public to judge this mystery for themselves. This approach was to work as effectively when Barnum issued a similar challenge to New York audiences more than a decade later. It is likely that the Bencoolen Mermaid was one and the same as the one purchased by Captain Eades in Java from a north Chinese fisherman for the sum of $5,000. In London, the Mermaid was examined by William Clift, curator of the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, who declared her a forgery made of parts of an orangutan, a baboon and salmon. Her nails were synthetic, and the primate arms had been shortened. Although Clift proclaimed her to be a fraud, public interest and belief in the existence of mermaids persisted well into the Victorian era.2 Captain Eades’ mermaid was displayed in London where she drew 300 to 400 visitors daily.3 Indeed so popular were displays of mermen and mermaids in the nineteenth century, that the first volume of the Magazine of Natural History printed in London in 1829 included an article entitled “The Tests by which a real Mermaid may be discovered.” Inspired by the sight of a mermaid in a Dutch museum, the author “Conchilla” concluded that the existence of lungs in the specimen and its lack of fins were all indicative of the three-foot-long creature’s inability to survive or travel under water for any significant length of time. He suggested that “if it had been presented as an artificial instead of a natural curiosity, it would have been worthy of admiration, but that, as it was, I

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3Phillpotts, Mermaids, 58.
conceived it to be an unworthy imposition."4

Responding to the success of the Infernal Regions, Dorfeuille continued his expansion of wax figures in the Museum. By April of 1829, he was able to advertise that he could "flatter himself that he can now present to the public a specimen of art and taste which may vie with any thing of the kind in the United States. To those who are acquainted with the genius and talents of Mr Hiram Powers it will only be necessary to say, that the work to be exhibited is the production of his hands, and that it is the result of several months study and labour." This wax grouping consisted of a lovely female dressed "a la Turque" crowning the Hero of Orleans, General Jackson, who was attired in a Roman toga. Dorfeuille justified the appropriateness of classical clothing not only by the classical purity of the dress, but also because it made visual reference to Jefferson’s comment that Jackson "possessed more of the Roman than any man now living."5 In response to charges of quackery in his exhibits and to questions about the Infernal Regions, Dorfeuille denied "anything like quackery. He boldly and confidently invites the visits of the whole community, without fear of hearing a murmur of disappointment, he is proud to say that what he offers to the public, is not a mere "exhibition of wax figures" - but a specimen of the fine arts seldom surpassed in any country.


5In general, Americans were opposed to their heroes not looking American. Jefferson’s commission of a statue of George Washington by the renowned artist Canova was ridiculed when it was installed in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1821. Viewers complained that the toga-clad Washington looked un-American. Horatio Greenough’s 1833 sculpture of Washington in a toga was also received poorly because the attire was considered unsuitable. Matthews, Toward a New Society, 20.
and never equalled in this.”

The success of this new grouping was equally phenomenal. Powers later reported that “Tho it has been exhibited but a short time, the proprietor of the museum has cleared more than a thousand dollars by it and as the inhabitants still continue to come in crowds to see it, the result will probably be several thousand dollars gain. The group has been examined by critics and they tell me that if I could animate my figures I should be overwhelmed with orders for wives.” However, the immediate success of the figures did not ensure long-term attendance. The public, eager for newer and more novel attractions, continued to drive the Museum’s exhibit agenda.

To celebrate the Fourth of July in 1829, Dorfeuille informed the Cincinnati public that he would on this day display a new wax figure representing the Male Beauty of Cincinnati by Hiram Powers. (Within the past year, Powers’ name had appeared regularly in the advertisements, in recognition of his talent and skill and as a major promotional tool.) On this particular Fourth of July, the Western Museum was not to be illuminated. Dorfeuille justified this decision with the explanation that “this Beauty does not need any nocturnal blaze from the windows of the Museum to throw light upon it; it would be profaned by such vulgar exaltation. Lamps may be kindled in order to give lustre to that which will be forgotten almost as soon as the oil that feeds the flame is wasted; but this Beauty is inextinguishable, and shall not pass away. It will leave a track of light which shall endure

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6 *CCLG*, April 4, 1829.

7 Quoted by Wunder, *Hiram Powers*, 50.
through time; it is like that streak in the heavens, on which ladies will forever gaze - it is bright and everlasting - for it is Beauty in all its native simplicity. Beauty when unadorned/Is adorned the most." To add to the celebratory nature of the day, Dorfeuille had engaged a full military band "at a very considerable expense" to perform at the Museum during the daytime festivities.

Dorfeuille's continuing program of changing exhibits attracted local, unpaid editorial coverage. For example, in the July 11th edition of the Cincinnati Chronicle and Literary Gazette, the editors noted that the public amusements in the city were more numerous and attractive than was usual for the "hot and dusty month of July". Benjamin West's celebrated painting of Ophelia could be viewed at the Apollonian Garden while a "recent addition to the Western Museum of a wax representation of the proprietor of that institution from the hands of Mr Hiram Powers, which will be found to sustain the reputation that this young gentleman has already acquired in this department of the fine arts." The editors recommended that "with these and some private modes of killing time, such as an occasional 'sociable,' whist party, &c, &c, we who are so unfashionable as to remain in the city after the fourth of July, must look for relief against ennui..."

Not long thereafter Letton's Museum ushered in a new era of exhibitions for the Cincinnati museums by announcing the first of many displays of "human wonders". In March, Letton's patrons could view the extraordinary "LIVING MAMMOTH CHILD". Born

\footnote{CCLG, July 4, 1829. Dorfeuille's reference to the streak of light is topical; that summer a comet visible in the skies over Cincinnati was the subject of great interest.}

\footnote{CCLG, July 11, 1829.}
in Ohio to parents of normal stature, the child had attained the following proportions by the age of ten months - a height of 2 feet 11 ½ inches, and a body circumference of 2 feet 5 ½ inches. Twenty-five cents was the cost of admission to see this amazing child; admission also included access to the recently enlarged collections of natural and artificial curiosities. Letton reassured the public that this "wonderful specimen of man is not designed to gratify the idle stare of the unthinking." The interest generated in the child had prevented parents from working without interruptions, and thus they had decided to display the child as the reward of their labour was their only support. The ad was gone by April 10, 1830.10

The exhibit must have been successful for by the end of April, Dorfeuille responded by entering the realm of exhibiting unusual living humans. He engaged Miss Paulina Snyder, who had exhibited at the New York and Philadelphia Museums with some success, for an appearance at the Western Museum. The young Miss Snyder had been born without arms and with but one leg. Although another foot emerged from her knee, each foot possessed only four toes. Despite her lack of limbs, Miss Snyder had become proficient at a number of domestic skills, including knitting and sewing. Dorfeuille promoted her as "as an object calculated to excite the greatest curiosity and elicit the most intense interest; indeed, her acquirements are such as to lay claims to uncommon ingenuity."11

Miss Snyder was one of a number of limbless individuals who made their living displaying their ability to create functional and decorative objects. One of the best known and

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10CCLG, March 13, 1830.

11CCLG, April 24, 1830.
most popular of these women in the first half of the nineteenth century was Miss Honeywell. Born without arms, Martha Ann Honeywell had first appeared in 1798, at the age of seven years, in Gardner Baker's New York City Museum where she had demonstrated embroidery, plain sewing, and had delighted audiences by demonstrating the act of feeding herself. She continued to travel throughout the country until the late 1830s. She continued to acquire skills which amazed audiences and was soon demonstrating the fine art of paper cutting by manipulating the scissors with her mouth. These skills were featured during her appearance in Cincinnati. An undated handbill now in the possession of the Cincinnati Historical Society advertised her gallery of paper cuttings located temporarily in the Large Room, No. 8 on Wall Street. Here likenesses of General Jackson, Napoleon Buonaparte on horseback, as well as flowers and landscapes could be viewed or purchased. The admission price of fifty cents, later decreased to twenty-five cents, included a profile likeness of the visitor completed by the artist in a few seconds.

Both museums in Cincinnati were now competing with such temporary exhibits as a gallery of paper cuttings depicting military, sporting and archeological subjects. This was the famous Papyrotomania Gallery which had previously appeared in New York with such success. Run by a Mr. Hankes, it promised visitors their own full-length portraits completed for merely $1.25.

But one of the most successful of the itinerant amusements was the exhibit of

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12 Bogdan, _Freak Show_, 28.

13 _CCLG_, May 29, 1830.
Maelzel’s automatons on the Midwestern leg of their ten-year North American tour. Aimed at a large-scale audience, the automatons, including a bass fiddler, a speaking figure, a slack-robe dancer and the renowned chess player appeared at the theatre. These amazing automata could be viewed for fifty cents (first tier and pit seating) or for 37 ½ cents for seating in the second tier and gallery. Johann Nepomuk Maelzel (1772-1838) had previously built a large number of automata, musical instruments, music boxes, and even an ear trumpet for Ludwig van Beethoven. The beauty and uniqueness of these items had gained him fame and wealth in Europe. Maelzel had served as a sort of “court mechanic” to the Austrian monarchy and had opened a kunstkammer in Vienna. The automated chess player, built by Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen in 1769, had been purchased by Maelzel and had been enhanced by 1818 to speak French. The turbaned “Turkish” figure engaged a member of the audience in thirty-minute chess matches. These games usually ended with a win for the automaton, who signalled check-mate with two nods of his head. The North American tour of these automata was accompanied by a “sublime mechanical spectacle,” a large panorama of ‘The Conflagration of Moscow’ - a representation of Napoleon’s invasion of the city, accompanied by music on the Panharmonicon. This widely imitated (but one suspects seldom rivalled) musical instrument consisted of an automatic orchestra of forty-two musicians playing strings.

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14 CCLG. August 7, 1830.

15 Altick, Shows of London, 352.

clarinets, trumpets, flutes, drums, cymbals and triangles. Beethoven had composed Wellington's Victory, also known as the Battle Symphony, for the automated instrument. The cost of admission to these events was steeper than the typical twenty-five cents; it was priced at fifty cents, with children under twelve at half that price. Maelzel presented himself to his audiences as an inventor rather than a showman; as a genius who had created a machine capable of "copy[ing] the notions and peculiarities of life with the most wonderful exactitude."  

By November of that year, the popular Miss Snyder had returned to Cincinnati for a short duration, but this time to Letton's Museum, demonstrating her knitting and sewing skills once again.

In the summer of 1831, Dorfeuille advertised a display of living reptiles - among them an anaconda, or "Great Mountain Serpent, known by the natives of Hindostan as the Terror of Ceylon." In addition to the anaconda, there was a real asp from Egypt as well as a "camelion". The public was reassured that these dangerous and unusual animals were secured in cages and posed no threat to the visitor. The exotic creatures provided Dorfeuille with an opportunity to remind the public that they could also see the "handsomely tattooed" head of the Cannibal Chief Howaman. The Infernal Regions were also open, but Dorfeuille cautioned the public that "visitors cannot, on any account, be admitted twice for the same charge during  

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17Quoted in Cook, "From the Age of Reason to the Age of Barnum," 248.

18CCLG. November 13, 1830.
the exhibition of the Reptiles in the Museum."

It was with great pride that Letton’s Museum informed the local citizens of Mr. Morgan’s arrival from New York with his “useful and wonderful novelty” - three manufactories for cotton and woollen cloths and card, moved in full operation by dogs! "The exhibition is not intended merely to gratify idle cur, but to instruct, as well as to amuse." The Hall of Industry, as the exhibit was known, was open for viewing from 10 am to 1 pm and 3 to 5 pm as well as 6 to 10 pm for the usual twenty-five cent admission. The display of new types of machinery in museums was popular. It has been argued that these demonstrations of mechanical ingenuity and efficiency were indeed amusements for viewers. Machines had not yet emerged as a threat to the traditional, artisanal forms of livelihood they would eventually replace in the developing industrial, urban landscape. Instead they were perceived as yet more evidence of human skill and ingenuity in creating these potentially labour-saving devices.

By 1832, Dorfeuille had moved his establishment to new location at the corner of Main and Pearl Streets. He proudly announced the relocation in the papers, noting that the new room had been “designed expressly for his use. The fruits of a whole life’s experience have been applied in the arrangement of the rooms, to mingle the utile et dulce - to connect the attractive with the useful, and to blend Science with Amusement.” By encouraging this

19CCLG. July 23, 1831.

20CCLG, May 12, 1832.

21Dorfeuille’s choice of wording aligned him closely with methodologies encouraged by educational reformers of the time. It is reminiscent of Burgess Allison’s philosophy of education
connection, Dorfeuille continued to promote the Museum as an institution of learning which blurred the boundary between the acquisition of knowledge and leisure activities. Nor had any expense been spared in creating this new space, for the artistic talents of both Powers and Mondelli had been enlisted in creating the exhibits and decor. Dorfeuille concluded that his past efforts had been rewarded by sustained patronage of the local population and that “he now presents for the gratification of the Public, an Institution unrivalled in the West, and not surpassed in the Union”.22

Later that fall he introduced and subsequently re-engaged the popular Mssrs. Fletcher and Coney.22 Mr. Fletcher reenacted Roman and Greek statuary while Mr. Coney added some comic relief to the performances by offering popular songs. In the usual effusive language, Dorfeuille indicated that Fletcher had studied at the Royal Academy in London as well as at the Louvre in Paris. He was to demonstrate (in seven poses) Hercules struggling with the Nemean Lion, Achilles throwing the discus, Cincinnatus fastening his sandal, The African alarmed at the thunder, Ajax defying the lightning, as well as Cain killing his brother. Some twenty-five classical statues were to be imitated. The evening would end with the crowd-pleasing and highly celebrated presentation of the Dying Gladiator (in all four poses). The

which recommended that “with regard to amusements, certainly much may be done to unite the utile with the dules [sic], and it must be evident to every person of the least reflection, that if we can contrive to amuse whilst we instruct, the progress will be more rapid and the impression much deeper.” Quoted in David Brigham, Public Culture in the Early Republic, 19-20.

