

The Peale, Baltimore's Community Museum, to Celebrate its 208th Birthday with Festivity-Packed Grand Reopening

After a 20-year Vacancy and Five Years of Renovations, the Nation's First Purpose-Built Museum Will Debut its \$5.5 Million Birthday Suit

Baltimore, MD (August 5, 2022)—On **Saturday, August 13, 2022**, The Peale will open its doors to guests of all ages to celebrate its 208th birthday with a **FREE** grand reopening celebration. The day-long, festivity-packed event will showcase the five-year, \$5.5 million renovation of the nation's first purpose-built museum from **10:00 AM until 4:00 PM**, featuring exhibitions, entertainment, and local food. There will be something exciting for all ages during this event.

The Peale's grand reopening celebrations are supported by **PNC Bank** and the **Maryland State Arts Council**.

Over the past two centuries, The Peale has evolved, serving as the site of several groundbreaking firsts for the City of Baltimore, the State of Maryland, and the United States. Seated in the heart of downtown Baltimore City within eyeshot of City Hall, the building was once Baltimore's first City Hall, the first public high school available to Black students in the State of Maryland, and the birthplace of the Baltimore Gas & Electric company (BGE).

Founded in 1814 by artist and gaslight entrepreneur Rembrandt Peale, The Peale is home to the world's largest digital archive of Baltimore stories. Unlike many museums, The Peale doesn't have a physical collection but amplifies Baltimore's voices, cultures, and experiences as both a laboratory and teaching museum and a production house of culture where programming is community-driven.

The Peale will showcase artists from all around Baltimore during the grand reopening through innovative exhibits and installations. The event will open with **The Dan Meyer Choir** and a praise song by Mama Linda Goss for The Peale's garden. A ceremonial lighting of a replica "Ring of Fire," as Rembrandt Peale's 19th-century gaslight chandeliers were called, by a representative of Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE) will follow.

Curator Catherine Borg will inaugurate the **Spark: New Light** exhibition, and artist Lauren Muney will dedicate the **Peale Faces** frieze of silhouettes of contemporary Baltimoreans. Additionally, Historic Ebenezer AME Church and neighboring Zion Lutheran Church representatives will join The Peale's Board Chair William Chickering to lead a ceremonial ribbon-cutting of The Peale's "**Walk of Honor**," a path of commemorative bricks donated by supporters of the renovations.

"We are thrilled to be able to honor and uplift the stories and voices of Baltimore's communities by giving them a home in the nation's first museum building with its rich and transformative history, now fully restored and accessible to all," said **Dr. Nancy Proctor, founding director and chief strategy officer**. "We look forward to The Peale continuing to play a dynamic role in the city's arts and culture ecosystem for another two centuries and beyond!"

Attendees will explore The Peale's three floors filled with history and attractions all day.

The **Spark: New Light** exhibition will illuminate the creative vision of 24 artists in homage to Baltimore, also known as "Light City," presented by Towson University, UMBC, and PNC Bank. Guests will participate in **Hostile Terrain 94**, an interactive art project sponsored and organized by the Undocumented Migration Project.

Participants will explore the **Peale Faces** frieze with silhouette artist Lauren Muney, see Lee Boot's 25-year retrospective exhibition in development, and record their Baltimore stories with Daisy Brown.

Attendees will peruse the names of the more than 700 individuals and organizations who made The Peale's renovations possible and have the opportunity to share their memories along with suggestions for how the museum can be a resource to the community in the future.

Additionally, guests will have a firsthand opportunity to travel through the long, diverse, and eventful history of The Peale as they explore the many stories of the 208-year-old building and the family that built it, including learning about its pivotal role in African American education in the state as **Male and Female Colored School No. 1** (1878-1889).

After a 20-year vacancy following its closure in 1997, The Peale embarked on its multi-million dollar renovations of the nation's first purpose-built museum under the leadership of the late **James D. Dilts** in his capacity as Board President of The Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture. Known today simply as The Peale, this national treasure is now fully renovated and ready to share authentic Baltimore stories presented by the city's storytellers, griots, performers, artists, architects, historians, students, educators, and culture-keepers of all kinds.

View photos of the Peale before and after the renovation [here](#).

A Brief History of the Peale Museum Building

The Peale is based in the oldest museum building in the United States. The national historic landmark was commissioned in 1813 by American artist Rembrandt Peale. Robert Cary Long, Sr., Baltimore's first professional architect, designed the building.

Peale's Museum and Gallery of the Fine Arts opened on August 15, 1814. An 1823 catalog lists the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Gainsborough, Breughel, Reynolds, Bosch, van de Velde, Ruysdael, Kauffman, Claude Lorrain, Poussin, Velasquez, Canaletto, Raphael, and Sully.

Rembrandt, and later his brother Rubens, operated their museum until 1829. Museum trustees then sold the building to the City of Baltimore to become Baltimore's first City Hall. The collection eventually went to American showman and businessman P.T. Barnum.

In 1878, the city repurposed the building to host Male and Female No. 1 Colored Primary School. Over the next 11 years, the building was home to a primary school, grammar school, and the city's first public high school for Black Baltimoreans.

Between 1889 and the 1920s, the building housed Baltimore's water department, an organ factory, a sign painting company, a machine shop, and a bedspring factory.

Following a reconstruction in 1931, which transformed the building into the structure we see today, it became the Municipal Museum of the City of Baltimore. That museum introduced generations of Baltimoreans to the history, culture, and traditions that defined their city.

In 1997, the museum closed, and its collection was transferred to the Maryland Historical Society, now the Maryland Center for History and Culture. The shuttered building would remain largely vacant for two decades.

The Peale sprang back to life in 2017 as a new kind of civic museum and home to Baltimore stories. The building underwent extensive renovations and reopened in 2022 to serve as Baltimore's Community Museum.

Learn more about The Peale by visiting <https://www.ThePeale.org/>.

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