22CCLG, Saturday, September 29, 1832.

23Sol Smith recalled that Mr. Fletcher had presented “Ancient Statuary. Very good,” at the Columbia Street Theatre in the same year. Sol Smith, Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years (rpt; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 80.
presentations were followed by Mr. Coney's performance of favourite comic songs. Offered at a cost of twenty-five cents; the show began at half past seven in the evening. The representation of classical art works by living beings had originated in England in 1813. The popularity of this form of entertainment reflected not only the contemporary admiration of ancient Greece and Rome but enabled audiences to take advantage of the convention whereby the suggestion of nudity was exempt from censure. The performers often were clad in form-fitting clothing which mimicked skin colour. To enhance the illusion of an art work, the poses were often struck within large picture frames set up in the middle of the stage. The show was obviously popular with the public and continued into the first weeks of December. It was, no doubt, the same Mr. Fletcher who appeared in New York at the Museum in 1831, this time accompanied by Mr. Coney.

Although Dorfeuille aggressively promoted his current and forthcoming attractions through paid advertisements in local papers, he did not hesitate to exploit any opportunity to familiarize the public with his attractions. He made use of innovative and unexpected venues to promote his Museum, relying on the power of the unexpected. Dorfeuille continued to commission wax figures of locally popular and recognizable personages from Powers.

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24 CCLG. November 24, 1832.

25 Altick, Shows of London, 343.

26 The actor Sol Smith was invited to sit or rather "stand" for Powers in 1830. He was to be depicted in the character of Mawworm, which he had been playing for some time at the theatre. He declined the opportunity to be immortalized by Powers as Smith was concerned that the intended portrayal of him behind a pulpit-like stand would allow "unthinking spectators who did not know me (knowing, however that I was an actor) to suppose Sol Smith was making a mock of the forms of religion, which he has never done nor ever will do." Sol Smith, Theatrical
Among them was Alexander Drake, one of the most beloved comic singers of the West. Drake was best known for his rendition of the song "Love and Sausages". Dorfeuille commissioned Powers to create a wax figure of Drake and then arranged for the following event to take place:

There were some comical tricks played with this same figure when it was but just finished, and before the public were aware of its existence. It was one night taken to the theatre. It had previously been announced in the bills, in very ambitious phraseology, that the favorite song of Love and Sausages would be sung that evening by a sort of double Aleck Drake; and there was a good house. D was a universal favorite, and everybody was on the lookout for something very funny. The play is over and the prompter's bell summons the musicians to their places in the orchestra. Another ring, and the curtain rises. There stands Aleck in the customary attitude; and they greet him with several rounds of applause! They pause to hear the favorite song. Aleck holds the same attitude; his eyes are staring wide open, and the usual ragged dirty white handkerchief dangles motionless in his left hand. Some thought he had got a fit, and some began to whisper that he was blue! The musicians impatiently repeated the key note, and tired themselves da capoing the symphony; still no sign of a sound from Aleck!

The people began to hiss, the prompters rang the bell, and down went the curtain. 'What can the matter be?' Two or three doctors demanded their checks, and, hurrying around to the green-room door, offered their services. They are informed that he has recovered, and that the prompter is about ringing up the curtain a second time. All hasten back to their places, and the same dumb scene is enacted again! The house is amazed, mystified, mad. Cents, apples, nuts &c jingle, bounce, and skip about the stage, and the curtain falls in an uproar. Everything was ripe for a row, and, had some mischievous wight set the example, Drake's perversity would have brought down terrible retribution on the management. But Aleck was a pet, and the clamor was hushed at the first sound of the prompter's bell. The curtain again rose. Aleck did sing this time, and was encored till he was tired out. The house was completely hoaxed with Powers's likeness of Drake, which now stands, I believe, in the Western Museum.27

With the appeal of the Infernal Regions well established and Powers' continued

Management in the West (New York, 1868), 266.

contributions to the wax works, Dorfeuille had seemingly ensured the financial success of his Museum. But it was to remain an illusory if elusive goal. This time the uncontrollable forces of nature intervened.

The spring floods of 1832 were the first of a series of disasters to befall Cincinnati. A sixty-three-foot flood crest drove thousands from their homes and filled the main streets with ten feet of water. Stores were destroyed and the lower thirty-six squares of the city were inundated with water. Thousands of inhabitants were forced to seek higher ground. This disaster was followed by a financial crisis, a fire, and an epidemic which wreaked havoc with the economic and social life of the city.\textsuperscript{28} In August, a series of suspiciously-set fires destroyed three steamboats, a sawmill, a foundry, and two hotels, including the Pearl Street House which had been recently built at a cost of $40,000. The cholera epidemic which followed, killed an average of twenty-one inhabitants a day during the first few weeks, and drove eight thousand from their homes in search of safer refuge. Hotels and theatres shut down. Farmers avoided the community and markets were poorly supplied.\textsuperscript{29} Not only did the epidemic threaten local citizens, it frightened away visitors as well as potential settlers, and destroyed the city’s reputation as a vacation resort. Local physicians, hoping to address the problem, warned locals to avoid crowded theatres, ballrooms, and close apartments. Instead, they encouraged outdoor activities such as fencing, skipping rope, swimming, or playing

\textsuperscript{28}Aaron, \textit{Cincinnati: Queen City of the West}, 43.

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, 44-45.
quoits and cricket. \textsuperscript{30} Letton’s Museum participated in the communal effort at rebuilding by holding flood benefits on its premises. Benefits were also staged in Mr. Franks’ Gallery of Paintings, Mr. Brown’s Amphitheatre and the Second Presbyterian Church. \textsuperscript{31}

The winter of 1833 saw the eagerly awaited Siamese Twins, Chang and Eng, arrive in the city. Their international tour had already taken them through the eastern United States and England (where they had been on display at the Egyptian Hall), and back to the United States. Joined by a “cartilaginous ligament of several inches in length and circumference... proceeding from the breast-bone, just above the pit of the stomach,” the lively twins appeared side by side, with each arm around the neck or body of the other. \textsuperscript{32} Although intense negotiations had been carried out during the previous year, neither Letton nor Dorfeuille were successful in engaging the conjoined twins for their museums. In a letter to Hiram Powers, dated January 1, 1832, D.T. Disney indicated that he had recommended to the twins the “propriety” of selecting the Western Museum as their place of exhibition in Cincinnati. To his surprise he found that they had already been approached by one of Letton’s sons. Letton himself had followed up this meeting with a letter; however, the twins indicated to Disney that they had made a commitment to no one. Nor were they particularly interested in appearing at any museum. In fact, they were “averse to going into museums, as the amount

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 91-92.

\textsuperscript{31} Greve, Centennial History, 587.

\textsuperscript{32} Altick, Shows of London, 162. The twins’ careers extended into the middle of the nineteenth century and stimulated much discussion about the relation and unity of the human body and soul.
that generally fell to their share in such places was less than that which they would have received had they exhibited in a different place."

By early February of 1833, the twins arrived in Cincinnati having selected the Pearl House tavern as their exhibit venue. They received visitors twice daily - from 2 to 4 pm in the afternoon as well as from 6 to 8 pm in the evening. Admittance was twenty-five cents per person regardless of age. No discount was offered for children. Biographical pamphlets containing the engraved likenesses of the twins, a description of them and their condition by a professor of medicine at the University of Edinburgh, as well as a discussion of the possibility of a surgical separation could be purchased for an additional twenty-five cents. Advertisements in local papers advised women and children to visit the twins in the afternoons as they would find the earlier session "the most pleasant time."

In the same month, Dorfeuille attempted to compete with this phenomenal attraction by engaging for a few days only, "the following rare and beautiful works of creation." One was "the first ever brought alive to America, HYSTRIX CHRISTATA or Porc-Epic". Usually inoffensive, the animal could be roused to ferocity in self-defence. It could kill serpents by forming itself into a ball and rolling over attackers with its spines, some of which measured two feet in length! Two serpents were also featured in the display - the 18-foot anaconda, its horrific powers evident in its common name - the "Terror of Ceylon," as well as

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33 D. T. Disney to HP, January 1, 1832, PP, CHS.
35*CCLG*, February 2, 1833.
36Commonly known as the African hedgehog.
a boa constrictor of similar length. Known as the “Strangling Serpent,” it could kill large
deer, buffaloes, and even tigers. The public was reassured that despite these creatures’
capacity for terror and death, the colours of these “stupendous specimens of nature’s work,
are beautiful and vivid beyond description; and some idea may be formed of their amazing
voracity, from the circumstance of one of them swallowing several large fowls feathers and
all at a meal.” However, the public was reassured that the display was so secure that even the
most timid lady could approach and view the animals with perfect safety.37

In June, the popular serpents returned to the Western Museum. Dorfeuille announced
that J. T. Cops had just arrived in the city with a “splendid” collection of Asian serpents.
Cops was the owner of a large menagerie and made frequent appearances on the national
museum scene. The boa and anaconda were back, this time enhanced by two additional
reptiles, “the HARLEQUIN, or Diamond Serpent, The Crotalus Horridus, and the Water
Moccasin.” A live ocelot and an alligator completed the display. Each evening, Mrs. Cops
handled the serpents “with the greatest impunity”. No additional charge was set for this
exhibit. The Museum was open from 10 am to 10 pm daily, Sundays excepted, and
admittance was twenty-five cents for adults; half price for children.38

Nor were the snakes, ocelot and alligator the only living animals on display in
Cincinnati. In July, Letton responded to Dorfeuille’s exhibit by proudly announcing the
exhibition of a “Living Sea Dog, the first animal of its kind ever brought alive to the West

37CCLG, February 16, 1833.

38CCLG, June 8, 1833.
This animal is sometimes called 'seacalf,' and it belongs to the seal species. He is quite docile and is perfectly harmless. He knows his name, will crawl in and out of the water at the command of his master, and subsists exclusively upon fish, which he will eat from the hand of his keeper. His head bears some resemblance to a dog, having white whiskers and large black eyes. His four limbs armed at their extremities with long sharp claws, and seeming in their structure to partake of both fins and legs, serve him the double purpose of walking and swimming. His hair is smooth and shining, of a silvery dappled grey color.

These animals swim with great rapidity in their native element, and sometimes play about ships at sea, uttering plaintive cries, which may have given rise to the absurd stories that are told respecting mermaids and other imaginary beings. The structure of this creature is so wonderful that it was kind of model on which the ancient poets formed their tritons, syrens, and seagods, with a human head, the body of a beast and the tail of a fish....

It is a curious fact that although most animals are thrown into great consternation by thunderstorms, these creatures will sit upon the rocks during the uproar of the elements at such times and seem to contemplate these convulsions of nature with great delight and admiration.

Dorfeuille's advertisements that summer indicated that the Italian minstrels, Mr. and Mrs. Canipa, whose performances on the mandolin had "excited the universal approbation of thousands in the cities of New York, Charleston, New Orleans, and Louisville," were now at the Western Museum. During their stay, the Infernal Regions would be closed. But attendance would continue to decline with the recurrence of the cholera epidemic in 1833.

The Western Museum continued its extension and expansion of collections. In June of 1834, "extraordinary novelties" had been acquired. These new and attractive amusements had been in preparation for some time. Visitors would be particularly charmed by one object in

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39 This reference is probably to the Bencoolen Mermaid which was still on display at the Western Museum.

40 CCLG, July 6, 1833 and August 24, 1833.
particular, "A BEAUTIFUL MOSS COVERED FOUNTAIN, to which are fitted several
changeable and pleasing jets d'eau, throwing the water to a great height, in a variety of
curious and fantastic forms." Fitted at considerable expense, the fountain not only served an
aesthetic function but imparted "to the Great Room of the Museum, a delightful and
refreshing coolness during the oppressive heat of the Season." The public was also invited
to view a "PHENAKISTICCOPE" which had been recently exhibited before the Royal Society
of London and which Dorfeuille had secured "at great expense". The optical illusion created
by it had been greatly enhanced by the extraordinary skills of Mr. Hiram Powers, identified
in the advertisement as the "artist of the museum". An enormous elk which had recently
trampled to death a man on the property of Mr. Jeptha Garrard could also be viewed. And as
usual, the Infernal Regions were open. The advertisement concluded with the following
poem:

Come hither, come hither, by night or by day,
There's plenty to look at and little to pay;
You may stroll through the rooms and at every turn
There's something to please you and something to learn.
If weary and heated, rest here at your ease.
There's a fountain to cool you and music to please;
And further, a secret I still have to tell,
You may ramble upstairs, and on earth be in ______.

The fountain became a popular spot for visitors to the Museum. Maximilian, Prince of
Wied's, visited Cincinnati in the fall of 1834 and noted that:

41 With the recurrence of the cholera epidemic in the summer of 1834, it is likely that
Dorfeuille's strategy in providing and promoting the cooling effect of the fountain was an
attempt to counteract the prevailing medical advice to avoid overheated and overcrowded places.

42 Cincinnati Chronicle, June 14, 1834.
Cincinnati is a considerable town, and carries on an extensive trade, and is frequented by numerous steam-boats, of which a considerable number were now lying on the banks of the Ohio. Many travellers have already described everything worthy of notice in this town, and I will, therefore, only mention some establishments connected with natural history, which we were now able to visit at our leisure, as we were no longer apprehensive of the cholera. The Western Museum, belonging to Mr. Dorfeuille, which Mrs. Trollope has described, is the only one worthy of notice. I observed several interesting articles, though all American establishments of this kind are calculated, not for the advantage of science, but for pecuniary gain. This museum is lighted up every evening at eight o'clock, and an indifferent concert is performed, chiefly by Germans. In one of the rooms was a small fountain, round which the visitors sat upon benches, gazing at it with astonishment. The owner has a taste for the sciences, and would pay greater attention to them, if he did not attract many visitors till he introduced, in the upper rooms, an absurd representation of hell. Grottoes, in which a number of frightful skeletons are moving about, and among whom the devil acts a principal part; these, and other hideous scenes, attract the vulgar multitude, and bring considerable profit. Mr. Dorfeuille has, however, several interesting specimens, such as petrifactions, fossil impression, Indian antiquities, Mexican curiosities, and some fragments of parchment with hieroglyphics painted on them; the best of which, however, was at this time in the hands of Mr. Bullock, an Englishman, who resides some miles from hence, and which I therefore did not see.\footnote{Maximilian, Prince of Wied’s, \textit{Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832-1834}, reprinted in Reuben Gold Thwaites, \textit{Early Western Travels} vol. XXIV (Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), 143.}

The amount of advertising for both museums diminished greatly in the 1834. Only one notice for new attractions at Letton’s Museum was found. In November of 1834. “Col David Crocket [sic] Grinning the Oppossum off the tree!” was advertised. This wax figure was presented in a “beautiful Forest Room fitted up expressly for that purpose) and surrounded by his UNTAMED friends and foes”.\footnote{CC. November 1, 1834.} It is the last advertisement to be placed for Letton’s Museum. Ralph Letton’s death, the lack of visitors and cash all contributed to the Museum’s precarious position and soon its very existence was imperilled. In the early
winter. Letton's Museum closed its doors to the public.

Although the Western Museum was now free from local competition, it was not free of problems. In the weeks that followed, Dorfeuille's greatest fears were realized. Powers decided to leave the Western Museum to pursue opportunities in the nation's capital. Supported financially by Cincinnati art patron Nicholas Longworth, Powers relocated to the city of Washington. Here he hoped to receive a government commission to create art works for the federal buildings then under construction and to acquire a more prominent, affluent and influential clientele for portrait busts. 

It was hoped that this would be a temporary stay. While in Washington, Powers sculpted the busts of some of the most famous Americans of his day including President Andrew Jackson, John Calhoun, Martin Van Buren, and John Quincey Adams.

Powers' departure from Cincinnati was a cause of considerable concern to Dorfeuille who had for many years relied on the Powers' name in his promotions. Few advertisements had failed to mention Powers' involvement in the development or presentation of new exhibits. Dorfeuille knew that Powers could draw both repeat and new patrons anxious to see what new lifelike figure he had created for the Museum.

Dorfeuille addressed his concerns to Powers in early January while the sculptor was

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45Powers had supplemented his Museum earnings by sculpting some of Cincinnati's most prominent and affluent individuals. His first "official" bust commission was of the Reverend Dr. Robert Hamilton Bishop, first president of Miami University at Oxford, Ohio for which he was paid one hundred dollars. Powers believed that he could quickly surpass his income from the Western Museum in a short period of time as he was able to complete a bust in two weeks.

residing in Washington. He pleaded with Powers to maintain his ties with the Western Museum. This continued association was crucial as financial difficulties had already taken their toll on the other museum in Cincinnati - Letton’s Museum. Ralph Letton’s death had left his Museum in his wife’s care but due to financial difficulties, their home had already been repossessed. It was possible that the Museum would be as well. Dorfeuille knew that without new attractions with popular appeal, this fate could also await his Museum. Although he could still report profits from his existing collection, Dorfeuille also knew that any new works completed by Powers would attract a sizeable audience to his Museum.

I hope you will not forget me or my Museum as to a copy of Such Busts, as you may finish and endeavor to procure for also, as many duplicate or triplicate copies of autographs of our Great men as you can procure during your sojourn in W.[Washington] City, you must not be permitted to forget even D. Crockett of Storytelling Notoriety...
I have averaged at least Twenty Dollars per day...
Mrs. Letton now finds herself in a perplexing dilemma, the fact is she finds herself constrained to remove her Museum (the Trust Co having taken the house she occupies) not having the means or credit to do so, she has been bothering me...to buy her out. I have taken upon myself the trouble of removing her collection and the expense of fitting it up, but of that I have had enough as you know. I shall not very soon again try the experiment and bear the responsibility - Let her make the attempt...”

By February, however, business at the Western Museum had fallen off significantly. Despite the acquisition of new curiosities, the Museum remained vulnerable to uncontrollable factors such as the weather as well as the economic cycle of boom and bust. The winter of 1835 was severe and temperatures had fallen to between 9° and 18° Fahrenheit below zero, freezing even the wine in Dorfeuille’s bedrooms. Few people were willing to venture

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47Joseph Dorfeuille to HP, January 7, 1835, PP, CHS.
outdoors. Museum attendance was so low that Dorfeuille found it preferable to keep its doors closed. He informed Powers that "the Papers also, begin to chime in your Praises, now, that you are gone... whereas, had you remained here till Doomsday, they would no doubt have remained as silent as the Tomb. ...will you not send me a copy of each of your busts - it strikes me that you promised this much, and you cannot doubt, but they will materially help me out." Linden Ryder, hired to replace Powers "got along pretty well, and nothing has occurred yet, to diminish or detract from any part of the exhibit." It was clearly Dorfeuille's fear that Ryder, although capable, would not be able to restore the waxworks to their original state should any serious damage occur. Without the Infernal Regions the popular appeal of the Museum would be greatly jeopardized. The fame of the exhibit had grown and a New Yorker visiting Cincinnati that year noted:

The collection... is extremely interesting, from embracing a number of enormous organic remains among its curiosities, with antique vases and various singular domestic utensils, excavated from some of the ancient mounds in Ohio. In the upper story of the same building there is another exhibition, which, from the accounts I have had of it, I should hardly expect to be patronized in so enlightened a community: - it is nothing less than a nightly representation of the final place of torment in the other world, with all the agreeable accompaniments that the imaginations of the vulgar delight in conceiving as belonging to it. A very respectable man, whom I chanced to meet with long before reaching here, mentioned to me the existence of this piece of charlatanism, and dwelt upon it with great unction, from the "good moral effect it would produce!" Now, it is not surprising that the very persons who condemn theatrical representation are the ones of all others to countenance such gross and impious humbug? The success of such disgraceful mummery is, perhaps, the strongest argument that could be adduced in favour of a well-regulated stage."

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48 J. Dorfeuille to HP, February 17, 1835, PP, CHS.

Ryder’s correspondence to Hiram Powers provides a glimpse of how the Museum operated during Powers’ continued absence:

Old Oystershell [Dorfeuille] has been getting along pretty fairly lately - of course owing to your departure. He has secured the hatchet with which Cowan destroyed his wife and children and expects to make a good sum of money by exhibiting it, he has also W Cowan’s Bonnet and the whole of the dresses which they had on at the moment of the horrid sacrifice. The old man has been quite in a state of excitement while getting these things together. He told me last night that he was at work upon some wax figures which he meant to dress up in the identical clothes so as to shew the group as they were seen when they were first discovered immediately after Cowan had run from the house. It will be a profitable spectacle no doubt...”

Despite Ryder’s perceptions of financial difficulties in the operation, Dorfeuille continued to spend money on new attractions. The staff had not been paid, but Dorfeuille had purchased expensive wood and a very “splendid piano”. Dorfeuille’s willingness to invest in a new piano must have been based on his optimism about the ticket receipts to be generated by the new waxworks display of Cowan in the brutal act of murdering his family. The realistic grouping was enhanced by the actual clothing and murder weapon. Perhaps Dorfeuille hoped that the axe and blood-stained clothing would also distract the public from noticing the obvious decline in artistic standards of the wax modelling.

Even with Powers gone, it is not difficult to understand Dorfeuille’s optimism about the drawing power of the planned exhibit. Cowan’s crime was one of the most sensational of

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50Dorfeuille’s nickname was a reference to his discovery of a previously unidentified land mollusk. It was named Polygyra dorfeuilliana by the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences in his honour.

51Linden Ryder to HP, November 21, 1835, PP, CHS.
its era. His public hanging had been witnessed by an estimated crowd of between 20,000 and 30,000. Cowan’s public acknowledgement of his guilt and his attribution of it to intemperance had added an edifying component to the hanging. He had warned those in attendance to be “beware of the seducing bowl.” Dorfeuille’s willingness to purchase the blood stained clothing and murder weapon was an exploitation of an existing and, to our late-twentieth century sensibilities, morbid fascination. Yet in ante-bellum America, public executions were a source of free entertainment for thousands. Patricia Click has documented the attendance at public executions in three American cities: Baltimore, Norfolk and Richmond. These events, known as the “Carnival of Death,” delivered a strong moral and didactic message in their proceedings. After preliminary comments from a local authority, the criminal usually made a few remarks. Then a clergyman addressed the assembled crowds about the consequences of evil.

In Cincinnati, the 1829 execution of Philip Lewis was watched by a crowd estimated at between eight and fifteen thousand. Three years later, the reprieve of John Birdsell just prior to his hanging, infuriated a crowd of fifteen thousand which had been gathering for ten days. The city had been brought to a standstill and on the scheduled day of execution all business in the city was suspended. Workshops, stores and

52 Ohio historian William Venable recalled that in the 1840s, stage coaches travelling to Cincinnati would stop near the gallows-tree upon which Cowen and Hoover were hung. A part of the gallows could still be seen; travellers were encouraged to view the “ghastly relics”. William Venable, “Going Down to Cincinnati,” in The Hesperian Tree, ed. John Hames Piatt (Cincinnati: 1900), 233-235.

53 Buckeye and Cincinnati Mirror, November 28, 1835, 39.

offices were deserted. Onlookers sang and drank while the accused was escorted to the
gallows, provoking outcries from local press that these were carnivals for amusement
seekers. The scientific community was also distressed by the decision for they had promised
to conduct publicly a number of galvanic experiments on Birdsell's body. Nor was the
display of body parts unusual in American museums. Even prior to the nineteenth century,
Charles Willson Peale's Museum in Philadelphia had featured the trigger finger of the local
murderer Mr. Bruliman as a moral and cautionary tale.56

Troubles continued to plague Dorfeuille's operations. Although it was now the only
museum in the city, it encountered repeated difficulties in maintaining the Infernal Regions,
its most popular exhibit. By year's end many of the mechanized figures created by Powers
were showing signs of wear and tear. It was doubtful whether Dorfeuille would ever be able
to find anyone as talented as Powers to repair or replace the figures in the event of complete
breakdowns. Although it had been hoped that Powers' stay away from Cincinnati would be
temporary, it was now clear that it would be an extended trip. Ryder wrote to Powers that

Philosopher Belsebub has begged of me to inform his creator of his sadness and
disappointment at your forgetfulness, or regret, "true it is, he says, "he grinds and
giggles every day to the gaping vulgar herd whom he is under the necessity of
admitting to his levee; - but it is all hollowness and mockery: - he doubts that he shall
be able to bear up much longer. His eyes show symptoms of weakness and old age -
and his head he fears moves not as it was wont to do when you, his good providence
watched so well his springs of action and ministered so carefully to prevent the
imperious encroachment of time - he fears his constitution has recently received a
severe shock and he feels that you, who understood that constitution well are not at
hand to help. I have endeavored to console the old gentleman as well as I could - but

55 Aaron, Cincinnati. Queen City of the West, 104.
56 David Brigham, Public Culture, 139.
he will not be comforted because you are not here. Poor Lucifer too has had a locked jaw with which he suffered more or less about a fortnight. I am in hopes of his recovery - though severe measures were necessary to understand the peculiar nature of his indisposition...

Fearing that the Museum would go under, Ryder was now forced to claim his salary daily: "I make it a point of duty not to sleep until I have pocketed my fee - a course which you were not sufficiently scrupulous in attending to." Despite Dorfeuille's averaging of $100.00 to $120.00 per week in attendance fees, he was "regularly irregular in his payments... What the end of it will be I cannot tell - but it seems clear enough that I must take care or Longworth will soon place him upon his beam ends..."57

It is impossible to ascertain the actual expenses involved in maintaining the Museum. But we do know that in addition to Dorfeuille's salary, the salaries of at least three staff, possibly part-time, had to be paid. Ryder notes that W. Bartlett was responsible for writing labels and assisted in keeping the upstairs doors to the Museum. Philpot continued to "light up" the Museum58. Their individual salaries are unknown, but Powers had once claimed that he earned $300.00 a month from Dorfeuille.59

By the end of the following year, Dorfeuille had engaged a Mr. Zaionckzeok, "a Pole who balances a thick pole on his chin, holds up cannon balls by his fingers..." But to no avail. The response to this seasoned New York performer was less than enthusiastic and Dorfeuille

57Linden Ryder to HP, December 23, 1835, PP, CHS.
58Wunder, Hiram Powers, 59.
59Charles Bulfinch, Jr. to HP, May 25, 1835, PP, CHS. This amount seems to be contentious as Wunder claims that Powers was paid four hundred dollars per annum. Wunder, Hiram Powers, 59.
refused to rehire him even at half-price. The Infernal Regions were closed during this performance; they were once again in need of repair. John King, engaged to fix the figures, wrote to Powers that

...it is a curious circumstance with regards the "Regions," that all the old strings and cords kept breaking about the same time. I had to open the [? indecipherable] of the serpent; to clean the brains of Lucifer and Belzebub; to set Cerberus on his legs again, to repair the Phantasmagoria etc. So frequently have these attentions been necessary that many a time and oft, I have wished you in hell rather than myself. When are you coming home?"

Despite the concerns of the staff, visitors continued to line up for the Infernal Regions. The Infernal Regions kept the Museum afloat. Michel Chevalier, who visited the United States between 1833 and 1835, offered the following description of the American museums:

[the] museum, which is merely a private speculation as all American museums are, and consists of some few crystals; some mammoth bones, which are very abundant in the United States; an Egyptian mummy; some Indian weapons and dresses and a half-dozen wax figures, representing, for instance, Washington, general Jackson, and the Indian Chiefs, Black Hawk and Tecumseh; a figure of Napoleon afoot or on horseback; a French cuirass from Waterloo; a collection of portraits of distinguished Americans, including Lafayette and some of the leading men of the town; another of stuffed birds, snakes preserved in alcohol, and particularly a large living snake, a boa constrictor or an anaconda.

But the Western Museum distinguished itself from its competitors. Chevalier noted that:

One of these museums in Cincinnati is remarkable for its collection of Indian antiquities, taken from the huge caves of Kentucky or from the numerous mounds on the banks of the Ohio, several of which were on the site of Cincinnati. This museum has one show which I never saw anywhere else it is a representation of the Infernal Region, to which the young girls of Cincinnati resort in quest of that excitement which a comfortable and peaceful, but cold and monotonous, manner of life denies them. This strange spectacle seems to afford a delicious agitation to their nerves and

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60John King to HP, December 22, 1836, PP, CHS.
is the principal source of revenue to the museum.61

It was now clear to both Ryder and Powers that the Museum and Dorfeuille were in serious financial difficulties. Although the Powers and Ryder correspondence is sporadic, it is certain that the men had proposed some type of buy-out scheme to one another. In January of 1837, Ryder wrote to Powers that he had as yet “not heard a whisper about the matter of which we are considering - nor do I observe in the conduct of our worthy friend “Spec” [Dorfeuille] any thing indicating uneasiness or insecurity...” Once again the cold temperatures had frozen the river and rendered the canal impenetrable; museum attendance had fallen off so that a daily average of forty-three visitors had sought admission to the museum between December 6, 1836 and January 9, 1837.62 It was not enough to cover the costs of operating the Museum and paying its staff.

In the spring of that year, Dorfeuille engaged storyteller D. Valentine and ventriloquist W. Skelline. But their performances failed to amuse or startle the “mobility” and after one week of poorly-attended presentations, Dorfeuille was forced to cancel their appearance. Ryder noted that some evenings the attendance was “very bad at the Museum, some nights not paying the expenses”. Financial difficulties forced Dorfeuille to contact the local Natural History Society, consisting of Graham, Ridell, and Buchanan and others, offering to sell them all the natural history specimens in his collection. But they had not yet


62Linden Ryder to HP, January 10, 1837, PP, CHS.
provided a reply. Ryder speculated that if Longworth held the mortgage on the property, such a sale could not be made without his consent. Ryder was not in favour of joint stock companies managing museums. "Whereas if the collection be kept as it is and added to by private interest it generally succeeds better than when what is every body's business is no one's business." He wrote Powers, "I think that if I were you I would write to Longworth informing him of this matter; when as you observe, you return here, something may be effected. D has once or twice when things have not been going as well hinted his dislike of it and his wish he could sell a part of it and retain the works of art and the Infernal Regions. But you know him well enough to expect that when business comes on again he alters his tone about selling." Fluctuations in attendance were not unusual. Ryder himself noted that business had revived somewhat and that on February 27th, eighty-nine visitors had sought admission to the building. Attendance remained high for the next two days, but plunged to forty visitors on March 2nd.

In April of 1837, Ryder was able to report that Dorfeuille was in trouble again. "For

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63 It is most likely that the Western Academy of Natural Sciences did not reply to Dorfeuille's offer as it did not meet for most of 1837. The group had been formed in 1835 to promote science through the preservation and collection of facts and specimens in the various departments of scientific knowledge. Most of its members were self-taught and pursued scientific interests as an avocation, although a significant number of local physicians were members. Dorfeuille, along with John Locke, John Riddell, and J. H. Perkins were appointed curators for the organization. Although collecting and displaying specimens were of importance to the organization, it lacked a permanent location. As a result, meetings and specimens were often held in the homes of the members. For a more detailed account, see Walter Hendrickson, "The Western Museum Society," Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio vol. 7 no. 2 (January 1941).

64 Ryder to HP, March 3, 1837, PP, CHS.
the business is so bad that if he does not leave it, it will leave him..." Dorfeuille’s spirits had been temporarily lifted by the arrival of his son from New Orleans but the staff found the younger Dorfeuille arrogant and disdainful. The wax figures of the Infernal Regions continued to need repairs. "The Ghost has a slight cold in its eyes - The Right Rev Professor Belzebub looks quite as sanctified as ever - W. Van Buren - What a blunder!... And now not to forget our worthy friend Cerberus. I have to tell you in all sorrow and sadness that he’s got lock’d jaws - but I mean to make all the doctors here soon hide their diminished heads - for I shall be sure to cure that dreadful disease in half and hour."  

Business continued to suffer. The economic depression that descended upon the nation on May 17, 1837 destroyed the savings and independence of many thousands. In Cincinnati, a declining standard of living for many inhabitants had been evident for some time prior the Panic. The influx of workers to the city in the late 1820s and 1830s had brought the artificially inflated wages of the labour-scarce frontier city into line with lower eastern wage levels. Their wages now failed to keep up with the rising cost of living. As the prices of food and housing continued to increase between 1830 and 1840, the wages of skilled and unskilled workers remained the same or declined. The Panic brought an abrupt halt to employment in many sectors. Weekly wages of artisans and labourers were cut from $10.00 to $7.00 and $6.00 to $4.50. Few could recall a time that could compare with the widening circle of misery. Many were forced to beg; the number of paupers admitted to the  

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63Ryder to HP, April 21, 1837, PP, CHS.

66Ross, Workers on the Edge, 43.
Commercial Hospital increased from a few hundred prior to 1837 to 1,035 in 1841. Those were able to maintain employment or find work often worked increased hours from 6 am to 8 pm. Few had the financial resources to visit the Museum.

Nonetheless, against all odds, Dorfeuille persisted. Later that summer, he acquired the head, right hand, and heart of the notoriously renowned Cincinnati murderer Mathias Hoover. Immersed in alcohol in "appropriate vases," the body parts were on display in the Museum. Dorfeuille reassured the public that the display did not exploit the sensational aspects of the crimes committed but that:

It may, perhaps, be already known that Mathias Hoover, the Murderer, previous to his execution, bequeathed his body to the proprietor of the Western Museum for the express purpose of its being exhibited publicly, as a warning to others of the awful risk, attending a departure from the paths of virtue. Such being the case, his wish has been complied with as far as possible and such parts of his body have been preserved and prepared for public inspection as could be effected consistently with a sense of what is due to the feelings of the visitors of that establishment."

Admission to this exhibit was twenty-five cents, "without distinction of age."

Dorfeuille’s effort to capitalize on the notoriety of Hoover was understandable. The Western Museum was floundering financially. Dorfeuille was desperate to attract an audience.

Little documentation exists to permit a detailed accounting of the Museum’s next few years. It is clear from Ryder’s correspondence to Powers that Dorfeuille’s efforts to sell the collection must have been sustained. He finally succeeded in 1839. Ryder informed Powers that Dorfeuille had left Cincinnati to establish his own museum in New York City on March

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67Ibid., 48.

68Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, July 4, 1837.
1, 1839. He was fortunate to have found on Broadway, just below the Park, in the "the building formerly used as the "American Museum" and next door to "Hanington's Diorama", a small room which he rented for $100.00 per month. Under the terms of the sale of the Western Museum, Dorfeuille was to retain all of the wax figures with the exception of the Aleck Drake as well as an unfinished male figure in the basement of Western Museum. "And with these Dorfeuille says he shall offer a second exhibition for the Gothamites. I doubt not his doing well if he takes care." Accompanying Dorfeuille to New York was his cook, bottle master and current wax-figure builder, Pettacola. It is clear from Ryder’s letter to Powers that he had hoped to convince the sculptor to purchase the museum; with their skills they would be able to run it at a profit. "I may first mention that I thought you and I might jointly purchase it for $6500 - paying the money in $500 installments at intervals of two years with 6 per cent interest, this however I have not proposed, and would rather hear what you have to say." Dorfeuille had advised Ryder that the natural history specimens "are so injured by being worm eaten as to be comparatively worthless but begged me not to mention this, which I attend to making yourself the only particular exception." Ryder also informed Powers that Dorfeuille had disregarded the sale agreement by taking all of the tools used by Powers in the preparation of the exhibits, the Phantasmagoria,\(^69\) and the female figure in hell.

A number of things had disturbed Ryder; he shared some of his concerns with Powers:

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\(^{69}\)This may well have been a duplication of the Phantasmagoria seen in Peale’s New York Museum which depicted the moving figures of dragons and the replicating witches. No mention of it has been found in any of the paid advertisements in Cincinnati papers.
In the first place I was requested by Mr. Longworth to commence the negotiating for the Est. Well, you know I could manage this with Dorfeuille by seeming in his interest, for with such a "slippery-eel" of a fellow I have no scruples in playing the best game I can. The conscientious old man then proposed to give me if I effected a sale for him $500. I then saw L and told him the prices $8,000 - but deducting the $500 for of course I could not take anything for such work (it was reduced to $7500) Things then went on for a while till W Longworth induced several other individuals to unite with him in the purchase among them Doctor Wm Wood. Finally the matter was taken hold of by the said Dr Wood, he made all of the definitive settlements with D. and paid him $6500 for all but the wax figures referred to. I, hearing how matters were going, then told Wood of the $500 which if he was "smart" he might secure for the stockholders, but he let it slip; and Dorfeuille gave him $100 for his troubles in settling it, and said he considered the promise he had made as nothing. As I had a good deal of information to get out of Dorfeuille yet, I took care not to notice this matter to him, hence we have ever since been "hail fellow, well met," and a nice quantity of "sly rascality" I have squeezed from him...

D. advised me, if Lever undertook the concern to call an auction and sell of without reserve all the perishable articles at present belonging to it, just as they were in their cases, selling a single one at a time. And then removing the 'Infernal Regions' to the corner of Fifth and Main, and, as I had an opportunity, laying out there a museum of such imperishable articles as might be left. The Antiquities, he says, are all valuable. Your views if you please. Beard just tells me he heard Dr. Wood say 'I wanted the bargain all on one side' this is curious considering that when we last parted he was to let me know that result of his conference with the stockholders. I think the Doctor is in a little bit of a humbug!

In May of 1839, Dorfeuille took out the following paid advertisement in the *New York Enquirer*. Drawing heavily upon the promotions of the past, he wrote:

The former proprietor of the Western Museum, in Cincinnati, having at an immense expense brought on the exhibition of the INFERNAL REGIONS, so well known by reputation throughout the Union, (and which has been in successful operation there for the last ten years) has the honor of inviting the public of New York, to pay their respects to him forthwith in the SATANIC DOMINIONS located in the City Saloon (formerly Hanington's Diorama) and next door to the American Museum, where the whole may be seen Every evening, at t 8 o'clock precisely.

Description:
In the centre on a shelving rock is large human Skelton, representing MINOS the Judge. He is seated at the entrance of the Infernal regions; his right hand is seen to

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70Ryder to HP, March 15, 1839, PP, CHS.
raise at intervals, as in the act to pronounce sentence; below him appear the concluding words of Dante's celebrated inscription:
“Abandon hope,
All ye, who enter here!”
In advance of this figure, the foreground is occupied by Beelzebub seconded by his companions, Cerberus and Python. The one a monstrous Three Headed Dog, the other a Gigantic Snake, moving in such a surprising manner, as to inspire the beholder with a belief that they are living. Farther on the left of Minos is Lucifer. Around whom are numerous human skeltons, some of which are transformed into Demons and Imps tormenting the sufferers. Still further back is a Skelton holding the Standard of Death, illustrating the following lines:
“To this grim form our cherished limbs have come,
And thus lie mouldering in their earthly home.
In turf bound hillock, or in sculptured shrine.
The worms alike their cold carcasses twine;
So far we all are equal, but once left
Our mortal weeds of vital spark bereft,
Asunder farther than the Poles we’re driven;
Some sunk to deepest hell, some raised to highest Heaven.”
The background presents a Fiery Gulf. Large icicles hang from the rocks that form Infernal cavern, and reflect on their surface the red Glare of the Fires within! On a sudden the visitor is plunged in pitchy darkness, whilst he is surrounded by the mournful shrieks of Condemned Spirits! The clanging of chains, and uproar of devils and imps which complete this scene of Horrors.
Admission 50 cents; Doors open at a quarter past 7 o’clock.
It may add to the interest of this exhibition, by stating that all the Skeltons therein contained, are those of Malefactors offences. In short the Proprietor feeling high confidence in the tendency of this exhibition to be exercised for good moral and religious purposes, respectfully invites the gratuitous attendance of the reverend Clergy of New York.
P.S. The exhibition only last ½ to 3/4 of an hour; and visitors occupying the first seats are forewarned not to touch the grating separating them from it, as the punishment for such temerity would not only be instantaneous but most shocking.”

Subsequent advertisements in the Morning Courier and the New York Enquirer promoted a “Nocturnal Polymorphous Fantoscope, a new Philosophical Apparatus, lately from London” which could be viewed prior to the opening of the Infernal Regions. Among

71 New York Enquirer, May 29, 1839.
the twenty-seven subjects depicted were dancing cats, Cherubini, George Washington, a shrouded skeleton, and the English actress, Mrs. Siddons portraying Lady Macbeth.

Cosmoramic views of the conflagration of National Theatre as well as the French and African Churches were offered to relieve the “tediousness heretofore felt in awaiting the Phantoscope and Infernal Regions.”\(^\text{72}\)

The New York *Morning Courier* of November 1, 1839 carried an extended advertisement for Dorfeuille’s Museum which promoted wax figures “created by Hiram Powers”. Among them were the Male and Female Exquisite as well as the General Jackson in a Roman toga. The quality of the work was vouched for by that notable museum owner, William Bullock, “late of the Museum of Egyptian Hall, London”.\(^\text{73}\)

Dorfeuille’s success in New York was short-lived.\(^\text{74}\) He died of consumption in New York City on July 23, 1840 and was buried in Green Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. What happened to the wax figures and other Museum collections remains unknown. It is more than likely that they were sold or auctioned to other museum enterprises in New York City. The physical proximity of the Dorfeuille’s Museum to Scudder’s enterprise suggests that this

\(^{72}\)Quoted in Kellogg, “Joseph Dorfeuille,” 16.

\(^{73}\)Ibid., 16.

\(^{74}\)A young store worker celebrating the Fourth of July in New York City recalled that the Infernal Regions were more memorable than the array of panoramas and anomalies he had encountered in Peale’s Museum. “On a sudden the visitor is plunged into pithy darkness, whilst he is surrounded by the mournful shrieks of condemned spirits. The clashing of chains, and uproar of devils and imps complete the scene of horrors.” He concluded that the exhibit inspired “reverential awe and astonishment”. Lewis O. Saum, *The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 35.
Museum could have been one of the buyers interested in the collection. As Barnum purchased Scudder's entire collection in 1841, the possibility that some of the Dotfeuille's collection may have soon found its way into the Barnum enterprises must also be considered. Philip Kunhardt indicates that Barnum possessed the club that killed Captain Cook. The cudgel, or one of these alleged instruments, was once mentioned among the possessions of the Western Museum in Cincinnati. This assertion remains difficult to document as it is likely that numerous objects related or allegedly related to Cook's expedition may have been on display throughout the country.

In Cincinnati, what remained of the Western Museum attempted to woo visitors with two popular live attractions: the Albino woman and the Irish Giant. Both were well received by the local newspapers. The woman, in particular, was described "in form and features like others of her sex - perfect - with hair white as the driven snow like the finest spun glass. Her eyes were prismatic and of variegated pink, changing their color and position every moment. Mr. O'Clancy from County Wicklow, Ireland, was conceded to be one of the tallest, yet well proportioned men in the world." Another popular attraction was a fancy glass blower who could spin glass animals or ships. Among his celebrated achievements was the ability to spin 1,000 yards of glass in one minute.

The new owners of the Western Museum had restocked the Infernal Regions. The wax works were not of the same quality as Hiram Powers' creation but their notoriety

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76Greve, Centennial History of Cincinnati I: 706.
continued to attract visitors. Foreign travellers were still compelled to view the Regions; seldom did they fail to write about the exhibit. Frederick Maryatt visited Cincinnati in the 1840s and noted its sad and rather dilapidated appearance.

...as the museum-keeper very appropriately observed to me, "It was a fine thing once, but now it had all gone to h-ll." You entered a dark room where, railed off with iron railings, you beheld a long perspective of caverns in the interior of the earth and a molten lake in the distance. In the foreground were the most horrible monsters that could be invented - bears with men's heads, growling- snakes darting in and out hissing - here a man lying murdered, with a knife in his heart; there a suicide, hanging by the neck - skeletons lying about in all directions, and some walking up and down in muslin shrouds. The machinery was very perfect. At one side was the figure of a man sitting down, with a horrible face, boar's tusks protruding from his mouth, his eyes rolling, and horns on his head; I thought it was a mechanism as well as the rest, and was not a little surprised when it addressed me in a hollow voice: "We've been waiting some time for you, Captain." As I found he had a tongue, I entered into conversation with him. The representation wound up with showers of fire, rattling of bones, thunder, screams, and a regular cascade of the d--d, pouring into the molten lake. When it was first shown, they had an electric battery communicating with the iron railing; and whoever put his hand on it, or went too near, received a smart electric shock. But the alarm created by this addition was found to be attended with serious consequences, and it had been discontinued.77

But it was not the only version of Pandemonium in town. Capitalizing on the exhibit's former acclaim and great success, a neighbouring museum owned by Frederick Franks had developed its own version called the Hellas Regions. Franks' earlier interests in painting and sketching imps and demons were well known in the city and made him eminently qualified to attempt to duplicate the successful exhibit in his own Museum.78 Advertisements in local papers promoted the idea that visitors to Cincinnati could visit Hell twice in one evening!

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77Marryat, A Diary in America, 455-456.

The two exhibits caused some confusion in the press in 1840 when the *Daily Chronicle* reported that

The Infernal Regions took fire yesterday afternoon and before they could be extinguished the two upper stories of the building on Front Street, between Sycamore and Broadway, occupied by Franks' Museum, were destroyed.\(^79\)

However, the next day, a letter from W. W. (Dr. W. Wood?) of the Western Museum reassured the public that:

*Gentlemen: I find in your paper of today an editorial stating that the "Infernal Regions" were consumed by fire yesterday. I hope you will have this statement corrected. For the exhibition originally got up by Dorfeuille, and made by Powers, now in Italy, is still in operation in the Western Museum at the corner of Main and Pearl Streets. Mr. Franks had something in his Museum which he called 'Hellas Regions' (got up long after this) which I learn was consumed yesterday. I hope therefore you will refer to this subject again, as your notice of yesterday will evidently injure this institution.\(^80\)*

Little is known of the final thirty years of the Western Museum. It is thought that Frederick Franks, the creator of the Hellas Regions, eventually acquired the Western Museum. Upon his death, it passed into the hands of his son, Frank Franks. Fredrika Bremer, visiting America in the 1850s, described the Western Museum as a highly successful financial venture and noted that the Museum was then owned by a Swede (probably one of the Franks).

Many Swedes are resident at this place [Cincinnati], and among them several who, after having been unsuccessful in the Old World, have succeeded in the New, and are now in comfortable circumstances. One of these has made his fortune by exhibiting "Hell," a youthful production of the American sculptor, Hiram Powers, who was born in Cincinnati, worked here at a watchmaker's, and here commenced various works of

\(^79\)Quoted in Kellogg, "Joseph Dorfeuille and the Western Museum," 10.

\(^80\)Quoted in Kellogg, "Joseph Dorfeuille and the Western Museum," 10.
art. Among these was a mechanical, moving representation of Hell. The Swede purchased it, set it up in a kind of museum, invited people to come and see how things went on in Hell, passed some violent electric shocks among them, accompanied by thunder and lightning, and is now a rich man, with wife, children, and country house, all acquired by his representation of Hell.\textsuperscript{81}

Although this account suggests that the Western Museum continued to prosper from its association with Hiram Powers, then the best-known American sculptor, a growing sophistication was evident in the city’s other entertainments and leisure opportunities. By the middle of the century, Cincinnati’s meteoric expansion had continued and city’s population soared to 115,000. Visitors noted that “Prosperity and progress are everywhere evident, and the long lines of steamboats and piles of merchandise on the levee, the bustle of the passing crowds, the whizz and whirr of factories, and the elegant stores and bank buildings give token of a brilliant future to the Queen City of the West.”\textsuperscript{82} The expanding canal system and the railway tracks which linked the city with the major centres of the country contributed to the sense of promise for the economic growth of the city. New York City could be reached in only seventy-two hours! The rising affluence of the local population and the city’s continued growth led to predictions that the city was destined for greatness. J. W. Scott, a booster of Western cities, claimed that Cincinnati would become the greatest metropolis on earth by the year 2000.\textsuperscript{83}

The city’s population had changed. Until the 1840s, Cincinnati had been a


\textsuperscript{82}Quoted in Vitz, \textit{The Queen and the Arts}, 37.

\textsuperscript{83}Vitz, \textit{The Queen and the Arts}, 37.
homogeneous city of white, native-born Protestants who had come from the eastern seaboard of America. But by the 1840s, approximately one-half of the city claimed Germany as its place of origin. Although Germans had come to the city in small numbers prior to 1830, a series of natural disasters and political upheavals in Germany resulted in a significant immigration to America in the next decade. This significant German population settled in the enclave north and east of the junction of the Miami and Erie Canals, an area which came to be known as "Over-the-Rhine." Here German remained the language of discourse, commerce and culture. German newspapers, business ventures, churches, theatres and a variety of cultural activities flourished within the quarter. Isolated from the general population of Cincinnati by language difficulties, the German community was further marginalized from the mainstream by the anti-Catholic sentiments of the English-speaking inhabitants of the city.

While the affluence of the city had maintained an active, if rather provincial, cultural life until the 1840s, the ease with which Cincinnati could be reached now made the city a major stop on the American tours of European celebrities. Increasingly, the residents of Cincinnati had access to the major talents of the age. The Norwegian violinist Ole Bull performed in the city in 1852. Soon thereafter, Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale, arrived. The famed pianist Sigismond Thalberg performed for two thousand music lovers who paid up to $1.50 for seating. Nor was the city neglected by prominent lecturers - Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Mann, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

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*Ibid.*, 44.
presented popular public lectures attended by hundreds. The Harvard palaeontologist Louis Agassiz spoke at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science held in Cincinnati in 1851. These events contributed to an atmosphere of stimulation and sophistication, and suggested that Cincinnati was at the forefront of cultural and scientific developments in America. But despite this growing sophistication, local audiences still supported the frequent appearances of infant prodigies and unusual performances such as the red-shirted firemen who struck anvils for the "Anvil Chorus."  

Even art began to establish an attentive and avid audience. In a city which had long dismissed artistic production as a frivolous activity, increased support for painting and sculpture became evident with the re-launching of the Western Art Union in 1847. Based on the American Art-Union in New York City and operated by a board of local luminaries, the Western Art Union sold $5.00 memberships which entitled subscribers to an original engraving and free admittance to the Art Union's gallery. Membership fees were used to purchase art works by local and nationally renowned artists for the gallery. But perhaps the most appealing aspect of being a member was the opportunity to win one of the displayed works through the annual lottery draw. In its first year of existence, the Western Art Union attracted 724 subscribers and by 1850, its membership swelled to 5,000. Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave* was the principal prize in 1850 members' lottery. Despite the immense success of the organization, the Western Art Union collapsed in the following year under allegations

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85 *Ibid.*, 44.

and accusations of financial irregularities in management.

The demise of the Western Art Union rapidly gave rise to the creation of a number of new galleries and organizations which eagerly attempted to gain from the success and popularity of the defunct organization. Mrs. Sarah Worthington King Peter launched the Ladies Academy of Fine Arts to “aid in the cultivation of public taste - to afford encouragement to artists, and to furnish a source of intellectual recreation and enjoyment to the people...” The Academy soon opened a public gallery and reading room, presented classes and organized lectures, and established an annual loan exhibition. Copies of notable European art works were commissioned including Murillo’s *Virgin of Seville*, Raphael’s *Virgin in the Veil* and a half-size copy of his *School of Athens*. The Academy, consistent with prevailing attitudes toward the role of art in society, stressed the acquisition of the principles of proper design, skills which were crucial to the economic success of local manufacturers. This emphasis was particularly appealing in a city which produced furniture and pottery for national and local distribution. The Academy survived until the Civil War but in 1864, the collection was bequeathed to McMicken University.

By the end of the fifth decade of the nineteenth century, however, hopes for Cincinnati’s cultural and economic dominance began to fade as the nation shifted from water to rail transportation. Population growth slowed. Soon Chicago and St. Louis would overtake Cincinnati as the commercial and manufacturing centres of the Midwest. Despite the collective efforts of the local societies and cultural promoters, Edward Mansfield

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reflected upon the city’s progress in 1855 and expressed concern that Cincinnatians had not succeeded in turning their city into a cultural centre. Mansfield complained that the arts "should have grown up as part of the very body of society," not "as appendages of commerce." But, lamented Mansfield, the pursuits of commerce and business had become, not the means to a higher end, but the end itself.  

In 1857, low river levels, a severe winter, and a coal shortage affected the local economy. With the threat of secession, southern markets appeared less appealing and it is possible that debt collection from the southern states became more difficult to enforce. Immigration slowed to a trickle. Nonetheless in 1860, Cincinnati was still the third-ranked industrial city in the United States, the leading manufacturing centre of the west, and one of the ten most populated cities in the country. Despite the subtle signs of the city’s decline, Samuel Pike, a Jewish-German immigrant whose surname had been changed from Hecht, opened Pike’s Opera House in 1859. Costing $500,000.00 and capable of accommodating three thousand seated and another thousand standing patrons, the Opera House opened with a five-week festival of European operas. The performances of works by Donizetti, Mozart, Verdi and Rossini succeeded financially and artistically. The Opera House soon became a scene of theatre, ballet and musical performances as well as a venue for community events.

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58 E. D. Mansfield, Memoirs of the Life and Service of Daniel Drake (Cincinnati, 1855), 156.

59 Aaron, Cincinnati, 231.

(In 1866, a few hours after a performance of *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, the building burned down.)

As in other cities, interest in cultural events waned with the advent of the Civil War. Army enlistments and then a steady stream of wounded entered the city. Cincinnati rallied to raise funds for the United States Sanitary Commission in 1863 by organizing the Great Western Sanitary Fair. A variety of lectures, musical entertainments and other cultural events took place throughout the city. However, the Western Museum was now on the periphery of such activities. Most events took place in the recently-built Mozart Hall as well as Pike’s Theatre which could accommodate significantly larger numbers of participants than the Museum. Nonetheless, Joseph Dorfeuille’s daughter participated in the effort to raise funds for the Union armies by loaning her father’s notebooks for public display.¹¹

Little is known about the Western Museum’s last years. No paid advertisements appeared in the local press. It is possible that the Museum relied upon more ephemeral forms of promotion such as handbills which are not extant in public collections. We do know that it was no longer the only museum in town. Although little is known of Colonel Wood’s Museum and Theatre, located in the Broadway Building at Fifth and Walnut Streets, the press announced that both were destroyed by fire on July 14, 1857.²²

In Cincinnati as in other major centres of the United States, proprietary museums were in jeopardy. Established in the early stages of growth of a primarily rural America, they


²²It is not certain but is interesting to speculate that Colonel Wood was related to the William Wood who had purchased the Western Museum from Joseph Dorfeuille.
were now competing within a much more dense cultural matrix. In America, there was evidence of a new type of museum. The founding of the Smithsonian Institution marked the beginning of a publicly-funded and state-supported museum which would impact significantly upon the longevity and vitality of proprietary museums in the nation.

Eventually, proprietary museums would become marginalized, relegated to a peripheral role associated with fair grounds and amusement parks. In 1846, Congress used the more than half a million dollars left to the United States by the Englishman James Smithson to establish the Smithsonian Institution. The bequest, intended for the “increase and diffusion of knowledge among men,” had been the subject of a lengthy and acrimonious dispute. Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian, had argued that Smithson’s intentions of “increasing” and “diffusing” knowledge were incompatible. Without an increase in the amount of knowledge, there was little to diffuse; therefore the legitimate and only role of the new Institution was to be the creation of scientific knowledge. Henry refused to make the Smithsonian the keeper of a national museum, art gallery or even a library. Ultimately, he was not successful in staving off the creation of a national museum within the Smithsonian. Nonetheless, Henry attempted to keep the museum within bounds, reminding his critics that the collections of the Smithsonian were intended essentially for study and not “to gratify an unenlightened curiosity.” Henry strongly rejected making the Smithsonian a popular institution arguing that his “self-imposed mission and deliberate purpose was to prevent, as far as in him lay, precisely that consummation.” He dismissed the notion that the institution was to win the favour of the public. Although Henry never gave up his vision of the Smithsonian, the separation of the Institution from a national museum never occurred. By
In Cincinnati, the Western Museum, located at the corner of Main and Pearl Streets, continued to exist until 1867, passing through the hands of a number of different owners. The last published recollection of a visit to the Museum can be found in Edward Hingston's *Genial Showman*. Along with the popular comedian and lecturer Artemis Ward, Hingston visited the Museum in 1861. The proprietor of the now run-down Western Museum was a Mr. Allen. The lower floor served as a repository for a motley collection consisting of broken models, stuffed pigs, oddly-shaped balls, and even a thunderbolt which had fallen to the ground in Kentucky. On the upper level, the head and hand of the notorious murderer Hoover were still on display. The attendant admitted that the last wax figure to be included in the collection was that of General Fremont; however, the resemblance was poor as he had been refashioned from the body of the much stouter Emperor of Russia. Hingston and a number of other patrons then ascended up a steep and rickety staircase to see the Infernal Regions. Although an effort had been made to duplicate the original, it was not as successful. Some of the animals depicted appeared to be hybrid creatures, others were indiscernible. A Minotaur had appeared.

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Despite Hingston’s criticisms of the quality of the wax works, some of the spectators were genuinely terrified by the show. Others, more nonchalant and obviously familiar with the exhibit, eagerly anticipated the next movements of the figures, explaining the actions to those less familiar with the Infernal Regions. As darkness descended upon the visitors, the serpents began to crawl, the skeleton began to glide, and the winged demons flapped their wings. A figure clad in black moved forward to shake his claw-like hand in the faces of those in the front row. An animal form resembling a feline growled. Then shrieks filled the room. Lucifer addressed the assembled; he admonished the crowd to behave or he would see them at a future time. Hingston declared that “nothing we ever had in London could equal the entertainment provided for the visitor to the Ohio show-shop,” while his companion Artemis Ward was more emphatic in his praise. “It’s the best show in Cincinnati.”

In 1867, the Museum was put up for sale. Once the most famous and imitated Museum of the American West, its demise hardly raised the interest of the press. What remained of the contents was sold at public auction. Sol Smith’s brother Sam was living in Cincinnati at the time. He had been a warm friend of Hiram Powers and also of the now-deceased Aleck Drake, and learning that the Museum had “smashed up,” and that all the curiosities were to be sold at auction to the highest bidder, attended the auction. Sam Smith saw “Washingtons, Websters, and Jacksons knocked down to the Barnums of the country at astonishingly low prices.” At the end of the day, a dusty old head was produced from a

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bare.

It was now bald (the wig having been used for another wax figure), but there was no mistaking it for the head of Aleck Drake. Sam Smith was willing to pay dearly for the wax head, and anticipating that the price would be "run up" on him if it was known who had sculpted it, assumed an air of indifference. The auctioneer, uncertain of the identity of the head, began the bidding. No one in the audience could remember the once-famous performer.

"Sir, I don't know whose head it is, but it will be yours if you purchase it." The head was soon the property of Sam Smith. The auction continued. Even the component parts of the Infernal Regions were sold in lots to suit purchasers. "Devils were at a discount. Pitchforks were not in demand. Demons of all kinds went for a song. Even old Satan himself brought only a dollar and a half!"

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95 Most wax figure-makers sculpted only the heads and hands of the personages in wax. These would later be mounted upon suits of clothing which had been stuffed with straw. Smith, *Theatrical Management*, 265-266.

Chapter Ten

The Birth of the Publicly Funded Museum in Cincinnati

In the aftermath of the Civil War, a different model of the American museum as a public, non-proprietary institution began to coalesce. Influenced by the Smithsonian as well as the new British Museum of Manufactures established at the end of the Great Exposition of the Industry of All Nations (or the Crystal Palace) in London in 1851, this museum model would find its expression in the major centres of America before the end of the nineteenth century. The Museum of Manufactures (later known as the South Kensington, and by 1899, as the Victoria and Albert Museum) was founded by the British government to house the objects purchased through government funds from the Great Exhibition. This collection was to benefit and educate the students in the Government Schools of Design as it was generally believed that access to objects of such exceptional beauty and craftsmanship would not only elevate design standards but boost moral standards in the nation. The Museum's collection continued to grow with additions from subsequent international exhibits. Under the leadership of its director Henry Cole, the Museum would exert a powerful influence on museums of applied arts around the world, but most particularly in North America. The Museum's mission was elaborated by Cole in his first annual report to the Board of Trade:

[A] Museum presents probably the only effectual means of educating the adult, who cannot be expected to go to school like the youth, and the necessity for teaching the grown man is quite as great as that of teaching the child. By proper arrangements a Museum may be made in the highest degree instructional. If it be connected with lectures, and means are taken to point out its uses and applications, it becomes elevated from being a mere unintelligible lounge for idlers into an impressive
schoolroom for everyone.\textsuperscript{1}

Under Cole the Museum amalgamated educational purpose, aesthetic ambition and commerce-enhancing ends. These were the programmatic concerns which appealed to the Americans, rebuilding their nation after the Civil War.

In Cincinnati, as in other urban centres of America, the idea of a museum which served as an engine of social improvement and education found a particular resonance. Buoyed by the overwhelming success of the Cincinnati Room at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 and eager to emulate the public art museums which had opened in New York City and Boston in 1870, the Cincinnati Women's Art Museum Association organized a series of lectures exploring the application of art to industry. The lectures, including one by Sidney Maxwell, president of the city's chamber of commerce, emphasized the need for improved and increased production of local manufactures. Attorney Charles P. Taft concluded the series by discussing and praising the critical role in this area played by London's South Kensington Museum. Taft attributed the poor artistic standards of American products to a number of factors including the increasing separation of the artist from the working man; the prejudice of the higher classes against industrial labour; as well as the greed of the manufacturer and his willingness to sell poorly produced and badly designed products to the public. But Taft proclaimed that the consumer was equally complicit in maintaining this situation. Public ignorance in matters of taste meant that Americans were

willing to purchase and live with poorly made furniture, appliances and wares. A new
Cincinnati museum of applied arts which promoted higher standards in design would remedy
this sad state while also offering significant financial and social gains to the local economy.
Taft concluded his address by reinforcing the need for a local museum based on the
principles espoused by Cole in England:

The Ladies Association, in establishing such an institution [as South Kensington] is
seeking to relieve the present pecuniary distress of our idle population, by opening
new industries or enlarging the scope of the already existing.²

The goals of the Women's Art Museum Association were now directed toward the elevation
of standards of taste and the education of the genius of the masses³. It was precisely this
commerce enhancing aspect of the collective experience of art which appealed to Cincinnati
business men and committed them to the public museum movement at the end of the
nineteenth century.⁴

Despite the efforts of Julius Dexter, Joseph Longworth and Charles West to gain
control of the efforts to build a new museum in Cincinnati, the Women's Association refused
to relinquish its hold on the project. However, their efforts were undermined in 1880, when
Charles West announced that he would donate $150,000.00 toward an art museum,
contingent upon matching funds raised by public subscription. The community rapidly raised

²Quoted in Michael Conforti, "The Idealist Enterprise and the Applied Arts," in A Grand
Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum, eds. Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson

³Vitz, The Queen and the Arts, 216.

the required monies and on October 9, 1880, Mayor Charles Jacob proclaimed "Museum Day" in the city. Public offices were closed in celebration, while homes and businesses were decorated with floral tributes and ribbons in tribute to the proposed institution. The city donated grounds for the future site of the museum on Mount Eden, one of the seven hills surrounding Cincinnati, which afforded a spectacular view of the city and the Ohio River. In a gesture of benevolence and in recognition of the important role to be played by the museum, the city government exempted the land from future taxation. The Cincinnati Museum Association was established as a joint-stock company with shares issued at twenty-five dollars each. However, unlike previous joint-stock efforts in the city, the stock was neither interest-bearing nor redeemable. Shares were limited to one per person. Although the building of the museum now rested in the hands of the city's male elite, the Women's Association continued its commitment to the project by collecting funds for the acquisition of objects suitable for the new museum's collections. In 1883, the Cincinnati Museum Association formally acknowledged its relationship with the South Kensington Museum by purchasing from it a collection of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century textiles and laces.5

The Cincinnati Art Museum opened its doors to the public in 1886. It was the first building west of the Alleghenies built specifically as an art museum. The board indicated that the Museum would collect and exhibit "interesting objects of every kind and nature," including fine and applied art, as well as archeological and ethnographic materials. But the idea of a "museum" was firmly entrenched in the public imagination. Accustomed to the

5Vitz, *The Queen and the Arts*, 221.
objects of curiosity displayed in the proprietary museums of their youth. Farmers continued to offer the Cincinnati Art Museum such specimens as a “well preserved CALF with EIGHT LEGS, one perfect body and head.” Civil War relics and ethnographic curiosities were also firmly rejected by the new Museum’s board.

Although the Cincinnati Art Museum wished to provide a service to the working and leisure classes of the city by providing free access to all who wished to visit, the board was nonetheless faced with the need to cover operating expenses. The lack of tax support for the new institution forced the board to establish admission charges. An admission charge of twenty-five cents was levied but this cost was considered too steep for the average industrial worker as it represented one hour’s wage. Eventually the board agreed to a reduced admission of ten cents on Sundays to enable Cincinnati’s working classes broader access to the Museum. In Cincinnati, the era of the publicly-funded, nonproprietary museum had begun.

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6Ibid., 223.

7Ibid., 224-225.
Chapter Eleven

The Proprietary Museum Revisited

This study of the Western Museum of Cincinnati represents an effort to redress the prevailing historical and public perception of the pre-1870 American museum. Dismissed by contemporary historians as a mere sideshow, the Museum was, in its time, a successful and surprisingly long-lived institution. Established by Dr. Daniel Drake in 1818, the Museum was an integral part of the city's ambitious goal of overcoming its frontier image and taking its rightful place alongside of well-established American cultural centres. Boosters like Drake hoped that Cincinnati would soon become the "Paris of the West". Nonetheless, the Western Museum was not the populist museum historians have claimed. At its inception, it appealed to and was promoted, as a place for the city's cultural and social elite. In fact, it resembled the semi-private cabinets of early scientific societies more than a publicly-accessible museum. It was under the leadership of Joseph Dorfeuille that the Western Museum became aligned with the proprietary museums then in operation in the larger cities of America. However, the financial success of the joint-stock company Museum remained illusory. Dorfeuille, a legitimate practitioner of science, was soon forced to enter into competition with the neighbouring Letton’s Museum. He continued offering his audiences not only regular lectures and demonstrations, but eventually responded to the success of Letton’s Museum by incorporating a program of waxwork displays into the Western Museum.

With the arrival of the British Frances Trollope and William Bullock in Cincinnati, however, Dorfeuille became aware of newer and more successful methods of attracting paying customers to his Museum. Together with the French artist Auguste Hervieu who
accompanied Frances Trollope on her voyage to America, the group achieved financial and critical success by recreating the popular entertainment called “The Invisible Girl”. This was *not* the invention of Frances Trollope and her friends as some accounts of the Western Museum have claimed. Rather, it was a popular feature of the British and New York City stages at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But the group’s greatest success was to be the creation of the Infernal Regions, an animated waxworks display of Dante’s Inferno brought to life by the talented local artist, Hiram Powers. Previous historians have assumed that Frances Trollope was the instigator and creative genius behind this exhibit; however, they have not considered the influence of William Bullock on the development of the display which would become synonymous with the Western Museum for the duration of its existence. Bullock was one of the most successful museum proprietors in England and was widely admired for his innovative display techniques which stressed the recreation of life-like, three-dimensional environments. It is highly unlikely that Frances Trollope alone would have had the skill to create the phenomenal Infernal Regions. Her theatrical experience was restricted and consisted of staging domestic entertainments which featured her own children. Dorfeuille’s Hell, as the exhibit came to be known, was a theatrical experience which was separately ticketed from the rest of the Western Museum. The sophistication of the backgrounds and the scope of the environment with its icy lakes, thunder, lightning and smoke, suggest that Bullock was influential in the creation of the Regions. The financial success of the Infernal Regions was guaranteed as the exhibit was constantly enhanced by the talented Hiram Powers who went on to garner international acclaim as one of the greatest nineteenth-century American sculptors.
Although traditional accounts of the Museum end with the opening of the Infernal Regions, the Western Museum continued to exist for almost forty years following its inception. Dorfeuille remained committed to developing the extensive collection which embraced thousands of man-made and natural objects from around the world. During the 1830s, he and Letton began to compete with one another in bringing live entertainments to the local populace. Many of the performers who appeared at both museums in Cincinnati can be traced through a circuit of performances they presented in other American museums. But despite the constant refinements and additions to the collections, both museums in Cincinnati were vulnerable to national economic developments as well as to the uncontrollable forces of the weather. In the summer, when the water levels of the Ohio River fell, river boat traffic subsided and a significant source of revenue disappeared. Throughout the 1830s, cholera epidemics took their toll upon the local population. The national Panic of 1837 further affected the security and livelihood of local inhabitants. These financial and natural disasters took their toll on the local museums. Letton’s Museum was forced to sell its collection to Dorfeuille after the death of its proprietor. Dorfeuille too became increasingly discouraged with the uncertainty of the enterprise. Eventually his efforts to sell the collection and to take the wax works to a larger city succeeded. In 1839, Dorfeuille left for New York City, taking most of Powers’ figures with him. The quality of the modelling of the waxworks and the fame of Hiram Powers, now in Italy, must have assured him of success in the east.

In Cincinnati, the Infernal Regions were restocked. Despite the lower quality of execution of the figures, the fame of the exhibit continued to lure paying customers into the Western Museum. The institution passed through the hands of a number of owners but its
demise was inevitable. Little is known of the last years of its existence but by the middle of the century, a new model of museums was becoming evident. Funded by philanthropy or state monies, the new nonprofit museum would eventually supersede its predecessor, the proprietary museum.

The Western Museum may be used as an informant upon the past; as an example of what was typical of the nascent American museum movement. As a model of this movement, it can illuminate some of the more contentious issues which have been perpetuated historically and can contribute to a revised view of the antebellum, proprietary museum. Although some of the features of the Western Museum must be considered as unique, particularly the success and virtuosity of the production of the Infernal Regions, much of what it offered its public was derivative and based upon well-established precedents in larger cities. Although many historians have accused early museums of catering to a cultural elite, it is clear that museums attempted to appeal to the broadest segment of society possible. As joint-stock companies, they were market-driven enterprises. If they were to survive, ticket admissions had to generate sufficient funds to cover the operating expenses and generate a profit for the stock-holders. Opening hours for museums were often extended into the evenings when greater numbers of local citizens could attend. With the development of gas lighting, this became possible on a regular basis, with late-night openings becoming typical. Although the twenty-five cent fee of attending the Western Museum was expensive when compared to the cost of food in the city, Cincinnati offered a standard of living that was much superior to that of the older cities on the East coast. In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the dearth of workers in Cincinnati meant that higher salaries were paid, while the
cost of shelter remained below national averages. In fact, the Cincinnati of the 1820s prided itself upon a socio-economic equality which was atypical of much of America and which was understood to be indicative of the city’s commitment to republican ideology.

Other historians have dismissed early museums as consisting of chance assemblages of objects. However, then-contemporary documents indicate that the Western Museum under Drake and Dorfeuille adhered to prevailing classification systems for its displays of animals and minerals. The Linnaean classification prevailed in the display of the animals while Parker Cleaveland’s system of classification underpinned the mineral exhibit. The dependence upon these classification systems was not unique to the Western Museum; Peale had relied upon these very systems in developing his own exhibits in Philadelphia. The adherence to internationally accepted systems of classification also enabled early museums to be of interest and use to scientists and scholars.

It is certain that early museums had to rely upon donations from interested citizens to form or complete their collections. By promising to display the names of donors in prominent positions near the specimens, museum proprietors were able to appeal to donors and to expand their collections in an inexpensive fashion. This did, however, mean that collections grew in uncontrollable and possibly undesirable directions. But museums also made efforts to increase their holdings in a more systematic and controlled fashion by purchasing collections when they became available. Dorfeuille bought an extensive and acclaimed collection of rocks, minerals and American antiquities through an estate sale of the belongings of the renowned collector Mr. Clifford of Lexington, Kentucky. Documentation also exists which indicates that the Western Museum undertook its own collecting trips into nearby states to
excavate the bones of the mammoth. These were subsequently displayed in the Museum, but some specimens served as a valuable source of revenue as they were sold to museums and scientific societies throughout the nation. Indeed, even before the Western Museum had opened, Drake had proudly stated that the curators had returned from collecting trips with new, and as yet, unknown specimens of birds.

Orosz has suggested that museum proprietors engaged in the same activities at the same time for the same reasons. Earlier historians had attributed this similarity in endeavours to chance occurrences rather than deliberate and direct exchanges of information. The history of the Western Museum lends support to Orosz's claim. Although Orosz attributed this to the prevailing intellectual values of the day, some similarity and even exact duplication of exhibit displays must be attributed to the well-known success of some exhibits in attracting public attention. In New York City, Scudder's re-creation of Peale's three-dimensional pond environment was obvious. It seems that some effort was also made in Cincinnati to provide more realistic settings for the preserved animal and bird displays. Word of successful displays travelled through newspaper accounts which were reprinted throughout the nation. Nor was it unusual for travel accounts to describe museum interiors. Information about exhibits and display techniques could be shared readily and easily. The all-too-frequent demise of museum enterprises and subsequent sale or auction of collections must have also contributed to a cross-fertilization of display techniques and styles.

The content of waxworks displays was most certainly driven by prevailing values and beliefs. It is impossible not to be overwhelmed by the ubiquity of the Jacksons, the Adams, the Charlotte Cordays and Marats as well as the Biblical groupings in both proprietary
museums as well as itinerant exhibits. In New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Cincinnati, these waxworks rendered the past visible. They served to unify a diverse public through their presentation of heroes, pivotal moments and underlying values. They participated in the codification of a common historic and mythic American past and in the creation of a distinct American identity. In Cincinnati, the waxworks enabled the Western Museum to remain true to its initial goal of reflecting local identity. Dorfeuille commissioned wax figures of local personalities such as the beloved actor and comic singer Aleck Drake. It is interesting to note that when Dorfeuille left for New York City with the Infernal Regions, he agreed to leave behind the figure of Aleck Drake. It is more than likely that the figure, although finely modelled, would have been meaningless to a New York audience unfamiliar with an actor who had achieved Western but not national fame.

It has been tempting for many historians, accustomed to museums which are funded by public monies, to look back upon proprietary institutions such as Letton’s Museum and the Western Museum with disdain and even dismay. Their collections of wax works, natural curiosities, paintings, minerals and insects have been described as disorderly or incongruous. Educational goals, although clearly stated in the founding documents, appear to be absent or more readily categorized as amusements. Historians have dismissed much of what took place in antebellum American museums as “mere” or “vulgar” entertainment. However one must challenge these assumptions by asking what the typical exhibits and displays were about. Were they instructive? Did they serve a purpose beyond revenue generation for their proprietors?

The antebellum proprietary museum must be understood as the product of a particular
sociohistorical moment. From its inception, the museum existed to serve popular ends. It served a young and predominantly rural nation curious and eager to see the products of exploration. Its educational goals were interpreted in many ways, contingent upon the rapidly changing philosophical, social and economic values of its day. Indeed, each generation of museum educators has redefined that process anew. The educational goals of the proprietary museum were achieved through a variety of techniques which ranged from moral edification through the display of specimens and objects, to amusement, to instruction.8 Although museums provided visitors with more formal opportunities to learn through lecture series as well as demonstrations utilizing museum specimens and objects, there was also what historians have described as superficial entertainment or exploitation of the gullibility of the museum visitor. Orosz suggests that this is the outcome of a shift in orientation to public education evident as early as the efforts of Charles Willson Peale. Frustrated by the "uncultivated" visitors who attended his Museum, Peale became convinced that the Museum should be concerned with

the presentation of supposedly objective facts to the people so that they could make their own decisions. For those who would not or could not learn, the museum would at least provide "rational amusement" that would reduce the need for frivolous pleasure or vices. The museum would thus be simultaneously a school in which the sovereign people would earn to make wise choices and a place of wholesome diversion for the thoughtless."9

Peale realized that the public needed not only access to learning but a sense of control over


9Orosz, Curators and Culture, 81.
what it was learning. In the nineteenth century, this idea of control would be linked to the social climate of Jacksonian America which militated against expertise. While knowledge and learning were valued in Jacksonian America, they were not believed to be the exclusive preserve of the elite or “experts”. Following this approach to understanding the era, Lisa Roberts has argued that the display of human prodigies, anomalies and automata in early museums pandered not only to the public appetite for entertainment but that these displays also reinforced onlookers’ emerging senses of authority. The displays challenged the onlookers, and not the experts, to judge the veracity of the objects before them. This detection of fraud and empowerment of the common person was, according to Roberts, a national pastime which would later be reinforced by the exhibit techniques of Phineas T. Barnum in his museums.¹⁰

But these displays can also be understood in a very different manner - as an extension of much older traditions of collecting established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe; collecting practices which engaged an ageless human capacity for wonder and awe. Joy Kenseth has argued that an intense fascination with the marvellous, that is, with objects that were unusual, unexpected, exotic, extraordinary or rare was a characteristic of seventeenth and eighteenth-century European culture. Descartes himself had designated wonder as the first of all passions, making it clear that the human reaction to surprising or marvellous things was a subject of considerable importance. Fostered by the exploration of hitherto unknown lands, the rapid acceleration of settlement and the subsequent influx of

previously unseen flora and fauna, the vogue for the marvellous was widespread and could be detected in the collections, literature, and entertainments of Europeans. Advances in science and technology also contributed to the taste for the marvellous. The telescope and microscope made visible worlds which had merely existed in realm of the imagination. Optical devices such as distorting mirrors, and the forerunners of our own film cameras which recreated movement, astonished and delighted viewers. The strangeness of animals such as the platypus, which appeared to be a composite animal made up equally of features of birds, quadrupeds and fish, lent credence to the possibility of existence of creatures previously known only through literary and mythic accounts. For the average European, the diversity and abundance of life-forms was undeniable proof of the infinite complexity and beauty of God’s creation.

Man-made or natural objects which could elicit the sense of the marvellous were sought after by collectors. Among these were objects which were either novel or rare; foreign or exotic; strange or bizarre; unusually large or small; vivid; transcendant or sublime; surprising or unexpected; or demonstrated virtuosity in technical achievement. Kenseth argues that the taste for the marvellous diminished in Europe by the beginning of the eighteenth century as the number of collectors increased. With the proliferation of collections, these objects became increasingly common and familiar. They had lost their power to excite wonder, surprise and astonishment. The excesses and the oddities were increasingly perceived as meaningless exercises that ultimately had little edifying purpose.
The defenders of the norm and the morally uplifting eventually "won the day."11

However, the very qualities of the marvellous which Kenseth identifies as important to the eighteenth-century European collector were the defining characteristics of the collections of proprietary American museums. Here, for a small fee, one could view objects which inspired awe and wonder through their size, foreignness, or their incredible ability to imitate or duplicate reality. American collecting, in the early part of the nineteenth century mirrored the process of discovery which had taken place in earlier centuries in the Western world. As settlement and exploration extended into the interior of the continent, new specimens of animals and plants became evident. But these marvellous objects were not only the products of the North American continent. The excavation of Egyptian and Greco-Roman antiquities fulfilled the need for the exotic object. New technologies, imitating motion and movement in pictures, were displayed and artistic endeavours which mimicked life were acclaimed. Although most proprietary museums also collected specimens of local rocks, minerals as well as the flora and fauna, it was the object which elicited the sense of the marvellous which was promoted in the paid advertisements. But in America, as in Europe, familiarity with the object led to the need to find ever more marvellous and unusual specimens. It was this spiral which drove the proprietary museum - the acquisition of objects which would satisfy the voracious need of a public eager for something newer and even more marvellous. Eventually the inability to fulfill this public need led to the demise of the

proprietary museum as a pervasive feature of the urban American landscape. In America, as in Europe, the representative object would eventually become the collected museum specimen.\footnote{Despite Kenseth’s claim that the taste for marvellous fell out of favour with museums, contemporary museum blockbuster exhibits still demonstrate this preoccupation with treasures or spectacular pieces.}

We live in an age when cultural production dominates the nonprofit sector. Funded by private foundations, corporations and especially, government sources, it is easy for us to overlook the radical role this change in funding has played in redefining museums’ core goals and enabling their fulfilment. The funding of museums, either through philanthropy or government monies, has freed them from market constraints and the vagaries of a public ever eager for more novel attractions. It has allowed museums to dedicate themselves to the less profitable and often publicly invisible tasks such as the conservation of objects, research into collections as well as the more obvious public dissemination of this knowledge. Although these roles are now central to our understanding of what a museum is, this change in funding has resulted in a growing separation of the museum from the elements of broader based, popular culture. By the beginnings of the twentieth century, by a process which remains poorly understood, the separation of popular and high culture was almost complete. Brought about partially by the changes in the funding base, this dichotomy was also the product of a changing understanding of the role of art and artistic production. Once viewed with suspicion, and conflated with dangerous and unnecessary luxury, by the middle of the nineteenth century, art was understood as something which could elevate and purify the
intellectual, moral and spiritual life of American citizens. This new concept of art as a redemptive force which could be harnessed in public museums and galleries, was derived partially from the work of the English cultural critic John Ruskin and in America, by the great cultural arbiter, Charles Eliot Norton. The change in organizational structure brought about by the funding changes also resulted in a different and diminished role for the director. The proprietor of the antebellum museum had served a variety of roles including that of impresario. Many, like Peale, were also trained as taxidermists or artists and participated directly in the creation of the museum displays. The new museum structure encouraged a narrower role for the director, that of an administrator who now oversaw a staff with specialized roles.

We are accustomed to a strong dichotomy between the offerings of the museum, the theatre, and the opera house - or high culture - and low culture, associated with more commercial varieties of production. Yet this distinction had not emerged in the beginning of the nineteenth century in America. As Paul DiMaggio and Lawrence Levine have argued, one factor which influenced the isolation and differentiation of high culture from popular culture was the source of funding. By the end of the nineteenth century, changes in funding led to the emergence of two distinct organizational forms - the nonprofit cultural institution and the commercial, popular culture industry. Prior to 1850, little distinction had existed between art and entertainment, or culture and commerce. These boundaries had been permeable and fluid. Museums interspersed sculptures, waxworks, live animals and popular live entertainments in

13Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Culture and the City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1976), 4.
a "promiscuous combination of genres" which are now understood to be implicitly incompatible. The "sacralization" of art which occurred in the late nineteenth century, enabled museums to escape from market constraints and encouraged the cultivation of less profitable products.\(^4\) As cultural institutions became more differentiated from commercial enterprises, they increasing based their rationale on connoisseurship. In museum collections, this attitude became evident in the new emphasis on the exclusive and specific rather than the general and eclectic. Science became independent from art, while the fine arts were distinguished from minor arts.\(^5\) The aesthetic merits of a work, questions of style and authenticity came to dominate the museological discourse. The beauty of an object and not its subject matter or fame became the focus of museum collections. The devaluation of casts or replicas of European classics and the desire to collect authentic works of art was but part of the process of the sacralization of culture which ultimately divorced museums from the broad range of cultural genres and elevated them into temples of contemplation. The philosophical underpinnings of the museums of the early twentieth century may be best summarized by Benjamin Ives Gilman, the secretary of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, when he declared that "a collection of science is gathered primarily in the interest of the real; a collection of art primarily in the interest of the ideal... A museum of science is in essence a school: a museum


of art is in essence a temple."\textsuperscript{16}

This fragmentation and separation was becoming evident in most facets of American cultural and intellectual life. In science, a redefinition of its mission and methodology was evident. The fissures between experts and amateurs became apparent as science became increasingly opaque to a general audience. Scientific endeavours in the young nation had been dominated by a Baconian philosophy which emphasized that observation and description of nature were the keys to understanding the world and its Creator. Baconian science with its disdain for idle speculation and its emphasis on the accumulation of observations from which the laws governing natural phenomena would emerge, had been ideally suited to a continent which was still poorly known.\textsuperscript{17} The distinctiveness and richness of the country as well as the ease with which specimens could be collected also meant that major contributions to scientific knowledge could be made by amateurs and those pursuing science as an avocation. The democratic assumptions of Jacksonian America militated against professional expertise and proclaimed that the untrained and trained could contribute equally to the development of knowledge.\textsuperscript{18} But as the scientific observations accumulated, it became evident that existing systems of classification were unable to cope with the amount of information available. The proliferation of new names and new species of animals

\textsuperscript{16}Quoted in Levine, \textit{Highbrow/Lowbrow}, 154-155.

\textsuperscript{17}George H. Daniels, \textit{American Science in the Age of Jackson} (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1968), xiv.

underscored the difficulties in the Linnaean system of classification and resulted in the adoption of the "natural" system of Antoine Laurent de Jussieu, already in practice in Europe. New systems of taxonomic classification, based on internal structures and not easily-observable differences, were established. In mineralogy, classification by surface characteristics was replaced by a system which relied upon chemical analysis. The contribution of the amateur became largely irrelevant to the advancement of science which increasingly relied upon theoretical structures of such complexity that only the specifically-trained could adequately comprehend them. By the end of the century, the goal of most scientific societies was no longer the mere diffusion of science. Instead, the advancement of science came to dominate the concerns of professional groups.\textsuperscript{19}

In museums, this development was reflected in the natural history exhibits and displays. While the early museum included the very large, the very small or even chance formations which resembled other known objects, these specimens were no longer cherished or sought out. Instead, scientific classification shifted the grounds of singularity from the object to a category within a particular taxonomy. Museum displays of natural history no longer displayed the curiosities or unusual productions of a boundless natural world. Instead they emphasized the normative or representative specimen.\textsuperscript{20} That is, the exhibits featured typical members of each class. The museum had become, in the words of George Brown

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 167.

\textsuperscript{20}Kenseth, "A World of Wonders in One Closet Shut," 98.
Goode, "a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen." 21

Perhaps the greatest difference was evident in the display of living and preserved teratological specimens. Kenneth Graham called this "perhaps the greatest change that has taken place in showlife in our generation." 22 These anomalies exploited public fascination yet were also legitimate objects of scientific curiosity and study. They attracted not only those seeking the mysterious and sensational but also legitimate scientists who were attempting to develop comprehensive systems of classification. Despite contemporary historians' dismissal of these exhibits as sideshows, they were an integral part of the collections of museums in Europe and North America. Well into the twentieth century, the British Museum had a department of "Modern Curiosities". In its collections were a two-headed lamb and a two-tailed lizard, while the British Museum (Natural History) displayed "a collection of monstrosities... of quite recent origins as well as an equine series which held horned horses." 23 Even at the end of the nineteenth century, the inclusion of these specimens was recommended by William Henry Flower who noted that "the Teratological series, or collection of congenital malformation of man and the lower animal necessarily forms part of every general biology museum." 24 No less an authority than David Murray, writing in 1904, agreed with Mr. John Henry Parker, the curator of the British Ashmolean Museum, who


22 Quoted by Ritvo, The Platypus and the Mermaid, 143.


explained the he did “not wish to exclude curiosities from [the Museum]; they attract people, and when they are brought hither by curiosity, they may stop to learn something better; they may want to know something of the history of the curiosities they have come to see.”

Despite the differences between contemporary and early nineteenth-century museums, the proprietary American museum, at the height of its success, was capable of providing a memorable and powerful experience. For many Americans, a visit to a museum would remain an important event conflated forever in their minds with the sophistication, opportunities and horrors of an unfamiliar urban environment. The noted historian William Venable, writing more than half a century later, recalled his childhood visit to Cincinnati:

But the opportunity which, in common with thousands of country boys, I could least think of forgoing, was that of visiting Monsieur J. Dorfeuille’s Western Museum, of which I had heard many a wonderful tale. ... There were Indian clubs and pipes, tomahawks and bows, ponderous bones of the mammoth, the cudgel with which Captain Cook was slain, a bunch of rusty keys from a robbers’ cave in Southern Illinois, fragments of the boiler of an exploded steamer, the Moselle, and dazzling pictures of Asiatic cities and Circassian girls, seen through magnifying glasses fixed in the wall. But all these attractions were eclipsed by a series of wax figures, single and in groups, portraying notable or notorious characters. There stood Aaron Burr in the act of firing his pistol at Alexander Hamilton, and there lay George Washington on his deathbed. In the next booth reclined the Sleeping Beauty in all her loveliness, the Prince, on tiptoe, meditating his kiss. To relieve this pleasing scene, we had the harrowing tableau showing Cowen in the act of murdering his wife with an ax. His children, already slain, weltered bloody on the floor. From this tragedy the morbid spectator inevitably turned to enter the Chamber of Horrors, in which by far the most revolting exhibit was the head of Hoover, the actual caput, severed from the murderer’s shoulders, and preserved in a huge glass jar filled with alcohol. The sight proved a lasting torment to my dreams. A horrible fascination compelled one to see it. Even the Chamber of Horrors was outdone by the ingenious representation in the top story, where late every night, Mons. Dorfeuille unlocked to his patrons the half-grotesque, half-terrific moving machinery of the “Infernal Regions.” This original

David Murray, Museums: Their History and their Use (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1904), 204.
contrivance of waxwork and scenic painting was the joint invention of the sculptor, Hiram Powen, and a French artist named Hervieu. It was a composite study suggested by Dante’s Inferno and Milton’s Hell. There were lakes of fire and mountains of ice, walking skeletons, imps with flaming eyes, black devils tormenting damned souls. The diabolical exhibition was very popular, and was kept going for at least twenty years. I recall the spasm of terror with which I beheld the glaring eyes, of the waxen female Sin, who sat by the infernal gate, silent for a time and then sprang toward me with a horrid cry. The King of Terrors I recollect as a decidedly good-natured, red-horned, forked-tailed old gentleman in tights, who politely welcomed us all to his fiery kingdom - said he was very glad to see us all in that hot place...

The coarse extravagance of the Western Museum, though revolting to taste, was redeemed by a broad humour which everybody could enjoy. The exhibition was certainly wonderful, and it helped to sustain the illusion that the City was a strange, unreal world, altogether unlike the Country. My childish fancy confused the living men and women swarming along the street with the lifelike wax-figures in the showcases. The unearthly, and by no means heavenly music, ground by hand from a peculiar big organ just within the entrance, haunted my ears like a ghost of lugubrious sound. The fat and talkative old French lady, who sat the foot of the stairway to take our tickets, seemed as much a part of the mechanism of the place as were the grind-organ by the door and the moving skeletons in the Shades above. The evening spent at Dorfeuille’s I regarded as the most exciting I had ever passed.\(^6\)

As Venable’s recollections suggest, the Western Museum, in its day, assumed an importance that no modern museum can hope to achieve.\(^7\)

The history of the American proprietary museum remains neglected. Traditional museum history is dominated by accounts of the “golden age” of formation of American museums, that is, the founding of urban, publicly-funded institutions. All too often the first hundred years of American museum history are dismissed as merely the prologue for the birth of the nonprofit museum. Although the efforts of scholars such as Charles Coleman


\(^7\)Tucker, “Ohio Show-Shop,” 105.
Sellers, Joel Orosz, and David Brigham have contributed greatly to a reassessment of longstanding criticisms and assumptions about the early proprietary museums, these accounts remain isolated from the mainstream of museum history. It is unfortunate that our understanding of this early American museum movement is still fragmented and disconnected. The lack of interest and research in the area is a curious fact which is not readily explained. After all, the period has a palpable importance in setting the foundation for many of the problems which beset the contemporary museum, most notably, the unresolved and deeply-rooted tension between education and entertainment. It is hoped that with more research a comprehensive understanding of the efforts, successes and failures of a century of museum-makers whose ventures preceded the beginnings of the nonprofit museum in America will emerge. Gary Kulik’s assessment of the appeal of Charles Willson Peale is perhaps the most eloquent plea for continued efforts in this direction. He reminds us that the early museum proprietor was “not a model for what we ought to do, nor a hero for our time, nor a worthy precursor to our perfected present, but a figure, different from us, but significantly similar to continue to provoke our interest and our respect. Neither he nor we could ask for more.”

This study is offered as a small step in that process.

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